

Satirising the breast: women's bodies in late Georgian graphic satire

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines over one hundred caricatures from Britain in the late eighteenth century, exploring the social, cultural, medical and political meanings attached to the breast in contemporary graphic satire. Caricaturists such as William Hogarth, James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson and Isaac Cruikshank recycled and reimagined the symbolism of the breast to capture, interpret and intervene in important aspects of Georgian life. The breadth and depth of satirists' engagement with the breast as a satirical motif necessitates closer investigation. By working outwards from the breast rather than taking a panoptic view of women in prints, this thesis moves beyond existing histories of gendered representations in graphic satire. Making connections between the graphic body, the physical body and social experience, it identifies four recurring themes which frame caricatures of breasts; these form the basis of each chapter. The first demonstrates how the transgressive breast was employed as a motif of maternal selfishness; the second explores how fashion satires used the breast to condemn the nefarious influence of fashion; the third addresses how grotesque breasts emblematised civic corruption and decline, and the final chapter scrutinises how breasts were appropriated for propagandist agendas in anti-revolutionary prints. These discussions shed critical light on complex ideological debates on women's bodies, exploring discourses on the family, domesticity, sex, sexuality, class, social ills, artificiality and 'nature', ageing, moral decline, political disorder and more.

Alongside a close examination of graphic satire as visual discourse, this thesis draws on medical treatises, lady's magazines, conduct books, poetry, philosophical works and sentimental art to contextualise the aesthetic and intellectual processes which framed specific caricatures of the breast. In the context of national preoccupations with questions of health, morality and prosperity, answers were sought in the false ideal of the nurturing, virtuous female body. As the first major study of breasts in satirical prints, this thesis offer scholars of gender, medicine and visual culture an original and nuanced perspective on the political representation of the female body.

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**Abbreviations**

BNF: The Bibliothèque nationale de France Catalogue Général

BM: The British Museum

BL: The British Library

LOC: Library of Congress

LWL: The Lewis Walpole Library

MBVB: Museum Boijmans Van Beunigen

MET: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

NPG: National Portrait Gallery

NYPL: The New York Public Library

RCIN: Royal Collection Inventory Number

RCT: Royal Collection Trust

V&A: Victoria and Albert

WC: Wellcome Collection

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## Introduction

From prehistoric statues of fertility goddesses, ancient sculptures of Aphrodite, medieval portraits of Madonna Lactans, Renaissance renderings of Venus, to impressionist, modernist and postmodernist expressions of the female form, breasts have played an essential role in visual explorations and interrogations of femininity. Today, images of breasts conceptualise both embodied and abstract impressions of the erotic, the fashionable, the diseased and the maternal. Perhaps they evoke ideas of gender liberation and oppression; from the nursing mother of the new French Republic to the Free the Nipple movement of 2012, the bare breast has long signified the distinct bodily authorities, freedoms and responsibilities of the sexes.<sup>1</sup> Its iconography is complex, multifaceted and deeply political; in the cultural imagination, the breast almost always stands for something more than itself. As Marilyn Yalom highlights in her history of the breast, it has been positively and negatively coded in almost every society since time immemorial. Its social, cultural and political significance in eighteenth-century Britain, however, was exceptional. ‘At no time in our history’, Yalom remarks, ‘have breasts been more contested.’<sup>2</sup>

Enlightenment philosophies, rapid developments in science, medicine and technology as well as fractious international relations prompted mass re-evaluation of what it meant to be a citizen not just of the nation, but of the world. As Britain’s identity, values and institutional structures were troubled, the social relations and roles of its people were also brought into question. Concerns about national stability, prosperity and morality intersected with debates about gender, sex and the family – accordingly, the role of women came under close scrutiny. Nurturing motherhood was promoted as the mainstay of female duty and desirability, as women’s private lives and bodies were put to new political uses. This politicisation of motherhood,

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Free the Nipple Campaign, see James K. Beggan, “Leadership and the Free the Nipple Movement: An autoethnographic case study” in *Leadership and Sexuality: Power: Principles and Processes*, ed. James K. Beggan and Scott Allison (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018), 54-72; Sarah Schrank, *Free and Natural: Nudity and the American Cult of the Body* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 172, 197-198; Laura Patterson, “Whiteness in contemporary feminist campaigns: Free the Nipple” *College of Arts & Sciences Senior Honors Theses*. Paper 100 (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (London: Pandora, 1998), 105.

literary scholar Ruth Perry argues, engendered the ‘colonisation of the female body’; it was zoned and manipulated in the interests of others.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, the breast became a focus for debate about feminine nature, morality and civic responsibility. Such was its weight that it has attracted major attention from scholars of gender, medicine and the body.

Historians, literary scholars, philosophers and sociologists have traced how eighteenth-century representations of the breast reflected and shaped everything from perceptions of sexual attractiveness to attitudes towards infant feeding. They have investigated how it appeared in a vast and diverse corpus of material including fiction, medical treatises, political tracts, religious writings, theatre and fine art. However, one important group of sources has been overlooked. Besides being a pivotal period for the history of the breast, the eighteenth century witnessed the genesis of the satirical print industry in England; giants such as William Hogarth, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson set the precedent for generations of caricaturists to follow. As such, it has been widely recognised as the ‘golden age’ of graphic satire; Gatrell has estimated that over twenty-thousand prints were published in London between 1770 and 1830.<sup>4</sup> ‘When it comes to caricature’, the essayist and art critic Charles Baudelaire remarked in 1972, ‘the English are extremists.’<sup>5</sup> Yet representations of the breast in satirical prints, one of the era’s most popular textual mediums, have received no substantial study. Accordingly, there is a fissure between appreciation of the breast as an object of political appropriation, and recognition of graphic satire as a mechanism within this process. Beginning to bridge

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Perry, “Colonising the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no.2. Special Issue, Part 1: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe (October 1991): 204-34, 234.

<sup>4</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, ed. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1972), 233-4.

this gap, this thesis turns to satirical prints to offer a fresh perspective on the politicised status of the female breast in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst satirical images of the breast are understudied, satirical prints themselves have been, and continue to be, the focus of important cross-disciplinary investigations into the eighteenth century. The dawn of the satirical print market is traceable back to the 1730s, when Hogarth released his popular six scene series *A Harlot's Progress* (1731), followed shortly thereafter by *A Rake's Progress* (1735). Hogarth's works set the tone for graphic satire's moralising interpretation of everyday scenes, which would later target loftier subjects, communities and people. Both of these early works by Hogarth pay close attention to women – *A Harlot's Progress* tells the tale of Moll Hackabout, who becomes a prostitute. *A Rake's Progress* concentrates on a young man, but his story is punctuated by his pregnant fiancé, a disappointed mother, an orgy of syphilitic sex workers, an old maid, his infant daughter and a pair of fashionable ladies who watch as he languishes in an asylum. Art historian Cindy McCreery suggests that a satirical gaze was cast over women in the mid-to-late century; they feature, she estimates, in over a third of the items held in the British Museum's collection of around 5000 prints from 1760-1800.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis is indebted to McCreery's *Satirical Gaze*, which offers an astute review of a number of prints which are the focus of later chapters. McCreery taxonomises the women who appear in prints according to various social roles – prostitutes, courtesans, actresses, literary ladies, female politicians, wives, widows and especially pertinent to this thesis, mothers. This range of subjects makes her

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<sup>6</sup> As art historian Temi Odumosu states, the terms 'caricature' and 'satire' (or satirical print) appear largely interchangeable in historical and contemporary scholarship. This practice, Odumosu observes, illustrates the 'layered interpretations and functions' of graphic satire as a medium. Although caricature is generally accepted to mean the physical distortion of bodies or items to create a 'new but recognisable likeness', and satire more generally refers to the ridicule or criticism rained upon a person, event, notion, or place, this thesis uses the two words interchangeably so as not to disrupt the messages of the scholarly material it engages with. Odumosu, *Africans in English Caricature: Black Jokes, White Caricature 1769-1819* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 10. For more on the use of the word caricature in particular, see Amelia Rauser's chapter "Character or Caricature" in *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 36-55, as well as discussion at 19-21.

<sup>7</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Clarendon Press, 2004), 2, 6.



findings wide-reaching - by McCreery's own admission, her monograph is a survey rather than a series of arguments.<sup>8</sup> Whilst this is useful in its own right, this project takes a different approach. By focusing on the breast specifically, this thesis makes precise and substantial claims about *why* women's bodies appeared as they did in prints. Reflecting on women's representations through the lens of social roles can be restrictive; the retrospective prescription of such roles is often presumptuous, imprecise and obfuscating, offering only a partial and prejudiced picture of a person's cultural representation. Working outwards from the body instead allows for a targeted analysis of its politicisation, which can consequently be connected to aspects of social behaviour, identities and where appropriate, roles. This thesis follows McCreery's example however, in prizing the unique perspectives that prints provide on the eighteenth-century treatment of female bodies, behaviours and identities. Alongside comparatively more 'polished, intellectual, and studied accounts', McCreery argues, visual satire offers 'a more immediate, undigested, and frequently unsophisticated analysis of a situation.'<sup>9</sup>

*The Satirical Gaze* was followed by important works including Gatrell's *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London* (2006) and *The First Bohemians: Life and Art in London's Golden Age* (2013), Amelia Rauser's *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (2008), Simon Dickie's *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (2011), Haywood's *Romanticism and Caricature* (2013), John Richard Moores' *Representations of France in English Satirical Prints 1740-1832* (2015), Temi Odumosu's *Africans in English Caricature: Black Jokes, White Humour 1769-1819* (2017), Todd Porterfield's *The Efflorescence of Caricature 1759-1838* (2017) and David Taylor's *The Politics of Parody: A Literary*

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

*History of Caricature, 1760-1830* (2018).<sup>10</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the work is done. As recently as 2015, Moores mourned that satirical prints are still ‘understudied and underused.’<sup>11</sup> With this comment Moores joined a long list of scholars who have championed graphic satire as the underdog of eighteenth-century print culture, including Diana Donald, Mark Hallett and those, such as H. T. Dickinson and John Brewer, who contributed to Michael Duffy’s seminal seven volume series *The English Satirical Print, 1600-1832* (1986).<sup>12</sup>

Typically, visual satire’s reputation as a ‘low’ form of culture has stirred a certain squeamishness in social, political and medical historians. Moores puts some of this reluctance down to the dearth of contemporary commentary that survives on satirical prints – this could, he writes, mislead some to assume graphic satire’s ‘cultural irrelevance.’<sup>13</sup> Haywood sees an opposite problem, venturing that graphic satire was so topical and entrenched in culture that it deters scholars with little time to, or interest in, untangling the vast social and political networks which it references.<sup>14</sup> Considering historians’ ‘odd’ neglect of satirical prints, Gatrell offers that the sheer enormity of the print archive is off-putting. They are a ‘gold mine for the historian of cultural change’, Gatrell promises, but the collections that they are

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<sup>10</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter, The First Bohemians: Life and Art in London’s Golden Age* (London: Allen Lane, 2013); Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*; Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); John Richard Moores, *Representations of France in English Satirical Prints 1740-1832* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Odumosu, *Africans in English Caricature*; Todd Porterfield, *The Efflorescence of Caricature 1759-1838* (London: Routledge, 2017); David Taylor, *The Politics of Parody: A Literary History of Caricature, 1760-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Moores, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1996); Mark Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); H. T. Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986); John Brewer, *The Common People and Politics, 1750-1790s* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986); John Miller, *Religion in Popular Prints, 1600-1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986); Peter D. G. Thomas, *The American Revolution* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986); Michael Duffy, *The Englishman and the Foreigner* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Moores, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature*, 6.

held in are 'very big, scattered and difficult to access and sample.'<sup>15</sup> Mary Dorothy George's immense achievement in categorising and describing the prints held by the British Museum did much to improve access to and knowledge about graphic satire.<sup>16</sup> George's work did little however, Gatrell argues, to dispel the 'theoretical and aesthetic scruples' which prevent many scholars from engaging sincerely with graphic satire. Concurring with Moores and Haywood, Gatrell claims that its perceived 'lowness' has posed the most significant barrier to its serious study; 'artistic hierarchies remain jealously defended', Gatrell writes, 'and comic or satirical art is still generally excluded from them.'<sup>17</sup> 'Their sketch-like quality, their vividness, their frequent rudeness and crudity', Moores similarly remarks, was - and still is - considered by many to be 'unseemly, impolite, uncivil and characteristic [only] of the lower orders.'<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1988, medical historian Roy Porter warned against this type of dismissal. Satirical prints were not 'high art', Porter conceded, but were nonetheless 'flamboyantly arcane artefacts' which made use of hieroglyphic style references, in-jokes, 'riddling rebuses, ellipses and allusive metonymy.' They should not, Porter made clear, be underestimated. Praising the recently published Chadwyck-Healey commissioned volumes which provided historical commentaries on the English satirical print, Porter argued that 'to see pictures as a sort of baby-food mode of communication, pap for those whose minds could not digest real words, would be to misread the function of visual image in emergent commercial culture.'<sup>19</sup> It is the immediacy, coarseness and lack of censorship offered by graphic satire which makes it such a precious resource. Gillray expert Timothy Clayton writes that they were 'quintessentially expressive of British liberty', whilst art historian Temi Odumosu similarly remarks that their often ambiguous humour granted them a 'unique freedom

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<sup>15</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Dorothy George, *Catalogue of political and personal satires preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 11 vols. (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1935-42). Following George's efforts, the museum itself and other institutions including the Lewis Walpole Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have provided excellent digital access to reams of known prints from the period.

<sup>17</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Moores, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Roy Porter, "Seeing the Past" *Past & Present* 118, no. 1, (February 1988), 186-205, 191, 189.

of expression' envied by foreign visitors.<sup>20</sup> Not only did prints respond with more freedom, speed and humour than other art forms, they perhaps also provided a more veracious and pragmatic account of eighteenth-century life. Far from mollifying minds who 'could not digest real words', prints expressed that which 'words could not bear.'<sup>21</sup>

However, it is important to acknowledge that methodologically, this thesis approaches prints as *representations* of reality, rather than as records of it. Too many historians, Jordanova observed in *Nature Display'd*, have read satire as a 'transparent criticism of what was actually done rather than a complex representation in its own right.'<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, the following chapters carefully consider the biases, prejudices and manipulations which undoubtedly influenced satirical images of the breast. This thesis looks to prints to speculate on how contemporaries perceived certain behaviours, events and people, but does not pretend to capture the reality of actual experiences. In conducting close readings of prints, it builds upon the work of Haywood, who sought in *Romanticism and Caricature* to analyse single prints 'in the same detailed manner in which [scholars] look at paintings of literary texts', in order to shed light on their 'aesthetic and ideological complexity.' Whilst closely reading prints will be necessarily impressionistic, the subjective nature of this approach is mediated by attentiveness to what Haywood refers to as the 'intervisual qualities' of graphic satire – those details which allude to, borrow from and parody elements outside the frame.<sup>23</sup> Translating the meanings that both visual and intervisual references would have generated for contemporaries offers a rewarding way to discern how items such as gender and the body were complexly represented in satirical prints. As Yalom emphasises, graphic representations were not created in a vacuum and therefore 'do not tell the whole story.'<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, other meanings related to the breast will be collected from portraits, novels, poems, medical tracts, conduct books, magazines and networks of letters. An initial exploration of the

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<sup>20</sup> Timothy Clayton, "The London Printsellers and the Export of English Graphic Prints" in *Loyal Subversion? Caricatures from the Personal Union between England and Hanover (1714-1837)* ed. Anorthe Kremers and Elisabeth Reich (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, 2014), 140-62, 154; Odumosu, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Jordanova, *Nature Display'd*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Haywood, 8, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Yalom, 36.

maternal meanings attached to the breast as well as the contexts in which satirical prints were produced, published and consumed will lay the historical and scholarly groundwork for the thematic chapters which follow.

### **The Breast in the Eighteenth Century**

Any study of the breast, but especially one situated in the eighteenth century, must inevitably be coloured by maternity. The mid-to-late century is widely considered the period during which the social, cultural, medical and political meanings attached to the breast underwent the most profound transformation.<sup>25</sup> As the cultural celebration of motherhood gained momentum, the erotic significance the breast had accrued during the Renaissance gave way to its maternal function. Instead, the breast became the site at which sexuality and maternity collided, and which battles over pluralistic private and public authority were fought. Across the course of this thesis, I will demonstrate how the iconographic significance of the breast shifted in line with changing attitudes towards infant management, personal civic responsibility, familial life, feminine virtue, bodily beauty and fashion. The presence of the breast within satirical prints is rarely incidental, and almost always alludes to a context outside the immediate circumstances of the print.

The seminal work of Valerie Fildes and subsequent studies by Yalom, Carol Duncan, and Gal Ventura have shed light on the changing historical attitudes towards maternal nurture and breastfeeding in particular.<sup>26</sup> In her study of maternal nursing in French art, Ventura observes breastfeeding as one of the chief activities that shapes ‘conceptions of motherhood, gender and body management’,

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<sup>25</sup> Yalom, 105; Clare Hanson, “The Maternal Body” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, ed. David Hillman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 73-86, 87; Ruth Perry, “Colonising the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (October 1991): 204-34.

<sup>26</sup> Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986); *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Yalom; Carol Duncan, “Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 201-20; Gal Ventura, *Maternal Breastfeeding and Its Substitutes in Nineteenth-Century French Art* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018).

recognising how it is 'directly influenced by the society and culture in which it is performed.'<sup>27</sup> Unpicking some of these influences in the eighteenth century, this thesis reflects on medical, philosophical and political advocacy which pushed maternal nursing as a 'natural' social good. Considering emergent propagandist discourses surrounding mothers' milk, it demonstrates how, by the latter half of the century, as Yalom asserts, breastfeeding took on 'the aspect of a cult.'<sup>28</sup> The elevation of the nursing breast emerged alongside calls for a return to a more simple and moral way of life. The 'deepening vogue' for natural motherhood, as art historian Vic Gatrell describes it, coincided with acute anxieties about the changes taking place in Britain and the rest of Europe.<sup>29</sup> The breastfeeding mother was presented as an anchor in a volatile society being irreversibly transformed by the industrialisation of cities, developments in science and technology, and changing gender roles. Scholars including Ludmilla Jordanova, Londa L. Schiebinger, Quill Kukla, Julie Kipp and Corinna Wagner have shown how in order to validate the concept of the 'good mother', contemporary physicians, moralists and philosophers yoked it to nature.<sup>30</sup> Nature, Schiebinger writes, served 'as the guiding light of social reform', and became a 'moral category of considerable weight' amidst unease that the modern polity was devoid of principles and lacking in moral integrity.<sup>31</sup> Subsequently, the motif of the 'unnatural' mother, as in Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751) gave credence to negative accounts of women who failed or refused to connect with their maternal 'instinct.'

In *The Myth of Motherhood*, Elisabeth Badinter shows how the eighteenth-century glorification of maternal nurture differed from earlier celebrations of mother love. Compared to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, she argues, maternal nurture was imbued with new public significance. It was presented as a 'natural and

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<sup>27</sup> Ventura, xiii.

<sup>28</sup> Yalom, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 367.

<sup>30</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Quill Kukla, *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture and Mothers' Bodies* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2005); Corinna Wagner, *Pathological Bodies: Medicine and Political Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). Quill Kukla published *Mass Hysteria* under another name, Rebecca Kukla.

<sup>31</sup> Schiebinger, 4.

social good, favourable to the species and to society', rather than a private virtue.<sup>32</sup> To breastfeed was to give an infant the best start in life, but also to weaponise your family and wider community against an affected and afflicted modern society. The staging of breastfeeding as a social duty has prompted some scholars including historian Jennifer J. Popiel to argue that motherhood was positively transformed into an act of authority and liberation.<sup>33</sup> In this imagining, women were not, as Perry and others have argued, subordinated by domestic and maternal charges, but rather enjoyed higher social positions, increased respect and greater private and public agency.<sup>34</sup> Popiel maintains that the Rousseauvian valorisation of women's 'special talents' relating childcare was protofeminist, and did not intentionally exclude women from civic roles.<sup>35</sup> However, this thesis considers maternal commendation as part of an exploitative and false effort to recast physical and emotional labour as an empowering and edifying choice.

The political agency attached to the eighteenth-century family gave rise to what Badinter describes as an 'atmosphere of obligation' for mothers, which to some extent, persists today.<sup>36</sup> The eighteenth-century celebration of mothers over-promised and under-delivered; it was often conditional upon strict adherence to ideals which restricted individual identity. Investment in the female self was sanctioned only when it benefitted the family and thus the state - personal ambitions,

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<sup>32</sup> Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: an Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 428-9; Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, London: Academic Press, 1978), 208-17; Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America." *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 247-69; Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (New York: Pearson Education, 2004), 100-3; Eileen Janes Yeo, "The creation of 'motherhood' and Women's responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914" *Women's History Review* 8, no. 2 (2006): 201-218; Jennifer J. Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 110-11, 6, 148, 179; Anne Borsay "Nursing, 1700-1830: Families, Communities, Institutions" in *Nursing and Midwifery in Britain since 1700*, ed. Anne Borsay and Billie Hunter (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 23-38, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Perry, 209.

<sup>35</sup> Popiel, 148.

<sup>36</sup> Badinter, 117. Modern sociologists have called attention to the pressures created by 'lactivism' crusades, arguing that the popular narrative 'breast is best' risks marginalising and suppressing the desires and agencies of mothers themselves.

desires and pleasures which conflicted with familial sentiment went unsupported. Recently, scholars have unravelled the pronatalist rhetoric which underpinned these maxims, identifying them as constricting; Elizabeth Johnston has written that women's 'individual choice and autonomy' was supposed as 'bound up in and essential to' the functioning of new republics.<sup>37</sup> Those unable or unwilling to dedicate themselves to the domestic and sexually sanitised maternal sphere forfeited any privileges a 'natural' motherly identity might have earned them. Far from being organic or universal, the idea of the good and natural mother was institutionally constructed by social, political and medical forces in order to confront anxieties about women, families and the national body. In a society which idealised and cherished the 'good' mother, many women were misunderstood, condemned and left behind. Satirical prints deride some of these outsiders and consequently endorse the aspirational and unattainable norm of the unendingly and effortlessly selfless and modest mother.

Speaking on how mothers feed their babies, social anthropologists Erin Taylor and Lora Ebert Wallace note that guilt is a 'well-accepted and time-honoured tool in the physician's bag of tricks.'<sup>38</sup> The eighteenth-century blaming and shaming of women who didn't breastfeed is comparable to today's stigmatisation of bottle feeding, a practice which many report is shrouded in guilt.<sup>39</sup> Eighteenth-century physicians propagated fear and shame in mothers by relentlessly condemning other types of feeding – especially wet-nursing. In the final third of the century in particular, European philosophers, physicians, moralists and scientists led what Yalom describes as a 'virulent outcry against wet-nursing.'<sup>40</sup> Wagner notes that whilst there had always been some suspicions about wet-nurses, the 'widespread and concentrated' campaign against them in the eighteenth century was novel in terms of

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<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Johnston, "Big Mother: Breastfeeding Rhetoric and the Panopticon in Popular Culture, 1700 to Present" in *Breastfeeding and Culture: Discourses and Representation*, ed. Ann Marie A. Short, Palko Abigail L. Palko and Dionne Irving (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2018), 15-33, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Erin N. Taylor, Lora Ebert Wallace, "Feminist Breastfeeding Promotion and the Problem of Guilt" in *Beyond Health, Beyond Choice: Breastfeeding Constraints and Realities*, ed. Paige Hall Smith et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 193–202, 195.

<sup>39</sup> On guilt, shame and bottle feeding, see Taylor and Wallace; Joan B. Wolf, *Is Breast Best? Taking on Breastfeeding Experts and the New High Stakes of Motherhood* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 60, 66-8, 104-6, 135-6.

<sup>40</sup> Yalom, 106.



its ‘forcefulness, the profound influence it had on women’s lives, and its lasting political significance.’<sup>41</sup> A previously popular practice particularly amongst the aristocracy, physicians now warned families that wet-nurses could transmit debased characteristics and behaviours through their milk and moreover, that a nurse could not be trusted to properly care for a child.<sup>42</sup> These misgivings were rooted in anxieties about class and race, and mapped conveniently onto ideological arguments about the precedence of nature, biological family, and a healthy body politic.<sup>43</sup> As Yalom explains, the maternal breast and the breast of the wet-nurse, and later transgressive women more widely, became metonymical badges for that which was ‘linked to familial and social regeneration’ and that which ‘corrupted’ or ‘polluted’ the nation.<sup>44</sup> The many eyes of medicine, politics, satire and wider society treated the breast as a lens through which to make judgements about key aspects of personal, systemic and institutional well-being. Taking a closer look at the satirical and medical contexts which hosted and shaped images of breasts illuminates the overlapping creative, scientific and commercial processes which affected their design, consumption and subsequent social and cultural impact.

## **Women’s Bodies and Breasts in Print Culture: Satirical and Medical Gazes**

### *Satirical Gazes*

In their early *History from Things*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery cautioned that objects are ‘mute to those who listen only for pronouncements of the past’, but that improper attention to their meanings and messages leaves history ‘impoverished.’<sup>45</sup> Building upon this, historian of material culture Serena Dyer has recently reiterated that although ‘issues of interpretation, inaccuracy and partial retention’ abound in the study of such sources, their transiency and cultural entanglement offers unique avenues for ‘accessing and assessing’ myriad layers of

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<sup>41</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Johnston, “Big Mother,” 18.

<sup>44</sup> Yalom, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, “Introduction” in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture* ed. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 1-23, 1.

social meaning.<sup>46</sup> Satirical prints in particular, literary critic and Romanticist Ian Haywood writes, provide ‘a window – through distorting and kaleidoscopic glass – onto the highly conflicted moral and material compulsions’ of the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Heeding John Richard Moores’ warning about the futility of looking ‘for clear answers’ in prints, as well as historian Mark Philp’s argument that to do so is ‘arguably to misread the nature of satire’, this thesis instead considers the ‘plurality of possibilities’ within each frame.<sup>48</sup> Scrutinising the potential impulses behind satirical representations, it looks outwards to the cultures and contexts in which they were created, published and received.

Recently, there have been a number of invaluable investigations into how satirical prints were produced. Following in the footsteps of John Ford and Timothy Clayton, scholars including James Baker, Heather Carroll and Moores have revisited in detail the complex collaborative networks and professional processes which carried prints from conception to completion, to commercial market and finally, to the consumer.<sup>49</sup> Baker in particular has shed light on the business, profit and production procedures which coloured how prints were made, sold and received.<sup>50</sup> As Carroll notes, the practice ‘involved many hands’, – including women’s - and post publication, prints fell into many more.<sup>51</sup> ‘The distinctive importance of prints’, the political historian Paul Langford decreed, ‘is to be found more in the character of

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<sup>46</sup> Serena Dyer, “State of the Field: Material Culture” *The Journal of the Historical Association* (2021), 1-11, 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Haywood, “Rude Britannia: New Perspectives in Caricature” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012), 437-40, 437.

<sup>48</sup> Moores, 13; Mark Philp, “Nervous Laughter and the Invasion of Britain 1797-1805” in *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain: Political and Religious Culture, 1500-1820* ed. Mark Knights and Adam Morton (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 173-89, 189.

<sup>49</sup> John Ford, *Ackermann, 1783-1983: The Business of Art* (London: Ackermann, 1983); Clayton, *The English Print 1688-1802* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1997); Moores, *Representations of France*, 11, 16; Heather Carroll, *Visualising Elite Political Women in the Reign of Queen Charlotte, 1761-1818*. Unpublished PhD thesis. (University of Edinburgh, 2017), 27-32; James Baker, *The Business of Satirical Prints in Late-Georgian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 59-78.

<sup>50</sup> See especially Chapter 1, “Beginnings,” 1-19.

<sup>51</sup> Carroll, 28; Odumosu observes Mary and Matthew Darly and Gillray and Hannah Humphrey as famous examples of male-female print publishing partnerships, 28.

their audience rather than in the nature of their subjects.<sup>52</sup> Following Eirwen Nicholson's early, rather uncharitable explanation of graphic satire's 'uncertain status as historical evidence' as owing to a collective intellectual failure to 'identify the *public* of the prints', scholars have busied themselves with investigating – if not agreeing on – the intricacies of who purchased and saw satirical prints, and where.<sup>53</sup>

It is generally accepted that satirical prints had a wide appeal and a diverse, expansive viewership. Although Nicholson notably upheld that political prints were largely restricted to the Westminster elite, social and personal satires have been credited with, as Baker observes, enjoying a 'loosely conceived inter-class audience.'<sup>54</sup> Nicholson's claims are contested, and are not particularly useful to the present study, which approaches *all* satirical prints as inherently, if not explicitly, political. The social and the political go hand in hand - as did, Haywood explains, the appreciation of the low and high brow content of prints: 'the socially diverse viewing public of caricature lapped up all kind of low artistic pleasures, including bawdy, scatology, charivari, while at the same time appreciating the caricature's rationalist debunking and exposure of contemporary political themes which tied the images to reportage and the printed word.' It was this very combination of 'self-conscious fantasy making with pungent ideological criticism', Haywood continues, which gave caricature 'such as an irresistible aesthetic force.'<sup>55</sup> Clayton sees them as a 'peculiar product', which whilst 'very much part of an elite culture' also served as an 'often violently offensive' mode of collective social entertainment.<sup>56</sup> This idea of collectiveness is important; those who ruefully recognised themselves or others within satirical frames were moved from a singular sense of being to a shared experience, whether through the kinship of communal condemnation, the sense of having one's perspective changed by another, or the affirmative feeling of not being alone in a particular peculiarity, aberrance or attitude.

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Langford, *Walpole and the Robinocracy: The English Satirical Print, 1600-1832* (Chadwyck-Healey, 1986), 31.

<sup>53</sup> Eirwen Nicholson, "Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England" *History* 81, no. 261 (January 1996), 5-21, 6, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholson, 9, 14, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Haywood, "Rude Britannia: New Perspectives on Caricature" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012), 437-440, 438.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton, "The London Printsellers and the Export of English Graphic Prints," 154.

Historians of satire generally push back against the idea that the prints only reached particular sets of people. Drawing evidence from contemporary correspondence, advertisements, personal print albums and other exchanges and ephemera, they have presented a view of graphic satire as a medium which offered a myriad of opportunities for formal and informal consumption. Most maintain however, that print purchase was restricted to a moneyed clientele. Hand coloured prints, Odumosu explains, cost upwards of two or three shillings; almost an entire week's wages for a housekeeper or live-in footman, and a day's pay for a bricklayer or carpenter.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, they were purchased and collected by very wealthy print enthusiasts, whilst other well-off patrons could rent volumes of satires for a lesser, but still considerable, price. They could also be purchased jointly; groups made mutual acquisitions designed to be displayed in communal areas such as taverns or workshops. They were pasted up, George records, 'at street corners and in ale-houses and gin-shops', and could also be hired in bound albums.<sup>58</sup> Their reach was further broadened towards the end of the century, when fee-charging exhibitions also became popular.<sup>59</sup> Satirical prints were also advertised for purchase - and sometimes reprinted - in newspapers, periodicals and magazines. Nicholson argues that these written materials 'penetrated the provinces', meaning that even though print production was London-centric, its consumption was not geographically confined.<sup>60</sup> When the publisher William Holland advertised his bound volumes and single prints in the newspaper *The World*, he took care to explain that they were intended for 'ladies and gentlemen retiring to the country', specifying that they could be hung in 'country billiard rooms, dressing rooms, print galleries, alcoves, pavilions, or other recesses of love and pleasure.'<sup>61</sup> But perhaps the most popular way to access graphic satire was in printshops, which also sold items including books, stationery and portraits.<sup>62</sup>

McCreery has similarly shown that visits to printshop windows were a 'well-known pastime' for contemporaries, with personal accounts recording parties of men

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<sup>57</sup> Odumosu, 27.

<sup>58</sup> George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London: Penguin Press, 1967), 17; McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Moores, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Nicholson, 18.

<sup>61</sup> 'Advertisements', *The World* 13 (June 1788).

<sup>62</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 242.

and women travelling to London specifically for this purpose.<sup>63</sup> Publishers such as Hannah Humphrey, Carington Bowles and Samuel Fores all used their ‘cavernous shop windows’, Baker writes, to ‘give back to Georgian Londoners a view of themselves laughing at the latest prints of the day.’<sup>64</sup> A sense of this amused exchange and public enthusiasm is imparted in drawings and prints which show comical crowds jostling and craning to catch site of the latest and greatest prints. Drawings and satires by J. Elwood, John Raphael Smith, Edward Topham and Robert Dighton pictured people across age, class and sex spectrums engaging with graphic satire.<sup>65</sup> These introspective images of images blur boundaries between caricaturist, subject, print seller and spectator. In the anonymous print *Caricature Shop* (1801), an audience gawk at prints whilst an artist stands in the doorway watching them, poised with an etchers needle; their curiosity about caricature becomes the worthy subject of caricature itself.<sup>66</sup> With this the crowd become the subject of our amusement too; the print serves, Odumosu writes, as a ‘clever commentary on the fluid boundaries between art and life, on the public culture of looking at prints, and the combined expectations of their laughing audience, who catch a glimpse of themselves as well as others.’<sup>67</sup> Even the prints on display in *Caricature Shop* muddle any presumed separation between art and life: a skeleton draws back an arrow perfectly poised to strike the bent nose of its spectator.

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<sup>63</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 26-7.

<sup>64</sup> Baker, 2.

<sup>65</sup> See for example John Raphael Smith, *Spectators at a Print Shop in St Paul’s Church Yard* (1774), BM Satires 1758; *Miss Macaroni and her Gallant at a Print-Shop* (1774), BM Satires 5220; Edward Topham, *A Macaroni Print Shop* (1772), BM Satires 4701; Robert Dighton, *A real scene in St Paul’s Church Yard, on a windy day* (circa 1782-4), BM Satires 6352.

<sup>66</sup> Mike Goode has explored how prints like these conceive of the public in the context of a literary discourse of persuasion. See Goode, “The public and the limits of persuasion in the age of caricature” in *The Efflorescence of Caricature, 1759-1838* ed. Todd Porterfield (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 117-36.

<sup>67</sup> Odumosu, 19.



Fig. 1.1 J. Elwood, 1790. BM no. 1878,0511.654



Fig. 1.2 Anonymous, *Caricature Shop*, 1801. Courtesy of the LWL

James Peller Malcom records in his *An Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricaturing* (1813) that by the end of the eighteenth century graphic satire had established itself as ‘a kind of allegorical history of public events.’<sup>68</sup> Scholars including David Alexander, Gatrell, Rauser, Haywood, Odumosu, Taylor and Catherine Packham have contributed to present understandings of caricature as a political agent which operates in dialogue with other textual forms including literature, journalism and epistolary gossip.<sup>69</sup> In *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics*, Packham identifies the body as ‘representing, clarifying, [and] dramatizing

<sup>68</sup> James Peller Malcom, *An Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricaturing* (London: Longman, 1813), 102.

<sup>69</sup> David S. Alexander, *Richard Newton and English Caricature in the 1790s* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1998); Gatrell, *City of Laughter, The First Bohemians Life and Art in London’s Golden Age* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2013); Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*; Haywood “Rude Britannia: New Perspectives in Caricature,” *Romanticism and Caricature*; Odumosu, *Africans in English Caricature*; Taylor; Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

political realities' within satirical prints. For Packham, the female body is not a superficial reflection of political interests, but rather an 'explicit object of political rhetoric', an expressive medium with clear cultural impact and import.<sup>70</sup> Despite this, reflections on the representation of the women's bodies within satirical prints repeatedly return to superficial analyses of contemporary attitudes towards, as opposed to constructions of, female bodily beauty, sexual identity and public roles. For example, McCreery surmises that some caricatures of women, including those who depicted women behaving and dressed like men, were intended primarily for 'entertainment rather than moral education.' Whilst this makes for an interesting comment on contemporary perceptions of masculine women – McCreery notes that these prints sparked a range of responses from 'curiosity to flattery to titillation to outrage' – this form of analysis requires deepening.<sup>71</sup> Whilst this thesis recognises graphic satire as a medium through which conversations about gender were channelled, it aligns itself with studies of satire like that of Gatrell, Haywood, Packham, Odumosu, and Taylor in treating caricaturists as agent cultural authorities rather than as chroniclers.

By and large, the prints included in this thesis have been selected because they deploy what Hallett refers to as 'the pictorial negative.' That is, they represent the breast as an exception to an ideal in order to reinforce the validity of 'notional, normative, [...] prototypical views' of femininity.<sup>72</sup> This methodology is put to productive use in Anja Müller's study *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals and Prints*, within which she searches for print representations which show the family unit as 'unsettled, disrupted, or threatened.' These images, she argues, 'exemplify the precariousness of the proposed ideal', which in her case, revolve around care and protection of the child.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, this thesis interprets images of transgression as confirmation that specific ideals were challenged. Moreover, building upon the work of Marilyn Francus, it recognises the repetitive presence of such negative reinforcements as a 'desperate attempt to call [ideals] into being' rather than confirmation of their dominance, or even existence.<sup>74</sup> This

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<sup>70</sup> Packham, 122.

<sup>71</sup> McCreery, 147.

<sup>72</sup> Hallett, *Spectacle of Difference*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Anja Müller, *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals and Prints, 1689-1789* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 143.

<sup>74</sup> Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, 16.



approach to transgressive images chimes well with the construct of the nurturing breast in the eighteenth century, and the 'natural' mother that it represented. As Heather Meek argues in her work on motherhood and hysteria, the concept of 'natural' mother required the contrasting concept of the 'unnatural mother – the one who failed to 'nurture' - in order to take root.<sup>75</sup> The prints analysed are certainly not exhaustive, and do not totalise the contemporary satirical treatment of the breast. They primarily address issues of gender, but as a consequence they ask additional questions about class, race, and creed. I look outwards towards these issues where appropriate, but each deserves a study of their own. I therefore chiefly consider their relation to maternal ideals, recognising how the bodies and experiences of particular groups of women are obscured or rendered less visible in satirical prints due to circumstances such as age, race, disability and economics.<sup>76</sup>

### *Medical Gazes*

The eighteenth-century interest in graphic satire coincided with an increase in the visual scrutiny of the female body. Whilst curiosity towards and surveillance of the female form and women's behaviours did persist into the nineteenth century, it was during the 1700s that scientific practices such as anatomical dissections and drawings first flourished. In the 1740s anatomists including the Scottish obstetrician William Hunter began revolutionary work on female anatomy.<sup>77</sup> By 1774 Hunter had published his famous drawings of the gravid uterus, exposing and committing to print

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<sup>75</sup> Heather Meek, "Motherhood, Hysteria, and the Eighteenth-Century Woman Writer" in *The Secrets of Generation: Reproduction in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Raymond Stephanson and Darren N. Wagner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 238-57, 238.

<sup>76</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, "Introduction" in *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650-1865*, ed. Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 1-33, 5.

<sup>77</sup> For more on William Hunter and in particular his drawings of the gravid uterus, see Caroline Grigson, "An universal language': William Hunter and the production of The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus" in *William Hunter's World: The Art and Science of Eighteenth-Century Collecting* ed. Mungo Campbell, E. Geoffrey Hancock, and Nick Pearce (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 59-80; Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 94-8; Sean Silver, "Conception" in *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* ed. Sean Silver et al. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 2015), 189-225, 197-203.

elements of women's bodies which had been shrouded in mystery.<sup>78</sup> As Wagner explains, the gravid, or pregnant, body, was previously supposed to be 'closed to the public gaze', but drawings like Hunter's circulated knowledge about its biological reality. In her study of maternal bodies, the philosopher Quill Kukla has likewise commented that it had been 'formerly tucked away behind modesty and ignorance', but its status as an object of 'rigorous scientific surveillance and attention' took hold in the eighteenth century.<sup>79</sup> Not only was Hunter's work part of the broader effort to record, track, and better understand the inner workings of the female body, but it mobilised the medical and aesthetic fetishisation of it.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jordanova, "Gender, generation and science" in *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World*, ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 385-413, 401.

<sup>79</sup> Kukla, 66.

<sup>80</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 98.

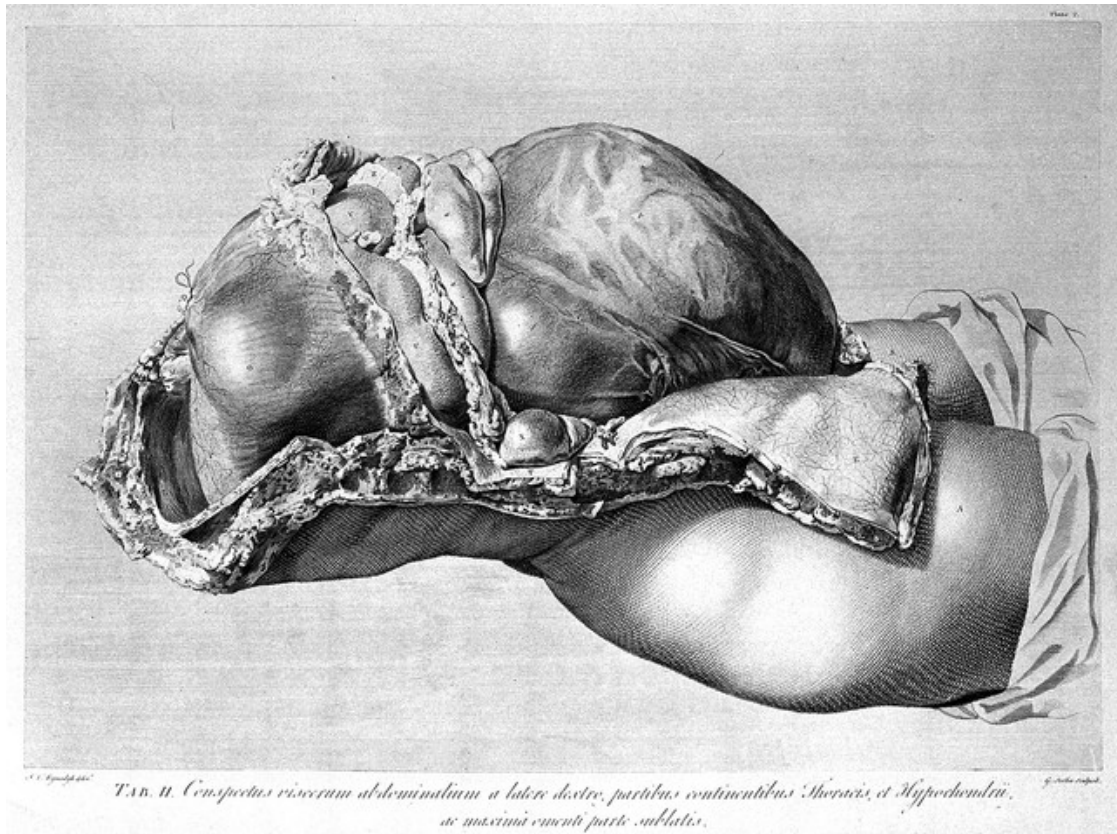


Fig. 1.3 William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*, 1774. WC, 6157

In terms of their anatomical accuracy, Hunter's images are extraordinary; as Wagner has noted, they are strictly impersonal and objective. This approach, Wagner argues, mapped onto wider medical and political frameworks which sought to 'strip away ornament and artifice in order to expose reality, to see things as they really were.' This movement, however, existed in tension with anxieties about the fading worth of that which affected the human condition, but which science did not account for; 'manners, customs, and tastes.'<sup>81</sup> This surge in and diversification of visual representations of the female body occurred during a moment when an ever-increasing amount of didactic material sought to prescribe the female experience. Conduct books, medical treatises, magazines and religious writings counselled women on *how* to live in their bodies, advising on activities, fashion, food, relationships, duties and much, much more. More often than not, these texts

<sup>81</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 96-7.

recommended what women shouldn't do. The desire to accurately account for the female body (anatomical drawings) whilst also prescribing its lived reality (conduct literature), can be seen to collide, at least in spirit, in satirical prints. Satirical prints go some way to reconciling the tension between these two drives. Caricatures of the breast for example, lay bare an element of the female anatomy often obscured to public view, but do so subjectively in order to facilitate speculation on women's moral inadequacies and failures. The presence of women in graphic satire whets the contemporary desire to see the female body exposed, as well as acknowledging the slippery presence of a feminine 'nature', a concept which cannot be scientifically accounted for, but which can be culturally shaped. In this way, graphic satirists dissect and display the female body whilst simultaneously offering a moralising commentary on its behaviours.

The extent to which eighteenth-century caricaturists relied on the medical realm for satirical content has been well observed. Scholars including Fiona Haslam, Noelle Gallagher, Antony Mahler and Frédéric Ogée have examined how sicknesses such as gout, gluttony, dropsy, consumption, skin diseases, venereal infections, melancholia and hysteria were mobilised as metaphors for wider social illnesses.<sup>82</sup> Medical imagery - including depictions of practitioners, sites, procedures and marvels - helped to contain and contextualise a rapidly changing medical landscape.<sup>83</sup> Beyond explorations of medicine as a graphic subject matter, historians have noticed similarities between the *practice* of satire and some medical – and especially anatomical - processes themselves. Literary scholar David B. Morris

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<sup>82</sup> Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996); Noelle Gallagher, *Itch, Clap, Pox: Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Antony Mahler, "The Legibility of the Bowels: Lichtenberg's Excretory Vision of Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*" in *Bellies, Bowels and Entrails in the Eighteenth-Century* ed. Rebecca Anne Barr, Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon and Sophie Vasset (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 159-88; Frédéric Ogée, "Rotund Bellies and Double Chins: Hogarth's Bodies" in *Bellies, Bowels and Entrails*, 252-70.

<sup>83</sup> For more on medical marvels as satirical subjects, see for example Karen Harvey's exploration of satirical representations of the infamous Mary Toft, who claimed to have given birth to rabbits, in 1726. Harvey shows how artists including Hogarth were interested in imagining the place and process of Toft's birth, the medical men who attended her, and the role played by her close family. *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder: Mary Toft and Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 55-61, 77-83.

argues that in the run up to the eighteenth century, theorists closely connected satire with practices like surgery.<sup>84</sup> Before Morris, satire scholar Robert Elliot wrote that written satire acted as an intrusive and ‘dishonouring shaft.’ Elaborating on this concept in *Satire and Secrecy*, Melinda Alliker Rabb explains that it was prone to ‘wound, pierce, severe, cut and sting.’<sup>85</sup> That this language of combat, the invasiveness and the abrasiveness is used to describe satire attests to its assailing and injurious potentiality. Certainly, the famed poet Lady Mary Wortley Montagu saw it this way; she wrote in 1773 that satire should wound its subject ‘like a polish’d Razor keen’ and like an ‘Oyster-Knife, that hacks and haws.’<sup>86</sup> It is no accident that Montagu draws upon the phallic imagery of the penetrative blade at a time when both the physician and the caricaturist were presumed to be male. Just like anatomists and male midwives, the graphic satirist invaded the female body, seeking to anatomise transgressive femininity in a bid to cure social, rather than medical, ills. Their obvious target for dissection was the breast, which, unlike the vagina, could apparently be explicitly depicted and derided without attracting too much offence or censorship.

The breast carried endless metonymic possibilities for caricature. But satirical images of the breast also worked to highlight the supposed unruliness of the female body. In *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture, and Mothers’ Bodies*, Kukla argues that the reproductive female body has been historically conceptualised as the ‘troubling counterpoint’ to the ‘well-bounded, fully unified, seamless masculine body.’<sup>87</sup> As a symbol of both sex and motherhood, the breast clearly marked the physical distinction between the sexes. But it also emblematised non-physical differences. Whilst medical investigations such as those by William Hunter had begun to debunk myths about women’s bodily excesses, there was still much suspicion about the relationship between the changeability inherent in the reproductive female body and

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<sup>84</sup> David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 177.

<sup>85</sup> Robert C. Elliot, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 5; Melinda Alliker Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy in English Literature from 1650-1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11.

<sup>86</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, “Verses Addressed To The Imitator Of The First Satire Of The Second Book Of Horace” (1733) in *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Essays and Poems and simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 265-70, 267.

<sup>87</sup> Kukla, 3.

women's perceived emotional and mental lability. In this vein, the breast was often employed as a marker of excess; it was presented as auxiliary to a body (and nature) which, were it not for its physical and emotional surpluses, might otherwise be containable.<sup>88</sup>

Kukla proposes that the medical and graphic drive to make the maternal body panoptic emanated from such anxieties about its surpluses and unstable boundaries, and the impact of these on the behaviour of the self.<sup>89</sup> In part, she attributes the eighteenth-century suspicion over the permeability of the female body to its excess of external functions – its tendency to 'leak, drip, squirt [...] sag, dilate, and expel.'<sup>90</sup> If the mutability of the female body caused such discomfort, then it is not surprising that so many eighteenth-century satires of transgressive femininity find their focus in the breast. Swelling, deflating, softening, hardening, sustaining, seducing, sickening; the breast shifts shape, function and significance depending on a host of social, cultural, emotional and environmental circumstances. Its displacement and distortion within visual satire can be conceived of as an attempt to control and monitor the boundaries which Kukla observes troubled contemporaries. Satirical images of the breast influenced impressions of what was natural, aberrant, comedic, scandalous and grotesque when it came to femininity, and thus served as a regulating technology.

### **From the Selfish to the Revolutionary Breast: Thesis Structure**

This thesis begins by spotlighting the figure of the 'selfish' mother-woman and her transgressive breasts. Paying attention to those who were condemned and side-

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<sup>88</sup> Rowlandson engages breasts in this way in his satirical print *The Breaking up of the Blue Stocking Club* (London: 1815), BM Satires 12642, which pictures what George describes as a 'wild mêlée over a tea-table.' This misogynistic portrait depicts the Bluestockings as grotesque hags viciously fighting, hitting, clawing and scolding each other. The upturned tea set at the centre parodies Richard Steele's famed early eighteenth-century imagining of 'reasonable women' who politely exchanged thoughts on society across the tea table. Instead, the women are revealed to be incapable of exercising masculine reason; their unruly natures and lack of restraint incite chaos and violence. Aligned across the centre line of the print, their large and flyaway breasts denote the uncontainable excesses of femininity. Both women's bodies and behaviours, Rowlandson implies, could benefit from some discipline. George, Vol. IX.

<sup>89</sup> Kukla, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

lined because of their perceived resistance to maternal ideals fixed around the breast, it demonstrates how interest and participation in sex, socialising politics, and creative work was presented and understood as incompatible with familial devotion. The transgressive breast, it proposes, was put forward as visual evidence of a mother's mistaken priorities. This first thematic chapter features case studies of two famous women: Georgiana the Duchess of Devonshire and the actress and poet Mary Robinson. Their representations in satirical prints, it contends, illustrate how the breast was used as a fulcrum from which to allege the wicked depravity - and sometimes sickness - of those who failed to fully devote themselves to childrearing. Exploring why such a high volume of the selfish mothers paraded in prints were urban and upper-class, it furthermore reflects on the authoritative medical sources which gave rise to the cultural celebration of instinctive, natural maternal nurture. In focusing on Devonshire and Robinson it also asks questions about status, satire and celebrity; were upper-class, aristocratic and well-known maternal personalities surveyed so heavily in caricature because they were more likely to engage audiences, or because their influence meant that their transgressions were experienced as more of a threat than that of their rural, lower-class counterparts?

Chapter two focuses on the fashions which revolved around the breast in the 1780s and 1790s. Turning first to the heavily mocked breast-boosting, padding, and plumping trends of the 1780s, it then considers how the breast-baring styles of the 1790 were treated in graphic satire. The pouter-pigeon breasts of the 1780s, it illustrates, prompted anxieties about fakery and concealment. Concerns about the unnatural appearance of the breast served as a kind of umbrella unease from which other worries emanated; caricatures of absurdly large and embellished chests speak to disquiet over the corrosion of the upper-class, developments in technology, the decline of modesty, and rising levels of artifice. In the 1790s, revealing neoclassical inspired drapery overturned the fashionable focus on elaboration and pulled the 'natural' breast into the limelight. Conservatives protested, however, that the styles were offensive takes on classical culture, enabling licentious sexual display under the guise of artistic imitation. As with the fashions of the 1780s, satirists responded to such unease by burlesquing the fools of fashion whose reputations were besmirched by their immoral and physically ill-suited participation in exposing fashions. Building upon the discussion of selfish mothers in chapter one, the chapter ends by considering how the fashions of the 1780s and 1790s intersected with representations and experiences

of motherhood. The perceived artificiality, mutability, inconvenience, immorality and performativity of some fashions, it shows, were weaponised against women in an effort to redirect their attentions towards modest, dutiful domestic identities. This chapter is concerned with agency, marginalisation and exclusion; it notices who satirists attack and who they do not, as well as what types of bodies are shown to benefit – in terms of creativity, bodily freedom and functionality – from new developments in fashion.

Chapters three and four look to more surreal and violent imaginings of the breast. The meanings attached to the breast became increasingly polemical as the century progressed. Following the mid-century reconceptualisation of the relationship between the individual and the state, the once predominantly sequestered maternal body was touted as an emblem of public morality, health and wealth. Chapter three explores the motif of the grotesque breast which appeared on the bodies of old women, witches, devils and mythological monsters to symbolise degeneration and corruption. Tracing how grotesque breasts signposted civic decline as entangled with female transgression, it illuminates how caricaturists used the bodies of women to probe social ills such as addiction, constitutional crises and maternal neglect. The fourth and final chapter, 'The Revolutionary Breast', turns its attention to how breasts are represented in anti-revolution British satires. Proposing the trope of the physically threatening French breast, it examines the vitriolic conflation of violent Jacobinism with radical femininity. It argues that as well as articulating acute anxieties about female agency and bodily authority, such images worked alongside other forms of propaganda to conceptualise France as Britain's dangerous and degenerate 'other.'

The diverse ways in which the breast appears in this thesis corresponds with the array of figures who parade it; the prints which follow depict the breasts of mothers, stepmothers, wet-nurses, drunks, campaigners, actresses, hags, Amazons, viragos and monsters, to name just a few. This multiplicity breeds an astounding wealth of meanings and reveals the manifold and often discordant femininities which helped contemporaries relate to their social and political realities. For scholars of eighteenth-century gender and visual culture alike, this study on satirical representations of the breast offers new and nuanced understandings of the female body at the forefront of cultural change.



## Chapter One

### The Selfish Breast

In 1767 the obstetrical physician Hugh Smith addressed women's misgivings about breastfeeding. Writing in his *Letters to Married Women*, a text so popular that it went through six editions and was translated into French and Dutch, Smith registered concerns that breastfeeding ruined women's bodies, jeopardised their romantic relationships and interfered with their social lives. His response was to sing the praises of the animal kingdom, to enshrine beasts who instinctively suckled and to shame mothers who, however fleetingly, thought of themselves first:

Did we consider the benefit of our children more, and the indulgence of our selfish inclinations less, the race of many would be more healthy, strong, and vigorous, then we can at present boast.<sup>1</sup>

Declaring his ambition to 'prevent, as much as possible the future growth of these evils', Smith tried to combat maternal selfishness by providing advice on 'natural and easy' methods of nursing. The irony of delivering directions on something he perceived to be natural did not escape him, but he considered selfishness to be a product of a particular set of circumstances – a consequence of middling and upper-class 'luxury and depravity.'<sup>2</sup> Surmising that a superfluity of choice, distractions and sources of pleasure were derailing women's natural impulse to nurture, he sought to reinstate the role of nature in childrearing. Smith's reflections on selfishness demonstrate how, in the second half of the eighteenth century, maternal breastfeeding was presented not just as a badge of virtue, but of female

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Smith, *Letters to Married Women, on Nursing and the Management of Children*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: C. and G. Kearsley, 1792), 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 63.

altruism.<sup>3</sup> Medical authorities celebrated the nursing mother who gave up everything to devote herself to her infant, praising her for fulfilling her maternal, marital and civic duty.

Whilst physicians' observations on the benefits of maternal milk were reasonable, their emphasis on nurture was bigger than the breast. First and foremost an apparatus for lowering infant mortality rates, maternal breastfeeding developed into a mechanism for female reform. The medical rhetoric surrounding nursing rested on conditions of selflessness, demanding a lot of give from mothers but allowing very little, if any, take. But despite this, many women challenged, resisted and reworked the self-sacrifice that was expected of them. There is evidence of this across textual culture; in the moralising philosophical, literary and medical works which criticised maternal selfishness, and in women's residual histories themselves. Biographies, letters, pocketbooks, poems, artwork, court records, newspaper reports and medical testimonies all document lives lived – sometimes favourably, but more often not – around or in defiance of totalising motherhood.

By turning to satirical images of selfish mothers and their 'unnatural' breasts', this chapter examines two women who did just this: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the actress, poet and courtesan Mary Robinson. These women's stories have been richly retold and reinvestigated, with their roles as mothers

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<sup>3</sup> Linda L. Layne records that the word 'selfish', and the concepts and impressions which were attached to it took hold in the seventeenth-century. Developed in the context of theological moral obligations, from the middle of century it joined with other terms such as 'self-concerned', 'self-interested' and 'self-pleasing' to describe 'improper or immoral attitudes and behaviours.' In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea of selfishness and its associated characteristics became central to debates about the reformation of civic manners and duties. Linda L. Layne, "Introduction: Self, Selfish, Selfless" in *Selfishness and Selflessness: New Approaches to Understanding Morality* (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 1-21, 9.

attracting ample interest.<sup>4</sup> Satirical prints, however, offer fresh insight into their histories. Telling different and often darker stories, satires share observations which are often misunderstood, under-explored or discredited as grievances or witticisms. Attention to these perspectives deepens critical understanding of the uneasy relationship between maternal experience and cultural representation, revealing the insecurity of ideological expectations. The narratives which find expression here are of upper-class and middling women. Although Robinson was not born rich and nor did she marry into money, she was upwardly mobile and gained prominence by cultivating social connections through her work. Born and married into the aristocracy, Georgiana Cavendish was at the forefront of elite society.

Both women's positions rendered their maternal roles visible, culturally representable and to a certain extent, more vulnerable to criticism. Their class and wealth also impacted upon their maternal experience, providing them with more options and agency than their working-class counterparts. Freer than others from the constraints of domesticity and work, their financial and social security made some personal autonomy possible. But although privileged mothers could employ help with childcare, their leisurely lifestyle also meant that they didn't necessarily need it. In the sources which follow, maternal selfishness is represented and treated as a maternal choice. Unlike transgressions such as infanticide and abandonment, which were often - although not always - treated as circumstantial tragedies, upper-class parental neglect was experienced as galling because the odds were perceived to be

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<sup>4</sup> For scholarship on Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire's role and representation as a mother, see Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Harper Collins, 1998); Müller *Framing Childhood*, 170-182; McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 188-192. For information on Mary Robinson including her experience as a mother, see Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Life of Mary Robinson* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005); Ellen Malenas Ledoux, "Working Mothers on the Romantic Stage: Sarah Siddons and Mary Robinson" in *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theatre, 1660-1830*, ed. Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr (Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 79-101; Ashley Cross, *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism: Literary Dialogues and Debts 1784-1821* (London, New York: Routledge, 2017).

stacked in a mother's favour.<sup>5</sup> If they were so inclined, elite mothers could dedicate plentiful resources – time, money, love – to their infants, and this advantage made their failure to do so reprehensible.

Whilst lack of maternal devotion was understood as a failure of character, it was to some extent understood as an environmental product. Broader suspicions about the immorality of the elite galvanised representations of selfish aristocratic mothers. In line with medical and philosophical reasonings, caricaturists presented maternal selfishness as a peculiarly aristocratic problem symptomatic of an endemic corruption. Queen Charlotte, figurative mother of the nation and biological mother to fifteen surviving children, provided a notable exception to this rule. She was usually – although not always, as Chapter three of this thesis will show – portrayed as a superb role model. Much of the praise she received however, was structured around her 'apparent antipathy to fashionable society', and in particular her disdain for the fashionable Whig set led by the Duchess of Devonshire. She aspired to a 'quiet maternal career', McCreery writes, whilst figures such as the Duchess 'adopted the trappings of devoted motherhood but not its substance.'<sup>6</sup> As the first section of this chapter explores, physicians characterised selfish motherhood as a consequence of vanity, ambition, urbanity and sexual indiscretion. Considering how this discourse manifested in visual culture, the remainder of the chapter examines how the Duchess and Robinson were pilloried in satirical prints and other textual sources.

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars including Wagner, Marilyn Francus, Dana Rabin, Julie Kipp and Mark Jackson have written widely on Georgian women who either struggled, failed or refused to care for their children. Wagner, "The Problem of Maternal Violence: Anatomy, Forensic Medicine, and the Mind" in *The Secrets of Generation in the Long Eighteenth Century* ed. Raymond Stephanson and Darren N. Wagner (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2015), 195-216; Marilyn Francus, "A-Killing Their Children With Safety: Maternal Identity and Transgression in Swift and Defoe" in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Katharine Kittredge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 258-82; *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012); Dana Rabin, "Beyond "Lewd Women" and "Wanton Wenches": Infanticide and Child Murder in the Long Eighteenth Century" in *Writing British Infanticide: Child-murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859*, ed. Jennifer Thorn (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 45-69; Julie Kipp, "Naturally Bad or Dangerously Good: Romantic-Era Narratives of Murderous Motherhood" in *Writing British Infanticide*, 236-364; Mark Jackson *New-born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 198-9.

The rationale for focusing on these two mothers is three-fold. Firstly, noticing that these women were particularly targeted by satirists provides a point from which to consider how issues of class, agency and visibility affected what types of 'selfish' mothers received visual representation. Secondly, the wealth of biographical material available on the Duchess and Robinson facilitates reflection on how mothers' personal histories intersected with institutionalised, notional ideas of maternity in graphic satire. Specific records of their maternal experience – for example regarding their children's fathers, their pregnancies and how they handled infant care - expose how caricaturists skewed or sensationalised elements of real life for entertaining or moralising ends. Crucially, the fact that these women's lives were lived in the public eye – their decisions, activities and behaviours well-known - reveals much about what was judged as selfish mothering towards the end of the eighteenth century. Both women were involved in a series of enterprises which conflicted with the idealised role of the mother; they were implicated in fraught political battles, had high-profile extra-marital affairs and were committed to creative and political pursuits. Whilst their positions of privilege meant that they led relatively unusual lives, the abuse they received for their actions suggested to other mothers, and women more widely, what behaviours would put familial reputations at risk. Finally, focusing on the Duchess and Robinson provides insight into how the typically private status of individual maternity became increasingly public in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The status of the Duchess and Robinson requires reflection on the influence of 'celebrity' motherhood during the Georgian period. Literary scholar Anja Müller ventures that the Duchess was 'the most illustrious aristocratic woman of her time', whilst Romanticism specialist Tom Mole notes that Robinson's fame was such that it provided significant 'commercial profit or cultural currency' to every source that 'published a story about her, a caricature of her, or a poem addressed to her.'<sup>7</sup> Exploring the politics of eighteenth-century celebrity, Mole, Leo Braudy, Laura Engel, and others have shown that British citizens were greatly interested in and closely influenced by that which they read, watched and heard about those in the public-

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<sup>7</sup> Müller, 170; Tom Mole, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture: 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 22.

eye.<sup>8</sup> Writing on the experience of celebrity itself, Braudy argues that fame opened up ways for ‘defining oneself, making oneself known, beyond the limitations of class and family.’<sup>9</sup> Engel has built upon this to show how it offered women agent opportunities for self-fashioning and self-promotion.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Emrys D. Jones and Victoria Joule have worked to determine how the identities and behaviours of notable actresses, politicians and writers were negotiated through print culture, finding that the emergence of celebrity resulted in interior lives being made public, and thus the public ‘acquiring new, private value.’<sup>11</sup> Blending personal matters with public medical and moral concerns, satirical prints showed how women’s failure to embody maternal nurturance could fracture not just one’s family, reputation and stake in the community, but also the equilibrium of wider society. In doing so, they made a significant and timely contribution to the critical commentary on upper-class maternal selfishness that was underway elsewhere in textual culture.

### **Medical and Moral Debates about Breastfeeding, Class and Selfishness**

‘The medical history of any country’, Alun Withey observes, ‘goes straight to the heart of the culture and beliefs of its people.’<sup>12</sup> Investigating medicalised practices like breastfeeding provides a means to reconnect with the minutiae of past experiences but also with the cultural, political and economic pressures which coloured everyday life. The social history of medicine offers a conceptual framework, Withey continues, from which to appreciate medicine as both ‘reflective and formative of society as a whole.’<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the medical debates surrounding breastfeeding in the eighteenth century both held a mirror up to and moulded the

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<sup>8</sup> Mole; Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011); Antoine Lilti, *The Invention of Celebrity 1750-1850*, trans. Lynn Jeffress (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Braudy, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Engel, 1-25.

<sup>11</sup> Emrys D. Jones and Victoria Joule “Introduction” in *Intimacy and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture: Public Interiors*, ed. Emrys D. Jones and Victoria Joule (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Alun Withey, *Physick and the Family: Health, Medicine and Care in Wales 1600-1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Withey, *Physick and the Family*, 2.

ideological impulses of wider society, infused as they were with questions about mortality rates, population strength and public virtue. As the second half of the eighteenth century got underway, the benefits of maternal breastfeeding were widely accepted amongst the European medical community. In Britain, a series of childrearing manuals by eminent male physicians including Smith, William Cadogan and William Buchan encouraged all women to breastfeed their own children for at least a year.<sup>14</sup> Maternal nursing was reckoned to lower infant mortality rates, support childhood health and growth, aid postpartum recoveries and prevent repeated pregnancies through its contraceptive qualities.

In the final third of the century, prognoses of improved infant survival rates provided the main social and medical motivation for maternal nursing. As Revolutionary violence in France grew, Britain experienced its own unrest; concerns about escalating conflicts both abroad and at home catalysed a constitutional focus on population growth and strength. Medical men professed that maternal milk, and the care with which it was delivered, would lay the foundations for a robust and unified society equipped to confront external threats. Invoking the myth of Hercules, Buchan promised that an infant ‘invigorated by his mother’s milk’ alone would have ‘force sufficient to strangle in his cradle any serpents that might assail him.’ Maternal breastfeeding not only offered great physical benefit but also the possibility for moral restoration. Its ‘happy consequences’, Buchan shared with his readers, ‘would be no less striking in a medical than in a moral point of view.’<sup>15</sup> Physicians argued that it formed solicitous bonds and engendered harmonious atmospheres which spread beyond the family, returning society at large to a more natural and principled way of life. Maternal breastfeeding, they insisted, was the virtuous glue which would fuse families, homes and communities together.

In line with these recommendations, the popularity of maternal nursing soared.<sup>16</sup> As Perry observes, breastfeeding became a ‘moral and medical imperative

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<sup>14</sup> Hugh Smith, *Letters to Married Women*; William Cadogan, *An Essay Upon Nursing and the Management of Children, from their Birth to Three Years of Age* (London: J. Roberts, 1748); William Buchan, *Advice to Mothers on The Subject of Their Own Health and on the Means of Promoting the Health, Strength, and Beauty of their Offspring* (London: T. Cadell, 1767).

<sup>15</sup> Buchan, xx.

<sup>16</sup> Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, 87-91, 106, 288-92; Romola Jane Davenport, “Infant-feeding practices and infant survival by familial wealth in London, 1752–1812” *The History of the Family* 24, no. 1 (2019): 174-206, 178, 186.

for women of all classes' as mothers increasingly shunned the previously preferred practices of wet nursing and hand-rearing.<sup>17</sup> Everyone who was physically able and economically secure enough to devote their time and bodies to their children were urged to do so. Yet despite this pressure, some mothers did resist breastfeeding and the tenets of nurture that it symbolised. 'Opulent' upper-class mothers, Smith speculated in his *Letters*, were common culprits; either they were too self-absorbed to pay attention to their offspring, or else they over-complicated the process, pacifying them with artificial food and affection instead of the natural goodness and love embodied in the breast. Smith's disapproval was characteristic of broader suspicions that urban luxury and excess was weakening the constitution of the aristocracy, leaving them idle, sickly and spineless.<sup>18</sup> Medical criticisms of upper-class mothers and satirical depictions of their selfishness comprised part of a wider middling-class effort to reform the upper-class and protect the potency of the next generation.

For Smith, an important component of this was highlighting the unique care that rural mothers offered their children. Divorced from 'riches' and luxuries, they were compelled to 'follow nature' and thus often breastfed immediately and protractedly. Praising their selflessness, he wrote that they 'thought of no other enjoyments' until their children were grown, giving up their 'pleasures and recreations' almost entirely. In contrast, selfish upper-class mothers sacrificed the health of their families in order to pursue transitory and 'contemptible interest[s]' which, he regretted, they 'rarely made good use of.'<sup>19</sup> Smith's criticisms of elite mothers were not unusual, and nor was his romanticisation of the rural poor. His insensitive celebration of the lack of choices available to lower-class mothers echoes claims made by the physician William Cadogan in his mid-century treatise *An Essay Upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, from Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (1748). Cadogan surmised that industrious mothers who belonged to the 'lower class of mankind' were in fact privileged in their poverty:

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<sup>17</sup> Perry, 218.

<sup>18</sup> For a varied discussion of how the concept of excess is treated in visual and material culture, including how it has been used to gesture to immorality, see the essays in Julia Skelly's collection *The Uses of Excess in Visual and Material Culture, 1600-2010* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Smith, 66, 65, 63.



Health and posterity are the Portion of the Poor, I mean the laborious; the Want of Superfluity confines them more within the Limits of Nature: hence they enjoy Blessings they feel not, and are ignorant of their Cause. The Mother who only has a few Rags to cover her Child loosely, and little more than her own Breast to feed it, sees it healthy and strong, and very soon able to shift for itself; while the puny Insect, the Heir and Hope of a rich Family, lies languishing under a Load of Finery, that overpowers his limbs, abhorring and rejecting the Dainties he is cramm'd with, 'till he dies a Victim to the mistaken Care and Tenderness of his fond Mother.<sup>20</sup>

Like Smith, Cadogan overlooked the socio-economic struggles of working-class mothers, reducing their experience to an idealised image of uncomplicated and unaffected care. This negation of struggle can be distilled into one affecting image: that of the mother with 'little more than her own Breast to feed [her infant].' Cadogan's rehashing of this poverty-stricken circumstance as a tender expression of affection shows how selflessness was valorised in the natural, nurturing breast.

False dichotomies between poor and rich mothers perpetuated damaging discourses about maternal nursing as a universally possible and cost-free blessing. In reality, mothers across the class spectrum faced a number of diverse medical, social and cultural barriers to nursing. Whilst not typically framed by socio-economic struggles, middle and upper-class women's objections to breastfeeding were nonetheless valid.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, physicians like Smith and Cadogan commonly

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<sup>20</sup> Cadogan, 7.

<sup>21</sup> As Susan C. Greenfield has shown, a poor mother's decision whether to exclusively breastfeed her child was rarely straightforward and often impossible. Her family often relied on the income she generated from labour in the fields or within rich households, work which she would have to reduce or give up entirely to breastfeed her child. Additionally, lactation offered the potential for an extra stream of income; instead of breastfeeding her own baby, a woman could monetise her milk as a wet-nurse. Poor mothers lived in a society, Greenfield argues, which 'taught them to cherish maternal love whilst making it financially impossible for them to care for their children.' For many, maternal nursing was an economic privilege – its function was 'marked by its exclusivity.' Greenfield, "Introduction" in *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature 1650-1865*, ed. Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 5-6. See also Alexandra Shepard, "The Pleasures and Pains of Breastfeeding in England c. 1600-c.1800" in *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550-1850: Narratives and Representations*, ed. Michael J. Braddick and Joanna Innes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 227-53, 240-1.

dismissed women's protests as facetious or ill-informed. Often, women raised concerns that the appearance of their breasts would change or that nursing would be too time-consuming. In response to these qualms, Cadogan reprimanded women for not sacrificing their beauty and time for the good of their children. A mother should be prepared, he advised, to 'give up a little Beauty of her Breast' to pacify her infant and provide a peaceful matrimonial home. 'Men would look past a sagging bosom', he reminded his readers, but they would not put up with 'a squalling Brat.'<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere, many mothers reported physiological difficulties; they had problems producing enough milk, establishing feeding and/or found themselves in excruciating pain. Whilst some physicians accepted these complaints, they rarely accepted that nursing was not in the best interests of every mother and child.<sup>23</sup> More often, they argued that problems could be overcome with sheer will – they insisted that instinct combined with selfless determination could supersede any physical or emotional issues. In a chapter providing 'directions' for the 'natural' process of breastfeeding, Smith repeated that nursing was an 'easy and delightful' task which could be achieved by all mothers – even the physically weak or infirm. 'Never more suffer it to pass for an argument', he declared, 'that a woman capable of bearing a child has not strength to suckle it.'<sup>24</sup> This perspective was subsumed by popular culture, including women's magazines. In the March 1774 issue of *The Lady's Magazine*, the author of a monthly column "The Friend to the Fair Sex" attacked mothers who sent their infants to wet nurses and 'recourse[d] to violent methods to dry up the milk which they are in want of', lamenting this as a wicked neglect of duty, femininity and morality. Every mother, it argued, 'is furnished with everything necessary for the subsistence of her children.'<sup>25</sup> In the trusted eyes of Smith, other medical men and the press, there were very few, if any, excuses which exempted women from dedicating their energies, bodies and time to nurture.

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<sup>22</sup> Cadogan, 24.

<sup>23</sup> One physician who showed compassion for the difficulties of breastfeeding was George Armstrong, who observed that although maternal nursing was preferable, circumstances including health and work did impact upon whether it could be achieved. Armstrong, *Essay on the Diseases Most Fatal to Infants: To which are added Rules to be Observed in the Nursing of Children: With a particular View to those who are brought up by Hand* (London: T. Cadell, 1767), 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Hugh Smith, 93.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Friend to the Fair Sex. Chapter X. On the Management of Children' *The Lady's Magazine* (March 1774), 146-8, 146.

Amidst medical assertions about woman's natural capacity to breastfeed and nurture, the notion of selflessness as the maternal default flourished. This created space for the vilification of women who failed to embody it. As Perry observes, mothers who didn't nurse risked being branded as 'selfish, callous and unnatural.'<sup>26</sup> They were cast not just as bad mothers, but as unfit women. The Scottish physician Buchan, for example, argued that if a woman could not bring herself to 'discharge the duties of a mother', then she had 'no right to become a wife.' 'Neither conjugal love' he reasoned, 'fidelity, modesty, chastity, nor any other virtue, can take deep root in the breast of a female that is callous to the feelings of a mother.'<sup>27</sup> Like the rest of his medical consort, Buchan exposed some of the inconsistencies surrounding ideologies of maternal nurture in his treatise *Advice to Mothers on the subject of their own health, and on the means of promoting the health, strength, and beauty, of their offspring* (1767). In the same breath, Buchan and his medical contemporaries spoke of breastfeeding and the care it represented as an effortless, instinctive undertaking and also as a task which needed to be learned. They promoted it as a cost-free joy but also as a practice which, if done properly, came at the expense of everything else. These flawed distinctions were characteristic of mid and late century medical reflections on breastfeeding. Lower and upper-class, rural and urban, nature and artifice, willingness and reluctance; these false dichotomies facilitated the division of mothers into two equally false camps; selfless and selfish.

This division was reproduced in satirical prints. In a similar manner to physicians, caricaturists attempted to shame women into nurture by providing moralising commentary on the consequences of mothers' transgressions. Satirists inverted the positive imagery of the nursing breast to deride women who, by investing their attention elsewhere, supposedly neglected their families. When viewed alongside their subject's maternal histories, these satirical portrayals of selfish mothers reveal how medical perceptions bled into cultural representations. Furthermore, they offer insight into how mothers themselves were deeply aware of the social, political and medical meanings ascribed to the maternal breast, and how they exploited these in order to engineer their public images. Delivering the first in two case studies, the following section considers satirical prints which foreground the

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<sup>26</sup> Perry, 217.

<sup>27</sup> Buchan, 170.

breasts of one of the most well-known and influential mothers of the Georgian period: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

### **Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire: Socialite, Political Campaigner and Mother**

The influential life of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire has been well documented and critically explored. Foreman, Elaine Chalus and others have led investigations into her marriage, motherhood, home, friendships, affairs, political activism, literary endeavours, financial problems and status as a style icon, as well as her portrayal in the popular press.<sup>28</sup> Some of these discussions have focused on her caricatural presence, exploring how concerns about her agency, visibility and influence mobilised the harsh satirical treatment she received.<sup>29</sup> Scholars including McCreery, Rauser and Noelle Gallagher have shown how graphic satirists seized upon rumours of her sexual immorality in an attempt to discredit her political efforts, and to pedal wider ideas about the modern decay of both femininity and politics.<sup>30</sup> Recently, Neil Howe has argued that satirical criticisms of the Duchess played out amidst a ‘brewing crisis of masculinity’ which saw female political engagement framed as a threat to male authority. Caricatures of the Duchess as masculine – with stubble, in male-dress and behaving lewdly – represented the gendered disruption

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<sup>28</sup> Foreman; Elaine Chalus, “Kisses for votes: the kiss and corruption in eighteenth-century in English elections” in *The Kiss in History* ed. Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 122-47; *Elite Women in English Political Life c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 69-83.

<sup>29</sup> Rauser, “The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire: Between Caricature and Allegory in 1784” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no 1. (2002): 23-46; *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 121-8; Anne Stott, “Female Patriotism”: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Westminster election of 1784’, *Eighteenth-century Life* 17, no. 3 (2003): 60–84; Linda Colley, *Britons Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 242-50; McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 1, 31, 41, 147, 187-91.

<sup>30</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 141; Rauser, “The Butcher-Kissing Duchess;” Gallagher, 76-81; Susan K. Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 120-22; from September 2014 through February 2016, the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University hosted an exhibition titled *Bawdy Bodies: Satires of Unruly Women*, which considers some of the sexually explicit prints of the Duchess which were published during the Westminster election of 1784. The exhibition booklet can be found on the Lewis Walpole Library website.

she had apparently caused by campaigning for Fox, a male non-relative, in the 1784 Westminster election. In 1784, Howe observes, the Duchess featured in more satirical prints than she had in all previous years combined.<sup>31</sup>

It is no coincidence that the three prints which follow were published during this time; as much as 1783-1784 was a moment of political change, it was also a year of personal transformation for the Duchess, who in the summer of 1783, nine years into her marriage, became a mother. This social genesis overlapped with the rush in satirical criticisms of her sexual and political behaviour. Yet in scholarship, these two events are rarely linked. Straddling the political, sexual and maternal, the breast offers a convenient visual and conceptual point from which to explore this connection. Satirical images of the Duchess' breast illustrate how satirists pitted her political and maternal identities against each other in attempt to discredit her authority in both. The Duchess' political activism was perceived not just as an assault on pillars of femininity, masculinity or politics itself, but as an attack against the family. In prints, her failures as a mother and as political woman are often inseparable – if her political activity is shown triggering her maternal transgressions, then her political unsuitability is also explained by way of her belonging in the home, with her daughter and husband.

McCreery and Wagner have recognised the significance of breasts in satirical prints of the Duchess. The conflicting sexual and maternal symbolism of the breast, Wagner argues, was used to bring the Duchess' role as a mother and political player into disrepute. Across satire, Wagner notes, exposed and bulging served as 'potent markers of women's biological incapacity', their uncontainable physical excess a reminder that neither women's bodies nor minds belonged on the public stage of politics. Their provocative sexual imagery, Wagner suggests, advertised the Duchess' potential 'to contaminate the echelons of political decision making', to corrupt and infiltrate the masculine ranks.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, McCreery identifies that there is a sexual/maternal identity split at play in satirical images of the Duchess' breasts. They underscored, McCreery proposes, her unnaturalness as a woman who claimed

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<sup>31</sup> Neil G. Howe, *Statesmen in Caricature: The Great Rivalry of Fox and Pitt the Younger in the Age of the Political Cartoon*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 94, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 63.

to be a devoted mother yet had an apparently insatiable appetite for sexual and political exploits. Conservative moralists took issue with the fact that the Duchess had interests unrelated to her family, and satirists accordingly shaped their depictions around allegations of her selfishness.

Characterisations of the Duchess as too selfish to be a good mother began long before the birth of her first child. In 1776, two years into her marriage, she suffered a miscarriage. The *Morning Post* speculated that she had brought the event upon herself by refusing to give up her fast-paced and fashionable lifestyle. ‘The Duchess of Devonshire lies dangerously ill’, they gossiped, ‘and we hear physicians have ascribed her indisposition to the reigning fashionable irregularities of the age.’<sup>33</sup> Invoking the medical authority of physicians, the *Post* made a thinly veiled stab at the Duchess’ mistaken priorities, appalled that she had put her own interests before her child’s health. Such open scrutiny of her lifestyle attests to the rising medicalisation of maternity during the latter half of the century. This male-led movement galvanised the surveillance of expectant mothers, whose culinary, sexual and social appetites were intensely policed.<sup>34</sup> Advised by physicians on what they ate, wore, looked at and even thought about, as well as the company they kept and the activities they participated in, it was easier than ever for women to make ‘wrong’ choices.<sup>35</sup>

With a constitutional focus on strengthening and morally reforming the population, the stakes of successful childbearing and rearing were high. Although the scrutiny the Duchess faced was undoubtedly exacerbated by her fame, many other aristocratic mothers and mother-to-be were watched closely by their physicians, families and friends. For the Duchess, the *Post*’s sly disapproval of her faltering

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<sup>33</sup> *Morning Post*, (April 12 1776).

<sup>34</sup> Although their voices were marginalised, European women did write on maternity, and in support of maternal breastfeeding. Margaret Hunt points towards Marie Angélique Anel Le Rebours as one of the ‘earliest champions’ of maternal breastfeeding, speculating that Rousseau was inspired by her 1767 treatise, *Avis aux mères qui veulent nourrir leurs enfans: avec des observations sur les dangers auxquels les mères s'exposent, ainsi que leurs enfans, en ne les nourrissant pas* (Paris: Lacombe, 1767). (Advice to mothers who wish to nurse their children, with observations on the dangers to which both mothers and children are exposed by failing to nurse). Hunt, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010), 142.

<sup>35</sup> For more on eighteenth-century perceptions of maternal imprinting, impressions and the maternal imagination see Sarah Fox, “Maternal Impressions” *Perceptions of Pregnancy Researchers’ Network* (September 28 2020).

entrance into the maternal realm was the beginning of a decades-long press assault on her shortcomings as a mother.

Despite press criticisms of her selfishness, contemporary records indicate that the Duchess was an affectionate and dedicated mother. Having married William Cavendish in 1774, she gave birth to her first living child in July 1783. Affectionately called 'Little G', her daughter Lady Georgiana Dorothy Cavendish was joined by a sister Harriet, or 'Harryo' in 1785, a brother, William, in 1790, and a half-sister, Eliza, born to the Duchess and her lover Charles Grey in 1792. Before she became a biological mother the Duchess also cared for her husband's illegitimate daughter Charlotte, who lived with them in 1780 after the death of her own mother. The Duchess' letters make clear her adoration of the child: in one she described her as 'the best humoured thing you ever saw.'<sup>36</sup> The various letters which she wrote to and about her children express her love and concern for each of them, evidencing her unusually hands-on approach to mothering as an upper-class woman. Where possible, the Duchess sought to care for her children herself, including breastfeeding them.<sup>37</sup> Looking back on her life in 1823, the authors of *The Percy Anecdotes* took the opportunity to praise her mothering style:

Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, who so often gave the tone of fashion, by her own example extirpated that vicious, and almost inhuman practice of employing mercenary nurses, which then so much prevailed in high life; and she, who for years had presided over the world of dress, feeling for her infant child, that

'No voice so sweet attunes his cares to rest,  
So soft no pillow as his mother's breast.'

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<sup>36</sup> Chatsworth 287: *Georgiana Devonshire to Lady Spencer* (May 9 1780).

<sup>37</sup> An early letter from the Duchess to her mother reveals that she did employ a 'rocker' upon the birth of her baby, whom would have been expected to help with the infant's sleep and hygiene routines. She discharged the hire shortly after however, when she turned up to work 'quite drunk', 'stink[ing] of wine and strong drink' and fell over and vomited. After this, the Duchess took primary care of her children herself. Chatsworth 529: the Duchess to Lady Spencer, September 1783.

introduced a practice which was so intimately connected with the dearest ties of affection; she suckled her own children, and, what is more, even made the duty a prevalent fashion.<sup>38</sup>

A monthly publication of letters providing 'lessons of conduct', the *Anecdotes* credit the Duchess with making breastfeeding fashionable, doing nothing to suggest her efforts was disingenuous. On the contrary, their reference to 'ties of affection' and 'duty' suggests that as an example to other woman, she embodied the sentimental and moral maxims which headed up the cultural promotion of maternal nursing. According to her friend Lady Sarah Napier, she spoke enthusiastically about breastfeeding while pregnant with her first child. 'The Duchess of Devonshire is taken up with nothing so much as the prospect of nursing her child herself', Napier wrote to a friend in 1783, 'which she talks of with so much eagerness as if her whole happiness depended upon succeeding.'<sup>39</sup> The Duchess did succeed, nursing 'Little G' from birth. Having reported on her earlier miscarriage with morbid glee, the *Morning Post* now congratulated her on performing her duty: 'her grace deserves commendation for this, but it is rather a reflection on the sex, that females in high life, should generally be such strangers to the duty of a mother, as to render one instance to the contrary so singular a phenomenon.'<sup>40</sup> Not everyone, though, was so full of praise – the decision was opposed by William Cavendish and his family, who, keen for a male heir, worried about the contraceptive effects of breastfeeding.

In her important study of infant feeding Valerie Fildes has shown that these effects were widely known, noting 'several eighteenth-century examples of high status women who were urged not to breastfeed, in order to increase their fertility, and the chance of producing an heir.'<sup>41</sup> The Duchess was one of these women: 'what makes [them] abuse suckling', she complained to her mother, 'is their impatience for my having a boy, and they fancying I shan't soon if I suckled.'<sup>42</sup> But despite objections from her husband's family, the Duchess continued to nurse. Her

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<sup>38</sup> Sholto and Reuben Percy, "Anecdotes of Woman," *The Percy Anecdotes*, vol. XX (London: T. Boys, 1823), 171.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Hugh Stokes, *The Devonshire House Circle* (London: H. Jenkins, 1917), 246.

<sup>40</sup> *Morning Post* (July 16 1783).

<sup>41</sup> Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, 108-9.

<sup>42</sup> Chatsworth 507: Georgiana Devonshire to Lady Spencer, September 1-16, 1783.



later correspondence suggests she continued the practice with her elder legitimate children, too.<sup>43</sup> ‘The popularisation of maternal nursing’ as indorsed by physicians and advertised by women like the Duchess, Susan C. Greenfield argues, ‘implicitly challenged the idea that an aristocratic mother’s main function was to supply heirs for the paternal estate.’<sup>44</sup> Breastfeeding was an important measure of maternity for the Duchess, and although some did not, many approved of her display of devotion. But it was also something which would be repeatedly weaponised against her in the 1780s, when her increasingly public role catalysed a flurry of derogatory satirical prints. These attacks reminded audiences that it was not enough that the Duchess cared for her children, or that she cemented her commitment through breastfeeding. To completely satisfy the ideology of nurturing maternity, her maternal role needed to supplant all else.

The most blatant and vitriolic attacks on the Duchess as an unfit mother were published in 1784, the year of the Westminster Election.<sup>45</sup> A brief discussion of her involvement in the campaign is necessary in order to contextualise satirical condemnations of her behaviour. The Duchess was both born and married into a politically active family, and had shown her support for the Whigs in the general election of 1778. Although the Duchess was a little more active and vocal than some would have preferred, her involvement was not, at this stage, unusual. Examining the political roles of British women, Chalus argues that political activism was an

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<sup>43</sup> In 1792, having been exiled to France to give birth to Eliza and pained by the separation from her other children, she wrote to her young son William: ‘alas, I am gone before you could know me, but I lov’d you, I nurs’d you nine months at my breast.’ When she was forced to entrust custody of Eliza to Grey’s family, she penned a poem imagining her ‘unhappy child of indiscretion’ slumbering upon her breast, mourning the child’s absence and writing that ‘my bosom struggles with its pain.’ Locating her maternal devotion in the breast, the Duchess also alluded to the physical pain she suffered having not been allowed to breastfeed her baby. As an illegitimate child, Eliza was taken from the Duchess at birth and passed to a wet-nurse in the country. Chatsworth 1115: Georgiana Devonshire to Marquess of Hartington, circa Jan. 27, 1792; Papers of Hugh Seymour, Esq.: “Verses copied by Lady Charlotte Cholmondeley in her common place book, 1816,” attributed to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

<sup>44</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 83.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the 1784 election and ‘the particular nature of the contest as a social and political watershed’ and of the Duchess’ role within it, see Rauser, “The Butcher-Kissing Duchess,” 24.

accepted and integral part of life for many elite women in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Aristocratic women like the Duchess customarily lent their backing to campaigns by making the most of their influential social connections; they spread the word, put in appearances at the right occasions, solicited votes from key personalities and even lobbied for and secured political roles for their husbands.

Dubbing these activities 'polticised socialising', Chalus proposes that this type of involvement was experienced as 'non-threatening' since it could be justified as supportive of family interests. Problems arose, as they did for the Duchess in 1784, only when women stepped outside of this family paradigm. In 1784, she made trailblazing front-line appearances for Fox and actively canvassed people below her social station, including tradesmen. This combined with her direct support of Fox as a non-blood relative, sparked accusations that she had crossed the line of appropriate political action for women.<sup>46</sup> Her increased agency and visibility since 1778 resulted in her emergence as a political player in her own right, and this set off suspicions about her behaviour and motives. As Chalus explains, under these terms a woman's political involvement was 'discouraged and trivialised' and, as in the case of the Duchess, often interpreted as 'anomalous, unaccountable, personal and often at least slightly salacious.'<sup>47</sup>

Satirists seized on scandalous rumours that the Duchess was in an intimate relationship with Fox and exchanged sexual favours with working-class men for votes. Prints appeared showing her using her body for political leverage, her bare or almost bare breasts alluding to her licentious sexual enthusiasm as well as to the

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<sup>46</sup> Howe, *Statesmen in Caricature*, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 3.

maternal responsibilities she shirked.<sup>48</sup> The satirical 'smear campaign' against the Duchess, Taylor observes, was enlivened through the 'vocabularies of promiscuity, prostitution and perversion.'<sup>49</sup> In the anonymous *The D-ss and the man of the peo- in buff tho' not in blue* (1784) the Duchess and Fox appear in the 'buff' as Adam and Eve, their hands linked in sexual and political partnership.<sup>50</sup> Published in *The Rambler's Magazine* the summer after the Duchess had given birth to Little G, it was accompanied by a short extract from *Paradise Lost* which opens with the line 'Half her swelling breast/Naked met his.'<sup>51</sup> Providing readers with an image that Taylor argues is 'soft pornography', the Duchess holds her right breast as if offering it to Fox to suckle on. On the wall behind, a portrait of the Duke with cuckold horns reminds of her infidelity.

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<sup>48</sup> For example, see Rowlandson, *THE DEVONSHIRE, or Most Approved Method of Securing Votes*. (London: Elizabeth Darchery, 1784), BM Satires 6520; *THE MATTER REVERSED, or one good turn deserves Another*. (London: J. Notice, 1784), BM Satires 6595; *The Poll*. (London: William Humphrey, 1784), BM Satires 6526; Anonymous, *The tipling dutchess returning from canvassing*. (London: A. Aitken, 1784), BM Satires 6560; William Paulet Carey, *The Devonshire minuet, danced to ancient British music through Westminster, during the present election*. (London: William Holland, 1784), BM Satires 6541; *A D- - -e [Devonshire] rout or Reynard in his element*. (London: F. Clarkson, 1784), BM Satires 6555; Anonymous, *A certain duchess kissing old Swelter-in-grease the butcher for his vote*. (London: 1784), BM Satires 6533; *Supplys for the year 1784*. (London: H. Macphail, 1784), BM Satires 6539; FEMALE INFLUENCE; or the Devons-e canvas. (London: Williams Wells, 1784), BM Satires 6493; William Dent, *Her +++++ carrying a plumper for Charly*. (London: J. Brown, 1784), BM Satires 6565; Anonymous, *The Covent Garden deluge*. (London, ?, 1784), BM Satires 6611; William Dent, *Nil desperandum, or the hands of comfort*. (London: ?, 1784), BM Satires 6494.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, 149.

<sup>50</sup> The work was published a month after its partner print - *The D-ss of D-v-e tasting the forbidden fruit* (August 1784), BM Satires 6651 - also appeared in *The Rambler's Magazine*.

<sup>51</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* ed. Elijah Fenton and Samuel Johnson (London: Printed for John Bumpus, 1821), 80.

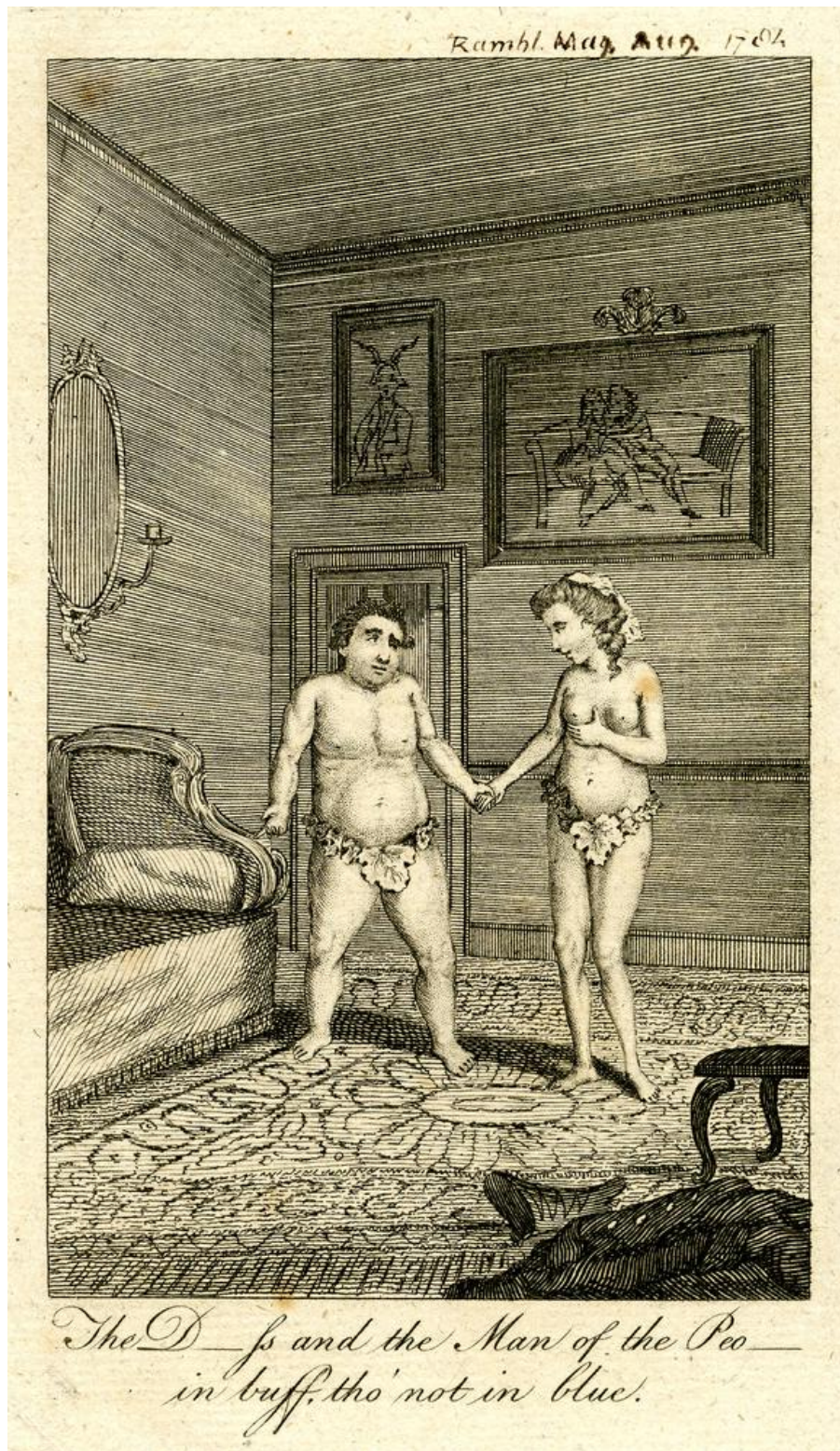


Fig. 2.1 Anonymous, *The D-ss and the man of the peo- in buff tho' not in blue*, 1784. BM Satires 6656

Whilst used to negative press attention, the Duchess was not untouched by allegations of sexual political corruption – in a letter written to her mother in the wake

of accusations that she had traded kisses and sexual favours for votes, she complained of the ‘abuse in the newspapers.’ She found it ‘very hard’, she admitted, that she had been unfairly ‘singled out’ when her fellow campaign women had behaved comparably.<sup>52</sup> In her biography of the Duchess, Foreman writes that she was preyed upon because of her flamboyant character but also because of her refusal to sacrifice herself to ‘female duty’:

...she brought her own personality to the campaign in an era when the only women who had public personas were actresses and courtesans. Since her marriage she had deliberately courted attention through her patronage of the arts and her flair for fashion. She had appeared as herself and not as a sacrifice to female duty, and this had affronted traditionalists.<sup>53</sup>

The Duchess’ public profile made her an easy and profitable target. Foreman observes that from the 1770s onwards ‘newspaper editors noticed that any report on the Duchess of Devonshire increased sales.’<sup>54</sup> So too, it seems, did print sellers; Rauser finds that in April 1784 alone, the Duchess appeared in at least eighty-nine satires.<sup>55</sup> The character assassination she experienced was a reaction to her political autonomy, but also as a response to her role as a devoted mother. Her followers recognised a tension between the image she projected of herself as a selfless, hands-on mother, and her increasingly egocentric participation on the public stage of politics. As such, graphic satirists questioned whether her dubious political activism had come at the expense of her familial devotion, using the breast to demonstrate her split priorities. Three prints do this explicitly; the anonymous piece *The Duchess of D- in the Character of a Mother*; Rowlandson’s *Political Affection*; and *The Devonshire Amusement* by John Wallis. Published in the March, April and June of 1784, the breasts in each of these prints point towards the Duchess’ selfish desertion of the Duke and her daughter.

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<sup>52</sup> Georgiana Spencer Cavendish, *Georgiana: Extracts from the correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, ed. the Earl of Bessborough (London: John Murray, 1955), 79.

<sup>53</sup> Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Random House, 2001), 103.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Rauser, “The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire,” 23.

*The Duchess of D- in the Character of a Mother (1784)*

*Character of a Mother* was published in the *Rambler's Magazine* just as the 1784 election was getting underway. Picturing the Duchess as an attractive young mother flanked by her husband and feeding her daughter in the family home, it ostensibly offered an image of domestic bliss. Appearing in the glow of new motherhood, the Duchess' cheeks are lightly flushed and a content smile plays across her lips. Her expression is mirrored by the Duke, who looks upon his wife and new daughter with pride. Upon closer inspection however, the scene reveals itself not as a celebration of the Duchess' newfound maternal identity, but rather as a criticism of it. The Devonshire's happy family is a façade, a forced imitation of an ideal which, given the couple's dysfunctional relationship and the strain of the Duchess' political pursuits, works to conceal an overwrought reality. As the title announces, the anonymous satirist alleges that for the Duchess, nurturing motherhood is nothing more than an unnatural *character*, a mask that she slips on and off to suit different situations. The Duchess' breast plays an important role in this pretence; partially revealed to imply she has been nursing Little G, it marks out her maternal, rather than sexual or political, devotion. Further attention to the details of the print reveals this to be a false staging, with the breast helping the satirist to make a series of claims about her selfish mobilisation of motherhood for personal gain.



Fig. 2.2 Anonymous, *The Duchess of D- in the Character of a Mother*, 1784.

BM Satires 6490

In her analysis of the piece Müller describes the scene as a ‘staged play set in an awkward jumble of incongruous evocative images.’<sup>56</sup> Superficially, these images paint a positive picture. The handsome cradle, the portrait of a pelican plucking its own breast to feed its chick, the statuette of Madonna and child above the fireplace – all these details corroborate the Duchess’ image as a caring and self-sacrificial, if not

<sup>56</sup> Müller, 174.

indulgent, mother. The ostentatiousness of this display, however, indicates suspicion of insincerity. The items are a still-life exhibition of the Duchess' desperation to appear as something that she is not. Müller's comment on the staged atmosphere of the scene evokes the popular portraiture which aristocrats commissioned to capture a flattering image of their family. As Engel points out, socialites and actresses also posed for such portraits, framing and staging their identities to sell 'idealised images of themselves to a wide range of spectators.'<sup>57</sup> Drawing attention to the bias of such art, the satirist reminds that the presence of these images evidence a desire to *appear* and be remembered as something in particular. The Duchess depicted in *Character of Mother* is one who wants to be remembered as a good mother. The tokenistic items in the room, the couples affected tenderness and the partially exposed but crucially not nursing breast all expose the Duchess – and her enthusiasm for breastfeeding – as similarly superficial to the objects which surround her. A natural, lower-class mother, the satirist suggests, would not have had to go to so much effort.

In a further nod to high art, the title of the print recalls the contemporary fashion for rich and notable women to have themselves painted 'in the character' of various goddesses, muses or famous persons, enabling them to make lofty claims about their personality, appearance, achievements or social standing. A custom which was appropriated ironically by graphic satirists, it saw women dress, make themselves up, pose and hold objects in order to appear in the guise of a chosen figure. The historian Rachel Brownstein has shown how publicly prominent women shaped and projected their reputations through the cultural enactment of symbolic roles. Brownstein argues that as these roles were performed, the character they exemplified became equated with a woman's identity.<sup>58</sup> Many details of *Character of a Mother* point to the Duchess' engagement with this form of self-conscious representation. Her almost-bare breast, the pose which suggests Little G has just nursed, her adoring-looking husband and her loosely clothed infant all advertise the Duchess as a natural mother, but their staged quality suggests a presentational bias apparent in other artistic portrayals of the family. Family commissioned portraits like Joshua Reynolds' *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her daughter, Lady*

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<sup>57</sup> Engel, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Rachel Brownstein, *Tragic Muse: Rachel of the Comedie-Francaise* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), xiii.



*Georgiana Cavendish* (1786) for example, picture the Duchess relaxed and playing with her delighted infant. It is safe to assume that as the sitter the Duchess had some say in her pictorial representation, and the portrait expresses her desire to be portrayed as an ideal mother. Working against and pre-empting these efforts, *Character of a Mother* exposes the false veneer of the Duchess' public 'character.'

There is evidence that those close to the Duchess recognised her sociable performativity before she had children, worrying about how it affected her relationships. Writing to the Duchess on her twenty-fifth birthday, her mother Lady Spencer lamented how the public nature of her role as a campaigner and socialite had made her shallow. 'In your dangerous path of life', she wrote, 'you have almost unavoidably amassed a great deal of useless trash – gathered weeds instead of flowers. You live so constantly in public you cannot live for your own soul.'<sup>59</sup> A few months following this letter, the Duchess announced she was expecting – an event much longed for by both families after a string of miscarriages. In the eyes of others, the pregnancy was not only good news for the Devonshire line, but offered the Duchess the chance to enjoy some of the 'flowers' of life her mother had mentioned – meaningful and soul-fulfilling relationships. For the Duchess however, it also provided an opportunity to galvanise public interest and to reshape her identity. Whilst her mother appealed to her pregnant daughter to wind down her social and political engagements – she herself had suffered miscarriages, she disclosed, due to an 'an agitation of spirits' – the Duchess continued to take an active role in public life.<sup>60</sup> As Foreman observes, her political involvement actually increased during this period as she fought keep the Whigs afloat in the coalition. Hosting 'political dinners several times a week', she remained at the forefront of society until her confinement in the last few weeks of her pregnancy.<sup>61</sup>

Given the cultural glorification of maternity, it is not hard to imagine the interest that the Duchess' pregnancy attracted. Horace Walpole even credited her condition with starting the fad for pads – cushion or cork stuffings which women wore under their dresses to appear with child. Writing to the Countess of Ossory in January 1783, Walpole commented that they were worn by fashionable ladies 'in

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<sup>59</sup> Chatsworth 197: Lady Spencer to Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, 7 June 1782.

<sup>60</sup> BL Althorp F37: Lady Spencer to Lady Harriet Duncannon, January 9 1783.

<sup>61</sup> Foreman, 113.

imitation of the Duchess of Devonshire's pregnancy.<sup>62</sup> When Little G eventually arrived the Duchess threw herself into motherhood, a role which *Character of a Mother* suggests became an important – and to some extent shameless – part of her public persona.



Fig. 2.3 Detail from *Character of a Mother*

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (New York: Dover, 1992), 91.

The Duchess' vain attempt to appear as a down to earth, natural mother is signposted by two items in the room; the towels hanging above the fire, and the Madonna and Child statuette. The majority of the decoration and items in her living room are archetypally aristocratic - the many ornaments and luxurious furnishings make clear the comfort and wealth which the family enjoy. Looking as if she has just breastfed amidst this, the Duchess appears determined to prove that, in spite of claims made by physicians and moralists, upper-class women can make good, practical mothers. The hearth, McCreery notes, was 'an important symbol of family comfort in English culture' with the physical warmth emitted from the fire serving visualising the 'emotional warmth of the family scene.'<sup>63</sup> This, along with the more modest elements of the room – especially the towels – illustrates the Duchess' hands-on, natural approach to mothering. But for Müller, the towels exist as a 'token of domesticity' rather than evidence of it. They are 'oddly out of place', she argues, amongst the rest of the finery in the house.<sup>64</sup> Flanking the Duchess and the bare bottomed Little G, they appear like processional flags to announce her natural approach to motherhood.

The scene evokes Cadogan's 1748 praise of the rural mother with 'only a few Rags to cover her Child loosely, and little more than her own Breast to feed it.' But despite the Duchess' efforts to align herself with the instinctive maternity that was so admired by physicians, philosophers and moralists, the riches of the room and their clothes earmark her as one of the naive aristocratic mothers which Cadogan feared would suffocate her children 'under a Load of Finery.'<sup>65</sup> Even the Duchess herself admitted to the excess of Little G's privilege: 'her cradle, robes, basket, etc., are, I am afraid... foolishly magnificent', she wrote in one letter to Elizabeth Foster. 'She has a present coming from the Queen of France, but I don't know what it is yet.'<sup>66</sup> In her study of eighteenth-century parenting, the historian Joanne Bailey notes that 'parents were warned not to over-indulge their offspring', in case it 'rendered their infant and mature bodies diseased and ineffectual.' Instead, they were advised to 'lead simpler, less luxurious lives and bring up their children in a like manner.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 209.

<sup>64</sup> Müller, 174.

<sup>65</sup> Cadogan, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Chatsworth 512: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire to Bess, July 1783.

<sup>67</sup> Joanna Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 105-6.

No matter how hard she tried to act the part, the anonymous satirist implies, the Duchess' social and financial status meant she was out of touch with the harsher realities of parenting. As pictured in contemporary prints like John Gerhard Huck's *The Good Mother* (1786), the selflessness of the good, breastfeeding mother was instinctive and compelled by necessity. Contrasting to the clutter in *Character of a Mother*, the sparseness of the room in *The Good Mother* pictures a mother who breastfeeds whilst taking care of two other infants. As early modern literary scholar Toni Bowers puts it, the lower or middling class nursing breast distinguished 'the selfless, virtuous, and affectionate domestic mother from the idle, selfish, pleasure-seeking aristocrat.'<sup>68</sup> When viewed alongside each other, prints like *Character of a Mother* and *The Good Mother* throw into relief the distinctions made between artificial and natural, lower, middling and upper-class motherhood, reminding how maternity, and breastfeeding in particular, was a varied and meritocratic experience.

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<sup>68</sup> Toni Bowers, "A Point of Conscience': Breastfeeding and Maternal Authority in *Pamela*, Part 2," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 3 (April 1995): 259-78, 261.



Fig. 2.4 John Gerhard Huck, *The Good Mother*, 1787. BM no. 2010,7081.2325

Crucially, the Duchess is *not* breastfeeding within *Character of a Mother* – the viewers are left to decide whether she has been, is going to, or is merely pretending to do so. Her false emulation, however, is implied through the iconographic image of the nursing. In combination with the mother-pelican portrait, the statue of the Madonna and Child suggests the Duchess' hypocrisy in mimicking the chaste and devoted mother. As Gal Ventura observes in her study of maternal breastfeeding in

French art, images of the Madonna nursing Jesus provide a cross-cultural sign of female nurture, visualising breastfeeding as the central and authoritative image of maternal sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> The idolisation of Madonna and her all-giving breast has traditionally revolved around her chastity. Recently, Emma Solberg has shown that Mary's sexuality was complexly fetishised in late medieval textual culture, but that it attracted a more vestal reverence in the eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> The Madonna's inclusion in *Character of a Mother* is ironic; the Duchess' audacity in purporting to imitate her would have been clear to contemporaries familiar with her controversial sex life and self-centred political pursuits. As well as rumours that she prostituted herself for votes and was sexually involved with Fox, the Duchess was involved in a ménage a trois with her husband and his mistress Elizabeth Foster.<sup>71</sup> The Duchess is a kind of anti-Madonna, her display of the statue reminding viewers that she is at best a poor imitation of, and at worst a subversion of, the ideal mother. In the context of this print, any claims she makes to similarity attract ridicule rather than pity, a satirical response which is further apparent in how the Duchess and her husband engage with each other and their child.

In 1775 the French physician Pierre Roussel claimed that eye contact was essential to successful nursing. 'To hold the child beneath her eyes and in his mother's arms fosters an interesting exchange of tenderness' he mused. Maintaining eye contact helped the mother to recognise the authority of the infant, as well as providing assurance of the rewards of selflessness; Roussel wrote that the position allowed a mother to truly 'enjoy her own sacrifices in the continual contemplation of [her] object.'<sup>72</sup> Breastfeeding, Roussel suggested, should be a reminder that nurture excluded all else, taking priority over other interests and concerns. In this context, the Duchess' lack of eye contact with her daughter undermines her claims to be a devoted mother who bonded with her children by breastfeeding. In her analysis of

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<sup>69</sup> Ventura, *Maternal Breastfeeding*, xv, 118, 136

<sup>70</sup> Emma Solberg, *Virgin Whore* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> For more on the relationship between the Duke, the Duchess, and Elizabeth Foster, who went on to become the Duke's second wife, see Foreman, 95-107; Caroline Chapman and Jane Dormer, *Elizabeth & Georgiana: The Duke of Devonshire and His Two Duchesses* (London: John Murray, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Madelyn Gutwirth, *Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 178.

breastfeeding bodies in art history, Kukla notes the rarity of images depicting a nursing mother ‘who is looking in any direction other than at her infant.’ Although, as she notes, there is certainly no reason for a mother ‘to stare at the infant throughout the whole process’, classical paintings and mothering manuals almost always show her gaze locked on her baby. Anything else implies ‘an agency with a direction distinct from the infant’s.’<sup>73</sup> Given the tokens of breastfeeding that she has filled the room with, and the fact that Little G is not actually suckling, there is a sense that the Duchess is keen to be *seen* nursing, rather than motivated by concern for her child’s wellbeing. Her sideways glance draws the viewer’s attention to towards the Duke, whose representation further implies familial discord.

In her analysis of *Character of a Mother* Wagner argues that the print shows a ‘reformed’ Duchess who is under the control of her husband. Wagner contends that the Duke has ‘regained control over his wife’s body’ following allegations that she had prostituted her body for political gain.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, his watchful gaze over her and his child suggests a masculine supervision of the type recommended by medical authorities such as Cadogan. In discussions which weakened his coexisting claims about maternal instinct, Cadogan advised that a father should see ‘his Child nursed under his own eye’ wherever possible.<sup>75</sup> As Kukla notes, this male surveillance of the maternal body moved it ‘into a domain of social concern’, increasing maternal accountability concerning infant feeding.<sup>76</sup> Whilst a father could not help practically with nursing, his masculine ‘reason and sense’, Cadogan explained, could and should be applied to ‘superintending and directing the management of it.’<sup>77</sup> For Wagner, the book which lies unopened at the Duke’s feet is further evidence of his control. Titled a *Treatise on getting and nursing of children by the Duke of D*, it

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<sup>73</sup> Kukla, 201.

<sup>74</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Cadogan, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Kukla, 48-9.

<sup>77</sup> Cadogan, 24. Lisa Wynne Smith has recently argued that self-management and self-discipline was integral to the concept of ideal manhood in the eighteenth century, and was a means by which physicians themselves fashioned their professional medical personas. Smith’s proposal that ‘polite masculinity’ required ‘constant monitoring of the body and self’ can be mapped on to familial management – an ideal husband and father was one that was aware of, and to some extent in control of, the bodies and bodily goings-on in his house. Smith, “Remembering Dr Sloane: Masculinity and the Making of an Eighteenth-Century Physician” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 4 (2019): 433-53, 436.

indicates that he has been 'recruited in support of the professionalisation movement' of maternity, which saw the displacement of midwifery in favour of male-authored medical texts.<sup>78</sup> However, when taking into account the Duke's negative attitude towards the Duchess' decision to breastfeed, this image of male supervision and control becomes less secure.



Fig. 2.5 Detail from *Character of a Mother*

The treatise on 'getting and nursing' children acknowledges a specific tension between the couple. As previously mentioned, the Duke was vocally opposed to the Duchess breastfeeding before she had provided him with a male heir. As Fildes has pointed out, infant feeding methods 'often depended upon the husband's will', and women had to work to persuade their partners of their choice.<sup>79</sup> Foreman correctly notes the Duchess breastfeeding Little G then, as a 'brave act of defiance' against

<sup>78</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, 114.



the bullying Cavendishes who pressured her to stop.<sup>80</sup> It is difficult to say whether the satirist who created *Character of a Mother* would have been aware of such objections to the Duchess nursing, but as Fildes and others have shown, the contraceptive effects of lactation were widely known, understood and taken advantage of.<sup>81</sup> Whilst it is tempting to think that the watchful Duke is supervising the Duchess breastfeeding, he could be trying to interfere in it. In her catalogue description of the piece Dorothy George notes that he extends a small saucepan towards the child. In her discussion of early modern childrearing practices, the historian Beatrice Gottlieb notes that ‘better-equipped households’ such as that of the Devonshire’s often ‘had a special pan for preparing pap.’<sup>82</sup> A gruel-like bread mixture which was soaked in warm milk or water, pap was popularly used to wean babies off the breast.<sup>83</sup> This considered, the Duke looks to be coaxing his wife into feeding Little G solids instead of breast milk. Sat up straight, her breast brazenly bare and with Little G clinging on, the Duchess glances at the pan with careless disregard. Showing no signs of stopping nursing, she suggests that the Duke has little control over her body, time and attention. Rather than an emblem of maternal selflessness and familial togetherness, the Duchess’ breast is a sign of her autonomy and defiance.

In addition to ridiculing the weak Duke, this image exposes the fragility of medical discourses which promised that nursing would repair fractured families and inspire husbandly admiration. Many prospective mothers worried that their husbands would oppose breastfeeding on the grounds that it would worsen the appearance of the breast. Dismissing these concerns, Hugh Smith insisted that women would appear more attractive nursing their babies than they had as virginal brides:

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<sup>80</sup> Foreman, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, 108-9; Rebecca Davies, *Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain: Educating by the Book* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014), 30; H. T. Dickinson, *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 213.

<sup>82</sup> Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 149.

<sup>83</sup> For more on pap and pap boats, see Sarah Fox, “An Eighteenth-Century Pap Boat: Breastfeeding, Pride and Maternal Love” *Emotional Objects: Touching Emotions in History* (April 2014); Michael Obladen, “Pap, gruel, and panada: early approaches to artificial infant feeding” *Neonatology* 105, no. 4 (2014), 267-74.

a scene like this will more firmly rivet the pleasing fetters of love: - for, though a beautiful virgin must ever kindle emotions in a man of sensibility, a chaste and tender wife, with a little one at her breast, is certainly, to her husband, the most exquisitely enchanting object upon earth.<sup>84</sup>

In presenting an unhappy scene of resentment, *Character of a Mother* tests these promises. It is unclear whether viewers would have sided with the Duchess' decision to breastfeed her daughter before conceiving a son, but it seems likely that medical men like Smith would have supported the Duke's resistance. After all, as Smith's writing made clear, much of the delight to be had from a breastfeeding was contingent upon the infant being a boy:

...when [a husband] beholds the object of his soul cherishing and supporting in her arms the propitious reward of wedlock, and fondly traces his own lineaments in the darling boy, it recalls a thousand delicate sensations to a generous mind; perhaps he drops a sympathetic tear in recollecting the painful throes of the mother, which she cheerfully bore, to make him such an inestimable present.<sup>85</sup>

Little G offered the Duke no opportunity to 'trace his own lineaments', and many sympathised with his plight. Whilst she certainly seems to have been treasured by the Duchess, not everyone greeted her entrance into the world with the same joy. Foreman observes that upon Little G's birth newspapers weren't sure whether to 'congratulate Georgiana' or to 'commiserate with the Duke', who had been certain that the baby was a girl all along.<sup>86</sup> Reporting on the birth, the *Morning Herald* offered a tentative celebration: 'We are extremely happy to inform our readers that her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire was brought to bed on Saturday morning at 5 o'clock.... the satisfaction on this happy occasion is perhaps a little impaired by the sex of the infant.'<sup>87</sup> In *Character of a Mother*, the satirist presses this issue by

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<sup>84</sup> Hugh Smith, 78-9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>86</sup> Foreman, 118-9.

<sup>87</sup> *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (July 14 1783).

drawing the *Treatise on getting and nursing of children by the Duke of D*. With their first child born several years into their marriage and with no sign of a son, viewers would have been aware that the Duke was in no position to provide advice on 'getting children.' Neither was he an expert on 'nursing' – not only was he opposed to it, but he didn't seem able to persuade the Duchess off it. As well as providing a thinly veiled attack on his masculine failings, naming the Duke as the author of the treatise troubles the validity of male-authored maternity advice.

A sardonic portrayal of an insincere mother, an impotent husband and a broken marriage, *Character of a Mother* comments on more than just selfishness; it challenges the validity of familial and medical ideologies more widely. In particular, it disrupts the cultural narrative of breastfeeding as the foundation of virtue and happiness. The print's portrayal of the maternal breast is an anxious one; despite medical arguments that breastfeeding brought families together, reformed morals and instilled virtue, the Duke and the duchess are corrupted and false. The Duchess, although physically transformed from her usual appearance in prints as a bare-breasted sexual disgrace, has not changed – her self-worth is still bound up in her image and influence. Like the caged canary which hangs above her, she is trapped; between her love for her daughter, duty to her husband and his family, longing for political change and desire to be liked. Competing against each other, *Character of a Mother* nonetheless shows the Duchess' concern for herself to win out.

Painting a portrait of a family headed up by selfish adults, it presents breastfeeding as a performative act and an act of protest - employed to shape public image and meet personal desires. Neither parent, it alleges, truly want the best for their child. The Duke would see Little G hand-reared, and the vain and self-interested Duchess is more concerned with keeping up appearances than love and care. In many ways, the subversive message of *Character of a Mother* hinges upon how the maternal breast is represented by the satirist and understood by the viewer – the Madonna and child, the Duke closely watching his wife nurse, the treatise on begetting and nursing infants – all these details provide a darker subtext to the ostensible image of nurture. The Duchess' appearance as a nurturing mother demonstrates how easy it was to *affect* ideal maternal behaviours and identities, whilst stopping short of embodying them.

In the month following *Character of a Mother*, Rowlandson also criticised the Duchess' mothering. Offering an explicit depiction of her selfish behaviour, *Political*

*Affection* (1784) shows her neglecting Little G in pursuit of political and sexual gratification. If *Character of a Mother* inferred the Duchess' spuriousness, then *Political Affection* confirmed it – there is no question of her failings as a mother, or the domestically destructive consequences of her transgressions. The second of two 1784 satirical takes on the Duchess as a nursing mother, *Political Affection* suggests that viewers of prints were attentive to, and seemingly wary of, the Duchess' enthusiasm for breastfeeding. Infamous for his explicit, highly sexualised and crude caricatures of women, Rowlandson's arrangement of the Duchess' breasts as the focal point of her unnaturalness uncovers much about the conflicts between maternity, sex and politics in the late eighteenth century.

*Thomas Rowlandson, Political Affection (1784)*

Arguably the most famous and vitriolic satirical attack on the Duchess, *Political Affection* conflates female political agency with sexual deviance and maternal neglect. The Duchess breastfeeds a fox monstrously clad in a child's dress, meant to represent Charles Fox. The animal suckles on her breast whilst Little G wails on the floor, reaching her arms up for attention. Engrossed in the fox, the Duchess doesn't hear, or perhaps chooses to ignore, her daughter's scream. In a mirrored image, a cat is shown licking a dog's face whilst its kitten is abandoned. This grotesque sexual constellation of images claims that the Duchess' political affection overrides her affection for her family.



Fig. 2.6. Thomas Rowlandson, *Political Affection*, 1784. BM Satires 6546

Müller argues that Rowlandson ‘openly refutes Georgiana’s self-image as a mother.’ Her callous disregard for her daughter and for her maternal role more generally, Müller argues, would have been understood as the ‘grossest offence to the economy of family affections’ that was naturalised across culture.<sup>88</sup> As Müller notes, breastfeeding, an act ‘so often esteemed as the duty fulfilled by good mothers’ is here ‘perverted into grotesqueness.’ The baby and the kitten represent ‘a threatened, precious yet ignored residue of nature and natural affection against the unnatural, degenerate mother figures.’ The Duchess’ abandonment of her child, Müller continues, is experienced not as an instance of mistaken priorities, but ‘as the utmost capital offense to morality that a woman can commit.’<sup>89</sup> Just as medical sources presented upper class mothers’ selfishness as a choice, Rowlandson shows

<sup>88</sup> Müller, 178.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

the Duchess taking sides; cold to the cries of her daughter she chooses sex over nurture, Fox over Little G.

Rowlandson's decision to spotlight breastfeeding in *Political Affection* is an interesting one; as an attack it works on a number of levels. First and foremost, it accuses the Duchess and Fox of conducting an inappropriate sexual relationship. Secondly, it emasculates Fox and belittles his political power. Thirdly, it criticises the Duchess' maternal behaviour, showing her passions fracturing her family. Anxieties about female pleasure, selfishness, influence and male weakness are distilled into one neat, depraved image of breastfeeding. As with all the prints considered of the Duchess in this chapter, *Political Affection* is set in the home. Chalus argues that the way the Duchess conducted herself in 1784 was met with hostility because she was perceived as making herself too physically available. She was too free with her time, company and personal space; unlike others of her station, she showed little regard for 'keeping proper distance' from the middling and lower classes, 'entering freeholders' shops and homes, and taking them into her carriage.'<sup>90</sup> This, partnered with her lack of professional boundaries with Fox, provoked criticisms that the Duchess was offering herself as public property. In *Political Affection*, Rowlandson shows this behaviour as having transformed the private space of her home into a public place.

The Duchess' previously private, family living room is intruded upon by both Fox and the viewers of the print. Her failure to assert boundaries and lack of attention to her home has given rise to a domestic invasion. Not only has this selfish negligence invited an intruder into the family home, it has pushed out those that should be in it; the empty cradle alludes, as it did in *Character of a Mother*, to the Duchess' failure to get pregnant with a male heir in the nine months following her daughter's birth. The Duchess has forgotten her first loyalty to her family, and therefore her home and body – especially her breasts – have become the symbolic property of the public sphere. Not only has the Duchess tempted the fox – who Müller describes as resembling the predatory and deceptive wolf in Little Red Riding Hood – into her home, she also appears to be enjoying its company.<sup>91</sup> For Wagner, the Duchess' visible sexual pleasure provides one of the biggest tensions in the

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<sup>90</sup> Chalus, 217.

<sup>91</sup> Müller, 176.

print. Her parted mouth, the fox's languid pose and their locked gazes all suggest a reciprocal sexual, as well as political, affection.



Fig. 2.7 Detail from *Political Affection*

Wagner argues that by Rowlandson exploits contemporary medical anxieties about maternal sexuality. The print uncomfortably pits the sexual and maternal roles of the breast against each other, asking who and what the breast is really for – female sexual pleasure, male sexual gratification or infant feeding. For Wagner, the Duchess' gratification recalls 'the medical argument that breastfeeding is an acceptable source of sensual pleasure for mothers', but subverts this by substituting the baby for the 'notoriously hard-living, philandering liberal' Fox.<sup>92</sup> What could have been a medically sanctioned moment of sexual desire for the Duchess is instead represented as an instance of her seizing pleasure unnaturally and selfishly.

Perry argues that women's desires were largely 'displaced and 'devalued' in the second half of the eighteenth century in favour of a 'single standard of sexual activity' – that of heterosexual, marital and ideally reproductive intercourse.<sup>93</sup> As

<sup>92</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Perry, 209.

Linda Land-Peralta explains, for 'good' women, 'pleasure was supposed to come from being legally impregnated, not from sex itself.'<sup>94</sup> Speaking on the 'lost eroticism of the breasts', feminist political economist Barbara Sichtermann notices that this demotion of female pleasure coincided with an emphasis on the joys and gratification to be had from familial duties, duties which were headed up by breastfeeding.<sup>95</sup> Physicians including Buchan claimed that a nursing mother could expect an 'exquisite sense of wedded joys, [...] the steady attachment of her husband, the esteem and respect of the public' and the 'warm returns of affection and gratitude from the objects of her tender care.'<sup>96</sup> A reward to be earned from giving pleasure to others – children, husbands and the wider society – Buchan stressed that it far exceeded any sexual thrills. According to Perry, this rhetoric placed pressure on women to be, or at least to appear to be, 'loving but without sexual needs, morally pure [...] benevolent, and self-sacrificing.'<sup>97</sup> In *Political Affection*, the Duchess exhibits none of these qualities. On the contrary, she takes her pleasure at the expense of caring for her daughter. Not only does she resist pressures to be 'nurturing rather than desiring' and 'supportive rather than appetitive', she inverts them.<sup>98</sup> With her left hand offering her breast and guiding the fox to feed, and with her non-nursing breast exposed, she is appetitive and agent. She towers over the fox, grasping the back of his neck with her right hand whilst looking him in the eye. This unnatural female influence over Fox, Müller writes, shows him 'deprived of his dignity as an adult citizen.'<sup>99</sup>

Grotesquely clad in a dress with a sash matching Little G's, Rowlandson depicts Fox as dependent on the Duchess. His greedy suckling at her breast symbolises his reliance on her patronage; emblematising her financial and electoral support of the Whigs, her milk is his lifeblood. As Müller notes, the print suggests that 'without being sustained in the house of Devonshire, [Fox] would hardly survive.'<sup>100</sup> As the gender historian Susan Kingsley Kent recognises, the financial

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<sup>94</sup> Linda Lang-Peralta, (ed.) *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of 1790s* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Barbara Sichtermann, *Femininity: The Politics of the Personal*, trans. John Whitlam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 57.

<sup>96</sup> Buchan, 164-5.

<sup>97</sup> Perry, 213.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Müller, 176.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.



support that the Whigs received from aristocratic women like the Duchess inspired the opposition to interrogate the ‘manliness of Fox and his democratic voters.’ Satirical prints like *Political Affection* portrayed Fox as ‘liable to the corruptions of female influence’ and therefore ‘unfit for public office.’<sup>101</sup> This criticism was framed by what the historian Rosemary Sweet recognises as an ongoing concern about and fascination with ‘the nefarious influence of female intervention and liaisons amongst the political elite.’ The public were conscious, Sweet writes, that the ‘private vice’ of political players such as the Duchess and Fox led to ‘public corruption’, including that of the male political order.<sup>102</sup> Rowlandson’s print demonstrates that this was a two-way process; public vice lead to private corruption, and vice versa. The domestic setting of *Political Affection* and the public figures who cavort within it make clear the false dichotomy of separate spheres. Public and private overlap and impel each other, leaving political and domestic order overturned.

The Duchess’ biggest sin in *Political Affection* is her disconnection with her family. The desperate figure of Little G evokes sympathy for the abandoned child and places the blame firmly on the Duchess, rather than Fox. A number of scholars have recognised how *Political Affection* engages with and has influenced other artistic impressions of the Duchess as a mother. Its closest companion is the famous oil painting *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her daughter, Lady Georgiana Cavendish* by Reynolds, which was published two years after Rowlandson’s satirical print. Müller proposes that Reynold’s took inspiration from *Political Affection* when creating his portrait of the Duchess; the visual similarities are striking. Their commentary, however, could not be further apart. Displaying a devoted mother emotionally and physically in sync with her child, Reynold’s portrait received much critical praise.

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<sup>101</sup> Kent, 122.

<sup>102</sup> Rosemary Sweet, “The Ordering of the Family and Gender in the Age of the Enlightenment” in *Ordering the world in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Frank O’Gorman and Diana Donald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 112-40, 121.



Fig. 2.8 Joshua Reynolds, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her daughter, Lady Georgiana Cavendish*, 1786. RCIN 664633



Fig. 2.9 *Political Affection*

Following its exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1786, the *Town and Country Magazine* celebrated the 'ease and elegance' of Reynolds's portrait.<sup>103</sup> McCreery writes that the image emphasises 'the Duchess' motherliness as she plays with her baby', with the pair's matching chemise-style dresses and hands movements calling attention to their 'family connection and relaxed manner.' Tender maternal portraits like this, McCreery continues, appealed to Georgian viewers' 'growing taste for sentimental scenes.'<sup>104</sup> First commissioned by the Duke, engraved three times during the century and later copied by another artist, it offered an uncomplicated vision of the Duchess' claim to be a nurturing mother. In an exhibition catalogue of Reynolds's portraiture, the art historian Mark Hallett argues that family-commissioned portraiture enabled public figures to 'generate, shape, and sustain' their

<sup>103</sup> 'Candid Remarks on the Pictures in the Present Exhibition', *Town and Country Magazine* (May 1786), 227.

<sup>104</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 190.

reputation.<sup>105</sup> Reynolds's portrait of the duo provided a way for the Devonshire family to construct a positive image of their identity away from the discrediting force of visual satire.

Its likeness to *Political Affection*, however, troubles its non-satirical status. Hallett proposes that Reynolds used aspects of scandal as a mechanism to engage with audiences and attract attention to his work. The literary scholar Thomas Keymer agrees, noting that Reynolds was 'an entrepreneurial, self-conscious agent of the new celebrity culture' who realised that figures like the Duchess would stimulate public interest.<sup>106</sup> Müller suggests that Reynolds was well aware that his celebration of the Duchess as 'an affectionate ideal mother' would be contested, and that his allusion to Rowlandson's print was his way of acknowledging, and possibly capitalising on, this fact. Reflecting on how the 'medium of satirical print can unmask false images that are propagated in academy painting', Müller argues that when viewed alongside each other, these competing images show the oil painting of the Duchess and her daughter to be a 'false version of a pretended family idyll.'<sup>107</sup> This of course recalls the earlier motif of pretence in *Character of a Mother*, a print whose lack of caricature, superficial sentimentality and aristocratic subject pretended to high art portraiture. This inter-textual dialogue between portraiture and print reminds that high art should not be viewed uncritically. Issues of commissioning in particular require examination, since they impacted upon who was represented in high art, and how. As Müller points out, portraiture and painting lent itself to the 'ideological support of aristocratic values' whereas the mass medium of print – 'accessible, reproducible, and far more open to public scrutiny and discussion' – claimed for itself 'a higher aspiration towards 'truth.'<sup>108</sup> Although *Political Affection's* grotesque and fantastical representation of the Duchess is certainly not embedded in reality, it nonetheless makes a claim to presenting a *true* version of her as a mother, and of aristocratic mothering more widely.

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<sup>105</sup> Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity, and the Exhibition Space" in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, ed. Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 35-48, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Keymer, "Small Particles of Fame: Subjectivity, Celebrity, Sterne" in *Sterne, Tristram, Yorick: Tercentenary Essays on Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New, Peter de Voogd and Judith Hawley (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), 3-24, 20.

<sup>107</sup> Müller, 178.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

The motif of maternal selfishness stretched across a number of Rowlandson's satires, and resurfaces in his 1787 print *The Triumph of Hypocrisy*. Similarly to *Political Affection*, it uses the sexualised, negligent maternal breast to make claims about selfish maternity. At the centre, an aristocratic mother offers her bare breast to a clergyman whilst in another room her baby is spoon fed pap fed by her husband.<sup>109</sup> He holds the pap in a small saucepan, very similar to that held by the Duke in *Character of a Mother*.



Fig. 2.10 Rowlandson, *The Triumph of Hipocrisy*, 1787. BM Satires 9671

<sup>109</sup> Rowlandson produced a number of satirical prints suggesting the dishonour of religious men, most commonly depicting a parson trying to seduce, or taking advantage of, a member of their clergy. See, for example, two prints titled *The Man of Feeling* (London: S. W. Fores, 1785, 1788), Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 810265 and 810149, and *A Man of Feeling* (1811), Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 810867.

Just like the Duchess in *Political Affection*, the lady should be breastfeeding her hungry baby but is instead engaged in a depraved sexual interaction. Her selfishness has broken up her family – who are separated by a door – and emasculated her cuckolded husband. The baby’s mouth is open in a cry, but as in *Political Affection*, does not stir its mothers’ attention. The print is peppered with evidence of the mothers’ sexual debauchery, including a copy of Martin Madan’s 1781 defence of polygamy *Thelyphthora* - more lengthily entitled *A Treatise on Female Ruin, in Its Causes, Effects, Consequences, Prevention, and Remedy: Considered on the Basis of the Divine Law Under the Following Heads, Viz. Marriage, Whoredom, and Fornication, Adultery, Polygamy, Divorce*.<sup>110</sup> Rowlandson suggests that the woman needs to read Madan’s treatise if she is to reform her character and repairing her marriage and role as a mother. Further allusions to her depraved behaviour come in the form of the black cat, her body language, the book on her lap, the bottle and paper beside her bed and the pictures on the wall.

The anthrozoologist James Serpell notes that black cats were associated with sin in the early modern period, considered by many to be ‘lecherous creatures that solicited sexual attention indiscriminately from any available male.’<sup>111</sup> The cat then, is a counterpart to the mother, who does nothing to discourage the vicar’s advance. In her description of the piece, George records that the mother throws her hand up ‘sanctimoniously’, as if to playfully ward off the clergyman. Her sexual looseness is further indicated by the open book between them which is crudely titled ‘Pilgrim’s Progress Knock and it shall be opened unto you.’ The paper besides the bed is inscribed ‘On Regeneration’, suggesting the bottle contains a tonic prepared to restore her post-partum sexual identity. Alternatively, the bottle could hold breast milk, a substance widely used for medicinal purposes. As Charlotte Jones explores in her work on wet-nurses, breast milk was thought to ease a plethora of medical complaints; it ‘helped the sick sleep’ and was mixed with flora or eggs to ‘make eye

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<sup>110</sup> Martin Madan, *Thelyphthora* - more lengthily entitled *A Treatise on Female Ruin, in Its Causes, Effects, Consequences, Prevention, and Remedy: Considered on the Basis of the Divine Law Under the Following Heads, Viz. Marriage, Whoredom, and Fornication, Adultery, Polygamy, Divorce* (London: J. Dodsley, 1781).

<sup>111</sup> James Serpell, *The Domestic Cat: The Biology of its Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 97.

and ear drops, [or] infused in powders to cure ulcers.<sup>112</sup> Whether hoping for sexual revival or using her breast milk aid sleep, the woman has bypassed the maternal function of her breasts. The portraits behind the pair include an image of the Foundling Hospital, which brings the print back around to its primary criticism of the woman as selfish for deploying her breast in a sexual, rather than maternal, manner. The Hospital suggests her abandonment of her infant, implying it would be better off in, or is destined for, the institution. Alongside high-profile and biographically supported representations such as that of the Duchess in *Political Affection*, prints like *The Triumph of Hypocrisy* illustrate that maternal selfishness was felt as an endemic aristocratic problem.

The figure of the infant appears in all of the satirical prints surveyed in this section. Exploring the status of the child within prints of transgressive mothers, Müller argues that it constitutes ‘part of a rhetoric to summon a woman into a naturalised role of motherhood.’ In the prints alleging the Duchess’ selfishness, the presence of Little G servers as a reminder of what is at stake. In *Political Affection*, the Duchess’ resistance of her maternal calling, even in the face of the literal wails of her child, is presented as a breach of natural femininity. As Müller observes, the figure of the child is not as a passive object within visual satire, but rather operates as a ‘structuring agent’ to illustrate deviations from normative or romantic ideals. Children illustrate ‘aberrant subject positions within the family framework as well as relationships’, positions often prompted by maternal selfishness.<sup>113</sup> *Political Affection* and *The Triumph of Hypocrisy* picture gendered subject positions being inverted, as men are forced into submissive and caretaking roles. Led astray by desire and no longer a feeder, comforter or carer, the mother thrusts responsibility of her child on to an unnatural and unhappy male other. This type of gendered disruption is pictured in a further satirical take on the Duchess as a bad mother, *The Devonshire Amusement* by John Wallis. Building upon the idea of the Duchess as deaf to her maternal, martial and domestic responsibilities, it presents her freely campaigning for Fox and splitting herself from her family in the process.

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<sup>112</sup> Charlotte Jones, “Wet-Nursing: A Significant Female Occupation in the Early Modern Bodily Marketplace,” *Discover Society*, 39 (2016). For detailed accounts of breast milk as eighteenth-century adult medicine see also Salmon, “The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding,” 247-69.

<sup>113</sup> Müller, 178.

Published in June 1784, John Wallis' *The Devonshire Amusement* shows William Cavendish forced to look after his baby whilst his 'Politick Mad Wife' galivants in the street. 'While her grace is busied in canvassing the Constituents', commentators on the election reported, 'her domestic husband is employed in the nursery, singing 'Hey my kitten!' and comfortably rocking the cradle!'<sup>114</sup> Replete with bawdy eighteenth-century humour, *The Devonshire Amusement* bares the cracks in the Cavendish family that were parodically papered over in *Character of a Mother*.



Fig. 2.11 John Wallis, *The Devonshire Amusement*, 1784. BM Satires 6625

<sup>114</sup> James Hartley et al., *History of the Westminster Election: containing every material occurrence from its commencement on the first of April to the final close of the poll on the 17th of May: to which is prefixed a summary account of the proceedings of the late Parliament ... with other select and interesting occurrences at the Westminster meeting .... to which is now added a complete history of the scrutiny and the proceedings of the House of Commons thereon / by Lovers of Truth and Justice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: J. Debrett, 1785), 234.



If *Political Affection* blurred imagined boundaries between private and public, then *The Devonshire Amusement* asserts them. As historian Linda Colley explores in her analysis of the print, the image is divided into two halves which are meant to mimic ‘the two separate spheres in which men and women supposedly operate.’ The curtain is literally lifted on the Devonshire reality, where, in a ‘dramatic transfer of roles’, William changes his daughter’s nappy whilst the Duchess, having freed herself from her responsibilities, campaigns.<sup>115</sup> As in *Character of a Mother*, the towels which hang behind the Duke remind of the hard domestic work of parenting. In an inverted image, the Duchess holds out a towel-shaped print of the Prince of Wales and declares a ‘Prince should not be limited’, drawing attention, in the process, to the lack of limits she enjoys and those which she has imposed upon her trapped husband. Forlorn, the Duke sits in front of a portrait of himself as a cuckold, the triangular hat which hangs on the wall reminding of the ménage à trois which he found himself in. Above him hang two phallic pullies which he can release to cover-up the sight of his emasculated state, and from his pocket protrudes a paper inscribed *Letters to Married Women*.

In her study of British sexual scandals, the historian Anna Clark argues that the *Letters* gesture to the Duke’s adulterous ways. They could also be a reference to Hugh Smith’s aforementioned popular medical treatise *Letters to Married Women on Nursing and the Management of Children*, first published in 1767.<sup>116</sup> The suggestion that the Duke has been consulting it for advice on how to care for his daughter in the absence of his wife, who should be leading the nursing and management of their baby, is emasculating. Cuckolded and left to caretake, moaning that ‘this Work does not suit my fancy’, it is clear the Duke’s marriage to the Duchess is not what he hoped. With full breasts and erect nipples, the Duchess’ body draws attention to her missed maternal obligations as well as her sexual abandon. The non-maternal display of her breasts alongside an image of her baby and husband invites reflection on the Duchess’ maternal and marital suitability. In particular, the image evokes the physician Buchan’s claim that if a woman who could not dedicate herself to ‘discharg[ing] the duties of a mother’, then she had ‘no right to become a wife.’<sup>117</sup> Through self-interest, the Duchess has reversed the ‘natural’ gender hierarchy and

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<sup>115</sup> Colley, 246.

<sup>116</sup> Clark, 75.

<sup>117</sup> Buchan 170.

created a topsy-turvy world in which men stay at home and women are free to pursue their passions.

Wallis' print tells that the Duchess' relative freedom has come at a price. Apart from separating herself from her family and earning a reputation as a bad mother and wife, the Duchess has surrendered her sexual virtue. As Colley notes, her free appearance 'out in the open air, her hair wild, her dress windswept' illustrates her sexual looseness.<sup>118</sup> Above her hair a bird announces 'No Tax on Maidenheads no Wray', punning on the contested issues of maidservant tax, and insinuating that the Duchess has been unfaithful to her husband.<sup>119</sup> Around her waist is a tie labelled 'Fox', and at her feet lies a note inscribed 'Secret Influence', an allusion to her reputation for prostituting herself to working-class voters, particularly butchers, in exchange for political backing.<sup>120</sup> Her improper relationship with Fox is raised once more as she holds up two phallic fox tails, and the portrait she holds of the Prince of Wales suggests that he too took Georgianna as a mistress.

That the Duke is portrayed as the victim in his marriage despite he himself being a prolific adulterer, coupled with the relatively innocuous representation of Fox and the prince, reveals the sexual double-standard at play. As Gatrell notes in his overview of Georgian caricature, the eighteenth century was an era in which satirists 'attacked women's complicity in sexual hedonism more than men's pursuit of it.'<sup>121</sup> Explaining how this impulse operated in a political context, Chalus proposes that sexual slander was the 'weapon of choice for critics and reformers who wanted to ensure that women stayed within the accepted boundaries of female political involvement.' Overtly sexualising their subjects allowed caricaturists to trace women's political influence back to the 'power of female sexuality', rather than having to credit them with skill or talent.<sup>122</sup> Standing on her own, her body language open and authoritative, and supported by only by *images* of powerful political men, the Duchess is very much a political player in her own right. What might be celebrated if she were a man is instead presented as a threat, and consequently her authority is ascribed to her salacious sexual behaviour.

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<sup>118</sup> Colley, 246.

<sup>119</sup> Howe, 83.

<sup>120</sup> Clark, 70.

<sup>121</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 317.

<sup>122</sup> Chalus, 14.

In his analysis of the print, literary and cultural historian Michael McKeon argues that *The Devonshire Amusement* draws on the imagery of the 'skimmington ride', a mock procession which saw an unfaithful wife walked through the village to be laughed at by onlookers.<sup>123</sup> Although the Duchess is certainly reprimanded for her behaviour by Wallis, her representation is not as humiliating as the emasculated Duke's. Whilst she is depicted elsewhere in graphic satire with masculine features such as a beard, Wallis draws her as hyper-feminine, with long flowing hair, a narrow waist and full breasts.<sup>124</sup> Although the coils of her hair are reminiscent of Medusa and her snaked locks, and her Liberty-staff designates her Amazonian tendencies, she still appears attractive – perhaps more so for her lack of conformity. Her moral transgressions have not corroded her physical femininity, and her charm remains intact. Scarcely caricatured and fashionable in a dishabille, she is glamorous and sexually appealing. The fallen garter around her ankle indicates her sexual looseness, but what she lacks in chastity she makes up for in beauty and charisma. Whilst her characterisation does warn of the dangers of wandering from the domestic sphere, it is not hard to see how it might have elicited admiration and titillation. For better and worse, the Duchess' enthusiasm to interact with people from all walks of life had garnered her a reputation as a woman of the people.

During the 1784 campaign Lady Spencer praised her daughter on her approachability, writing 'I delight myself with the Idea that your unaffected good humour, civility and attention to everyone will draw all hearts towards you.'<sup>125</sup> As Foreman notes, the Duchess didn't just mix with tradesmen and politicians but with women and children too, impressing families with her knowledge of 'such homely matters as nursing and discipline.'<sup>126</sup> The problem, as satirists like Wallis saw it, was that she spent more time talking about domesticity and motherhood than she did experiencing it. In *The Devonshire Amusement*, the Duchess' selfish desire for social and political validation - and her unconventional attempts to secure it - have turned her husband and child against her. This behaviour could not be condoned; 'as one of

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<sup>123</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>124</sup> For example, see *The Political Shaver* (London: J. Moore, 1784), BM Satires 6487.

<sup>125</sup> Lady Spencer to Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, August 14, 1784. Chatsworth 638.

<sup>126</sup> Foreman, 145.

the highest-ranking ladies in the land' Rauser explains, the Duchess was 'expected to set an example for British femininity.'<sup>127</sup> The ideal woman was the mother-figure 'devoted entirely and instinctively to her children, husband and home.'<sup>128</sup> If women infringed upon this image, as the Duchess was shown to in *Political Affection* and *The Devonshire Amusement*, then they were presented as fracturing their family.

When considered alongside each other, *Character of a Mother*, *Political Affection* and *The Devonshire Amusement* paint a picture of a self-interested and pre-occupied mother. Each satirist provides a behind-closed-doors glimpse of the Duchess' selfishness, exposing the incongruence between ideological display and lived experience. In 1784, caricaturists turned the Duchess' vocal enthusiasm for breastfeeding against her, creating damning depictions of her shallow or transgressive embodiment of maternity. Just because the Duchess was a proponent of breastfeeding, these prints caution, it didn't follow that she was a good mother. In fact, they suggest that on the contrary, breastfeeding enabled her to exploit her maternal identity for public gain; it was undertaken chiefly as an exercise in self-promotion. That she was lambasted as a bad role model should come as no surprise; personal satire, William Combe wrote in 1777, should 'direct its shafts towards know persons and character, holding them forth 'to the immediate and certain odium of their fellow creatures.'<sup>129</sup>

The medical meanings and political iconography associated with the nursing breast provided a visual point of reference for caricaturists to demonstrate the moral integrity and appropriate function of the maternal body. The sexual and nurturing roles of the breast were presented as incompatible with each other – in *Character of a Mother* the Duchess' deployment of the nurturing breast prevents her conception of an heir, and in *Political Affection* and *The Devonshire Amusement* the sexual status of her breast obstructs her infant's access to nurture. Speaking on the standards expected of new mothers as prescribed through breastfeeding rhetoric, Kukla observes that 'any substantial separation' a mother undergoes from her infant is

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<sup>127</sup> Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," 30.

<sup>128</sup> Johnston, "Looking into the Mirror, Inscribing the Blank Slate: Eighteenth Century Women Write about Mothering" in *Disjointed Perspectives on Motherhood*, ed. Catalina Florina Florescu (Lanham and New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 185-99, 186.

<sup>129</sup> William Combe, *The Justification: a Poem by the Author of the Diaboliad* (London: J. Bew, 1777), iv.

treated as ‘fundamentally compromising motherhood.’<sup>130</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century this notion of attachment parenting was gaining momentum, with elite mothers encouraged to drop the majority of their interests in order that they could devote their attention, time and bodies to motherhood. As Perry explains, this model left little room for ‘individual expression, desire and agency.’<sup>131</sup> Mothers who did chase these freedoms, however small, were vulnerable to allegations that they were bad, and sometimes unsafe, mothers. The satirical treatment of the Duchess and the press’ demonisation of her extra-familial interests is comparable to the case of the actress, poet and political activist Mary Robinson.

### **Mary Robinson and the Pathologisation of Mothers’ Bodies**

Robinson most commonly appears in graphic satire as the actress-mistress of the Prince of Wales, a relationship which Engel writes marked her out as ‘the ultimate celebrity of the moment.’<sup>132</sup> Whilst her impressive literary and editorial endeavours led some to christen her ‘the English Sappho’, she was better known during her lifetime as ‘Perdita’, an epithet bestowed upon her by the Prince after he became infatuated with her during her performance in *Florizel and Perdita* at Drury Lane Theatre in 1779.<sup>133</sup> The affair between the Prince and Perdita has been well-documented by Paula Byrne, whose biography of Mary provides an overview of the life of a woman ‘reputed to be the most beautiful in England.’<sup>134</sup> A protégé of the Duchess of Devonshire, Robinson was a political campaigner as well as an editor of the *Morning Post* and the author of a number of plays, poems, public letters and novels. Through her work she challenged some of the biggest social injustices of the day, confronting issues of gender inequality and highlighting the political corruption of the elite. But despite her professional achievements, Robinson’s reputation was muddied by her scandalous personal life and she became notorious for her sexual affairs. In his study of Robinson’s poetry, Daniel Robinson argues the fact that the moniker ‘Perdita’ dominates the titles of biographies of Robinson today attests to her

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<sup>130</sup> Kukla, 177.

<sup>131</sup> Perry, 209.

<sup>132</sup> Engel, 59.

<sup>133</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 101.

<sup>134</sup> Byrne, 228.

repute; it was essentially, he notes, 'a euphemism for "whore".' The actress and poet, Robinson continues, was 'a fashionable celebrity and sex symbol, the subject of gossip and pornography, and eventually a cultural pariah and an object lesson for young women on the dangers of promiscuity, pleasure seeking, and living beyond one's means.'<sup>135</sup> Her extra-marital relationships with the prince and other prominent men were the subject of many satirical prints and worked to distract from her talents.

In 1783, a couple of years after the Prince ended their liaison, the anonymous print *Florizel and Perdita* showed him and Robinson in a split screen as two halves of a bust. Alike in appearance, the satirist suggests that Robinson is assimilating herself to his in an attempt to absorb his wealth and status. Just beneath Robinson's shoulder, her current husband appeared with horns as 'the King of Cuckolds', supporting a shelved trio of men also rumoured to have been her lovers.

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<sup>135</sup> Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4, 3.



Fig. 2.12 Anonymous, *Florizel and Perdita*, 1783. BM Satires 6266

Literary scholar Betsy Bolton writes that Robinson's breast 'juts aggressively and unnaturally out of her shirt.'<sup>136</sup> Jumping out of the frame at the viewer, it implies the manner in which Robinson publicly pushed forwards her sexual persona. 'Just as Robinson has worn her lovers out', gender scholar Laura Engel puts forwards, 'she has also saturated the public with her image.' But Robinson's breast also reminds audiences that she is a mother, an element of her identity which is scarcely discussed in tandem with her reputation as a courtesan and fashionable socialite. 'Because of her very public affair with the Prince', Engel argues, 'it was not possible for Robinson to be seen as entirely maternal or domestic. Robinson faced an

<sup>136</sup> Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Threat and Politics in Britain 1780-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 31.

unavoidable dilemma inherent in foregrounding her own body as a desirable commodity, while at the same time appearing to be authentic, natural, and feminine.’ In *Florizel and Perdita*, the satirist foregrounds Robinson’s body in a similar vein, and in doing so reminds of the limits of her sex, as Engel explains: ‘instead of appearing in a fashionable costume, she has been literally stripped of her disguises and pared down to the essential image of the breast—a symbol of sexuality, maternity, and female vulnerability.’<sup>137</sup> Although Robinson is undressed, the Prince remains clothed. This juxtaposition serves as a reminder that it is the sex beneath the costume that dictates the possibilities of one’s identity. Reviewing episodes and representations connected to Robinson’s breast provides insight into how the popular press exploited the tensions between sex and motherhood. Renowned women like Robinson were heavily judged if they went against or mediated advice on pregnancy and breastfeeding, and risked being labelled as selfish, preoccupied or irresponsible.

At fifteen years old, Mary Darby was wed to an abusive and philandering clerk named Thomas Robinson. Two years into their marriage in November 1774, Robinson gave birth to a daughter, Maria. Although she employed a nurse for help, she was considered unusual amongst the aristocracy for assuming responsibility for the everyday care of her daughter, believing herself not superior to the duties of a mother. Like the Duchess of Devonshire, she exclusively breastfed.<sup>138</sup> Describing the moment she met Maria, Robinson wrote in her memoir:

At length the expected, though, to me, most perilous movement arrived, which awoke a new and tender interest in my own bosom, which presented to my fondly beating heart my child, - my Maria. I cannot describe the sensations of my soul at the moment when I presented the little darling to my bosom, my maternal bosom; when I kissed its hands, its cheeks, its forehead, as it nestled closely to my heart, and seemed to claim that affection which has never failed to warm it.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Engel, 60, 74, 60.

<sup>138</sup> Byrne, 62.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Elizabeth Robinson (ed.), *Memoirs of the late Mrs Robinson, Written by herself with some posthumous pieces in verse*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Robinson, 4 vols, vol I (London: Richard Philips, 1901), 143-4.



In her study of parenting in late eighteenth-century England, in which she identifies 'self-sacrifice' as one of the cultural discourses which permeated self-presentations of parenting, Bailey points out that Robinson's effusive account locates the nursing breast at the centre of her affection.<sup>140</sup> Breastfeeding, the 'most highly visible aspect of embodied motherhood', is recorded as a moment of bonding for mother and child.<sup>141</sup> A few months after this event, however, Maria suffered an episode which caused Robinson to question her abilities as a mother.

*Milk spoiled by selfishness*

Recovered from childbirth, Robinson accepted an invitation to a ball even though she was exclusively breastfeeding her daughter. She asked her nurse to bring baby Maria to her when she was hungry, at which point she would step out to an antechamber to nurse her.<sup>142</sup> A social creature, Robinson's excitement at being out after months at home looking after her daughter was palpable:

My spirits and strength had been renovated by the change of scenery, and I was persuaded to dance. I was at that time particularly fond of the amusement, and my partial friends flattered me by saying that I measured the mazy figure like a sylph. I was at that period a nurse; and, during the evening, Maria was brought to an antechamber to receive the only support she had ever yet taken.<sup>143</sup>

Robinson successfully breastfed Maria, and the infant was taken home to sleep. By the time Robinson returned home however, she found her daughter fitting,

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<sup>140</sup> Bailey, 146.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, over one hundred years later on 13 March 1878 an illustration was published in the weekly comic paper *Judy, or the London Serio-Comic Journal* showing a woman at a ball being brought a baby by a nanny. Titled 'A little anecdote', the piece shows a crowd of people, mostly women, looking on disapprovingly, whilst the woman stares adoringly at the infant, who is presumably her own child. The scene echoes Mary Robinson being brought her baby to breastfeed at a ball one evening in 1775. British Museum, Museum number 1921,0719.7.

<sup>143</sup> Robinson, 104.

suffering 'strong convulsions.' Mary and those around her put this down to the fact that she had been strenuously dancing before breastfeeding, and that the excitement, heat and face-pace of the ballroom had spoiled her milk. Blaming herself, Robinson became hysterical, with the result that her milk would not let down and she couldn't soothe the child further by nursing. She recalled of the incident:

Unconscious of the danger attendant on such an event, I gave her accustomed nourishment immediately after dancing. It was agitated by the violence of exercise and the heat of the ball-room, and, on my return home, I found my infant in strong convulsions.

My distraction, my despair, was terrible; my state of mind rendered it impossible for me to afford any internal nourishment to the child, even when her little mouth was parched, or the fit in the smallest degree abated. I was little less than frantic; all the night I sat with her on my arms; an eminent medical man attended. The convulsions continued, and my situation was terrible; those who witnessed it cautiously avoided informing me that the peril of my infant proceeded from my dancing; had I known it at that period I really believe I should have lost my senses.<sup>144</sup>

Robinson's guilt at having caused her daughter's fit was shaped by conduct manuals and lay medical discourses which blamed infant illness, miscarriages, problematic pregnancies and conditions such as foetal irregularities on the heightened passions of a mother. In her recollection of the event Robinson records numerous friends, a clergyman and a 'medical attendant' coming to check on the baby, who recovered after a day. None of them, it seems, contradicted her fear that her milk had caused the fit – although Robinson writes that they initially spared her the knowledge that her vigorous dancing was to blame. Yet, seven years earlier, the paediatric physician George Armstrong had identified post-feeding fits as a normal physiological occurrence. Writing in his 1767 treatise *An Essay on the Diseases most Fatal to Infants*, Armstrong explained that convulsions happened when an

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 154-5.

infant's glands secreted too much saliva, which then mixed with mucus and became acidic:

During the time of sucking, the glands of the mouth [...] being squeezed by the contraction of the muscles, spew out their contents plentifully, which afterwards mixing with the mucus of the gullet and stomach, render the milk of a slimy consistence, by which it means it is not so readily absorbed into the lacteals; as in most infants there is too great an acidity in the stomach, the milk is thereby curdled [...] hence sickness and spasms [...] produc[ing] the convulsive motions [...] which go commonly by the name of inwards fits.<sup>145</sup>

These convulsions almost always appeared, Armstrong observed, 'immediately after sucking, or feeding; especially if the child has been long at the breast, or fed heartily, and has been laid down to sleep without having first broken wind.'<sup>146</sup> That Robinson herself, those who witnessed the event and the medical man that attended the baby all considered Robinson responsible for the fit suggests that despite works like Armstrong's, inflammatory warnings about the dangers of maternal behaviour took purchase. Medical cautions about excessive maternal passions and bodily instability slotted neatly into cultural discourse which sought to place absolute responsibility for infant welfare on mothers, thereby requiring them to sanitise their behaviour. As Kukla notes, pregnant and post-partum bodies were typically viewed as 'especially volatile and susceptible to nervous and imaginative excesses and imbalances', and this meant that mothers' were advised to restrict socialising.<sup>147</sup>

As Bailey explains in her examination of the relationship between childrearing and the wellbeing of the polity, parents' healthy bodies and behaviours were perceived as crucial to the establishment of 'a healthy, strong nation.'<sup>148</sup> Britain's 'People of Condition' Cadogan warned, were at risk of becoming a 'puny valetundinary Race' chiefly owing to infant experiences of 'bad Nursing, and bad

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<sup>145</sup> Armstrong, 15-16.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 20-2.

<sup>147</sup> Kukla, 79.

<sup>148</sup> Bailey, 102.

Habits contracted early.<sup>149</sup> According to literary scholar Jean Terrasse, there were countless restrictive conditions that mothers needed to meet in order to produce 'good' milk. For philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the perfect nursing mother was 'calm, placid and without passions', leading a life 'above reproach' and without excessive excitement.<sup>150</sup> Cadogan similarly advised that a nursing mother be 'sober and temperate', with 'foundations [that] are not greatly disturbed or tainted.'<sup>151</sup> The fact that milk was thought to be 'spoiled' or 'disordered' so easily and by so many circumstances required women, Kukla argues, to be 'unendingly vigilant in their self-control.'<sup>152</sup> Women like the Duchess and Robinson were represented as insufficiently disciplined to contain their interests, or even worse, simply unwilling to. In her study of representations of motherhood in British writing, Bowers shows that conduct literature denigrated aristocratic mothers as 'unloving pleasure-seekers who refused to be inconvenienced' by aspects of motherhood including breastfeeding.<sup>153</sup> The public latched on to this impression and were quick to suspect mothers of failing their children.

Robinson and those around her who presumed her vigorous dancing was the cause of her infant's illness reminds of the quickness with which the *Morning Post* held the Duchess responsible for her miscarriage in 1776. Just as the press pathologised the Duchess' passion for fashion and socialising, Robinson's social activities were understood as dangerous to her infant. In *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic*, Julie Kipp observes that this mistrust of fashionable women grew towards the end of the century, and often found articulation in discussions about breastfeeding. The radical republican and historian Catherine Macaulay, Kipp offers as an example, 'limited her support of maternal breastfeeding' out of concern

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<sup>149</sup> Cadogan, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Jean Terrasse, *Rousseau et l'éducation: Etudes sur l'Emile: actes du colloque de Northfield, 6-8 mai 1983*. North American Society for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (Sherbrooke: Editions Naaman, 1984), 98.

<sup>151</sup> Cadogan, 27, 14.

<sup>152</sup> Kukla, 79, 95.

<sup>153</sup> Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 160. David Kunzle has noted how this was part of a more general feeling of the aristocracy as 'deficient in maternal feeling.' Kunzle, "William Hogarth: The Ravaged Child in the Corrupt City," *Changing Images of the Family*, ed. Virginia Tufte and Barbara Myerhoff (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 99-140, 127.

for the infants of fashionable mothers.<sup>154</sup> In 1790 she warned that these mothers were too selfish by nature to sacrifice their ‘amusements’ to breastfeed and care for their children properly:

Can you expect that a fine lady should forgo all her amusements and enter into the sober habits of domestic life, in order to enable her to nourish her offspring with wholesome food? Now milk overheated with midnight revels, and with the passionate agitations of a gamester’s mind, must have qualities rather injurious than beneficial to life.<sup>155</sup>

As Kipp notes, Macaulay likened ‘the attributes of the mother to those of the food she provided’, taking issue with the ‘integrity and purity’ or lack thereof, of the upper-class maternal body.<sup>156</sup> Aristocratic breastfeeding, she concluded, was ‘almost always of more prejudice than good.’<sup>157</sup> Impelled by fashion and preoccupied with their social lives, they were deemed too self-interested to achieve the egoless work of motherhood. Robinson’s own writings, however, tell a different story. Whilst still nursing the young Maria, Robinson became pregnant with her second child. She was at this time in the midst of trying to relaunch her acting career, having some years earlier come to the attention of preeminent actor and theatre maestro of the day, David Garrick. As Engel recounts, one night she was visited by Richard Sheridan, owner of the London Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. Sheridan dropped in on her unannounced, finding Robinson ‘dishabillé’ in her nightgown. Despite her lack of preparedness, he asked her to recite some verses from Shakespeare, and ‘delighted with her talents’, decided her theatrical re-debut should be as Juliet. Whilst gladdened at the prospect, Engel observes that Robinson had some qualms about performing given her ‘domestic state.’ Pregnant and nursing the almost three-year-old Maria, she was relatively tied to the home, and expressed fears about emerging from her state of maternal ‘solitude’:

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<sup>154</sup> Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42.

<sup>155</sup> Catherine Macaulay, *Letters on Education: With Observations on Religion and Metaphysical Subjects*. 1790. (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1974), 32-3.

<sup>156</sup> Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic*, 42.

<sup>157</sup> Macaulay, 33.

The only objection which I felt to the idea of appearing on stage was my then increasing state of domestic solitude. I was, at the period Mr. Sheridan was first presented to me somewhat advanced in that situation which afterwards, by the birth of Sophia, made me a second time a mother. Yet such was my imprudent fondness for Maria, that I was still a nurse; and my constitution was very considerably impaired by the effects of these combining circumstances.<sup>158</sup>

Despite her reservations Robinson decided to accept the role and began appearing as Juliet in December 1776. In May 1777 she gave birth to Sophia, who sadly died of convulsions shortly after her birth. Her ‘concerns about her body’, Engel writes, and ‘her admission that she is still breast-feeding her older child’ serve as ‘poignant reminders of the physical and emotional demands on actresses.’<sup>159</sup> They also contradict popular contemporary narratives about actresses, fashionable socialites, politically engaged and elite mothers as selfish. Robinson’s concern for her pregnancy and the protracted breastfeeding of her ‘adored and affectionate secondself’ Maria gesture to deep concern about her maternal role.<sup>160</sup> Engel is careful, however, to entertain the possibility that Robinson’s recollection of Sheridan’s visit was a retrospective exercise in self-fashioning. Robinson ‘moved between personas’ in her memoirs, Engel suggests, in order to ‘fit and, at certain moments, to rebel against the desirable models of femininity projected by late eighteenth-century culture.’ The image of the pregnant and partially dressed Robinson receiving a surprise visit from Sheridan is ‘a startling visual reference.’ Engel questions whether this image is supposed to be read ‘as a moment of sympathy’ or is rather intended to animate ‘voyeuristic pleasure.’ The ‘double image of Robinson as seductive ingenue and new mother’, Engel concludes, offers ‘the perfect combination for fashioning female celebrity’, encouraging readers to feel empathy and desire ‘at the same moment.’<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Robinson, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson*, 189–90.

<sup>159</sup> Engel, 93.

<sup>160</sup> Cited in Sarah Gristwood, *Perdita: Royal Mistress, Writer, Romantic* (London: Bantam, 2005), 265.

<sup>161</sup> Engel, 61, 93.

As literary scholar Eleanor Ty argues in her exploration of Robinson's literary empowerment, her memoirs worked to 'counter the pictorial and 'gossipy' representations of her that were created by others.'<sup>162</sup> Robinson's 'branded identity' Mole reminds in his discussion of her celebrity, evolved through a body of work which included 'her theatrical performances, her poetry volumes, her novels, her non-fictional prose, her work as a literary editor of the *Moring Post*' and through the 'field of media' which targeted her as a subject.<sup>163</sup> This media attention swelled into a circus as Robinson's career as an actress soared and her private life took a very public turn. In the 1780s, Robinson appeared prolifically in satirical prints; McCreery claims that she featured in forty-one prints, more than any other courtesan of her time. Only two elite women – Queen Charlotte and the Duchess of Devonshire, had higher representation.<sup>164</sup> As the barrister Charles Abbott declared in his 1786 *An Essay on the Use and Abuse of Satire*: the 'introduction of known characters gives particular force, as they both interest the passions by their familiarity, and convince the judgement by their truth.'<sup>165</sup> Graphic satirists offering up Robinson's story as a moral tale, seeking to convince of the pitfalls of fame, fashion and fortune.

Having separated from her abusive husband ten years after Maria's birth, Robinson became pregnant again. She had since seen her husband imprisoned for debt, lived in prison accommodation with him and the six-month old Maria, begun her literary career, found great fame as an actress, suffered the death of Sophia, become a mistress to the Prince of Wales and campaigned for the Whig party. As Engel notes, eighteenth-century society was enamoured with actresses, with people 'clamouring for information about their private lives and relishing the scandals and intrigues fed by the growth of newspapers, prints and memoirs.'<sup>166</sup> Following affairs with a number of men, in 1783 she was in a relationship with Banastre Tarleton, an army officer plagued by debt. The *Morning Herald*, unable to resist reminding of her past sexual indiscretions, used her popular moniker to break news of her pregnancy:

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<sup>162</sup> Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 24.

<sup>163</sup> Mole, "Celebrity and Anonymity" in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism* ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 464-77, 466.

<sup>164</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 101.

<sup>165</sup> Charles Abbott, *On the Use and Abuse of Satire*, vol. I (London: ?, 1786), 186.

<sup>166</sup> Engel, 11.

‘The Perdita is pregnant!’<sup>167</sup> Although she was a mother to a ten-year-old, Robinson role as a mother had been rarely discussed or represented.<sup>168</sup> On the contrary, she appeared in satire highly sexualised, her bare or almost bare breasts habitually used to symbolise her promiscuity.<sup>169</sup> In one of Gillray’s earliest and crudest ventures into caricature, she appears as part of a sign above a tavern, inscribed ‘THE WHIRLIGIG *Alamode Beef, hot every Night.*’ As Byrne observes, she is ‘impaled on a long pole, with legs spread wide apart and completely exposed breasts.’ A whirligig, Byrne explains, was a cage suspended mid-air in which ‘prostitutes were hoisted for punishment.’<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Morning Herald* (12 July 1783).

<sup>168</sup> This was perhaps because, unlike the children of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Mary’s daughter was not born into the aristocratic nobility. There was no expectation that her child would be of any particular social standing or importance, and it was not an heir to a title.

<sup>169</sup> See for example, Anonymous, *Florizel and Perdita*. (London: 1780), BM Satires 5767; Anonymous, *Florizel and Perdita*. (London: William Humphrey, 1781); Anonymous, *Florizel granting independency to Perdita*. (London: 1783), BM Satires 318; Anonymous, *[Mrs Robinson dancing with Fox]*. (London: 1783), BM Satires 6320; *Scrub and Archer*. (London: John Boyne, 1783), BM Satires 6221; Anonymous, *The C-ton [Carlton] House levee*. (London: 1784) BM Satires 6660; *Non commission officers embarking for Botany Bay*. (London: Hannah Humphrey, 1796), BM Satires 6990.

<sup>170</sup> Byrne, 197.





Fig. 2.13 James Gillray, *The Thunderer*, 1782. BM Satires 6116

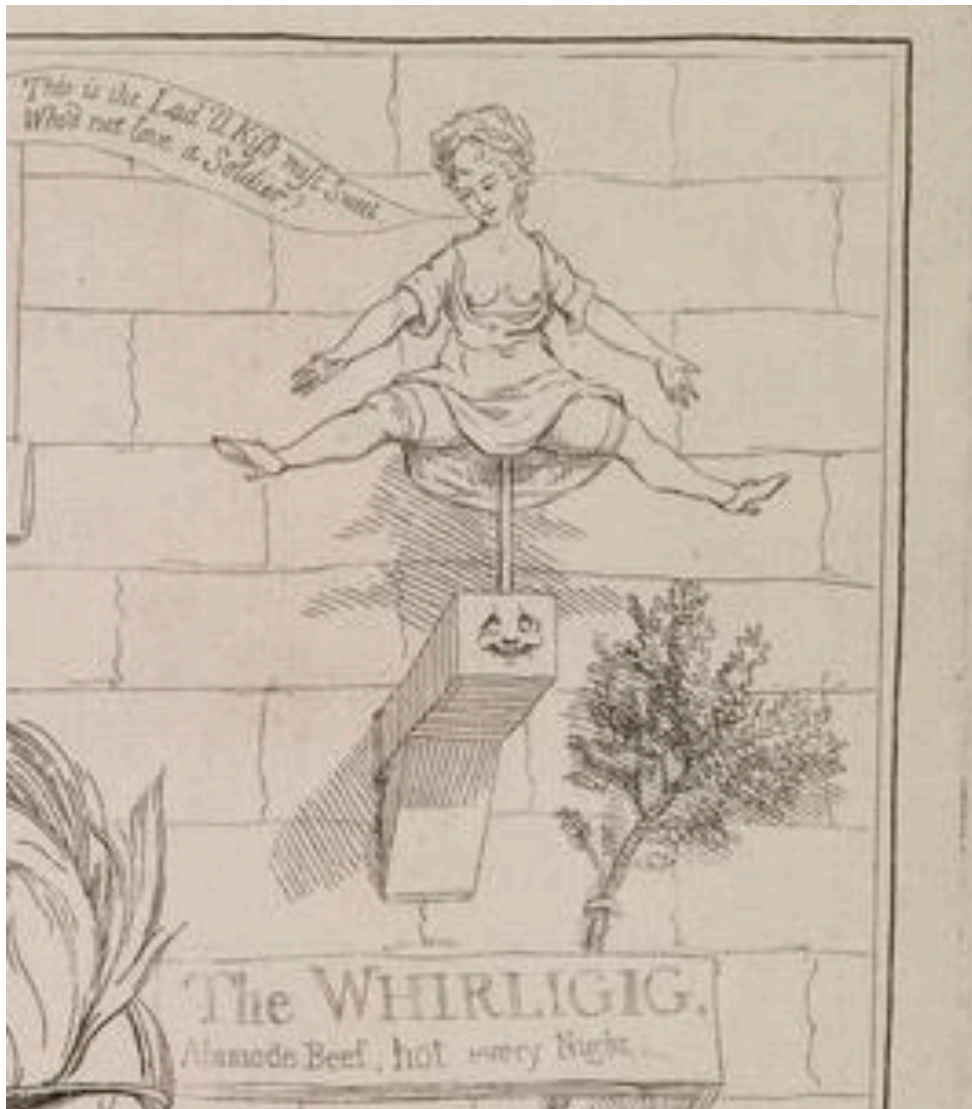


Fig. 2.14 Detail from *The Thunderer*

Robinson, writes Byrne, had 'developed a reputation for promoting herself by means of her sexual allure.'<sup>171</sup> The *Morning Herald* even ran a story - two months before announcing Robinson's pregnancy - claiming that she used her breast to stamp the wax seal on her letters:

...the *Perdita* frequently seals her letters to her intimate friends with an impression of her own *bust*, which, being in wax, *hieroglyphically* conveys the

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<sup>171</sup> Byrne, 222.

idea of a *melting* fair, and is therefore kissed as the *symbol* of the beauty whom it represents.<sup>172</sup>

'By this device', Byrne comments, she and her breast became 'symbol[s] of her own desirability.'<sup>173</sup> News of Robinson's pregnancy in 1783 then, came after a slew of highly lewd satirical representations and cascades of journalistic gossip. Although privately devoted to her daughter, Robinson was not perceived as a nurturing mother. Unlike the Duchess, it doesn't appear as if Robinson ever tried to improve her maternal image. Such an identity, Engel suggests, would have been difficult for Robinson to cultivate under her circumstances. An actresses' domestic reputation was built upon 'the idea of faithfulness to her husband and devotion to her children', and Robinson's high-profile affairs made her legitimacy as a mother suspect.<sup>174</sup> 'Women making their living on display', literary and theatre scholar Lisa Freeman argues, were considered to be 'at odds with notions of domesticity and privacy central to respectable eighteenth-century ladies.' Their profession denied them privacy and rendered their bodies and lives public property; their images and experiences were additionally 'circulated, bought, sold, and discarded' via 'newspapers, pamphlets, treatises, memoirs, biographies, portraits, prints, engravings, illustrations, sculpture and porcelain.'<sup>175</sup> But in spite of the slanderous and scandalous representations and commentary that claimed otherwise, Byrne ventures that Robinson was settled with Banastre Tarleton. He had 'captured her heart' and, she was delighted that they were expecting a baby.<sup>176</sup> Tragedy struck shortly thereafter though, when she miscarried.

### *Perdita Upon Her Last Legs*

Recounting the episode, Byrne explains that one night Robinson suspected that Tarleton had been forced to flee to France because of their accumulating debts. Distraught, she rushed to Dover by coach in the early hours of the morning, 'without

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<sup>172</sup> *Morning Herald* (24 May 1783).

<sup>173</sup> Byrne, 222.

<sup>174</sup> Engel, 10.

<sup>175</sup> Lisa Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

dressing herself for the night air or thinking of her pregnancy.’ According to Maria Robinson’s continuation of her mother’s memoirs, during the journey she fell asleep with the windows open to the cold and became ill. She fell into a fever for six months and was left partially paralysed with a ‘violent rheumatism.’ At the age of twenty-five, she was left in a ‘state of infantine helplessness’ which continued for the rest of her life.<sup>177</sup> Although she was pregnant when she left for Dover, Robinson never gave birth to Tarleton’s child. Byrne speculates that the rheumatic fever she suffered was caused by a streptococcal infection, prompted by a miscarriage.<sup>178</sup> Correspondence from the time supports this - a letter written by the Earl of Pembroke in the same year said of Robinson:

Her face is still pretty, but her illness had brought on a disadvantageous scowl to it; and as to her body, she is quite *défaite*... she may possibly come about again, but she must not go any more to an Opera on the day of miscarriage.<sup>179</sup>

Now a favourite of caricatures and journalistic gossip, society was morbidly hungry for details of Robinson’s illness, as they had been when the Duchess miscarried.<sup>180</sup> Commentators were eager to connect her illness to her excessive vanity and irresponsible behaviour. The *Morning Herald* wrote that ‘the envious part of her sex’ ascribed her sickness to ‘chagrin at the declining influence of her charms’, whilst the *Rambler’s Magazine* claimed it was ‘occasioned by her love of gaiety; and keeping her revels of midnight beyond her strength of constitution.’<sup>181</sup> Core elements of Robinson’s identity – her pride in her appearance and passion for socialising – were pathologised and framed as morally and medically incompatible to health and responsible maternity. Her reputation as sexually corrupted and committed to the social scene conflicted with hegemonic ideas of maternal femininity which celebrated selflessness and nurture.

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<sup>177</sup> Robinson, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson*, vol. II, 96.

<sup>178</sup> Byrne, 229.

<sup>179</sup> Herbert, Henry (ed.), *Pembroke Papers (1780-1794): Letters and Diaries of Henry, Tenth Earl of Pembroke and his Circle*. Vol I. (London: J. Cape, 1950), 227.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>181</sup> *Morning Herald* (31 July 1783); ‘Amorous and Bon Ton Intelligence’ *Rambler’s Magazine* (26 August 1783).

A year later, newspapers and prints were still making an example of Robinson, seizing on her 'dissipated lifestyle' and sexual reputation.<sup>182</sup> The *Morning Post* referred to her condition as 'the effect of divine justice' and wrote that a 'life of wanton dissipation has reduced her to penury and distress [...] her constitution and the use of her limbs are gone; death stares her in the face, and no comfort is left but the recollection of such actions as contradicted the general tenor of her conduct. To view the Perdita now, would be a lesson indeed!'<sup>183</sup> A little later, the *Rambler's Magazine* published a cruel satirical print titled *Perdita upon her last legs* (1784), showing a hunched Robinson begging the Prince of Wales for money. With her dress in rags and her face slack with desperation, she is a far cry from the glamorous 'Perdita' the play bill plastered to the wall reminds that she once was. Her partially exposed, sagging breast and the almost empty, wrinkled money pouch which the Prince extends to her suggests that she is used up – aged just twenty-five, she has nothing left to offer in terms of desirability or productivity.

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<sup>182</sup> William D. Brewer, "Mary Robinson's Paralysis and the Discourse of Disability" *Disabling Romanticism*, ed. Michael Bradshaw. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 105-26, 111. For examples of satirical prints of Robinson from the early 1780s, see *Florizel and Perdita*. BM Satires 5767 (London, 1780); Gillray, *The Thunderer*, BM Satires 6116 (London, 1782); Thomas Colley, *Peridto and Perdita – or – the Man and Woman of the People*. BM Satires 6117 (London, 1782); Gillray, *Monuments lately discovered on Salisbury Plain*, BM Satires 6115 (London, 1782); *The New Vis-A-Vis Or Florizel Driving Perdita*, BM Satires 6259 (London, 1783).

<sup>183</sup> *The Morning Post* (16 August 1784).



Fig. 2.15 Anonymous, *Perdita upon her Last Legs*, 1784. BM Satires 6655

For the *Morning Post* and the anonymous artist of *Perdita upon her Last Legs*, the case of Robinson delivered a stark warning against the slackening of sexual and social boundaries. It showed that if the maternal principles of virtuous, modest maternity were infringed, then social ruin, illness and loss would follow. The way in

which Robinson's 'love of gaiety' was blamed for inciting her infant daughter's post-breastfeeding fit, and as responsible for her miscarriage and ensuing illness, demonstrates how women's bodies and behaviours were pathologised if they did not meet the exacting standards of natural nurture.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by considering how the medical promotion of breastfeeding expected and glorified female altruism. From the mid-century, breastfeeding rhetoric combined instructions about the physical 'giving' of maternal milk with moralising meditations on the importance and attractiveness of selflessness. Maternal nurture was presented not just as a duty, but as a privilege which would accrue husbandly affection, social approval and familial joy. Evidently, these physician and philosopher-led discussions were about more than the breast; they worked to direct woman's energy towards others and away from themselves, restricting their bodily and emotional engagement with the world beyond maternity. This impetus stemmed from anxieties about population growth, health and morality, as well as more specific concerns about the slippage of gender roles and female virtue. Breastfeeding, and the selflessness it represented, became a carrier for hopes of a reformed future and more settled present. But as the cases of the Duchess of Devonshire and Mary Robinson show, it was not enough for women to breastfeed, or to profess their devotion for their children. To be accepted as a good mother required complete, and even reverent devotion to the spirit of nurturing motherhood. This is plain from one of the more admiring newspaper reports on Robinson, which came as she was forced to halt her literary efforts in order to care for a sick Maria. Praising her 'maternal affection', the *Oracle* approvingly informed its readers that Robinson had dropped everything to tend to her first and only proper duty; being a mother. 'Mrs Robinson's literary pursuits are at present interrupted', they celebrated, 'by the claims of maternal affection. Her lovely and accomplished daughter is now under inoculation, and [...] doing well.'<sup>184</sup> That this event made it into the paper, let alone the fact that it was celebrated, reveals much about the value placed on maternal devotion.

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<sup>184</sup> *Oracle* (6 March 1792).

Even though both the Duchess and Robinson were enthusiastic mothers and by all accounts adored by their children, some contemporaries couldn't – or wouldn't – accept that a woman could be a good mother and also interested in, and good at, other things. Politics, socialising, writing, acting, sex – public success at and enjoyment in all these activities was portrayed as unnatural and even pathological. Conservative commentators, physicians and caricaturists tried to shame elite and famous mothers into domestic retreat, worrying that their fashionable influence would corrupt the maternal sensibilities of those interested in them. Their breasts, once a site of their self-professed commitment and care to their children, were transformed in satirical prints into symbols of their sexual depravity and emotional neglect. Yet, as the cases of the Duchess and Robinson show, these attempts to sanitise and discredit 'selfish' mothers were not systemically successful. What emerges instead is evidence of lives lived colourfully, dynamically and with plenty of non-maternal or maternal-adjacent intent.<sup>185</sup> Journalistic reports and satirical prints even suggest that the Duchess and Robinson's refusal to submit to the oppressive doctrines of maternal selflessness was met with a kind of disapproving curiosity, represented as a daring and sometimes seductive resistance. Of course, this reaction was stirred by their particular fame, beauty and influence, and there is plenty to suggest that other mothers' comparative transgressions, if they had been given space to happen in the first place, would not have been tolerated. Political, creative, sexual and social pursuits outside the realms of the family were a predominantly upper-class privilege, but elite mothers' visible participation in them still set a bad example.

As such, criticisms went beyond the Duchess and Robinson. Well-known women including the actress, courtesan and royal mistress Dorothy Jordan and Mary Ellen Bowes, the Countess of Strathmore were also pilloried in prints as selfish

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<sup>185</sup> Bailey has argued that the pressure to be selfless extended to fathers too, and thus its 'role in restricting female personal subjectivities' was not as great as is sometimes assumed. 'Parenthood and personhood were intertwined', Bailey states 'motherhood did not develop into a binary opposite to selfhood.' *Parenting in England 1760-1830*, 155.



mothers.<sup>186</sup> A pair of Gillray prints from 1786 featuring Strathmore provide a particularly salient example of the disastrous and dangerous upper-class mother-type. Both works, Anna Clark notes, were likely commissioned by Strathmore's husband, the politician and criminal Andrew Robinson Stoney-Bowes. Stoney-Bowes was physically and mentally abusive; Clark records that he burned his wife with candles, and once, 'tried to pierce her tongue with a pen.' When she eventually instigated divorce proceedings, Stoney-Bowes abducted her, made her sleep in a pigsty and threatened rape. The two satirical prints published in 1786, Clark argues, were part of Bowes' effort to earn the support of the public and 'turn scandal against his wife' and earn the support of the public.<sup>187</sup> In both works, Gillray uses the transgressive breast to make claims about Strathmore's sexual depravity, particularly as a wife and mother-figure. In *Lady Termagant Flaybum going to give her step son a taste of her desert after dinner*, Gillray draws Strathmore as a 'brute who beats her stepson for her own sexual gratification.' As McCreery points out, the salacious subject of the print is spurious not least because Strathmore didn't actually have a

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<sup>186</sup> See for example, Dorothy Jordan in Gillray's *La promenade en famille-a sketch from life* (1797), BM Satires 9009. In this Gillray depicts the Duke of Clarence submitting to family duties while his mistress, the actress Dorothy Jordan, learns lines. Clarence is shown unkempt and perspiring; with toys tumbling from his pockets, he drags a cart stamped with a chamber pot and crown. Jordan, who had seven further children with the Duke, strides forward aloofly, fully immersed in her study and undisturbed by their demanding brood. Significantly, her breasts are entirely concealed and inaccessible underneath her high-necked clothing, gesturing to her lack of interest in a maternal identity. The masculine style of her dress emphasises her inversion of gender, as she declines to sacrifice her own interests to parental devotion. In *Satirical Gaze*, McCreery interprets this print as Jordan 'dominating' the Duke, leaving him to care for their children whilst she pursues her artistic passion (63). She argues that Clarence is pictured as a 'slave' to his wife in *La Promenade*, and the fact that his brood witness this weakness and gender transgression 'sets a dangerous precedent' for the future (110). Gillray cautions that the Clarence children will end up as selfishly immoral as their mother, or as spineless as their father. For McCreery, Jordan's behaviour was a 'shocking display of influence for a royal mistress', and her audacity sparked agitation about the example she set to other aristocratic courtesans, as well as her children. An earlier print, *Symptoms of Cruelty: A Representation of the manner of Treatment of the Slaves in the West Indies – or an Advocate for the Slave Trade receiving a Taste* (circa 1792-3) by William Dent, shows Jordan brandishing a whip, lashing the semi-naked Duke. Odumosu reviews the print in detail in *Africans in English Caricature*, deconstructing its reference to slavery, 155-59.

<sup>187</sup> Anna Clark, 69. For more on the Countess of Strathmore, her marriage to Andrew Stoney Bowes-Strathmore and Gillray's prints see 61-9 in Clark; McCreery, 175-7.

stepson – although she was reputed to 'dislike her eldest son greatly.'<sup>188</sup>

Nonetheless, the nurturing symbolism of the bare breast is inverted to advertise her anti-maternal aggressiveness, transgressive sexual appetite and proclivity for public indecency. Indebted to Rowlandson's *Political Affection*, another print, *The Injured Countess, S.-*, sees Gillray offer his own take on the selfish breast. The drunk Countess of Strathmore breastfeeds two kittens whilst her son bawls beside her, crying out 'I wish I was a cat / my mama would love me then.'



Fig. 2.16 Gillray, *Lady Termagant Flaybum going to give her step son a taste of her desert after dinner, a scene performed every day near Grosvenor Square, to the annoyance of the neighbourhood*, 1786. BM Satires 7011

<sup>188</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 195.



Fig. 2.17 Gillray, *The Injured Countess*, S., 1786. BM Satires 7013

Both buxom burlesques, these depictions of Strathmore remind that the transgressive mother was negligent because she was desiring, distracted and debauched rather than supportive, attentive and virtuous. As a satirical motif the selfish breast parcelled all of these unnatural qualities into one accessible and often disturbing image which valorised the cultural privileging of all-giving motherhood. As the century advanced, this motif was joined by and merged with other parodic versions of the nursing breast. Increasing apprehension about female mutability, artificiality, vanity and deceit inspired satirical scrutiny of the role of the breast in the fashionable dramas that were unfolding around the female body. For better or worse, the breast was once again on parade.

## Chapter Two

### The Fashionable Breast

The relationship between fashion and the breast is long and tortuous. Since antiquity, the nipples, silhouette and décolletage have been the focus of fashionable dress or undress. These areas have been varyingly accentuated, minimised or altered in appearance: pushed up, pushed down, covered, left bare, positioned to peek through, made-up and adorned. Oscillating in line with shifting tastes and technologies, their fashionable display has been geared to titillate as well as to point to different social roles, positions and identities. In Western Europe, the exposure of the breast has long divided opinion. The fourteenth-century Belgian chronicler Jean Froissart christened the cleavage the ‘smile of the bustline’, whilst the French Catholic clergyman Olivier Maillard judged women who exposed it deserved of being ‘strung up by their udders in Hell.’<sup>1</sup> In the centuries that followed, debates about its proper sartorial show raged, with legions of moralists weighing in on issues of propriety, formality and practicality. In Georgian Britain, an abrupt and dramatic change in the fashionable presentation of the breast during the 1780s and 1790s caused particular controversy. Firstly falsified, thrust up and puffed forwards, it was later admired in its more unaffected state; a leaning which developed out of an increasing cultural preference for a more ‘natural’ aesthetic. Fashionable breasts went from being encased in material and bolstered by corsetry to largely left to their own devices – swathed only in loose, filmy drapery.

Encouraged by art historian Ameilia Rauser’s recent argument that ‘when fashion changes dramatically, then we should investigate’, this chapter takes the 1780s and 1790s as a point from which to examine how the fashionable breast was represented in satirical prints.<sup>2</sup> Whilst such change cannot be fixed to a moment -

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Elodie Piveteau and Philippe Vaurès, *Underdressed* (Paris: Fitway Publishing, 2005), 214; quoted in Adam Knobler, “S(m)oothing the Savage(‘s) B(r)east: Covering and Colonialism in the Age of Euro-American Expansion” in *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Alexandra Cuffel and Brian Britt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 241-50, 245.

<sup>2</sup> Rauser, *The Age of Undress: Art, Fashion, and the Classical Ideal in the 1790s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 8.

fashions overlap, regress and anticipate each other – the substantial difference between the styles which dominated during this period demands scrutiny. Although overblown, satirical takes on fashionable – or unfashionable – breasts neatly capture the extremity of this swing. Published in 1787, the anonymous print *Such Things are Telles Choses Sont* mocks the fad for amplification; women are unbalanced by comically boosted fronts and behinds and eclipsed by massive muffs and headpieces. Just seven years later, Isaac Cruikshank's *The Graces of 1794* made a spectacle of women whose neoclassical-inspired costume left little to the imagination, with their empire-line costumes boldly baring their breasts in a titillating illustration of the latest vogue.



Fig. 3.1 *Such Things are Telles Choses Sont*, 1787. BM Satires 7252



Fig. 3.2 Isaac Cruikshank, *The Graces of 1794*, 1794. BM Satires 8571

In her impressive study of dress in eighteenth-century sentimental literature, Jennie Batchelor argues that whilst the fashion industry put pressure on women to self-scrutinise and accept surveillance from others, it also afforded them agency. Building upon the work of fashion scholars including Anne Buck, Aileen Ribeiro,

Jessica Munns and Penny Richards, Batchelor shows how, as ‘the most immediate signifier of self’, dress helped its female wearers to navigate their way through an increasingly prescriptive and rapidly expanding world.<sup>3</sup> Not only did it empower women to negotiate and reclaim elements of their physical identity, it also enabled them to respond to imperatives founded upon virtuous ideals of courtship, marriage and maternity. With this in mind, this chapter approaches fashion and anti-fashion not merely as indexes of changing tastes, but rather as technologies which were shaped by and contributed to a series of late-century social, cultural and political revolutions.

Whilst researchers have rightly emphasised the agent possibilities of fashion, less attention has been paid to how its evolution and experience was impacted by reactionary narratives. The irreverent commentaries provided by visual satire variously acknowledged, undercut and augmented the agency granted to some by fashion. In particular, satirical prints encouraged the public objectification, commodification and exclusion of certain bodies, as well as enabling resistance and creativity on behalf of others. In the late 1700s, the functional and representational aspirations of fashion and graphic satire were similar; both suggested how women should clothe and conduct themselves, as well as the spaces and places they should inhabit. As creative makers working in the public sphere, graphic satirists served as custodians of fashion as well as documenters of and commentators on it. Like the designers of clothes, the illustrators of fashion plates and the authors of style advice, (male) satirists affected the who, what, when, where and how of fashion.

To begin, this chapter briefly explores the relationship between fashion plates and fashion satires in the late century. The aesthetic similarities between the two, it shows, offers insight into how fashion knowledge was disseminated and denounced. The second section examines the fashion for bolstered, padded and heavily decorated bosoms which proliferated in the 1780s. Spotlighting a series of anxieties that were aggravated by the fad for shapewear, it demonstrates how prints betrayed an unease with excess, as well as with women’s capacity to conceal their ‘authentic’ selves, both materially and immaterially. Moving on to the 1790s, the third section of this chapter turns its attention to neoclassical fashion. Analysing caricatures of

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<sup>3</sup> Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 125.

women with breasts partially or completely exposed, it questions how satirists perceived the cultural impulse for all things 'natural' to be backfiring. Part of what Rauser observes of as a 'wave of aesthetic gestures fuelled by a growing distrust of artifice', neoclassical fashion ironically stirred suspicions about immorality and imitation. The extremity of the trend for exposure also provoked, as it did with the fashions of the 1780s, questions about the sagacity of women's sartorial choices.<sup>4</sup> Building upon the discussion of selfish mothers in Chapter One, the final section of this chapter returns to the theme of motherhood to show how fashionable women were cast as incapable of being practical, loving and natural mothers. Bringing together prints from the 1780s and 1790s, it examines how the conflicting fashions for bolstered, covered chests and minimally supported, uncovered breasts prompted similar yet separate protests about maternal detachment.

### **The Visual Culture of Fashion: Plates and Satirical Prints**

In the very first issue of *The Lady's Magazine* in August 1770, readers were reminded that 'external appearance is the first inlet to the treasures of the heart.' 'Dress is like the sun-shine', the editors wrote, 'it animates the figure, and gives them all their embellishment.' Its authority warranted its careful study; 'we shall by engravings', they promised, 'inform our distant readers with every innovation that is made in the female dress, whether it respects the covering of the head, or the clothing of the body.'<sup>5</sup> As Batchelor has shown, this promise was by and large broken – although essays on dress were periodically published, engravings and fashion plates are conspicuously lacking in *The Lady's Magazine* before 1800.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, however, they flourished; from the 1750s onwards fashion plates appeared popularly in pocket books, circulating changes in style through rich images

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<sup>4</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *The Lady's Magazine*, August 1770, A2.

<sup>6</sup> Batchelor, "Fashioning the Reader: Dress and Early Women's Magazines (Part 1)" *The Lady's Magazine (1770-1818): Understanding the Emergence of a Genre* (June 2018).

accompanied by written descriptions.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, scholars credit the French with inspiring British fashion plates. Art historians including Ribeiro have challenged earlier studies by Vyvyan Holland, Doris Langley Moore and Neil McKendrick which emphasised Britain's role in developing the genre in the eighteenth century, arguing instead that Parisian sources were producing plates a century earlier.<sup>8</sup> Both camps are united, material culture specialist Alice Dolan observes, by their understanding of plates as a medium which 'functioned to inform' those hungry for fashion knowledge in the late century.<sup>9</sup> And demand was high – not only were fashions evolving quickly, but commentators like *The Lady's Magazine* were increasingly stressing the importance of fashion to self-representation. Fashion plates offered aspirational middle-class viewers a snapshot of who and what they could be, depicting their models in good company, in genteel social settings and often partaking in refined leisure activities. Displaying the best of fashions on the best of bourgeoisie bodies, they encouraged dress as a mode of self-improvement.

This is not to say that less privileged communities were excluded from accessing their content; that they could be glimpsed, borrowed and swapped provided a means for many to access and adapt ideas for self-fashioning. But as Withey suggests in his study of the aesthetic ideals of body posture and shape, the mechanisms behind such value-led presentations were not delimited across society. It was the 'middling orders and elites', Withey comments, who were most likely to be motivated and able to 'fashion their bodies to suit normative rituals of politeness' –

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<sup>7</sup> Alicia Kerfoot, "Stitching the It-Narrative in *The History and adventures of a Lady's Slippers and Shoes*" in *Material Literacy in Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Nation of Makers*, ed. Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 117-33. As eighteenth-century scholars including Chloe Wigston Smith have discussed, fashion knowledge could be accessed via other pictorial ephemera. It could be collected, for example, from engravings of renowned actresses and social figures, and from painted depictions of aristocratic occasions such as royal celebrations. Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 182.

<sup>8</sup> Vyvyan Holland, *Handcoloured Fashion Plates 1770-1899* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1955); Doris Langley Moore, *Fashion through Fashion Plates 1771-1970* (New York, C. N. Potter, 1971); Neil McKendrick, 'The Commercialization of Fashion' in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1982), 34-99, 47-8.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Dolan, "An adorned print: print culture, female leisure and the dissemination of fashion in France and England, around 1660-1779" *V&A Online Journal* (Spring 2011).



whether that be by correcting deformities or following notions of fashionable dress. The lowers orders, Withey continues, generally experienced 'less demand to conform to expectations of gentility.'<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 3.3 *Fashionable full Dress of Paris* from *The Lady's Magazine*, February 1789

Fig. 3.4 *Morning Dress* from *The Gallery of Fashion*, June 1799

<sup>10</sup> Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Refined Bodies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21-2. For more on what Withey refers to as the 'nebulous concept' of politeness as it relates to the individual, particularly masculine, body see "Shaving and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Britain" *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36: 2 (2013), 225-43, 225-6, 228-30. For a comprehensive study on how the discursive norms of politeness were embodied and negotiated by women, see Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

The 1780s trend for projected bosoms and voluminous skirts as depicted in plates such as *Fashionable full Dress of Paris* was presented as part of a luxury aesthetic embodied by affluent, refined society ladies. In the 1790s, fashion plates characterised neoclassical inspired dress in similarly idyllic terms; drawn on bodies whose colour and measurements fitted with classical ideals, they imparted a sense of the virtuous interior as well as the fashionable exterior - a beautiful body meant a beautiful mind and soul. Discussing how engravers invoked cultural narratives through their plates, Richard Leppert argues that the telling of stories was a merchantile tactic: 'fashion plates are *about* consumption: they are to be visually consumed in an act producing desire, which precedes another, more material act of consumption, buying.'<sup>11</sup> In this way they differ sharply from satirical prints, which largely sought to discourage desire for the latest modes. As Donald explains, they were ostensibly designed 'to curb the follies of the frivolous, and to illustrate the sort of behaviour that right-minded people should avoid; for morality and taste were closely associated in the public mind.' In this sense, Donald continues, fashion satires 'were as important as fashion plates in forming the consciousness of consumers' even if their coded messages left a lot more up to individual interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

In his *Harris' Original British Ladies Complete Pocket Memorandum Book* (1782), the controversial pocketbook compiler John Harrison - alias Jack Harris – advised that dress 'is visible to everyone.' 'None can distinguish a person's abilities at first sight', he noted, and qualities, 'however respectable' cannot be discerned

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 71. In reality, fashion enthusiasts would often alter and add to existing clothes dress than commission a look in its entirety. This creativity and resourcefulness, when combined with extreme fashions such as the projected chest, left much room for error.

<sup>12</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion: Graphic Satires from the Georgian Period* (London: National Touring Exhibitions, 2002), 9.

without being duly signposted.<sup>13</sup> Yet with dress, ladies could say what they wanted about themselves without uttering a word. But whilst many celebrated clothing as a device for self-imaging in the late century, others cautioned that fashion could be weaponised against its wearer. Women whose dress was unsuited to their rank, role or physique, Harris warned his readers, frequently found themselves the ‘just subject of satire.’ If the complex material and semiotic significances of dress were misappropriated, misunderstood or mismanaged, then fashionable dress could ‘render the wearer ridiculous.’ As Batchelor notes in her discussion of the social meanings created by dress, ‘maintaining an appropriate form of sartorial display was a tricky balancing act for women’, and even more so for those disadvantaged by circumstances of class, race, status and place.<sup>14</sup> Such was the struggle to get it right that in 1780, a writer for *The Lady’s Magazine* advised its readers to shun its ‘folly and absurdity’ altogether, and along with it, ‘the prevailing foibles of the age.’<sup>15</sup> But fashion wasn’t going anywhere, and nor were its devoted followers and critics.

Inspired by the sartorial parade of the urban elite as well as the cutting-edge fashion ‘intelligence’ which was published in popular pocketbooks and periodicals, caricaturists traced, counselled about and laughed at the trends which evolved around the breast.<sup>16</sup> In the process, they recorded and affected the diverse socio-cultural, philosophical and political dramas which unfolded around late-century femininity. In the final two decades of the century, these dramas were many, manifold and often translated into fashion. These fashions provoked public fascination but also unease, providing satirists with a glut of material to translate into

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Harris, *Harris’ Original British Ladies Complete Pocket Memorandum Book: For the Year 1782* (London: J. W. Pasham, 1782), 5. Notoriously known as the ‘Pimp General to the People of England’, Harris is best known as the named author of *Harris’ List of Covent Garden Ladies*, a pocketbook designed as a gentleman’s guide to the city’s night life and prostitution. Harris was more familiar than most with how looks could deceive and reveal. Having begun his working life as a waiter, he made a career out of ascertaining people’s characters, desires and social positions based on their appearances and reputations. Historian Hallie Rubenhold has argued that the guide, which ran for thirty years from 1757 and sold an estimated two hundred and fifty thousand copies, was in fact written and compiled by an Irish poet named Samuel Derrick, who paid Jack Harris a fee from the profits of the guide in order to use his marketable name. Rubenhold (ed.), *Harris’ List of the Covent Garden Ladies* (London: Transworld, 2012), 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> Batchelor, 9.

<sup>15</sup> *The Lady’s Magazine* (December 1780), 652.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, (August 1770), A2.

irreverent, salacious prints which simultaneously addressed what curators Catherine Flood and Sarah Grant note as 'darker social and moral anxieties.'<sup>17</sup>

Fashion satires, historian of the body Susan J. Vincent observes, worked against fashion plates to create 'opposing fantasies of fashion: the refined and the grotesque, the aspirational and the repellent, the ideal and the harsh reality.'<sup>18</sup> Donald, on the other hand, sees prints as working alongside plates: they 'complemented and provided a knowing critique on the more idealising figments of fashion' making their own entertaining contribution to how fashion knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Highly accessible, entertaining and morally instructive, caricatures of the (un)fashionable proved immensely popular with middling and upper-class audiences; they were collected avidly by elite women such as Judith Baker and Sarah Sophia Banks, the latter whose considerable personal portfolio of pasted prints was passed on to the British Museum after her death.<sup>20</sup> As Flood and Grant demonstrate in their exploration of European dress in visual satire, late century fashion prints were devoured by 'an appreciative and for the most part, educated public' who sneered at the ostentatious display of their own as well as the imitation it inspired in those beneath their station.<sup>21</sup> Their 'taste and tolerance for a ribald, incisive humour', Flood and Grant explain, had been 'cultivated for decades' by graphic satirists and so crass, misogynistic and explicit representations flourished.<sup>22</sup> Fashionable women were frequently portrayed as desperate, foolish and vulgar; they lacked taste,

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<sup>17</sup> Catherine Flood and Sarah Grant, *Style and Satire: Fashion in Print 177-1927* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> As Gatrell notes, over a hundred examples from the last three decades of the century are listed in the British Museum catalogue. Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 362. Recently, there has been much scholarly interest in Sarah Sophia Banks and her collection of ephemera - see Gillian Russell, *The Ephemeral Eighteenth-Century: Print Sociability and the Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 98-152; Erica Y. Hayes and Kacie L. Wills, "Sarah Sophia Bank's Coin Collection: Female Networks of Exchange" in *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Arlene Leis and Kacie Wills (London, New York: Routledge, 2021), 78-92; Arlene Leis, "Sarah Sophia Banks: a 'truly interesting collection of visiting cards and Co.'" in *Collecting the Past: British Collectors and the Collections from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Toby Burrows and Cynthia Johnson (London, New York, Routledge, 2019), 25-44.

<sup>21</sup> Flood and Grant, 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

modesty, authenticity, self-awareness and most consistently, shame. They were also shown, however, as affecting great disruption, possessing the power to seduce, disguise and assimilate. Paying careful attention to who is mercilessly mocked and whose misdemeanours are tolerated or fetishised, the following analysis notices the cultural preferences and prejudices which influenced fashion and anti-fashion discourses. Close attention to how members of the public engaged with fashion satires - as well as to the representations within them - offers insight into how trends such as projected bosoms were borne out of a complex network of ideas based around gender, sexuality, class and race.

### **The Excessive 80s: Illusory and Inconvenient Breasts**

In 1786 an anonymous print showed a naked woman with what Dorothy George describes as ‘gigantic breasts and projected posteriors.’<sup>23</sup> *A Modern Venus or a Lady of Present Fashion in the State of Nature* purported to reveal the body beneath the current fashionable silhouette. The work caused quite a stir amongst London’s elite: originally sketched by ‘a young lady at Bath’, it was sent to Horace Walpole who in turn shared it with his friend Anne FitzPatrick the Countess of Upper Ossory, and later sent it to his close correspondent Horace Mann. Examining the knowledge and experiences that Walpole, Mann and Ossory brought to their discussion of the print offers insight into the motives behind its design as well as that of fashionable projecting busts more generally. Walpole was an avid collector of caricature and satirical prints, assembling an annotated portfolio of one hundred and thirty-five social and political works from the 1770s and 80s.<sup>24</sup>

One of these prints, *A Modern Venus* inspired what curator Cynthia Roman refers to as ‘particularly rich conversation and amusement’ within his circle.<sup>25</sup> Enclosing a copy of the drawing in a letter to Ossory, Walpole described its central figure as ‘a Venus of the present hour in her puris non naturalibus.’<sup>26</sup> The exchange

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in the British Museum catalogue at BM Satires 8257.

<sup>24</sup> See Joan Sussler, “Bosom Friends”: Enhancing the Figure of the mid-1780s” *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 22 (October 1993), 21-49, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Roman, “A Portfolio of Satires from Horace Walpole’s Collection” *Print Quarterly* 25: 2 (2008), 166-71, 167.

<sup>26</sup> Horace Walpole to the Countess of Ossory 27 January 1786 (P. Cunningham (ed.), *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Oxford*, vol. IX (1906), 37.

that this prompted – part of a long and lively epistolary correspondence comprising some 455 letters – exposes some of the more nuanced narratives which surrounded late-century fashion satires. The image had ‘diverted him so much’, Walpole confessed to Ossory, that he had instructed Kirkgate, his secretary and printer, to have it engraved into a print, and expected that ‘hundreds’ of reproductions would sell.<sup>27</sup> Sharing in his delight, Ossory responded to Walpole’s letter by creating her own art; using pencil to ‘feather in’ the fashionable dress that would cover the Venus’ exaggerated shape. Amused by her efforts, Walpole pasted Ossory’s drawing in his print portfolio along with the original and later, the engraving.<sup>28</sup> As Roman notes, that Walpole ‘so carefully collected, annotated and preserved’ these images of *A Modern Venus* offers ‘rich testimony about the role that caricature and satirical prints played in discourses about politics, society and fashion.’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 362.

<sup>28</sup> Claude Julien Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 133; Roman, 171.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



Fig. 3.5 Anonymous after Miss Hoare of Bath, *A Modern Venus or a Lady of Present Fashion in the State of Nature*, 1786. BM Satires 8257

Fig. 3.6 Anne FitzPatrick Countess of Ossory, *A Modern Venus Clothed*, 1786. The NYPL, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs

*A Modern Venus* was designed, as the literary scholar Claude Rawson puts it, 'to show how a woman would look if modern garments really represented the contours of the body, with the implication that the glamorous sexiness was really an impossible fantasy fostered by dress fashions.'<sup>30</sup> This motif of fantasy is interesting; Walpole, Ossory and Mann's engagement with the print demonstrates their awareness of the role of dress in wish-fulfilment processes; especially as related to gender performativity. Walpole's inscription of the print, which he penned for its

<sup>30</sup> Rawson, 133.

reproduction, makes explicit reference to this: ‘This is the Form, if we believe the Fair, Of which are Ladies are, or wish they were.’ This droll commentary on bolstering fashions jibes at the type of hyper-femininity masqueraded by ‘fair ladies.’ In a letter written to Mann, Walpole gently teased women who so brazenly advertised their sexuality by way of inflated breasts. He made sure, however, to defend their right to dress how they wanted, wryly admiring their tenacity. ‘Don’t, however’, he wrote to Mann, ‘imagine that I am disposed to be a censor of modes, as most old folks are’, rather, he declared, ‘I always maintain that the ordinances of the young are right. Who ought to invent fashions? Surely not the ancient.’<sup>31</sup> Keen not to be thought a prude, Walpole spoke as – and to – a man who was conscious of the concealment, confinement and liberation that fashion could offer. The print curator Joan H. Sussler argues that Walpole had ‘an avowed passion for dressing up in masquerade costumes’, and possessed outfits which allowed him to assume other identities, including that of an old woman and an ‘Indian courier.’<sup>32</sup>

Recently, queer theorists, historians and literary scholars have emphasised the influence that Walpole and the men in his circle had upon eighteenth-century material culture. Exploring how queer perspectives shaped Gothic art and architecture, art historian Matthew M. Reeve’s has shown how Walpole and his network invigorated and subverted the aesthetic and gendered order. Similarly, literary scholar Laura Westengard argues that Gothic novels including Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* offered queer subcultures the opportunity to critique the ‘normative structures’ which denied and devalued alternative perspectives. These studies follow a precedent set by George E. Haggerty, who has explored how Walpole’s letters illuminate how the intricacies of masculinity, male companionship and male desire were negotiated in the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Haggerty writes that Walpole’s more than forty year-long correspondence with Mann, touched upon almost ‘every private scandal and public affair of significance’: both loved gossip, with Mann sending

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<sup>31</sup> To Sir Horace Mann, May 4, 1786” in *Selected Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), 270.

<sup>32</sup> Sussler, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew M. Reeve, *Gothic Architecture and Sexuality in the Circle of Horace Walpole* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020); Laura Westengard, *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); George E. Haggerty, *Horace Walpole’s Letters: Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2011).



Walpole 'every delectable tidbit that he came across.'<sup>34</sup> In one letter to Mann, Walpole shared that he had overheard two gentlewomen speaking to his sister about his appearance:

Says one, "Lord! how fine Mr. Walpole is!" "Yes," replied t'other, (with a tone of saying sentences) "some men love to be particularly so – your *petits maîtres* – but they are not always the brightest of their sex."<sup>35</sup>

The derogatory implications of the phrase 'some men' are plain, and Haggerty writes that Walpole's telling of the tale sits somewhat uncomfortably in their correspondence: Mann failed to address the incident in his response. Contemporary caricatures on the other hand, Haggerty writes, responded to Walpole's fashionable effeminacy repeatedly.<sup>36</sup> The mock outrage that Walpole shares with Ossory and Mann at the false appendages in *A Modern Venus* gets at the hypocrisies at play within exclusionary fashion discourses. In the 1780s, popular prints including *Which is the Man?* (1786) used androgynous fashionable figures to suggest that modern fashion was blurring gender boundaries and destabilising social hierarchies. Other prints like *Cock and Hen Pouters* (1787) focused directly on the breast to bring about this issue; titled after a term coined by Walpole in 1773, it showed a fashionable man and woman face to face, their inflated, gauzy bosoms almost kissing. Below them, two tiny pouter-pigeons mirror their posture.

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<sup>34</sup> Haggerty, 121.

<sup>35</sup> Walpole to Mann, 24 February 1743, 18.180-81.

<sup>36</sup> Haggerty, 120.



Fig. 3.7 *Cock and Hen Pouters*, 1787. BM Satires 7249

The stream of satires caricaturing false breasts and bottoms, Sussler observes, were comparable in intensity to those that had mocked the ‘overstated dress’ of the young male macaronis that had returned from the Grand Tour. Such aspersions on foppish masculinity were rich, Walpole suggests in his responses to *A Modern Venus*, given the extent to which fashionable women were artificially affecting their own physical femininity. Whilst Sussler writes that Walpole’s cheerful engagement with the print is ‘a good indicator of his taste for nonsense’, it in fact reveals the weighty judgements and debates that graphic satire provoked.<sup>37</sup> As the thriving caricature industry affirmed, laughter was a serious business in the late century; that Walpole and his friends examined works like *A Modern Venus* for what they did and did not say about those around them is telling.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Sussler, 35, 24, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Haggerty, 127.

The connections between the amplified breasts, female ostentatiousness and what would in later centuries be called camp culture prompt reflection on who and what else was exploited for fashionable and satirical projects. In his reading of *A Modern Venus*, Rawson has drawn attention to Hoare's problematic engagement with racial tropes. The lady's inflated rear, Rawson argues, is caricatured in the vein of the 'steatopygic Hottentot.' As Rawson explains, this uncomfortable caricature suggests that the sartorial style was designed to reproduce some of 'the more unromantic contours of savages, in an unacknowledged tribute to their sexual attraction.'<sup>39</sup> Accounting for the concurrent image of indigenous people's large and hanging breasts – which appears often in written and visual satire – Rawson points to the gross distention of the fashionable bosom. Walpole himself made this connection between modern fashionable dress and the imitation of 'primordial forms.' Writing to Mann, he observed:

Our fine ladies seem to copy nature, or at least the ancient symbols of her, for though do not exhibit a profusion of naked bubbies down to their shoe-buckles, yet they protrude a prominence of gauze that would cover all the dugs of the alma mater.<sup>40</sup>

Walpole's allusion, Rawson notes, was to the 'many-breasted Diana of Ephesus', an emblem of nature and fertility which enjoyed prolific representation in visual culture. Fashionable ladies' enthusiasm in emulating such 'natural' figures was of course ironic, but padding the breast in the vein of an 'indigenous' form which itself was falsely presumed and stereotyped was particularly incongruous with any notion of nature.<sup>41</sup> Scholars including Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, Siphwe Gloria Ndlovu, Gabeba Baderoon, Sheila Smith McKoy, Janell Hobson, Schiebinger and Wagner have shown how following centuries of racist textual publications including caricatures, the arrival of Sarah Baartman in London in 1810 - and the ensuing exhibition of her character the Hottentot Venus – galvanised the European objectification, sexualisation and victimisation of Black physiognomy, anatomy and

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<sup>39</sup> Rawson, 133.

<sup>40</sup> "To Sir Horace Mann, May 4, 1786."

<sup>41</sup> For more on indigenous female representation in the eighteenth-century, see Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 160-71.

womanhood which persists today.<sup>42</sup> Baartman's visual representation, Odumosu writes, 'is most starkly demonstrative of how the Black body has been used in the West as a spectacular visual theatre – constantly mediating external projections and fantasies.'<sup>43</sup> Early nineteenth-century journalists, artists, scientists, novelists, anatomists and zoologists, Wagner explains, were united by their interest in Baartman's protruding buttocks, full breasts and what was referred to as her 'Hottentot apron' (enlarged labia).<sup>44</sup> In 2013, Alison E. Wright traced the iconography of the 'Hottentot Venus' in prints held by the British Museum.<sup>45</sup> Making their commodification offensively clear, prints like the anonymous *A Virgin* (c. 1800-1810) use the fashionable breast as a way in to sexualising and civilising the Black female form. George describes its fashionable subject as a 'light-skinned black woman', noting the contemporary annotation '[A Virgin] for Sixpence.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Natasha Gordon-Chipembere (ed.), *Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-16; Sipiwe Gloria Ndlovu, "'Body" of Evidence: Saartjie Baartman and the Archive" in *Representation and Black Womanhood*, 17-30; Gabeba Baderoon, "Baartman and the Private: How Can We Look at a Figure that Has Been Looked at Too Much?" in *Representation and Black Womanhood*, 65-85; Sheila Smith McKoy, "Placing and Replacing "The Venus Hottentot": An Archeology of Pornography, Race, and Power in *Representation and Black Womanhood*, 85-100; Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 19-86. See also Odumosu's brief discussion of early scholarship of Baartman, 33-4.

<sup>43</sup> Odumosu, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 209.

<sup>45</sup> Alison E. Wright, "The Hottentot Venus an Alternative Iconography" *The British Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (2013), 59-70.

<sup>46</sup> George at BM Museum no. 2013,7064.1.



Fig. 3.8 Anonymous, *A Virgin*, c. 1800-1810. BM no. 2013,7064.1

The European fascination with Baartman's body and bodies like hers, McKoy notes, 'grew out of sexual fetishes that were excited by her buttocks, and breasts'

and are expressed in the sexually suggestive padding fashions of the 1780s.<sup>47</sup> Rawson concedes that ‘not everyone at the time can have been conscious of the connections’ between breast bolstering fashions and primitive stereotypes. Hoare’s caricature and Walpole’s comments on it – as well as his fondness for masquerading as racial ‘others’ - do, however, demonstrate ‘some contemporaneous awareness of primitivist tendencies in elaborate styles of dress’, and should not be overlooked.<sup>48</sup>

Walpole owned other prints which travestied the fashion for inflated curves, including George Townley Stubbs’ *The Bosom Friends* (1786). Punning on the phrase bosom friends – meaning close confidants – it mocks the fashionable elite’s tendency to obey the dictates of fashion irrespective of whether a style was becoming or practical.<sup>49</sup> The bosom friends’ bodies are indistinguishable except for their arms, with their faces are made minute by dwarfing hairpieces.

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<sup>47</sup> McKoy, 91. Baartman’s body was taxidermied and displayed in the Musée de l’Homme for over 160 years following her death, an act which continued the ‘public commodification of her body’ – and ignorance of her life - that she had suffered whilst living. ‘The incomplete history of her life’, McKoy writes, and ‘the focus on her anatomy, represent a wider colonial history in which Africans and other peoples of colour were commodities as well as objects of sexual titillation and domination.’ (92)

<sup>48</sup> Rawson, 135.

<sup>49</sup> Sussler notes that earlier in the century, ‘bosom friends’ was also slang for body lice, like the phrase ‘back-biters’ (24). See the companion print to *The Bosom Friends*, titled *The Back-Biters or High Bum Fiddle Pig Bow Wow* (1786).



Fig. 3.9 George Townly Stubbs, *The Bosom Friends*, 1786. BM Satires 7112

Despite the gross distention of their curves, contemporary correspondence suggests this representation wasn't far off the mark. Enclosing a copy of the print in a letter to her friend Elizabeth Cranch, the American women's rights campaigner Abigail Adams wrote from London:

This is the Season of the Year in which London is a desert, even fashion languishes. I however inclose you a Print of *The Bosom Friends*. When an

object is to be ridiculed, tis generally exaggerated. The print however does not greatly exceed some of the most fashionable Dames.<sup>50</sup>

Adams' claim that the bosom friend trend did not require exaggeration in order to be ridiculed goes some way to explaining the criticism it attracted. Its extremity raised questions about the sagacity of those who participated in the fashion; prints like *The Bosom Friends* fixated on the idea that women in particular were like sheep, lacking the imagination to question the impetuses behind styles as well as failing to consider whether they were becoming. Whilst elite audiences such as Walpole and his circle clearly searched satirical representations of fashion for their cultural significances, modish subjects themselves were often drawn as devoid of any independent state of mind.

As the gender historian Kate Haulman demonstrates in her study of the politics of fashion, extreme and transient styles like fortification bosoms were taken as evidence of modern women's gullibility, capriciousness and prolificacy.<sup>51</sup> As early as 1724, in a reissue of his *The Fable of Bees* (1714), the Dutch born, London-dwelling philosopher Bernard Mandeville condemned the 'Fickle Strumpet that invents new Fashions every Week' thoughtlessly donning 'style after novel style.' Such a character, Mandeville argued, 'scatter[ed] about their Money without Wit or Judgement', and whilst he conceded that the 'strange, ridic'ulous Vice' of fashion certainly turned the wheels of commercial trade, he nonetheless worried that it was corroding social morality.<sup>52</sup> Donald explains that the slave to fashion was thought 'to be *intrinsically* harmful to society', an impression caricaturists reinforced.<sup>53</sup> The 'fools of fashion' they depicted, Donald argues, with their 'towering headdresses, false fronts and false bottoms', had their 'human and moral characters' totally obscured.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Cranch, "The Bosom Friends" (1786) in *Adams Family Correspondence, Volume 7, January 1786 – February 1787*, ed. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, Celeste Walker et al. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), xiv.

<sup>51</sup> Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits. With an Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*. (London: J. Tomson, 1724), 410, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Donald, *Following the Fashion*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, 86.



Noticing how caricaturists rushed to burlesque the 'preposterous' trend, the memoirist Henry Angelo recalled: 'Ladies, old and young, at this period, wore preposterous pads behind; and, as if this fashion wanted a counter-balance, enormous false bosoms were contrived of puffed gauze, so that they might be compared to *pouter* pigeons.'<sup>55</sup> Angelo's observations are corroborated by fashion satires such as the anonymous print *The Equilibrium* (1786), which shows a woman's pouter pigeon breast ballooning out like an excrescence on a body whose original shape is almost impossible to ascertain.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, with Memoirs of His Late Father and Friends, including Numerous Anecdotes and Curious Traits of the Most Celebrated Character that have Flourished During the Last Eighty Years*. Vol I. (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), 420-1.

<sup>56</sup> See also Benjamin Smith, *Street Walkers* (1786), BM Satires 7080; *The natty, lad or Polish, dwarf taking an airing* (1787), BM Satires 7220; Unknown, *The Inside of the lady's garden at Vauxhall* (1788), BM Satires 7437; Isaac Cruikshank, *Oysters. Oysters. I used to cry when the wind blew so hard that my boat could not ply-* (1792), BM Satires 8177.



Fig. 3.10 *The Equilibrium*, 1786. BM Satires 7109

Reflecting in 1780 on why particular fashions took hold of society so rapidly and resolutely, a writer for *The Lady's Magazine* observed the influence women had on each other's style: 'Let but a frightful fashion be adopted by any conceited woman, who is tolerably handsome, and, in an instant, as if by contagion, the whole sex is transformed into the same figure.' Addressing themselves to a 'young lady', the author continued: 'I hope you will never wish to afford a ridiculous spectacle to your friends and acquaintance, by following every silly, absurd fashion, whether it may be becoming, or elegant, modest, or the contrary; a mode, which I am sorry to

observe, is but too common among young woman at present.<sup>57</sup> Prints showed groups of women whose bodies had been made indistinguishable thanks to the extreme fashions that were meant to help them stand out from the crowd. Titles including George Townly Stubbs', *The Bosom Friends* (1786), *The Back-Biters; or, High Bum-Fiddle Pig Bow Wow* (1786), Rowlandson's *The Bumless Beauties* (1788) made fun of fashionable friends desperate to appear in vogue.



Fig. 3.11 Townly Stubbs, *The Back-Biters; or, High Bum-Fiddle Pig Bow Wow*, 1786.

LWL 553476

Fig. 3.12 *The go-between or barrow man embarass'd*, 1787. BM Satires 7245

Behind-the-scenes insights such as R. Rushworth's *The Supplemental Magazine* (1786) and Rowlandson's *Dressing for a Birthday* (1788) also captured swathes of fashionable ladies maximising their natural assets with the help of prosthetic padding, huge hats and ribbons. Often situated in a warehouse, such prints drew attention to the artisan, industrial and merchantile processes which

<sup>57</sup> "Letters from a Friend. Addressed to a Young Lady. Letter III." in *The Lady's magazine; or, Entertaining companion for the fair sex, appropriated solely to their use and amusement*, vol. XI (December 1780), 652.

turned the consumerist and cultural cogs of fashion. As medical historians David M. Turner and Alun Withey explain in their study of Georgian technologies for bodily correction, 'products aimed specifically at, and produced for, the body were an important part of the later eighteenth-century world of goods.'<sup>58</sup> Providing a voyeuristic glimpse into the edifice behind the fashionable bosom, Rushworth draws the women either fitted, or are waiting to be fitted, with what George describes as 'puffed-out gauze cages': the apparatus also referred to as 'fortification bosoms' or 'bosom friends.' Held up for inspection by the lady in pink, the bosom friends were a pair of 'balloon like pads' made of wool or flannel which, when placed over the chest and subsequently covered in frills of material, ensured the full forward thrust of the chest as well as keeping their wearers warm in winter.<sup>59</sup> A French poodle, shaved except for its upper-torso, mimics their false fronts.<sup>60</sup> In Rowlandson's similar birthday party scene, a bald older lady and a handsome young woman get ready for an event at the palace, using feathers, huge wigs and shapewear in an attempt to improve their appearance.

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<sup>58</sup> David M. Turner and Withey, "Technologies of the Body: : Polite Consumption and the Correction of Deformity in Eighteenth-Century England" *History* 99, no. 338, 775-96, 776.

<sup>59</sup> George, Vol. VI.

<sup>60</sup> On the relationship between lapdogs, other pets, fashion and female sexuality in eighteenth-century visual culture, see Ingrid H. Tague, *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 91-137. For a discussion of *The Supplemental Magazine* specifically, see 102-105.



Fig. 3.13 R. Rushworth, *The Supplemental Magazine*, 1786. BM Satires 7099



Fig. 3.14 Rowlandson, *Dressing for a Birthday*, 1788. RCT 810267

In spite of the fashion for covering the bosom in public, satirists made sure to offer salacious glimpses of bare breasts. Rushworth uses the huge hat lampshade in *The Supplemental Magazine* to draw the eye to a lady moving her stays into position. Attractive and flushed, she exposes her round breasts which are drawn with small, rouged nipples. Despite caricature representations of fashionable women as fools, fashion satires of the 1780s quite often drew their subjects as attractive. They pay lewd attention to the erotic potential of their dress, linking their vanity, indulgence and exuberant display to their sexual immorality. On the other hand, some mercilessly and misogynistically used these pseudo-private portrayals of women dressing to expose true ugliness; Rowlandson's plump bald lady is contrasted to the naturally beautiful maid that helps her to achieve a fashionable look. The woman's exposed breasts resemble her bald head, their nipples absent or obscured but suggested by the posy of roses she holds over her chest.

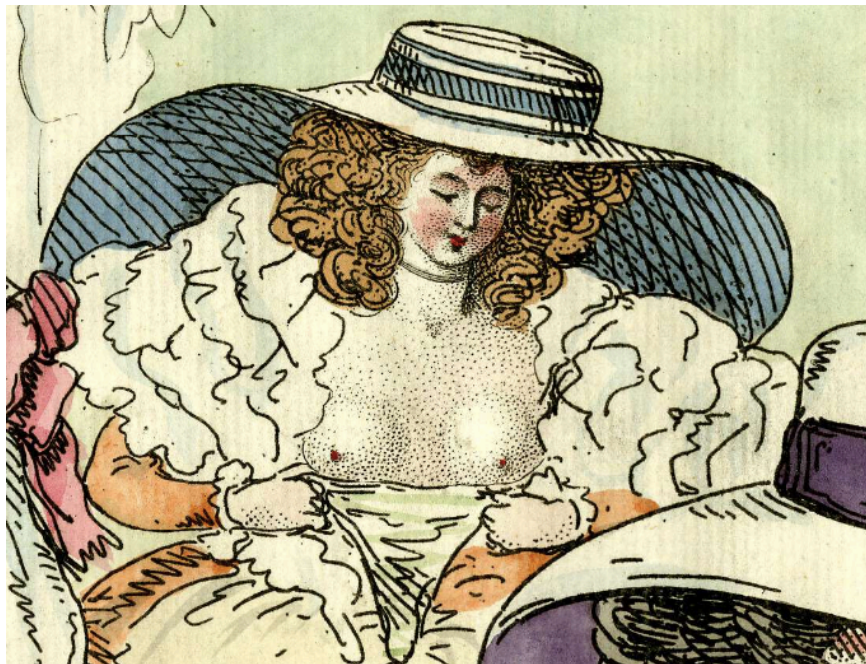


Fig. 3.15 Detail from *The Supplemental Magazine*



Detail from *Dressing for a Birthday*

Often, attacks on fashionable women targeted well-known personalities already suspected for their sexually laxity. Satirists treated women who solicited attention with their clothes as fair game: lampooning, leering and laughing at their breasts. In 1786, the twice widowed Maria Fitzherbert found herself on the receiving end of such an attack having married George, Prince of Wales in an illicit ceremony in December 1785.<sup>61</sup> The scandal made Fitzherbert notorious; Angelo remembers that the first satirical print to address the marriage – James Wickstead’s *The Follies of a Day, or the Marriage of Figaro* (1786) – had the printshop ‘crowded with the servants of the *beau monde*, for several days, demanding impressions faster than

<sup>61</sup> See Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 12-14, 255, 323.

they could be printed.<sup>62</sup> News of their nuptials saw Fitzherbert plagued by pregnancy rumours, cast in caricature as a controlling noose around the Prince's neck. *The Introduction of F- [Fitzherbert] to St James' (1786)*, for instance, shows her riding the Prince's shoulders as a procession leads her along the Pall Mall to the St. James Palace. Pushing the Prince's head down with one hand, she points impudently ahead with the other. Her straddled legs and exposed thigh indicate her sexual assertiveness, which is made plainer by her left breast which juts bare from the frills of her dress.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Angelo, 424. For other satirical print representations of Fitzherbert and her relationship with the Prince, see George Townly Stubbs, *His Highness in Fitz* (1786), BM Satires 8252; *Out of Fits, or the Recovery to the Satisfaction of all Parties* (1786), BM Satires 8253; William Maynard, *Thing o'my in the character of Macheath* (1786), BM Satires 6956; Gillray, *The Morning after Marriage – or – a Scene on the Continent* (1788), BM Satires 7298; Isaac Cruikshank, *The New Birth* (1789), BM Satires 7565; Isaac Cruikshank, *My Grandmother, alias the Jersey Jig, alias the Rival Widows* (1794), BM Satires 8485; William Hinton after William O'Keeffe, *The Rage* (1794), BM Satires 8498; Gillray, *The Dispute. To be or not to be a Protestant*. (1805), BM Satires 10363; George Cruikshank, *The Prince of Whales or the Fisherman at Anchor* (1812), BM Satires 11877.

<sup>63</sup> For a similar image of fashionable female control, see Anonymous, *Petticoat government [or the scripture fulfil'd]* (1800), BM Satires 9654.



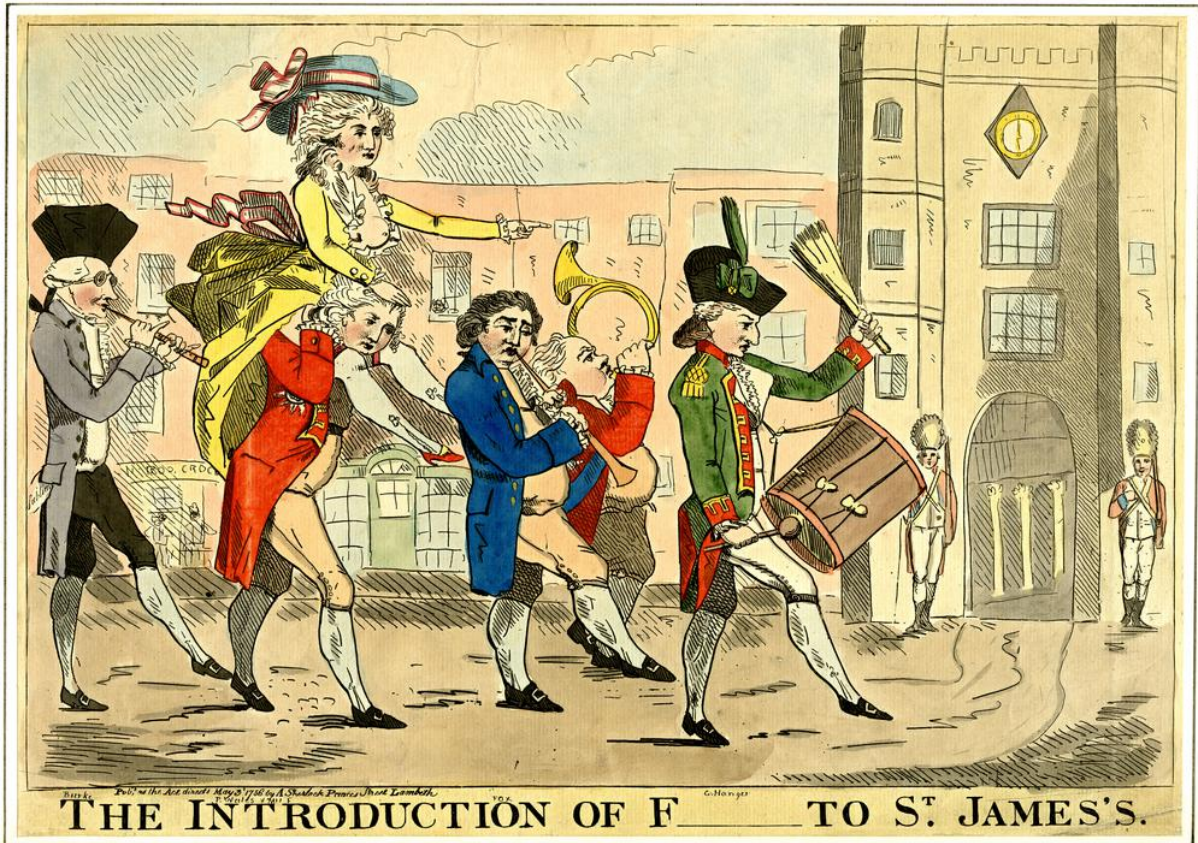


Fig. 3.17 *The Introduction of F- [Fitzherbert] to St James'*, 1786. BM Satires 6953

Fitzherbert's fashionably large bosom lent itself to irreverent satirical representations. *A Nest of Puppies or the Fashionable Bosom* (1786) puns on 'puppies' as a colloquialism for breasts, picturing Fitzherbert as a desirable and proud young woman. *An Heir apparent in Embrio* (1786) is more vitriolic; Fitzherbert appears in profile with her characteristic hooked nose, the padding of her breast mirrored by the suspicious protrusion of her stomach. As McCreery notes, the print connects 'the issue of her supposed pregnancy to the deceitfulness of female fashions.'<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 201. McCreery argues that Fitzherbert's 'ambiguous maternal position' was emphasised by the contrasting legitimate and idealised maternal role of Queen Charlotte.



Fig. 3.18 *A Nest for Puppies, or the Fashionable Bosom*, 1786. BM Satires 7108

Fig. 3.19 *An Heir Apparent in Embrio*, 1786. BM Satires 6963

Another print of Fitzherbert from 1786, Stubbs' *Modern Defence Or the Stage of Fort Phyllis* depicts her similarly devoted to modern fashion; she is drawn with a 'very projecting breast' as well as 'a large protuberance at the back of the petticoats.'<sup>65</sup> At the forefront a cupid can be seen using his arrow to chip away at the mound of earth she stands upon, whilst a cannon is aimed at her muff from the left, and on her right a trench-mortar is fired at her behind. Cannon balls are scattered around her feet having bounced off her fashionable protrusions.

<sup>65</sup> George, Vol. VI.



Fig. 3.20 George Townly Stubbs, *Modern Defence Or the Siege of Fort Phyllis*, 1786.  
BM Satires 7101

As scholars such as John W. Derry have shown, Fitzherbert faced great public and political opposition towards her marriage. But despite prolific attacks on her character, she stood firm. Her impenetrable dress serves a metaphor for this; although she is in a precarious position atop the hill and under attack, she is unmoveable and unharmed. The cannon balls strewn around her feet represent the abuse that she was willing to risk - and received – in order to uphold her relationship.<sup>66</sup> Fashion, Stubbs' indicates, could serve as a defence against vulnerability; it was a way to equip oneself against the outside world. Fitzherbert is an obstacle rather than a target to those around her as the shielding breastworks, muff and bolstering behind protect her from attack. The inscription reads:

<sup>66</sup> John Wesley Derry, *Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool: Continuity and Transformation* (New York: Macmillan Education, 1990), 62.

In vain Before the Fair one Arms,  
 With Breastworks high her panting charms,  
 In vain Behind yon Mount is plac'd,  
 Which Wits may say is Bum proof cas'd,  
 If parts More Weak to guard she fails,  
 Where artful Love by Mine assails.  
 Tho' Fox's Brush as Muff may warm  
 And snug conceal what all must charm,  
 Guard well that Pass: there lies the Proof  
 Jove! dearly lov'd a well Thatch'd Roof.'

Scoffing at her fashionable defences, this inuendo-laced verse reintroduces a bawdy perspective on Fitzherbert's body and actions, reclaiming her as a sexual spectacle and repudiating her claim to public authority. In March 1786 S. W. Fores published a print titled *Breast-Work or Female Fortifications* (1786). As George records, the military-inspired print shows a lady fashionably dressed in a padded behind and giant hat. Around her breast, 'in place of the fashionable projecting gauze, is a curving line of angular fortifications in masonry, from which guns project.'<sup>67</sup> The title riffs on a comment made in the popular periodical *The Rambler's Magazine*, which in January 1786 referred to projecting gauze as 'fortifications breastworks.' In military speak, breastwork is a temporary wall-like structure which, when built up to chest height, provides a cover to fire weapons over.

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<sup>67</sup> George, Vol. VI.



Fig. 3.21 *Breast-Work or Female Fortification*, 1786. BM Satires 7103

A close up of the print reveals cannons protruding through the breastworks; two of them are carefully placed so that their red bases tease the appearance of the

woman's nipples. The lady is attractive, her breasts pushed up to fully display her assets. At the base of the print is engraved:

And now the dear Creatures appear,  
 As if for Hot Action inclin'd Sir,  
 With Breast- Work projecting in Front,  
 And extended Bum Batteries behind Sir.  
 vide Paddy O'Brien.

The military focus of the print and the mention of 'Hot Action' projecting 'Breast-Work' and 'Bum Batteries' contributes an erotic, rather than derisive, representation of the fashionable breast. The forts and impenetrable defences scattered across 1780s prints present the female body – and especially the breast – as an object to be sieged and seized. In her study of the relationship between women's work and clothes in eighteenth-century novels, the literary scholar Chloe Wigston Smith argues that 'despite their satirical flavour', prints like this demonstrate how amplified fashions 'threatened to displace women's bodies.' Fitzherbert's dress means that physically, she is less herself; breast, bum and head pieces, Wigston explains, overpowered and eclipsed the female form. Women are shown turning this to both humorous and social advantage, whether out-manoeuvring their male counterparts in *The Bum-Bailiff Outwitted; or the Convenience of Fashion* (1786) or shielding themselves in *Modern Defence*. For Wigston Smith, the garments serve 'as uncanny reminders of the absent female bodies and body parts they have replaced.'<sup>68</sup> Certainly, false front and behinds were depicted in satires with a life of their own, wearing people rather than the other way around. Contributing to an anxious discourse about modern fashion's casual displacement of the 'natural', ordered and moral body, caricaturists showed bodies diminished, displaced and sometimes even damaged by inflated fashions. In contrast, coexisting satires credited fashionable individuals' awareness of the disruptive, rather than damaging, power of dress, cosmetics and accessories. Building on the motif of displacement, satirists drew modish men and women using sartorial modes to falsely advertise

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<sup>68</sup> Wigston Smith, 188-90.

themselves as something they were not, tricking people about their true appearance, roles and identities.

Recalling the fashion for protruding breast pieces in 1807, by which time the trend for natural, neoclassical inspired figures had taken over, Robert Southey noticed the inconvenience they caused women. 'There were protuberances on the hips called bustlers, another behind which was called in plain language a rump', he recalled, 'and a merry-thought of wire on the breast to puff out the handkerchief like a pouting pigeon.' Designed after the forked merrythought – or jutting wishbone – of a bird, breast pieces projected forwards to the extent that women struggled to see their toes. At mealtimes, Southey smirked, 'women were obliged to sip their tea with the corner of their mouths, and to eat sideways.'<sup>69</sup> Graphic satirists noticed this difficulty too; Stubbs' 1786 print *The Inconvenience of Dress* depicts a hollow cheeked, pained looking woman gingerly guiding a spoonful of food over an immense breast piece. Her plate is thrown into a complete shadow as the food slides off her spoon and down her false front. She sits uncomfortably upright; the back of her chair having been removed to accommodate her vast rump.

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Southey, *Letters from England by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* (Boston: Munroe & Francis, 1807), 228.



Fig. 3.22 Townly Stubbs, *The Inconvenience of Dress*, 1786. BM Satires 7111

'Rage for Dress - Bewitching passion! / 'Who'd not starve to lead the Fashion?,' the inscription trills. One of many prints which explored the extent to which women were prepared to suffer to appear in style, *The Inconvenience of Dress* was published following decades of moralising warnings about the physical damage that could be caused by fashionably tight lacings, too-small dainty shoes and weighty hats. Casting a satirical eye over such anxieties, caricaturists created darkly comical portrayals of women distressed by their dress. In 1777, *Tight Lacing, or Fashion Before Ease* showed a red-faced lady gripping on to a bed post as her husband and



aids engage in a tug of war with her corset, fastening it as tightly as possible. An open book on the floor announces her foolishness, emblazoned with the title 'Fashion's Victim: a Satire.' Rawson writes that *The Inconvenience of Dress* offers an amusing portrait of false fashions, with the protuberances appearing as 'comic discomforts.'<sup>70</sup>

Wigston Smith argues that prints like Stubbs' paint a tragic picture, exposing women's desperation to fabricate fashionable curvaceousness. 'The rounded shapes of [the lady's] prosthetic parts and frizzed hair', she argues, 'convey a bulkiness and depth that double for and displace the frail figure beneath.' The false parts not only 'supplant the female form' but also 'promise to reduce it', leaving 'permanent physical effects.' The lady's gaunt features 'communicate how the struggle to reach her food must be a regular challenge', indicating that the false parts conceal a starving body waning away beneath its fake, fashionable mass.<sup>71</sup> Such images, Wigston Smith notes, presented the 'real body' as a 'slight and delicate cousin to [its] counterfeit appendages.'<sup>72</sup> The fake silhouette created by pouter-pigeon breasts lent itself particularly well to the satirical motif of the body beneath. In *The Distress'd Damsel in a High Wind* (1786), a fashionable lady is exposed as flat-chested after her false bosom blows off into the wind 'like a fragment of balloon.' 'O cruel Wind', she mourns, 'I am not so Plump.' William Dent's *The Sudden Squall* (1786) similarly shows bottoms, wigs and bosoms being carried off by the wind, with the bodies they leave behind reduced to 'the state of nature.' Like Wigston Smith, Donald sees the pieces that fly away as 'detached from any sense of human identity', noting the obscurement of the subjects' faces.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Rawson, 134.

<sup>71</sup> Wigston Smith, 192-3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 188-9.

<sup>73</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 51.



Fig. 3.23 *The Distress'd Damsel in a High Wind*, 1786. BM Satires 7110



Fig. 3.24 *The Sudden Squall*, 1786. BM no. 1948,0214.588

As Withey and Turner have shown, some bodily improvement became socially sanctioned and less medically centred in the late eighteenth century. Examining how goods for 'shaping, correcting and improving' the body were sold to help conceal or rectify deformities including those caused by fashionable technologies, Withey and Turner show that corrective devices were advertised 'not merely as a means of alleviating suffering, but also as objects of taste and technological innovation.' 'Aesthetic improvement', they write, became less associated with pride and understood more as a 'duty for those wishing to succeed' - or please - 'in polite society.' But whilst the imitation, preservation or restoration of a 'natural' or able form was socially acceptable, other attempts at bodily enhancement drew suspicion. Breast and bum boosting technologies were perceived to refashion the body in a manner neither natural nor medically necessary, and accordingly attracted accusations of artificiality, vanity and deception. Such attacks, Turner and Withey note, were distinctly gendered; they drew on 'age-old accusations of female

duplicity', with women's 'artificial embellishments' understood as 'thinly veiling deficiencies not just of body but also of moral character.'<sup>74</sup>

Wigston Smith observes that prosthetic padding not only prompted unease about the diminution or encumberment of the female form but also rejuvenated 'longstanding critiques of the concealment and disguise enabled by feminine fashions.'<sup>75</sup> Prints showed figures using falsifying fashions and cosmetics to mislead others about their appearance, character and social roles. As Wagner, Withey and others have explained, this was a period during which the surface of the body was being scrutinised for what it revealed about the self. This cultural 'drive towards transparency', Wagner writes, sought to 'penetrate beneath surfaces to reveal otherwise intangible truths.'<sup>76</sup> 'Attention was increasingly being paid', Withey agrees, 'to the minutiae of bodily surfaces, like faces and hands, which were seen as holding the key to inner characteristics.'<sup>77</sup> These sites – together with breasts - can be considered as what George Rousseau refers to as 'anatomical anchors' which, Wagner notes, provided clues about a person's 'intelligence, character, motives and desires.'<sup>78</sup>

Breasts were treated as portals which could reveal much about interiority; as Marina Warner, Nina Prytula and others have shown in their studies of the female form, perhaps more than any other body part the breast was suspected as a conduit to the soul. For Warner, the breast has been historically conceptualised as 'a seat of honesty, of courage and feeling', held to be the physical 'fountainhead of sincere emotion.'<sup>79</sup> Prytula similarly observes that the breast 'embodies a kind of crossroads for the physical and spiritual aspects of identity', crediting this dualism with the

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<sup>74</sup> Turner and Withey, 789, 777, 775, 778.

<sup>75</sup> Wigston Smith, 190.

<sup>76</sup> Wagner, "Anatomy and Interiority: Medicine, Politics, and Identity in the Long Eighteenth Century" in *Literature and the History of Medicine: Volume 1: The Eighteenth Century* ed. Clark Lawlor and Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 242-68, 250.

<sup>77</sup> Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Refined Bodies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

<sup>78</sup> George Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p?; Wagner, "Anatomy and Interiority," 242.

<sup>79</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 278; Nina Prytula, "'Great-Breasted and Fierce': Fielding's Amazonian Heroines" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002): 173-93, 174.

cultural fascination it drew in the eighteenth century. Its import, Prytula argues, 'both derives from and is subsumed within a larger conviction that the breast is intimately connected to the female self in all its aspects.'<sup>80</sup> Given this significance, what happened – as it did in the 1780s - when the form of the breast was concealed by fashionable dress, leaving the soul beneath it obscured? Graphic satirists asked this question; multiple prints from the 1780s explore how fashions designed to alter or improve the appearance of the breast in fact obscured character.

The fact that dress, as Batchelor explains, was understood to function as a 'form of self-expression' in the eighteenth century only compounded anxieties about its potential to eschew reality.<sup>81</sup> The ability of fashion, and especially shape-altering devices, to facilitate 'false self-creation', was represented as an underhand threat. Donald argues that dress had long been suspected for how it enabled people to assume different 'characters', evidencing the 'capricious and fickle' natures of fashion devotees.<sup>82</sup> One anonymous print from 1786, *A Pig in a Poke*, provides an especially anxious portrait of the concealment made possible by plumping, padding and projecting fashions. Riffing on the motif of a pig in a poke – an item purchased without first being seen – it shows a figure dressed and undressed enacting what Donald describes as a 'bastardised version' of the 'ancient Medici Venus.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Prytula, 174.

<sup>81</sup> Batchelor, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



Fig. 3.25 Anonymous, *A Pig in a Poke*, 1786. BM Satires 7100

When the figure is unsheathed from its poke – in this case, a costume comprising cosmetics, a wig, hat, delicate shoes and a dress filled with fortification gauze and a cork rump – its blushing visage, daintiness and feminine curves vanish.<sup>84</sup> What lurks beneath is something entirely different to the image first projected. In her description of the piece, George notes that it shows 1780s dress ‘concealing the deficiencies of the figure’, with the nude woman at its right revealing ‘how far the form which it counterfeits is removed from classic beauty.’<sup>85</sup> Several scholars including George, Donald and Gatrell have analysed *A Pig in a Poke* closely. Describing its subject, George writes that ‘she is represented fully dressed on the left and naked on the right’, whilst Donald notes the transformation of an

<sup>84</sup> For a similar print, see Robert Dighton’s *A fashionable lady in dress and undress* (1807), BM Satires 10807.

<sup>85</sup> George, Vol. VI.

attractive lady into a 'meagre ungainly naked woman.'<sup>86</sup> Gatrell remarks that as her clothes are shed the reediness of her body is 'truthfully revealed', arguing that the print is 'unchivalric' in its approach.<sup>87</sup> These accounts speak of the figure as a woman, but the nude appears more like a man. A number of details point towards this; pectoral muscles, well-defined calves, short hair creeping out beneath the wig and the tell-tell bulge of an Adam's apple at the neck. Whilst its genitalia are ambiguously out of sight, there is nothing to suggest that a penis isn't tucked between the legs. What George identifies as cloaked feminine unattractiveness – she describes the second figure with 'hair straggling and lank; her feet large and ill-shaped, her face pale' – in fact appears as a case of masked sex.

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<sup>86</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 68.



Fig. 3.26 Detail from *A Pig in a Poke*

If the figure in *A Pig in a Poke* is a man, the satirist's argument about the deceptiveness of fashion persuasive. Many prints from the 1780s show false breasts and behinds falsifying a woman's shape, but *A Pig in a Poke* pushes this motif of misrepresentation further to picture an intersex impersonation. The man's feminine guise is sinister because his motivations are dubious; his presence in a ladies' dressing room could suggest he has used dress to infiltrate a typically gendered space and get unfettered access to female company. Male transvestism, the early modern historian Natalie Zemon Davis and others have shown, had real social and political impact in the eighteenth century. Davis observes how labouring men led



riots and assaults dressed as women in an attempt to trick the authorities.<sup>88</sup> 'Because women were believed to be incapable of their actions', Elizabeth Hunt argues, 'men could use a female persona during moments of political insurrection; disguised as women, they could then deny responsibility for their actions.' For Hunt, it is the 'doubleness of costume' – a concept visualised in the twinned images of *A Pig in a Poke* – which allowed for a blending of 'self and other', and subsequent access to different subjectivities.<sup>89</sup>

Alternatively, *A Pig in a Poke* could capture the realisation of queer desires. Perhaps the feminine façade is intended to underhandedly seduce men, to realise a fantasy which goes unfulfilled or unacted upon when/if the figure is his masculine physical 'self.'<sup>90</sup> As Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough have shown, male cross-dressing was common in late eighteenth-century urban sub-cultures. A staple of social venues such as molly houses, it was also valued as a dramatic act and played a part in cultural occasions such as carnivals and masked balls, where attendees would playfully burlesque members of the opposite sex but also sincerely impersonate them.<sup>91</sup> Or perhaps the figures' adoption of female dress and mannerisms takes place only in the private place of the closet, a safe space which offers partial commitment to an alternative yet safely sequestered reality.<sup>92</sup> Either

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<sup>88</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 148.

<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Hunt, "A Carnival of Mirrors: The Grotesque Body of the Eighteenth-Century Masquerade" in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century* ed. Katherine Kittredge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 91-111, 100.

<sup>90</sup> There is a possibility that a *Pig in a Poke*'s portrait of cross-dressing is also an allusion to and exploration of male fashion and effeminacy in the long eighteenth century. Sally O'Driscoll argues that there was a 'deep concern' with 'effeminate male self-presentation' towards the end of the century, and this concern was often represented in caricature. O'Driscoll, "What Kind of Man Do the Clothes Make? Print Culture and the Meanings of Macaroni Effeminacy" in *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print*, ed. Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 241-78, 251.

<sup>91</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>92</sup> For more on how artistic sources have historically appropriated the closet as a visual metaphor for hidden or should-be-hidden male desire and effeminacy, see Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

way, the man is a true 'pig in a poke': his 'authentic' physical self is apparent only upon examination inside or underneath the sack he wears.

This anxious image appeals to what the art historian Barbara Maria Stafford describes as a persistent disquiet over the 'deliberately fabricated incongruity between exterior and interior' in the period. Artistic elements of culture such as 'fashion, masquerade, theatre and cross-dressing', Stafford explains, caused alarm because they emphasised the 'total disagreement between seeming and being.' The 'fakes, counterfeits, tricksters, liars' and 'false transmutations', which Stafford observes as dominating visual and written media during the period urge the drawbacks of new material Enlightenment conceptions of selfhood.<sup>93</sup> The physical transformations made possible by false breasts, bottoms and wigs, prints like *A Pig in a Poke* suggest, were such that one could masquerade as anyone or anything. The 1780s *pad fad* prompted unease not just about feminine pretence, but about the broader modern misrepresentation of the self.

Discussing the forms and function of fashion satires, the literary scholar Sally O'Driscoll maintains that they exaggerated 'what appears to have been a reality' to a point 'beyond recognition.'<sup>94</sup> Consequently, she continues, prints and those represented in them became part of a 'a separate reality' which often had 'little to do with the actual clothes that people may have worn.'<sup>95</sup> With this in mind, it is tempting to view *A Pig in a Poke* as an exaggeration. However, George proposes in her catalogue entry for the print that the dress 'is scarcely if at all caricatured.'<sup>96</sup> Likewise, Gatrell remarks that it was one of many attacks on fashion which 'doubtless [...] spoke to an observed reality.'<sup>97</sup> It is conceivable then, that contemporaries would've found the deception at the heart of *A Pig in a Poke* credible, if unlikely. By its publication in 1786, admonitory discourses about the illusive capacity of cosmetics, clothes and other fashionable devices were well-established. In 1755, a writer for *The World* warned their 'readers of all sorts and sexes' not to fall for the 'the flattering delusions of art,' calling, as the gender historian Hannah Grieg observes, 'for the protection of the natural order':

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<sup>93</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (London: MIT Press, 1991), 86-7.

<sup>94</sup> O'Driscoll, 251.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>96</sup> George, Vol. VI.

<sup>97</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 68.

Let us follow nature, our honest and faithful guide, and be upon our guard against the flattering delusions of art. Nature may be helped and improved, but will not be forced or changed. All attempts in direct opposition to her are attended with ridicule... the woman to whom nature has denied beauty, in vain endeavours to make it by art.<sup>98</sup>

In her study of the ‘belly pad fad’ of the 1790s – a fashion which grew out of padded breasts and bottoms – Rauser shows that ‘nature’ was routinely employed as ‘a rhetorical foil to the artifice of fashion.’<sup>99</sup> Stressing the futility of fashion, *The World* finds artificial embellishments to be unconvincing; a person’s ‘true’ appearance cannot be ‘forced or changed.’<sup>100</sup> This denial developed from discomfort; elsewhere, contemporaries including caricaturists expressed uneasy awe at the transformative capacity of artificial devices. This authority was particularly threatening for those whose world order relied on social distinctions; widely available and imitative fashions made the visibility of class less secure. Although elite fashion was deeply intertwined with performances and perceptions of sensibility, politeness and propriety, certain faddish, pervasive and accessible sartorial styles such as breast padding removed an element of its exclusivity. Almost anyone could stuff their dress and procure some form of gauzy covering, and the accelerating commercialisation of fashion meant that prosthetic pieces were widely available to buy.

Faddish fashions and beauty trends blurred distinctions of rank and status: as Grieg explains, they ‘enabled an ‘unnatural’ mimicry of exclusivity by those lower down the social scale.’ Even the debauched prostitute, Grieg writes, could ‘daub her face, mask her depravity, and present herself as a virtuous lady.’<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Swift captured these anxieties in his 1731 poem “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” which images a weary prostitute - ‘Corinna, pride of Drury Lane’ – as she undresses

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<sup>98</sup> Hannah Grieg, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 174; *The World* (2 January 1755), 213.

<sup>99</sup> Rauser, “Vitalist Statues and the Belly Pad of 1793,” *Journal 18: A Journal of Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture* 3 (2017).

<sup>100</sup> *The World* (2 January 1755), 213.

<sup>101</sup> Grieg, 174.

at the end of the night. Describing her as she peels back her carefully cultivated, fashionable fake exterior, Swift writes:

Returning at the midnight hour;  
 Four stories climbing to her bow'r;  
 Then, seated on a three-legged chair,  
 Takes off her artificial hair:  
 Now, picking out a crystal eye,  
 She wipes it clean, and lays it by.  
 Her eye-brows from a mouse's hide,  
 Stuck on with art on either side,  
 Pulls off with care, and first displays 'em,  
 Then in a play-book smoothly lays 'em.  
 Now dexterously her plumpers draws,  
 That serve to fill her hollow jaws.  
 Untwists a wire; and from her gums  
 A set of teeth completely comes.  
 Pulls out the rags contrived to prop  
 Her flabby dugs and down they drop.

Removing artificial hair, a crystal eye and a set of teeth, Corinna proceeds to disentangle herself from the pads and bolsters which given her a womanly shape. First, she 'Pulls out the rags contrived to prop/Her flabby dugs and down they drop', and then 'Up goes her hand, and off she slips/The bolsters that supply her hips.' An early reference to the forms of breast padding fashionable in the 1780s, the image of Corinna's 'flabby dugs' dropping as she unwinds the supporting rags inspires pity rather than disdain.<sup>102</sup> Her breasts are a metaphor for her soul; her bosom, much like her spirit, is artificially lifted in public but falls low when there is no need for pretence. 'The most authentic version of the self', Rauser writes, was thought to be 'visible when the individual was in private, unmasked, and natural.'<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Swift, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," (Dublin and London: J. Roberts, 1731), 3-4.

<sup>103</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 12.

Caricaturists often reproduced this impression; Rowlandson's *Six Stages of Mending a Face* (1792) shows its subject – Lady Sarah Archer – getting ready in her private dressing room. Apparently inspired by *A Beautiful Nymph*, Rowlandson shows Archer undergoing the reverse process of Swift's Corinna – rather than undressing she is 'mending' herself ready to face others.<sup>104</sup> Lady Archer, McCreery explains, attracted intense satirical attention in the final two decades of the century. One of the notoriously hard gambling Faro Ladies, she attracted criticism for her 'age, appearance, and determination to maintain a high public profile.'<sup>105</sup> Infamous for her excessive use of cosmetics, Rowlandson shows her using face paint, fashionable dress, a hairpiece, a set of false teeth and even a false eye in an attempt to look her best.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> In 1779 Gillray also produced a print reminiscent of Swift's *A Beautiful Young Nymph*. Titled *the Whore's Last Shift*, it spotlighted a poverty-stricken sex worker with a towering headpiece, Gillray shows her washing 'her last shift' in a makeshift basin balanced on a chair. The parallels with Swift's Corinna who arrives home and 'Then seated on a three leg'd chair/Takes off her artificial hair' are clear; both women have undergone – and then reversed - a material process, having made themselves into a collection of artificial 'parts' in order to commodify and commercialise their bodies. *The Whore's Last Shift*. BM Satires 5604.

<sup>105</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 197.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 236. See also Gillray's 1791 print *The Finishing Touch* (BM Satires 7973), which shows Lady Archer applying excessive amounts of rouge.



Fig. 3.27 Rowlandson, *Six Stages of Mending a Face*, 1792. BM Satires 8174

In the first three stages of the metamorphosis, Lady Archer's bare, hanging and unsightly breasts remind of Corinna's 'flabby dugs.' By the close of the process, they are demurely covered-up and prettified by ruffled, virginial white, feminine drapery of the sort that was popular in the 1780s. Here, Lady Archer uses fashion to conceal the reality of her breasts in an attempt to appear as a naturally attractive, bashful young beauty. In Swift's poem, Corinna awakes in the morning to find that a rat, cat, and pigeon have nibbled on, soiled and stolen her aids in the night. Now a disembodied mess of 'scattered parts', she must recollect, rebuild and reunite the fragments of her 'exterior' body like Lady Archer. In his analysis of Swift's poem the literary critic Denis Donoghue argues that Corinna's 'outside' body is like a machine; she is nothing more than a mass of prosthetic objects, and her bedroom is a factory in which she is assembled.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Rawson describes the 'decorous beauty

<sup>107</sup> Denis Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 207.

aids' that she uses - including breast bolsters - as 'gadgets'.<sup>108</sup> Although developed around a source published in 1731, Donoghue and Rawson's perspective chimes with Wigston Smith's argument that the fashionable costumes of the 1780s disembodied and displaced the female body. Prints like *Six Stages of Mending a Face* and poems like *A Beautiful Young Nymph* support this, showing their protagonists as vulnerable without their fake parts.

Prints depicting the merchantile exchange behind false silhouettes further reinforce this motif of fashionable technologies as artificial adjuncts to the body. In R. Rushworth's 1785 print *The Bum Shop*, breast fortifications and bum bolsters are exposed for what they are – objects. Fashionable bodies, it implies, are nothing more than a series of dislocated parts. Like the bedroom-come-factory in *A Beautiful Young Nymph*, the warehouse of *The Bum Shop* offers its customers a space in which to purchase and assemble their fantasy-bodies.<sup>109</sup> As Donald notes, Rushworth's satire 'shifts some of the blame for the excesses of fashion from the women to the commercial promoter' – the customers' 'complacent delight' with the technologies signals 'delusion rather than evil, seductive intentions.'<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Rawson, 134.

<sup>109</sup> Gillray's *A Sale of English-Beauties, in the East Indies* (1786), BM Satires 7014, pictures a group of fashionable courtesans as they are indecently inspected for purchase by 'Englishmen and Orientals whose appearance is more Turkish than Indian.' Many of their breasts are exposed and touched by the men, wishing to examine their goods before they commit to a sell. George, Vol. VI.

<sup>110</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 50.



Fig. 3.28 Rushworth, *The Bum Shop*, 1785. BM Satires 6874

The inscription at the bottom of the print advertises that the shopkeepers 'submit to the attention of that most indulgent part of the Public the Ladies in general, and more especially those to whom Nature in a slovenly moment has been niggardly in her distribution of certain lovely Endowments.' The manufacturer of the pieces, it continues, 'stands unrivalled in this fashionable article of female Invention, having spared neither pains nor expence in procuring every possible information on the subject, to render himself competent to the artfully supplying this necessary appendage of female excellence.' The mention of Nature's slovenliness, 'Endowments', 'Invention' and 'appendage' all underscore the parts' artificiality. The dramatic transformations they affect can be seen in the contrast between the unpadded lady who stands at its centre and her plumped counterparts. Her tight corset pushes her bare bosom up like a shelf, creating an unnatural silhouette which is parodied by the partly shaven dog before her.



The fashion for padding, plumping and projecting the breast and bum peaked in popularity during 1785 and 1786.<sup>111</sup> Although short-lived, it attracted great attention from fashion chroniclers, moralists, conduct writers and especially graphic satirists, who condemned its excessiveness, deceptiveness and physical inconvenience. As the 1780s became the 1790s, distaste for and distrust of such veiling and transforming fashions grew. Bosom-boosting technologies were shirked in favour of more 'natural' styles which emphasised the sensual shape and surface of the breast. Whilst less illusory in its presentation of the female body, this new mode brought with it fresh concerns about the morality of modern fashionable women.

### **The Neoclassical 90s: 'Natural' Nude Breasts**

In February 1796 S. W. Fores published a print by Isaac Cruikshank showing two women – one Tudor and one Georgian - in a fashion face-off. The lady to the left, from 1556, stands stiff in a tight, heavily-embroidered bodice embellished with a dramatic ruff, whilst her modern counterpart sashays in a 'quasi-classical pose.'<sup>112</sup> Freed from the corseted, hooped and padded fashions of the past, she is scantily clad in a sheer, short-sleeved muslin robe which drapes over the contours of her body. What draws the eye, however, is her breasts, which are entirely and provocatively exposed.

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<sup>111</sup> George, Vol. X.

<sup>112</sup> George, Vol. VII.



Fig. 2.29 Isaac Cruikshank, *Too Much and Too Little or Summer Cloathing for 1556 & 1796, 1796*. BM Satires 8904

Etched and engraved after a drawing by George M. Woodward, Cruikshank's *Too Much and Too Little Summer Cloathing for 1556 and 1796* predicts that the upcoming summer's fashionable dress will provide 'too little' covering, whilst in the past it has delivered 'too much.'<sup>113</sup> Somewhere between the two, Cruikshank implies, would be just right. Although Cruikshank's contrasts sit two hundred years apart, a similarly productive comparison could have been drawn between the fashions of the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>114</sup> In a dramatic departure from obscured, padded and puffed out bosoms, the fashionable breast of the mid-to-late 1790s was one whose contours and surface were discernible. Often framed by a high-waisted, empire-line style dress as in *Too Much and Too Little Summer Cloathing*, this display of the breast owed its fashionable status to a series of cultural impulses and anxieties. A renewed interest in the classical past, a growing social enthusiasm for maternity, a broad distrust of artifice and the influence of French Directoire styles from 1795 onwards affected what Rauser terms a 'wholesale transformation of the aesthetic concerns of the moment.'<sup>115</sup> Rauser's work is important here; *The Age of Undress* provides an insightful overview of how neoclassical dress emerged amidst a rousing backdrop of revolutionary change, scientific and artistic innovation and changing social roles. A categorical rejection of all that had come before, neoclassical fashion was part of a wider emphasis on liberty, unity and freedom of expression.

The modern dress in *Too Much and Too Little Summer Cloathing* exemplifies this reactionary dialogue; its anti-fashion accent on the 'natural' denounces previously constraining and concealing styles. The lady who models it is Lady Charlotte Campbell, a socialite who was credited with bringing the *robe à la grecque* to the London fashion scene in 1793. Pictured in fashion satires including Gillray's *Modern Elegance. A Portrait* (1795) and George Moutard Woodward's *Savoyards of*

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<sup>113</sup> See also Robert Dighton, *Fashionable Females in 1700 – in 1800* (1800), BM Museum no. 1948,0214.0601.

<sup>114</sup> These comparisons were common in visual satires; in 1787, a print after Catherine Maria Fanshaw entitled *Ancient & Modern Pyramids* showed an elderly woman in the full dress of the 1760s compared to a young woman in fashionable costume of the 1780s (BM Satires 7250). In the same year, William Dent's *Such Things are – Such Things were* (1786, BM Satires 7251) also compared 'modern' and 'ancient' dress, comparing a woman with a pouter-pigeon breast and bolstered bottom to a demure lady in a hooped dress. Both costumes, George notes, are exaggerated.

<sup>115</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 8.

*fashion - or the musical mania of 1799* (1799), Campbell spent her teenage years living in Naples. Upon her return to London at eighteen, she became renowned for her innovative sartorial choices. Her dress, Rauser proposes, was as a product of her 'Neapolitan experience of "living" classicism', which blurred the boundaries 'between real and artistic bodies, art and life.'<sup>116</sup> Whilst many were enthralled by the freedoms granted by loose, light clothing, many were shocked by how much more of the body was revealed than before. Seeing Lady Charlotte at a ball prompted the Scottish statesman and poet Sir Gilbert Elliot to pen the following account:

I was, last night, at a ball... and I stayed just long enough to see some of the dancing generation. There were one or two instances of the modern fashion of dress for young ladies, by which they are made to appear five or six months gone with child. Perhaps you do not believe this fashion, but it is quite literally true. The original idea seems to have been an imitation of the drapery of statues and pictures, which fastens the dress immediately below the bosom, and leaves no waist... The dress is accompanied by a complete display of the bosom - which is uncovered and supported and stuck out by the sash immediately below it.

I am giving you a faithful description of Lady C- C- as she was at the ball last night. She is the most exaggerated in this fashion, but is followed in considerable degree by many others.<sup>117</sup>

Expressing disbelief at the fashion for pregnancy pads – a phenomenon which has been investigated by scholars including Amelia Rauser, Barbara Gelpi and Dror Wahrman – Elliot moves on to record how Campbell's breasts appeared 'uncovered and supported and stuck out by the sash immediately below it.'<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Rauser, "Vitalist Statues and the Belly Pad of 1793."

<sup>117</sup> Gilbert Elliot-Murray Kynynmound, *The Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto, 1751-1806*, vol. II (London: Green and Company, 1874), 133.

<sup>118</sup> Rauser, "Vitalist Statues and the Belly Pad of 1793;" Barbara Gelpi, "The Nursery Cave: Shelley and the Maternal" in *The New Shelley: Late Twentieth-Century Views* ed. Kim G. Blank (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 42-63; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 68-9.

Grecian and Roman style dress, Elliot insinuates, was allowing women to exploit fashion for indecent erotic display. Graphic satirists reinforced this impression: in his *Ladies Dress, as it soon will be* (1796), Gillray presents Campbell's bare-behind and breast as a sign of the increasing immorality of modern fashions.



Fig. 3.30 Charles Wilkin after John Hoppner, *The Right Honourable Lady Charlotte Campbell*, 1799. BM no. 1871,0610.685

Fig. 3.31 Gillray, *Ladies Dress, as it soon will be*, 1796. BM Satires 8896

Campbell followed in the fashionable footsteps of another elite Neapolitan resident – Lady Emma Hamilton – whose famous ‘attitudes’ immortalised the artistic practice of ‘living’ classicism. First intended as entertainment for guests at gatherings hosted by her antiquarian husband in the 1780s, Hamilton’s attitudes saw her pose, dress up and dance in imitation of classical mythological figures. Her loose, light

drapery allowed her to assume dynamic positions which were captured by contemporary artists including George Romney and the German portrait painter Frederick Rehberg, who published a collection of drawings of Hamilton in her attitudes in 1794 or 1795.<sup>119</sup> Recently, the impact that Hamilton's attitudes had upon fashionable circles in England and Naples has been reiterated. Literary scholar Katharina Boehm argues that Hamilton's attitudes contributed to the eroticisation of the female body as a living statue in the late century. Stressing that Hamilton's privileged position as a 'leisured, white woman', allowed her to 'respond to and contribute to antiquarian discourse with a degree of agency' unavailable to others, Boehm shows that despite its aesthetic interest in ancient ideals, neoclassical fashion expedited a fresh outlook on the public presentation of the erotic body.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Ery Contogouris has observed that Hamilton embraced 'the powerful sexual allure' of the barely decorated body, advertising the emancipatory possibilities of dress.<sup>121</sup> The creative and corporeal agency that Hamilton modelled through fashionable dress made her the subject of multiple satires: her body was burlesqued in prints including Rowlandson's *Lady H\*\*\*\*\* [Hamilton's] Attitudes* (c.1800?), the anonymous print *The Night Mare* (1798-1800), and Gillray's *Dido, in Despair!* (1801) and *A cognocenti contemplating ye beauties of ye antique* (1801), the latter in which she appears décolletée.

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<sup>119</sup> For more on Rehberg's portfolio of Hamilton's attitudes, see Andrei Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 93-105.

<sup>120</sup> Katharina Boehm, "Antiquarian Pygmalions: The Female Body, Ancient Statuary, and the Idea of Imaginary Transports in the Eighteenth-Century" in *The Sculpture, Sexuality and History: Encounters in Literature, Culture and the Arts from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Jana Funke and Jen Grove (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2019), 35-56, 51.

<sup>121</sup> Ery Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2018), 87. Contogouris' monograph provides a comprehensive insight into Hamilton's performances, as well as analysing art works and writings in which she appears.



Fig. 3.32 Charles Knight after George Romney, *Lady Hamilton*, 1797. BM no. 1853, 1210.619

Fig. 3.3 Rowlandson, *Lady H\*\*\*\*\* [Hamilton's] Attitudes* (c.1800?). BM Satires 9571

Away from Naples, other renowned and influential beauties were sharing in the revival of Greek and Roman styles. The 'extreme neoclassical fashion [that] flourished in the Directory period', Rauser notes, can be attributed to Campbell and Hamilton, but also to Thérésa Tallien – 'a Parisian beauty and heroine of Thermidor (the end of the Reign of Terror).<sup>122</sup> The ladies of the present day, without waists', the *Morning Chronicle* reported in 1796, 'do not perhaps know that they copy that fashion from Madame Tallien, who copied it from the Greeks.'<sup>123</sup> Often compared,

<sup>122</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 21.

<sup>123</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* (26 February 1796).

like Hamilton, to a living statue, Tallien's influence in France was substantial; fashion historian Ribeiro writes that her and her elite social set were referred to as 'the *élégantes*, women of the world.'<sup>124</sup> Likewise acknowledging her international influence, the gender historian Christine Adams argues that Tallien used fashion to wield political power; in changing acceptable standards of bodily beauty, she renegotiated social positions. Adams finds that Tallien's maternal identity – she gave birth to ten children across her lifetime – was erased by her fashionable social and political pursuits. History does not remember Tallien as a modest and maternal figure', Adams writes, but rather as a 'selfish and self-absorbed' mother and spouse.' The natural, unaffected mode of being that she purported to embody through her neoclassical image jarred with the highly stylised, luxurious and anti-familial way in which she paraded it.<sup>125</sup>

As with Campbell and Hamilton, the public nature of Tallien's sartorial efforts earned her bawdy representation in graphic satire. In Gillray's *Ci-devant occupations-or-Madame Talian and the Empress Josephine dancing naked before Barrass in the winter of 1797.-a fact!-* (1805) her nude body connects her influence to sexual laxity. In *La Belle Espagnole*, Gillray pictures a woman who is 'the double' of Tallien; Thomas Wright remembers that she was a 'well-known favourite of the ballet' renowned for her beauty.<sup>126</sup> George describes her as a 'handsome mixed race woman' who stands in front of a portrait of 'Havanna' wearing 'much quasi-barbaric jewellery.'<sup>127</sup> Considering how Tallien's beauty was celebrated at the time – Rauser observes she was commonly praised for her 'pallor' – Gillray's representation of the woman as Tallien's 'double' is a fetishised assertion of racial difference. In her adept analysis of the piece, Rauser shows how Gillray's representation exemplifies how

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<sup>124</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women & Cosmetic Art* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011), 214.

<sup>125</sup> Christine Adams, "Performing for the Court and Public: Female Beauty Systems from the Old Regime through the French Revolution" in *Female Beauty Systems: Beauty as Social Capital in Western Europe and the United States, Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Christine Adams and Tracy Adams (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 155-205, 169, 179, 158. Adams writes that Tallien was preoccupied with her social images, and 'plotted to make a splash at special events' where she knew members of the press would be waiting to record her appearance (170).

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Works of James Gillray, the Caricaturist; with the History of His Life and Times* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1873), 210.

<sup>127</sup> George, Vol. VII.



'elements of slave fashion and creole culture' and the 'dangerous, sexualised glamour of the West Indies' were appropriated for a genteel discourse which used neoclassical dress to stress fashionable women's 'whiteness and freedom.'<sup>128</sup> Gillray's teasing of the lookalike's breasts intensifies this eroticises that which, like neoclassical dress itself, was culturally 'other' to British standards of beauty.



Fig. 3.34 François Gérard, *When Princesse de Chimay*, 1804. Musée Carnavalet  
3096

Fig. 3.35 Gillray, *La Belle Espagnole, -ou- la doublure de Madame Tallien*, 1796. BM  
Satires 8898

<sup>128</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 152.

The 'radical discarding' of starched cloths, tight stays and bolstering pads at the turn of the century, Wahrman records in his discussion of fashion and femininity, attracted an especially 'wincing eye', from satirists.<sup>129</sup> Despite the contemporary preoccupation with unmasking – which Rauser argues kindled a 'passion for naturalism in fashion' as well as the 'vogue for caricature' itself – the increased visibility of the body as modelled by Campbell, Hamilton and Tallien concerned many. These late century protests had a long genealogy. Writing in *The Guardian* in 1713, the essayist and politician Joseph Addison complained that lady's necklines were creeping lower and lower. Worrying that the fashion to disregard tuckers - pieces of cloth which bridged the gap between the top of a gown and the neck – was evidence of women's depraved desires to expose themselves, Addison advised them to cover themselves back up. Whilst he himself, he assured his readers, could look upon a lady's neck or bosoms with 'coldness', the same could not be said for the majority of gentlemen:

The eyes of young men are curious and penetrating, their imaginations of a roving nature, and their passions under no discipline or restraint. I am in pain for a woman of rank, when I see her thus exposing herself to the regards of an ever-impudent staring fellow. How can she expect that her quality can defend her, when she gives such provocation!<sup>130</sup>

To prevent 'saucy familiar glances' from men, Addison advised, the leaders of fashion would do well to 'sew on their tuckers again, to retrieve the modesty of their characters, and to imitate not the nakedness, but the innocence, of their mother Eve.' Steering an ostensible criticism of male prurience towards disapproval of ladies' provocation, Addison questioned the modesty and sexual morality of women 'of rank.'<sup>131</sup> Wedding fashion to vice, he worried that their decorum was sinking as low as their necklines. Addison's accusatory attitude towards female fashion was not unusual - chiding his young readers in 1744, the Irish poet Wetenhall Wilkes made

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<sup>129</sup> Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 65.

<sup>130</sup> Joseph Addison, "No. 100 Monday, July 6" in *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison* ed. Richard Hurd, vol. IV (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877), 180.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

the similar observation that ‘the Negligence of loose Attire/May oft’ invite to loose desire.’ In 1772, a columnist for *The Lady’s Magazine* cautioned that ‘too much bosom disfigures and appears rather vulgar.’<sup>132</sup> The impression of too much breast as sexually lax, conceited and crass enjoyed considerable longevity and cultural authority, moving with changes in fashion. Such moralising attitudes towards the nudity of ‘half-dressed’ women were perhaps unsurprising given the association of the fashionably bare breast with dissipation in the preceding centuries. In the 1600s, the breast of famous courtesans became emblems of the licentiousness of the restoration court, commemorated in art as immodest displays of sexual immorality. Portraits of courtesans such as Eleanor ‘Nell’ Gwyn – actress and mistress to Charles II – featured the naked breast as part of assertions of women’s unashamed sexual prowess and power.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady: Being A System of Rules and Informations; digested into a new and familiar Method, to qualify the Fr Sex to be useful, and happy in every Scene of Life* (London: C. Hitch, 1744), 188

<sup>133</sup> For more on Nell Gwyn and artistic representations of her body, see Elaine McGirr, “Nell Gwyn’s Breasts and Colley Cibber’s Shirts: Celebrity Actors and Their Famous Parts” in *Intimacy and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture: Public Interiors*, ed. Emrys D. Jones and Victoria Joule (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 13-34.



Fig. 3.36 Simon Verelst, *Nell Gwyn*, c.1670. NPG L248

Connections between the fashionable breast and female sexual assertiveness, it seems, lingered in the minds of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century conservatives. Prints such as the anonymous *Boreas effecting what health & modesty could not!!!* (1800) continued the work of Cruikshank's *Too Much and Too Little* in using the bare breast to illustrate the sexual shamelessness of modern fashionable women compared to their predecessors. On the wall, a lady in Elizabethan dress looks accusingly at their nakedness. It is unclear whether her own

nipples are visible through her dress, or if the likeness of them has been bawdily added on top of the portrait.



Fig. 3.37 Anonymous, *Boreas Effecting what health & modesty could not!!!*, 1800.

BM Satires 9608

When women such as Campbell, Hamilton and Tallien shifted the focus of fashion to the natural silhouette, they sparked concern that swathes of the urban elite would soon be taking to balls, operas, salons and other fashionable soirées with their breasts completely bare. Lewd and disapproving – if not titillating – satirical depictions of completely nude breasts in the vein of Simon Verelst's *Nell Gwyn* followed, asserting the impudence and wantonness of some of fashion's finest.

#### *Prurient peeps at the breast*

Writing in *The Sporting Magazine* in July 1794, one commentator desperately tried to convince their readers that exposed breasts, however fashionable, could not be considered decent:

Feminine dress of the present fashion is, perhaps, the most indecent ever worn in this country. The breast is altogether displayed and the whole drapery, by the wanton management of the wearer in throwing it behind her, is made to cling so to the figure, that nothing can be said to be completely concealed. Well may it be necessary to veil the face!<sup>134</sup>

Four years later, one moralist was so appalled by the fashion that he announced the end of female shame. Writing on the 'manners and character of the age' in a summer 1798 issue of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, he stated:

When we observe the loose and indecent attire, in which only half-dressed females present themselves, without a blush, to the public eye, it is impossible not to conclude that shame, the last barrier of virtue, is taking its leave even of that part of the fair sex, who would scorn any imputation on their character.<sup>135</sup>

Continuing Joseph Addison's work of placing blame upon the wearers, rather than the voyeurs of fashion, these commentaries draw upon the language of shame – veiling and blushing - in an attempt to chasten women into concealing their breasts. Despite the prevalence of conservative outrage about revealing dress, Gatrell argues that breasts were generally only exposed in the context of high fashion. Day-to-day, the 'overwhelming majority of the nation's nipples', he reasons, 'in fact remained hidden.' Satirical prints however, demonstrate that 'fantasies about fashionably revealed nipples flourished periodically', contributing to the public displays of nudity that they ostensibly repudiated.<sup>136</sup> Raunchy representations of attractive women enthusiastically parading their breasts such as Isaac Cruikshank's aforementioned *The Graces of 1794* (1794), John Cawse's *Parisian Ladies in their winter dress for 1800* (1799) and Richard Newton's *The Thrifty Wife* (1795) encouraged audiences to frown upon modern fashions whilst enjoying explicit views

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<sup>134</sup> *Sporting Magazine*, IV (July 1794), 228.

<sup>135</sup> 'Manners and character of the age', *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 34 (2 July 1798), 566.

<sup>136</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 367. Gatrell's comments echo Donald's warning that caricatures did not intend to 'illustrate what the generality of the people were wearing', but rather to give a dramatic impression of the changing morphologies of fashion. *Following the Fashion*, 16-17.

of the breast. 'Her bosom, heav'n bless her', the caption to Newton's print announces, 'is as open as the day.' In the late century satirical favourites including Maria Fitzherbert – whose fondness for bosom-bolsters and tight stays was ridiculed as late as 1791 in Gillray's *Patent-bolsters; -Le moyen d'être en-bon-point* – were now criticised for competitively baring their breast in necklines slashed to the waist. In Isaac Cruikshank's *Symptoms of lewdness, or a peep into the boxes* (1796), Mrs Fitzherbert appears at the opera with Lady Buckinghamshire; the print's inscription records that instead of being shocked at each other's naked bodies, the friends strive to display 'who shall shew most of their own.'



Fig. 3.38 Isaac Cruikshank, *Symptoms of lewdness, or a peep into the boxes*, 1796.

BM Satires 8521

Cruikshank suggests that not only are women pushing neoclassical fashion too far, they are mistaking the point. The highly decorated and competitive nature of Fitzherbert's and Buckinghamshire's display betrays an excess at odds with the

ambitions of neoclassical dress. As an anti-fashion, Rauser explains, neoclassical dress was supposed to 'allow the women who embraced it to rise above petty artifice and ornament and to construct themselves as aesthetic agents at the center of key artistic and philosophical discourses of the Enlightenment.' Rather than 'treating the body as a surface to be decorated', it promoted dressing in a way that was 'explicitly outside fashion' affecting superiority in its 'timelessness and appeal to authenticity, naturalism, and women's artistic agency.'<sup>137</sup> A style intended to be 'intensely embodied and deeply emotional', neoclassical fashion is presented in *Symptoms of Lewdness* as a farce with no claim to 'natural' sophistication.<sup>138</sup> Fitzherbert and Buckinghamshire are slaves to fashion just like the fools who followed the pad fads of the 1780s. With their twinned curled hair, feathers and jewellery they are profoundly false; what is supposed to be an expression of individuality is shown instead to assimilate - they even wear identical dresses in different colours. Yet despite Cruikshank's mock outrage, the women's breasts are attractive; they fit neatly with contemporary bodily ideals. The satirical gaze encourages the viewer to appreciate the view whilst impugning its cause.

As Addison suggested as early as 1713, the problem of exposure was one women were made accountable for: 'I am in pain for a woman of rank, when I see her thus exposing herself... How can she expect that her quality can defend her, when she gives such provocation!' Similar sentiments were expressed in prints which showed men voyeuristically 'peeping' at the breasts exposed by the plunging neoclassical styles of the 1790s. Gillray's *Lady Godina's rout; -or- Peeping Tom spying out Pope-Joan* (1796) for example, shows Lady Georgiana Gordon – an aristocrat who was fourteen at the time of the print's publication – being watched by a candlesnuffer.<sup>139</sup> As Wright notes, Gordon is 'undressed in the height of the

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<sup>137</sup> Rauser, *Age of Undress*, 14.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>139</sup> Gillray's portrayal of Lady Georgiana extemporises on the story Lady Godiva, an Anglo-Saxon woman who rode naked on horseback through the streets of Coventry to protest the high taxes that her husband, the Earl of Mercia, pressed on his people. As later versions of the legend have it, the Earl forbade residents from looking at his wife as she passed through the town, ordering them to remain inside with their windows shut. Just one man, a tailor named Thomas, took a look – various accounts have him struck dead or blind, with his actions having inspired the phrase 'Peeping Tom.' For more on the legend of Lady Godiva, see Daniel Donoghue, *Lady Godiva: A Literary History of the Legend* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).



transparent taste of the period', with breasts uncovered by a dress slashed to the navel. Gordon's exposed breasts prompt the candlesnuffer 'to wander over the attractions' of her body 'to the detriment of the office he is endeavouring to perform.'<sup>140</sup> The candlesnuffer isn't the only one peeping Gordon's breasts – their naked display invites the sexual gaze of the print audience, too.



Fig. 3.39 Gillray, *Lady Godina's rout; -or- Peeping Tom spying out Pope-Joan*, 1796. BM Satires 8899

In her discussion of spectatorship in eighteenth-century periodicals, Manushag N. Powell observes the 'inexorable' trope of 'women's apparently insatiable desire to expose their persons to the public.' Prints and periodicals attempted to attack and regulate female fashion, Powell argues, by 'fussing over

<sup>140</sup> Wright, 210.

women's alleged tendency to display too much bosom.<sup>141</sup> Analysing Newton's 1794 print *A Peep into Brest with a Navel Review!*, Powell shows how ostensibly disapproving representations of fashionable female nudity in fact reveal women's rejection of moral authority and masculine control.



Fig. 3.40 Richard Newton, *A peep into Brest with a navel review!*, 1794. Courtesy of LWL

<sup>141</sup> Manushag N. Powell, "See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Spectation and the Eighteenth-Century Public Sphere" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012): 255-76, 269.

Newton's *A peep into Brest* shows a man uses a monocle to examine the bodies of two fashionable women who, as Powell notes, wear 'stunningly low-cut dresses.'<sup>142</sup> The historian Naomi Clifford argues that 'although not overtly violent, the punning title uses military terms that carry with them an implicit reference to strategy, assault, conquest and victory. The women are prizes to be captured and plundered.'<sup>143</sup> Whilst the women are unquestionably objectified, this description suggests a vulnerability lacking in Newton's representation. Rather than covering themselves, shrinking back or shying away from his 'scrutinising gaze', the women appear, as Powell argues, 'oblivious, uninterested; neither courting nor avoiding observation.' Unflinching, they don't surrender to or resist the voyeurism but rather stride forwards, physically dwarfing the diminutive man whose slight build suggests weakness.<sup>144</sup> What might have been a regulatory and exploitative action is instead fraught with masculine fragility and female agency.<sup>145</sup>

Established long before revealing neoclassical styles were scapegoated for attracting prurience, the peep genre of prints routinely painted men as intrusive lechers. Secretly spying on women in private – for example in their dressing rooms – they snatched glimpses of bare breast, legs and ankles. Etchings including Robert Laurie's *The Peep Behind the Curtain* (1772), James Sayers' *A peep behind the curtain at the widow Belmour* (1790) and the anonymous *A Peep into the Dressing Room or Handsome Leg* (1793) all showed bare breasted women being leered at by predatory men. In 1796, the peep genre received a boost when the fashionable French dancers Charles-Louis Didelot and his wife Rose arrived in Covent Garden

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<sup>142</sup> Powell, 270.

<sup>143</sup> Naomi Clifford, "Titillation and contempt: the meaning of 18th-century caricatures of female fashion" *Recovering stories of women in history* (14 June 2018).

<sup>144</sup> Powell, 270.

<sup>145</sup> In 1800, John Cawse's print *Nautical Observations on Female Dress!!!* painted a similarly insecure picture of male scrutiny. Featuring an attractive pair of women 'very 'décolletées' in neoclassical style dress being examined by a heavily caricatured sea captain and sailor, it scandalises modern fashion. Making a bawdy comment on the women's size, the looseness of their dress, and the roundness of their breasts, the captain declares: 'Women now a days Pipes!! Women are like Crazy Hulks in a rough Sea, the Port holes are Hardly secure!!!' As in Newton's *A peep into Brest*, the men come off worse than the women: they are old, ugly and depraved. Whilst the women are shamed to a degree for courting attention with their scanty dress, Cawse heaps the biggest portion of blame upon the voyeur. BM Satires 9609.

along with a talented ballet performer known as Mademoiselle Parisot. Parisot inspired a series of prints gawping at how loose-fitting neoclassical dress enabled - and sensually displayed - her extraordinary flexibility.<sup>146</sup> Gatrell notes that whilst it contributed to their popularity, Parisot and her balletic colleagues' undress incensed virtuous conservatives who upped their 'efforts at sartorial remoralisation.'<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, caricaturists exploited her talent for their own gain, catering to what Gatrell refers to as 'lip-smacking male prurience.'<sup>148</sup> The theatre historian Sarah McCleave writes that Parisot's flexible feats were harnessed by graphic satirists who saw an opportunity 'for well-placed male spectators to ogle a pretty young woman.'<sup>149</sup> Prints such as Isaac Cruikshank's *A Peep at the Parisot! with Q in the Corner!* (1796), Richard Newton's, *Mademoiselle Parisot* (1796), Gillray's *Modern grace, or the operatical finale to the ballet of Alonzo e Caro* (1796) and *Operatical Reform;-or- la Dance a l'Eveque* (1796) all featured dancers with their full breasts visible through, or exposed by, their light neoclassical-style dress.

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<sup>146</sup> Mademoiselle Parisot's performances attracted great attention from newspaper reporters; *The Monthly Mirror* noted that she 'created a stir by raising her legs far higher than was customary for dancers', whilst *The Morning Chronicle* described her movements as 'positively magical.' *The Monthly Mirror* (October 1796); *The Morning Chronicle*, as quoted in Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 370.

<sup>147</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 373. The dance historian Judith Chazin-Bennahum records that in 1798 the Bishop of Durham publicly condemned Parisot and her company, who 'denounced her in an intemperate speech before the House of Lords.' One of the outcomes of the bishop's tirade was the change in colour of the dancers' maillots (leotards) from skin tone to white – a move designed to chasten their appearance. Chazin-Bennahum, "A Longing for Perfection: Neoclassical Fashion and Ballet" in *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader* ed. Alexandra Carter, Lorraine Nicholas, and Geraldine Morris (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59-69, 67.

<sup>148</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 364.

<sup>149</sup> Sarah McCleave, "What place for a woman? Dancing in London's theatres c.1770-1810" in *Performing Arts in Changing Societies: Opera, Dance, and Theatre in European and Nordic Countries around 1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 128-44, 136.



Fig. 3.41 Gillray, *Modern grace, or the operatical finale to the ballet of Alonzo e Caro*, 1796. BM Satires 8891

According to Withey, dance was recognised as a positive steer in the late century; it was thought to shape healthy, productive and aesthetically pleasing bodies. Considering self-improvement and the shape of the ‘natural’ body, Withey explains that dance was ‘vaunted as a useful expedient for good posture’, with dancing masters treated as authorities on polite behaviour and deportment.<sup>150</sup> Styled as a social skill capable of teaching the genteel how to correct, conduct and present their bodies, it was also framed as a healthy outlet for the expression of ‘natural tendencies’ and physical energies.<sup>151</sup> Yet its practice – especially when performed by foreigners like the company of the Paris Opéra – often crossed over into immoral

<sup>150</sup> Withey, *Technology and Self-Fashioning*, 23.

<sup>151</sup> Anne Bloomfield and Ruth Watts, “Pedagogue of the Dance: The Dancing Master as Educator in the Long Eighteenth Century” *History of Education* 37. No 4 (2008) , 605-18, 607-8.

terrain. The sensuality of dance - including the ballets performed by Parisot and her band - set people on edge about the connections between creative bodily expression and debauched amatory aspirations.<sup>152</sup> Female dancers' fashionable neoclassical dress – or lack thereof – was used to evidence the unnatural corruption of otherwise natural bodies, with the bare breast touted as an emblem of slipped standards of politeness and respectability.

In Gillray's *Modern grace, or the operatical finale to the ballet of Alonzo e Caro* (1796) Parisot Didelot and his wife Rose dance with their arms thrown up in abandon, giving viewers 'an unrestricted view' of their figures.<sup>153</sup> Neoclassical costumes, McCleave explains, were designed to maximise the 'natural' appearance of the body, with materials like muslin often being dampened before performances so that they clung to the body's contours 'in imitation of the folds of Greek dresses.'<sup>154</sup> This revealingness is the chief target of Gillray's attack, which George explains is 'directed against Mme Parisot's exposure of her person and the transparent dress of Mme Rose.'<sup>155</sup> Such exposure, McCleave argues, prompted unease because it symbolised new possibilities for feminine identities; when the 'highly formulaic and artificial dress form' of the 1780s was replaced by neoclassical modes, 'the female body took on a new personality; it was reborn.'<sup>156</sup> With one breast completely bare and the outline of the other clear, Parisot's exposure gestures to her artistic, social and sexual freedom, as well as the liberty emphasised by French political ideals. Just below the stage, balancing on a piano, is a red Phrygian cap. As Rauser observes, this detail, along with the title's mention of 'reform', explicitly connects the dancers aesthetic and sexual radicalism to revolutionary politics.<sup>157</sup>

The company are shadowed by two young girl who dress and dance in imitation of their elders. This emulation implies the next generation are being socialised into sexual and political depravity. In his recent exploration of radical conduct and gender in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century London, Philp

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<sup>152</sup> Edmund Fairfax, *The Styles of Eighteenth-Century Ballet* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 299-300.

<sup>153</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 372.

<sup>154</sup> McCleave, 60.

<sup>155</sup> George, Vol. VII.

<sup>156</sup> McCleave, 60.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

notes that the 'spate of satires levelled against women baring their breasts and sallying forth into the public sphere' in the 1790s represented neoclassical dress as a subversion of 'all that was decent.' Its 'clear ideological associations' with the French Directory, Philp continues meant that its adoption in Britain was interpreted by loyalists as a 'sure and certain road' to the chaotic moral decay occurring in Revolutionary France.<sup>158</sup> Dress produced particular unease, the art historian Cora Gilroy Ware explains, because it 'allowed women to wade into the aesthetic, intellectual and, to a lesser extent, political discourses which characterised this revolutionary war-torn time.'<sup>159</sup> Whilst, as Rauser notes, neoclassical dress 'did not emerge from the crucible of political revolution' in France, it was allied with it, and emerged as a 'portal through which the harmonious union of art and freedom – both 'bodily and political' were rejuvenated.<sup>160</sup> But whilst purporting to be enlightened forms of creative expression, neoclassical inspired fashion, dance and other cultural outputs were mistrusted for their departure from virtuous social mores, and specifically, for the sexual attention they solicited.<sup>161</sup>

Even if, as Gatrell argues, the majority of breasts remained largely covered in the late century, the newly fashionable 'loose and low bodices' were revealing more of the breast than before. Breasts had culturally, politically and aesthetically 'come into their own' and satirists made, Gatrell states, 'what can only be called a meal of them.' Implicating themselves in the prurience that they purported to decry, caricaturists created titillating portraits of men gazing at women's exposed bodies. If the sexual spectacle of the fashionable breast was a source of shame for moralists, it was also, as Gatrell observes, 'much salivated over' by members of the public.<sup>162</sup> The perfect bosom, the 1795 edition of John Cleland's *A Dictionary of Love* set out, was 'white and charming' with 'breasts equal in roundness, whiteness and firmness, neither too much elevated nor too much deprest; rising gently and very distinctly

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<sup>158</sup> Philp, *Radical Conduct: Politics, Sociability and Equality in London 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 152.

<sup>159</sup> Cora Gilroy-ware, "The women who wanted to look like living statues" *Apollo: The International Art Magazine* (4 September 2020).

<sup>160</sup> Rauser, *The Age of Undress*, 10.

<sup>161</sup> McCleave, 66.

<sup>162</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 367-9.

separated.<sup>163</sup> Whilst this ideal was easy to fulfil in print, it posed problems for actual women. The unforgiving nature of neoclassical dress meant that unlike in the 1780s, bodily ideals could not be easily affected. But despite the fashionable contempt for artifice, this problem was met with a solution: the wax bosom. A falsie designed to discretely imitate Cleland's model of the naturally full, firm and round breast, it became a go-to for women insecure about the size and shape of their bosom.

In 1800, the newspaper the *True Briton* told the tale of a father who, arriving home one night, was enraged to find man with his hands 'very busy about the neck' of his fourteen-year-old daughter. Lifting a cane to 'knock the impudent fellow down', he was interrupted by his laughing wife who scolded him for getting 'in a passion for nothing.' 'The man', she explained, 'is only fitting Euphrasia with a proper bosom; if you had the smallest knowledge of the world, you must be convinced that the girl cannot appear in fashionable company with her present horrid flatness of chest.'<sup>164</sup> The man with the solution to Euphrasia's problem was likely someone like Dr Trussup, a character which features Charles Ansell's print *The Virgin Warehouse* (1799).

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<sup>163</sup> John Cleland, *A Dictionary of Love; Wherein is the Description a Perfect Beauty; the Picture of a Fop or Macaroni, And a Key to all the Arch Phrases, & Difficult Terms, used in that Universal Language* (London: W. Lane, 1795), 22.

<sup>164</sup> "Distresses of a Citizen," from the *True Briton* in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1800: Being an Impartial Section of the Most Exquisite Essays and Jeux D'espirits Principally Prose, that Appear in the Newspapers and Other Publications*, vol. IV. (London: James Ridgway, 1801), 100-1.





Fig. 3.42 Charles Ansell, *The Virgin Shape Warehouse*, 1799. BM Satires 9456.

Ansell's Trussup promises that, for a price, he can transform women from 'virgin-shaped' to well-endowed. 'Above all', the inscription to the print advertises, Dr Trussup was happy to acquaint his customers with 'his favourite & accommodating Circassian Vests, alias Bosom Friends, which permits free respiration, prevents all pressure on the chest, [and] raises the languid Breast to the appearance of a Juvenile heaving Bosom.' Named, as many contemporary fashion and cosmetic products were, after the famous idealised and eroticised beauties of Circassia, the vests were a harness-like proto-type bra which, when strapped around the waist and hauled over the shoulders, lifted up and pushed forwards the chest.<sup>165</sup> If needs be,

<sup>165</sup> For more on Circassian beauty, and its relationship with ideas of Caucasian supremacy, see Lynn Festa, "Cosmetics Differences: The Changing Faces of England and France" in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia and Jeffrey S. Ravel, vol. XXXIV (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 25-54, 41-3.

the vests could also hold light padding or else prosthetic wax breasts which, George observes, Trussup's apprentice in blue can be seen offering to 'a wizened knock-kneed hag wearing knickerbockers.'<sup>166</sup> Completely flat chested, the hag smiles as she examines the wax prosthetics that promise her a natural-looking full bosom. Designed to be worn beneath even the flimsiest of fashionable dress, the falsie even had a fake nipple to affect a natural profile. One exasperated reporter for *The Times* chose to look upon the development as progress: 'the fashion of false bosoms has at least this utility, that it compels our fashionable fair to wear *something*.'<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> George, Vol. VII.

<sup>167</sup> *The Times* (December 7 1799).



Fig. 3.43 Detail from *A Virgin Warehouse*

To the hag's left a large lady looks into a mirror having been fitted with a Circassian Vest by Trussup, who was an eccentric clergyman, conduct writer, and medical empiric.<sup>168</sup> Drawing, as the historian Joanne Begiato notes, upon 'the trope of the sexually predatory cleric', the print shows his hand lingering on her behind as

<sup>168</sup> Emma Major, "Trusler, John (1735–1820), Church of England clergyman and author" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 September 2004).

he looks smugly and directly at the viewer of the print.<sup>169</sup> Taking advantage of the lady's desperation to be in fashion, Trusler manhandles her into a contraption promising to transform her physique. Visible to the viewers and Trusler but unbeknownst to her, the Circassian vest has gathered the fat at her back into two breast shaped deposits. This is a misogynistic portrait of a lady who, under the care of men like Trusler, has been promised the impossible: a natural-looking, fashionably attractive figure achieved through artificial means.

Writing on the fashions of the late century, McCreery argues that 'women reveal more of their bodies to viewers than previously, but what they reveal is less truthful. Their beauty is immoral and their artificiality transparent.'<sup>170</sup> Yet unlike many of the satirical prints from the 1780s, *Virgin Shape Warehouse* doesn't purport to worry about the deceptive potential of modern fashions. Rather, the satirist suggests that no matter how hard they try, women like the fat lady and the emaciated hag will never affect 'natural' beauty. Their beauty is not, as McCreery suggests, immoral – it is absent, and their artificial efforts are simply not pulled off. As the writer in *The World* reminded its readers in 1755, 'Nature may be helped and improved, but will not be forced or changed. All attempts in direct opposition to her are attended with ridicule.'<sup>171</sup> Laughing at, rather than wary of, fashionable female subjects, *The Virgin Warehouse* demonstrates that despite their claim to the 'natural' the softly structured neoclassical styles of the 1790s were as, if not more, difficult to pull off than the excessive styles of the 1780s. Accordingly, prints attacking modern fashion used the breast to ridicule women who participated in neoclassical fashion despite it not 'suiting' them, creating harsh images of the too vulgar, the too poor, the too large or the too small.

In 1799 Hannah Humphrey published a print by Gillray titled "*Monstrosities*" of 1799. Set in Kensington gardens, it takes aim at extreme takes on neoclassical fashion, and particularly elite women's 'taste for transparencies.' Wright records that the buxom lady at the print's forefront is presented 'in the most scanty garments, made in the gauziest materials, which disclose the figure with every movement.'<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> William Gibson, Joanne Begiato (eds), *Sex and the Church in the Long Eighteenth-Century: Religion, Enlightenment, and the Sexual Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 268.

<sup>170</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 201.

<sup>171</sup> *The World* (2 January 1755), 213.

<sup>172</sup> Wright, 265.

Her generous breasts are visible through the thin material of her dress, the colour of which is outlandishly matched to the rest of her outfit. In the background, another young woman wears a similar yellow robe, the outline of her body clear and her breast seemingly uncovered. Whilst the latter appears attractive, the larger lady is mocked for her attempt to be in style. Bodies like hers, Gillray suggests, can't be fashionable; she reveals too much because she *is* too much, and her display is untasteful.<sup>173</sup>



Fig. 3.44 Gillray, "Monstrosities" of 1799, 1799. BM Satires 9454

In July 1775 *The Lady's Magazine* published its latest instalment of the serial advice feature 'Mrs T-SS' Advice to her Daughter.' Sharing their 'Thoughts upon Dress', the columnist counselled its readers:

<sup>173</sup> See also Gillray, *A Lyonsess* (1801), BM Satires 9758.

In matters of dress, never be the first in fashion, and when you do conform to it, let it be in the most moderate degree... for a beautiful woman will not be so much condemned for entering into the extravagancy of fashion, as a plain or deformed woman would be. But the essential point in dress is to consider what is really and truly becoming. It is folly to be taken with any particular mode of dress, from seeing it look well upon another woman, especially if she is handsome.<sup>174</sup>

The trope of women being taken in by unflattering fashions was a persistent source of humour and concern in the late century. In 1796 the newspaper *The True Briton* blamed Campbell for the hordes of women who were aping neoclassical fashions: ‘the excusable vanity of Lady Charlotte Campbell in displaying a beautiful figure to the greatest advantage, had unfortunately incurred the offensive imitation of all the City fustocks.’<sup>175</sup> In the same year, the anonymous print *The Gallery of Fashion* mocked a diverse line up of women modelling styles of the day with varying degrees of success.<sup>176</sup> The first, third and fifth figure have their failings exposed by their breasts; their nipples poke vulgarly through fabric or slip out of their flimsy supports.

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<sup>174</sup> “Mrs T-SS’ Advice to her Daughter. Letter II. Thoughts upon Dress” *The Lady’s Magazine: or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, 6 (July 1775), 350.

<sup>175</sup> *True Briton* (25 March 1796), cited at BM Satires 8905.

<sup>176</sup> The title of the print was likely inspired by the newly published *Gallery of Fashion* magazine, which, from 1794 to 1803, circulated fashion plates and monthly reflections on Regency dress.



Fig. 3.45 *The Gallery of Fashion*, 1796. BM Satires 8905

As Batchelor notes in her discussion of the social meanings created by dress, ‘maintaining an appropriate form of sartorial display was a tricky balancing act for women’, and even more so for those disadvantaged by circumstances of class, social status and place.<sup>177</sup> Whilst many misogynistic representations too aim, like *The Gallery of Fashion*, at the elite, others connected fashion blunders to shortcomings in class. Elsewhere in her column for *The Lady’s Magazine* Mrs T-SS entreated her readers to ‘consider their *situation* and *fortune*’ since ‘persons of rank may take liberties in dress, that others would be highly condemned for: they are above the reach of insults from the vulgar.’<sup>178</sup> The working classes in particular, Mrs

<sup>177</sup> Batchelor, 9.

<sup>178</sup> “Mrs T-SS’ Advice,” 350. As Grieg notes, ‘the perils of mocking such ostentation’ as exhibited by the upper-classes were ‘routinely parodied in caricatures of simple country folk returning from a jaunt to town unrecognisably and inappropriately *à la mode*, and in cartoons that show mercantile citizens rendered vulgar and ridiculous in their quest for fashionable things’ (34).

T-SS warned, were likely to be scorned by those above their station, who fail to recognise that they themselves are 'equally ridiculous in respect to their own dress.' Protected by 'arrogance, self-sufficiency, and assurance', they take bigger risks and attract less criticism. A number of graphic satirists used specific places and spaces as points from which to examine the strained relationship between class and fashion. In his 1796 print *Dividing The Spoil!! St James'. St Giles'*, Isaac Cruikshank drew exposed breasts to suggest that upper-class ladies were lowering themselves to the level of prostitutes through their decadent, fashionable pursuits. Split into two frames, the satire compares a modish set of gambling ladies from St. James with a group of prostitutes from St. Giles – the former argue over winnings whilst the latter divide up the spoil they have earned. In a reversal of the concerns expressed by Mrs T-SS in *The Lady's Magazine*, the prostitutes as drawn more attractive than their aristocratic counterparts – as George observes, 'they are younger, handsomer, and have pleasanter expressions than the women of fashion.'<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> George, Vol VII.





Fig. 3.46 Isaac Cruikshank, *Dividing The Spoil!! St James'. St Giles'*, 1796. BM Satires 8880

Discussing how aristocratic women were depicted as bad influences on 'more socially and financially vulnerable women', McCreery argues that satirists often connected 'gaming with prostitution.'<sup>180</sup> Aristocratic gamers were shown setting a

<sup>180</sup> McCreery, 169.

bad example, leading others astray and making themselves vulnerable to comparison with those beneath their station. In *Dividing the Spoil!!!* and prints such as *The snug party's exit. Or the farewell to Bath* (1799), this connection is made through the breast. Its' fashionable display in St. James is akin to its sexually immoral exhibition in St. Giles, and this point of commonality gestures to shared depravity. Lady Archer and her gambling gaggle appear no better than a group of prostitutes - only their privilege, the satirist suggests, has landed them in a better situation. Both sets of women wear similar styles of dress; late century fashions, Donald explains, 'could be given a personal application at all levels of society', with the acquisition and enactment of high fashion 'no longer imagined as being restricted to a moneyed elite.'<sup>181</sup> Although their dresses are ragged and less embellished, the ladies in St. Giles have youth and beauty on their side. Those from St. James, on the other hand are too old, too rotund, too uptight and too unsightly to be fashionable beauties.<sup>182</sup>

Gillray similarly uses places and breast as points from which to explore the unflattering potential of neoclassical dress in *Following the Fashion* (1794). As George explains, Gillray draws two women along each other; one is 'tall and pretty, except for her grotesque slimness, the other short, fat, and ugly' and both wear 'burlesqued versions of the new fashions.'<sup>183</sup> Identically attired, one is from St. James and the other from Cheapside. The inscription reads: 'St James' giving the Ton, a Soul without a Body' and 'Cheapside aping the Mode, a Body without a Soul.' This time, whilst both women are mocked, the lady from St. James comes off better – although thin, her face is still attractive and her body has held the intended column-like shape of the dress. Both ladies' breasts are, as Donald notes, 'clearly visible through the diaphanous fabric' and mirrored by their inflated puff sleeves. Their

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<sup>181</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 8.

<sup>182</sup> An earlier print by Rowlandson, *St. James'. St Giles'* (1792) shows things as they should be: two courtesans in fashionable but demure French dress are contrasted with 'two burly women, prostitutes of the lowest type', crudely over dressed, with hanging, plump breasts and warts on their face. The material that covers their breasts is thin and flesh coloured so that from a distance they appear bare. George, Vol. VI. Elsewhere, the breast was used to make clearer and more traditional distinctions between the virtuous elite and the depraved rural poor: in a pair of comparison prints from 1784 titled *A St James' Beauty* and *A St. Giles' Beauty* (BM Satires 6764, 6757) the satirist teases an image of a prostitute's breast whilst offering his upper-class subject more modest covering.

<sup>183</sup> George, Vol. VII.

nipples protrude through the material, but whilst the St. James lady's breasts are high, the Cheapside lady's drape over her stomach to conceal her waist. Fashion is treated 'as a grotesque distortion of the natural form', Donald argues – highlighting, as well as concealing, deficits and excesses.<sup>184</sup>



Fig. 3.47 Gillray, *Following the Fashion*, 1794. BM Satires 5868

The scholarly emphasis on the greater freedoms which neoclassical dress granted women are perhaps surprising given the plethora of prints which, like

<sup>184</sup> Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, 8.

*Following the Fashion*, use it to hold women accountable to restrictive bodily ideals. Whilst Gatrell writes that ‘translucent silhouette of the chemise dress and the rejection of the corset’ ushered in ‘a new female freedom and the old order’s end’, and Rauser agrees that it was ‘redolent with disruptive meaning’, it was also ripe for ridicule.<sup>185</sup> Whilst it may have liberated some bodies, particularly those who enjoyed wider socio-economic and political freedoms, neoclassical inspired dress ostracised, condemned and marginalised others. In visual satire at least, it held women more accountable than ever to the aesthetic standards that sought to shape and restrict their bodily, social and cultural autonomy. Deriding women for lacking the class, character or physique to pull off breast-baring dress, satirists created misogynistic portraits of women very much constrained by the bodies they inhabited.

Moreover, the fashionable glorification of undress unlocked new opportunities for lurid imaginings of the female form. Neoclassicism, the dance historian Judith Chazin-Bennahum proposes, was the style that ‘freed the body from the recent past’, but in graphic satire, it held women hostage to the sexualised male gaze.<sup>186</sup> Proponents of the ideology of ‘natural’ ways of living were also let down by neoclassical fashions; whilst they professed to be an antidote to female ‘frivolity, deceptiveness, and profligacy’, satirical prints from the period suggest that they did little to assuage anxieties about women’s vanity, sexual depravity and duplicity.<sup>187</sup> Whilst caricaturists exaggerated and exploited the fashion for exposed breasts to fulfil voyeuristic fantasies about ‘fashionably revealed nipples’, they also explored the moral implications of the fashionable predilection for and parade of all things ‘natural.’<sup>188</sup> The bare breast was found to be proof not of women’s refined sensibilities, but rather, as earlier in the century, of their sexual corruption, immodesty and narcissism, as well as to that of those who gazed upon them.

Prints which take aim at the breast to illustrate sartorial and moral travesty are too many to address; not mentioned here are titles such as Isaac Cruikshank’s *Frailties of Fashion* (1793), *The rage or shepherds I have lost my waist* (1794), *Great plenty and little waste* (1794) and *Ourselves!!* (1796); Gillray’s *Characters in High*

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<sup>185</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 366; Rauser, *The Age of Undress*, 10.

<sup>186</sup> Chazin-Bennahum, *The Lure of Perfection: Fashion and Ballet, 1780-1830* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 95.

<sup>187</sup> Rauser, *The Age of Undress*, 12.

<sup>188</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 369.

*Life* (1795) and *A Lyoness* (1801); William Hanlon's *A Scare-Crow* (1795) and Rowlandson's *Who's Mistress Now* (1802). Whether concealed, revealed, dressed, undressed, puffed out, pushed up, untouched or false, fashionable breasts of the late century were shown accelerating and accentuating moral, and sometimes physical, decline. Satirical messages, Grieg writes, was most often targeted at aspirants, but warned 'society at large against being seduced by fashion's surface glitter.'<sup>189</sup> A significant subset of late century fashion satires took aim at a particularly contentious subsection of these fashion aspirants; mothers. Across the 1780s and 1790s, commentators fretted about how fashion was impacting maternal performance. These anxieties were translated into caricatures of the fashionable breast, which became a repository for concerns about detachment, distraction, self-obsession and affectation.

### **Fashionable Mammams of the 1780s and 1790s**

In 1781, *The Lady's Magazine's* recurring advice column *The Matron by Mrs Grey* questioned whether a fashionable woman could make a good wife and mother. Focusing on the issue of hooped petticoats, an apparatus determined to be 'neither necessary nor becoming', it found fashion to be a literal and metaphorical barrier to hands-on mothering:

Men in general, and men of sense in particular, dislike this part of female dress: I can affirm, from my own knowledge, that a man of considerable learning and abilities, though a tradesman, and plain in his person, having made his addresses to a beautiful young woman, with a genteel fortune, insisted upon the resignation of her hoop, before he married her. She cheerfully complied with his request, and not only made an excellent wife, but an exemplary mother: shining in her conjugal and maternal characters with equal lustre: in the latter, as she brought up her children herself, her hoop would have only served to embarrass her in her nursery-occupations.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Grieg, 34.

<sup>190</sup> "The Matron by Mrs Grey" *The Lady's Magazine* (October 1781), 541-2.

For Mrs Grey, fashion disrupts the world of devoted matrimony and motherhood – it is a vain, self-absorbed and profligate extravagance. ‘Our women, at large’, she complains, ‘pay so little attention to the domestic duties, and so much to the unnecessary and costly part of their drapery, that the men, the wary men of the age, are actually deterred from marriage.’<sup>191</sup> As Kate Retford explains in her study on representations of the domestic sphere in the period, contemporary artists similarly saw fashion as incompatible with family life. ‘Female virtue and the ideal woman’s capacity to fulfil domestic, familial and household tasks’ Retford writes, ‘were polarised with idle, luxurious and vain concerns.’<sup>192</sup> For Mrs Grey and others, the backbone of domesticity was nurturing motherhood or ‘nursery-occupations’, an undertaking which ideally headed up by breastfeeding. Eight years prior to Mrs Grey’s comments another columnist for *The Lady’s Magazine* criticised that women who used their breasts ‘merely for parade’ rather than suckling did not ‘deserve the title of mothers.’<sup>193</sup> The spectacle of the fashionable breast in the 1780s sat, like the hoop, in contention with the decorous duties of motherhood.

Tensions between fashion and motherhood were explored in sentimental images of children choosing their wet nurses over their mothers.<sup>194</sup> In Étienne Aubrey’s portrait *Farewell to the Wet Nurse* (1780), for example, an infant struggles to free itself from the arms of his fashionable mother and back into those of his country nurse. Eight years later, William Ward made a print of George Morland’s similar work *A Visit to the Child at Nurse* (1788) which shows a nurse encouraging a reluctant child to greet its visiting mother. The mother appears awkward in the modest, homely room – her ostentatious dress includes dramatic plumes, a luxurious cloak and a pigeon-pouter breast. The door she enters through is left conspicuously open; she is a flighty, unfamiliar and unwanted intruder on the intimate scene. Behind her, an older child is pictured with matching curled hair, a dark hat and a white, ruffled dress. She is her mother’s miniature; the harmful legacy of fashionable motherhood, Morland suggests, will be passed on generationally.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Kate Retford, Unpublished (?) PhD “Family and Familiarity: The Domestic Sphere in Eighteenth-Century English Visual Culture” (University of Warwick, June 2000), 173.

<sup>193</sup> “The Friend to the Fair Sex. Chapter X. On the Management of Children,” *The Lady’s Magazine* (March 1774), 146-48, 147.

<sup>194</sup> Ventura, *Maternal Breastfeeding*, 5.



R. Delaunay after Étienne Aubrey, *Farewell to the Wet Nurse*, 1780. WC no. 46825i



Fig. 3.49 William Ward after George Morland, *A Visit to the Child at Nurse*, 1788. BM no. 1941,1011.69

In choosing not to live a fashionable life and forgo breastfeeding, these mothers have alienated themselves from their children. Perceptions of the non-nursing mother as physically and emotionally estranged from her children were not new, and certainly not specific to England and France. The celebrated seventeenth-century Dutch poet and politician Jacob Cats ‘summed up this attitude’, Yalom writes, when he shared the aphorism: ‘One who bears her children is mother in part,/ But she who nurses her children is a mother at heart.’<sup>195</sup> Yalom argues that the growing awareness of the ‘psychological importance of the intimate relationship between mother and child’ across the eighteenth century ‘added further weight to the

<sup>195</sup> Yalom, 93. Jacob Cats cited by Mary Frances Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 18.



mandate to breastfeed.<sup>196</sup> The capricious fashionable mother is pitted against the steady, lower class nurse and the familial affection she offers and found to be lacking. Quill Kukla explains that following Rousseau's praise of rural, 'peasant' or 'savage' lifestyles, literary and visual materials routinely contrasted fashion and nature in their illustrations of transgressive maternity. The urban mother who failed to nurse her own children, Kukla offers, was presented as the ultimate 'betray[al] of the maternal laws of nature.'<sup>197</sup>

This representation persisted - in his 1803 *Advice to Mothers* William Buchan regretted that 'in the polished, or rather the depraved circles of social life... Women enervated by luxury, allured by a false taste for mistaken pleasure, and encouraged by shameless example, are eager to get rid of their children as soon as born, in order to spend the time thus gained from the discharge of their duty in dissipation or indolence.'<sup>198</sup> Part of the problem as contemporary commentators saw it was that aristocratic mothers were unable - or unwilling - to appreciate the simple pleasures of family life.<sup>199</sup> 'When Women are thus perpetually dazzling each one another's Imaginations with laces and ribbons', one writer for *The Spectator* ventured, 'it is no Wonder that they are more attentive to the superficial Parts of Life, than the solid and substantial Blessings of it.'<sup>200</sup> These 'blessings' were imagined in romanticised paintings of rural poor families gathering to share food in warm, welcoming - if not luxurious - homes. Often published with titles like 'the good mother', 'the happy mother', or 'the good nurse' they placed nurturing maternity at the heart of happy, healthy family life.

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<sup>196</sup> Yalom, 123. Yalom notes that as time went on, it became less popular to send infants to the country and wet nurses were instead increasingly expected to live with the families they served. This went some way to reassuring about the separation between mother and child, and meant that even if a mother was unwilling to give primary care herself, she could at least supervise it.

<sup>197</sup> Kukla, 80.

<sup>198</sup> Buchan, 63.

<sup>199</sup> There were, of course, exceptions to this - in *The Satirical Gaze*, McCreery analyses an untitled print by Rowlandson from 1784 which shows 'three fashionably dressed [older] women' seated in a cosy home tenderly lavishing affection on a baby. Although none of them are the child's mother - they appear to be visiting family or a friend - the joy and attention they demonstrate provides an alternative perspective on the relationship between female fashion and family affection in the late century (209, 221).

<sup>200</sup> Quoted in *The Works of the Late Right Honorable Joseph Addison*, vol. II (Birmingham: J. and R. Tonson, 1761), 407.

As feminist art historian Carol Duncan observes, such depictions were not representative of reality, but rather attempted to bring into being a developing ideal. The archetype of the happy mother, Duncan argues, ushered in a 'new concept' of the rural family; the previous notion of the family as consisting of a 'chain of descents' was replaced by the model of the generative marital unit affectionately bound together.<sup>201</sup> The breastfeeding mother headed up this archetype; prints such as Benjamin West's *A Rustic Family* (1783) credited maternal nursing with bringing the family together. Representations of poor, rural women as maternal martyrs served as endorsements of traditional, simply ways of living compared to modern, fashionable, artificial modes of familial life.<sup>202</sup> Whilst the breastfeeding mother wasn't fashionable in the 1780s, it was certainly distinguished. In *A Rustic Family*, the father's fond supervision of the scene reminds of Rousseau's early instruction in *Émile*: 'Let mothers deign to nurse their children, morals will reform themselves... Let women once again be mothers, men will soon become fathers and husbands again.'<sup>203</sup> 'Although he wrote just a handful of comments on the topic', Kukla writes, 'it is hard to overestimate the critical role that Rousseau assigned to the nursing mother.'<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," 204.

<sup>202</sup> For instance, see John Greenwood after Willem van Herp, *The Happy Family* (1760), Richard Brookshaw after Jean-Baptiste Pillement, *The Happy Peasants* (c.1751-1804).

<sup>203</sup> Rousseau, *Émile; or On Education* (1772), ed. Christopher Kelly and trans. Alan Bloom (London: University Press of New England, 2009), 46.

<sup>204</sup> Kukla, 30.



Fig. 3.50 Benjamin West, *A Rustic Family*, 1783. BM no. 1871,0610.760

Like Rousseau's writings, such images valorised the good mother whose attentions were on her family and away from fashion and other contemptible interests. Mothers were warned against 'the seductive influence of fashion', Wagner notes, and encouraged instead to view attractiveness as arising from displays of

maternal devotion.<sup>205</sup> ‘Believe it not’, the physician Hugh Smith implored his readers in his popular *Letters*, ‘when it is insinuated that your bosoms are less charming, for having a dear little cherub at your breast.’<sup>206</sup> As political historian Laura Brace explains, Smith’s writings urged mothers to ‘resist the counter-pressure from the empire of fashion’, which appreciated breasts untouched by the physical demands of pregnancy and motherhood. Contemporary commentators insisted, Brace writes, that ‘fashion should not persuade women to remove their children from their ‘sheltering bosom.’<sup>207</sup> Fashionable mothers may *look* good, but their existence was meaningless without the blessings of conjugal and maternal affection. This dismissal of the superficial echoed increasingly cynical attitudes towards fashion in the 1780s. In 1784, one self-professed ‘Lady of Fashion’ wrote in *The Lady’s Magazine* that ‘Loveliness needs not the foreign aid of ornament/ But is when unadorn’d adorn’d the most.’ ‘Natural charms’ they ruled, would always put ‘the made-up faces’ and bodies of fashion to shame. As Morag Martin and others have shown, extravagant dress and cosmetics became associated with ‘promiscuity, corruption and deception’, rather than with wealth and social standing. For Martin, this move was shadowed by a conceptual shift in women’s social roles. ‘The good mother and wife’, she writes, ‘replaced the frivolous coquette or powerful mistress’ as a celebrated icon of attractive femininity.<sup>208</sup>

Matrimonial and maternal performance was increasing linked to corporeal beauty - as Wagner explains, physicians like Smith positioned ‘maternal self-sacrifice [...] bodily self-control and moral restraint’, as virtues which would earn a woman romantic attention as well as social esteem.<sup>209</sup> This motif of self-sacrifice was key; images of rural maternal nursing emphasised the attractive mother as an all-giving exemplar of her sex. In Richard Dighton’s *A Journeyman Parson with a Bare Existence* (c.1782/3) for example, one of a pair of prints which satirises the different prospects of a master and an indentured parson, a mother is shown instructing one

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<sup>205</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 57.

<sup>206</sup> Hugh Smith, *Letters*, 82.

<sup>207</sup> Laura Brace, “Rousseau, Maternity and the Politics of Emptiness” *Polity* 39, no. 3 (2007), 361-83, 366-7.

<sup>208</sup> Morag Martin, *Beauty: Painting Artifice – Cosmetic Fashions and Portraiture in Late Eighteenth-century France and England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 88.

<sup>209</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 57.

child on how to eat whilst nursing another.<sup>210</sup> Despite everyone else enjoying a meal she doesn't eat herself, busy as she is ensuring the comfort of everyone else.

Opposite, her husband strips a bone 'bare' in an image which mirrors his infant's hungry consumption of breast milk. The mother is being drained of resources, but this sacrifice renders her beautiful.

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<sup>210</sup> The companion print to *A Journeyman Parson's* companion is *A Master Parson with a Good Living* by Carington Bowles after Robert Dighton (1782-3). Together, they emphasise the disparity between two maternal experiences; a well-off mother is afforded the luxury to focus on herself, whilst a poor one must place others first.



Fig. 3.51 Carington Bowles after Robert Dighton, *A Journeyman Parson with a Bare Existence*, 1782-3. BM no. 1935,0522.1.49

Prints like this represented breastfeeding as something that lower class and rural mothers happily dispatched whilst juggling other priorities.<sup>211</sup> A similar scene appears as the cover image to *Les Consolations des misères de ma vie, ou recueil d'airs romances et duos de J-J. Rousseau* (*Consolations for My Life's Miseries, or, Collection of Airs, Romances, and Duos by J-J. Rosseau*) a 1781 collection of Rousseau's writings which were set to music after his death. A mother offers an infant her bare breast whilst, as in *A Journeyman Parson*, extending a piece of food or a flower to another child.

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<sup>211</sup> A print titled *Affliction* (1783) by William Dickinson depicts a destitute mother breastfeeding her tiny infant whilst her husband lay dead at her feet, whilst *John Howard Esp. Visiting and Relieving the Miseries of a Prison* (1790) shows a poor mother nursing in jail.



Fig. 3.52 Cover of Rousseau's *Les consolations des misères de ma vie, ou recueil d'airs romances et duos*, 1781. BNF, département Musique, VM7-7649



For Ventura, the mother 'represents the archetype of the proper lady, who cares for her children herself.'<sup>212</sup> Such images presented maternal nursing as pleasant, edifying and effortless – a framework which supported what the gender historian Alexandra Shepard refers to as the 'subtle reconstruction of breastfeeding as an expression of love rather than a form of work' in the mid-to-late century.<sup>213</sup> This paradigm was reproduced across visual culture in the 1780s, as the pleasures of maternal nursing were extolled over the shallow satisfactions to be had from the fashionable world. A medley of prints including John Gerhard Huck's afore discussed *The Good Mother* (1787), George Morland's *The Happy Family* (1787) and William Martin's *the Interior of an English Cottage* (1788) praised women who despite their plain dress and modest surroundings, were fulfilled by their maternal role. But a competing representation of maternal care emerged alongside these images; depictions of fashionable women attending to their infants and even breastfeeding began to flourish across Europe. Prints such as Peltro William Tomkins' *He Sleeps* (1789) showed extravagantly attired, attractive young mothers competently and contentedly caring for their babies.

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<sup>212</sup> Ventura, *Maternal Breastfeeding*, 13.

<sup>213</sup> Shepard, 229.



Fig. 3.53 Peltro William Tomkins, *He Sleeps*, 1789. BM no. 19121219.35

Finally, it seemed, moralising and medical efforts to encourage maternal breastfeeding had paid off. Concern soon spread, however, that they had been *too* successful. Following the example of sartorial roles models such as the Duchess of Devonshire, young mothers were not surrendering their fashionable lifestyles but were rather integrating maternity into them. As the cultural glorification of nurturing grew so did unease that participation in it was increasingly unnatural. Moralists, physicians and philosophers fretted that women were keen to emulate the good

nursing mother but weren't much interested in fulfilling the sentimental ideals which ran alongside it, or even in pulling off the practice properly. Accordingly, graphic satirists turned their attention to the urban, upper-class mother and the modish dress that enabled her role as a functional yet fashionable caregiver. If moralists at the beginning of the 1780s worried that transitory and impractical fashions were preventing mothers from being hands-on, they were now anxious that maternity – and breastfeeding itself - had become a kind of throw-away, conceited fashion.

The fashionable mother of the 1790s, Wahrman observes, 'wore her maternal role on her sleeve.'<sup>214</sup> Captured by Gillray in his 1796 print *The Fashionable Mamma, -or- The Convenience of Modern Dress*, this criticism emanated from concerns that middle and upper-class women were breastfeeding simply to be in fashion. Developments in maternity garments did little to quell this unease; the convenient 'modern dress' worn by Gillray's fashionable mamma is also the centrepiece of John Kay's *Modern Nursing* (1796), a work which imitates the fashion plate genre to depict an infant breastfeeding through a slit in a neoclassical style dress. Although both mothers technically fulfil the Rousseauvian principles of natural motherhood, their sentimental participation is remiss. Gillray's fashionable mamma, McCreery argues, nurses not because she feels morally or medically compelled to, but rather to 'persuade society, and indeed herself' that she is a good mother.<sup>215</sup> Examining medical discourses on women's health and dress, Andrew McInnes finds that the faddish dress of the print's title serves as a metaphor for the failings of the mother herself. It allows Gillray, he argues, to critique both 'the flimsiness of modern fashions' and the 'matching lassitude in [upper-class] women's moral fibre.'<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 66.

<sup>215</sup> McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 192.

<sup>216</sup> Andrew McInnes, "Amazonian Fashions: Lady Delacour's (Re)Dress in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*" in *Picturing Women's Health* ed. Francesca Scott, Kate Scarth and Ji Won Chung (London: Routledge, 2014), 29-44, 33.



Fig. 3.54 Gillray, *The Fashionable Mamma, - or - The Convenience of Modern Dress*, 1796. BM Satires 8897

In keeping with the fashions of the day, the fashionable mamma wears a loose-fitting dress, an ostrich feather headdress and ornate jewellery. But what is most striking is the customisation of her gown – two slits allow her to breastfeed without removing stays and other underclothes.<sup>217</sup> This design also permits minimum physical connection between mother and child; helped by a nursemaid, the lady does not hold or look at the infant but instead uses a single hand to maintain its latch. Donald describes her gaze as a look of ‘glacial unconcern’, as the child is held aloft and away from the rest of her pristine outfit.<sup>218</sup> This lack of intimacy is augmented by other eyes on the scene; the supervision of the nurse and the voyeuristic gaze of the coachman outside transform what should be a private exchange into a public spectacle. Gillray may have got inspiration for the nurse, McCreery argues, from his aforementioned *Lady Termagant Flaybum* (1786) which provides a similar representation of a maidservant who ‘proves to be a more ‘natural’ carer than the biological mother.’<sup>219</sup>

The failings of Gillray’s fashionable aristocratic mother come into closer focus upon consideration of her maternal better, the rural woman pictured in the portrait of ‘Maternal Love’ which hangs on the wall. The enthusiasm to condemn upper-class women as bad mothers in the 1780s continued into the 1790s, as did the valorisation of the rural poor mother. The ‘sincerity’ and ‘naturalness’ of the latter, McCreery argues, was used to shed light on the disingenuousness of upper-class mothering practices.<sup>220</sup> A paragon of maternal virtue, the rural mother in Gillray’s print feeds her baby beneath the boughs of a tree in the vein of the many European portraits which, following the tradition of Rousseau, celebrated the naturalness of maternal

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<sup>217</sup> In the nineteenth-century maternity corsets were designed to be unfastened to allow easier access to the breast. See the illustration: León and Jules Rainal, *A nurse’s corset (corset de nourrice)*, *Catalogue générale* (Paris: Imprimerie Générale Lahure, 1905), 74, cat. 2097.

<sup>218</sup> Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, 105.

<sup>219</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 196.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

breastfeeding.<sup>221</sup> Unlike the fashionable mamma and her child, the mother and baby are a unit – their affectionate embrace and matching clothes speak to their natural connection. The mother's white clothes imply her moral authority - McCreery goes as far as to suggest that the white' flowing dress and headscarf 'recall images of Mary suckling the infant Jesus', distinguishing her as the ultimate model of self-sacrificial femininity.<sup>222</sup> Unlike the ostentatiously decorated aristocratic mother, her priorities lie with her child rather than with her fashionable image.

Scholars have observed how the ostrich plumes of the fashionable mamma's headpiece advertise her spuriousness; McCreery writes that the feathers and those that wore them were 'harshly attacked by contemporaries for their alleged depravity.'<sup>223</sup> Their most famous association was perhaps with the Duchess of Devonshire, whom Rauser remarks was 'widely lampooned' as the instigator of the frivolous craze amongst the beau monde.<sup>224</sup> The historian Martyn Powell observes that the feathers were 'reviled by contemporaries', in part due to their lavish connotations but also because they existed as a sign of 'unmaternal qualities.'<sup>225</sup> Rumoured to bury its head in the sand to avoid the demands of its offspring, the ostrich was held up as a rare example of an animal lacking maternal instinct.<sup>226</sup> In *The Fashionable Mamma* Gillray draws the lady's feathers reaching up towards the

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<sup>221</sup> Gillray's image of 'Maternal Love' is remarkably similar to Austin Legrand's *Jean Jacques Rousseau ou l'homme de la nature* for example, published a year before *The fashionable mamma*. The portrait similarly profiles a mother feeding from her left breast, dressed in white, tenderly cradling her baby beneath a tree. She is forgiven for not looking at her baby because she is busy gazing with deference upon the figure of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who presents her with a posy of flowers. Beneath the painting's title Legrand writes of Rousseau, 'Il rendit les Meres a leurs devoirs et les Enfants au bonheur': he returned mothers to their work and children to their happiness. The French artist Jean-Baptiste Greuze also produced a number of portraits of breastfeeding mothers in the eighteenth-century. For examples see *Silence!* (Paris: 1759), Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 405080; *The Happy Mother* (Paris: c.1755), Museum Boijmans Van Beunigen Collection online.

<sup>222</sup> McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 194.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>224</sup> Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," 30. The Duchess and her Whig coterie were frequently depicted dwarfed by the huge feathers, their presence often coinciding with critiques on their neglect of domestic duties.

<sup>225</sup> Martyn Powell, *The Politics of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 49.

<sup>226</sup> In fact, the ostrich used its head to bury its eggs in the sand.

portrait of Maternal Love, underscoring the moral discrepancy between the two figures and positioning the latter as an aspirational model.



Fig. 3.55 and 3.56 Detail from *The Fashionable Mamma*

Gillray weaponises the fashionable mamma's breast to suggest the sexual depravity of the modern upper-class mother-woman. McInnes argues that her breasts are drawn 'pornographically', with their peek-a-boo appearance through the slit material inviting the male gaze.<sup>227</sup> Her right breast and nipple point towards the front of the frame even though there is no justification for its exposure - unlike the other naked breasts in the print, it is not nursing. Whilst the rural mother's non-

<sup>227</sup> McInnes, "Amazonian Fashions," 33, 34.

nursing breast is demurely covered by the infant's head, the fashionable mamma's naked breast gestures to her erotic identity. A similar point was made in the anonymous print *La mere a la mode. – La mere telle que toutes devriant etre* (c. 1790s), in which a fashionable mother with licentiously bared breasts is compared to a good, hands-on mother whose breasts are pointedly hidden by a bountiful basket of fruit. Despite Gillray's titillating characterisation of the fashionable mamma, the lady is less physically attractive than her rural counterpart. Whilst the rural mother's cheeks and lips are naturally flushed, the lady has one of the 'made up faces' so deplored by *The Lady's Magazine*. This distinction is woven into the details of the print; the mamma's sitting room, with its green walls and floral carpet, is a bad burlesque of the verdant surrounds in which the rural mother nurses. Just as her internal décor is a forced imitation of the natural beauty of the outside world, the fashionable mamma doesn't convince of her role as a natural nurturer. The effortless, instinctive and thus beautiful manner in which the rural mother discharges her duties earns her attractiveness; even her breast is fuller and more rounded than the small and flat breasts of her aristocratic counterpart.

It is worth noting here that Gillray draws neither the breasts of the fashionable nor the rural mother particularly accurately. Recently, Ventura has argued that artists widely failed to depict the maternal breast in all its 'naturalness', omitting details such as the darkening of the areolas and the coarse nodes (known today as Montgomery's tubercles) which lubricate the breast for feeding. Ventura ventures that these were not oversights but rather deliberate artistic efforts to maintain the illusion of the unblemished 'splendour' of the maternal body.<sup>228</sup> Whilst it is tempting to see such omissions as a result of male ignorance, numerous satirical depictions of the postpartum breast show this not to be true. Gillray's *Sin, Death, and the Devil* (1792) for instance, pictures mother-of-fifteen Queen Charlotte as an unattractive, useless hag with a wrinkled, paunched stomach and flaccid, dangling breasts, even though she did not breastfeed.<sup>229</sup>

Medical men like Smith, Cadogan and Buchan however, did downplay how the breast would be altered - in shape, size and firmness especially – by nursing.

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<sup>228</sup> Ventura, *Maternal Breastfeeding*, 31.

<sup>229</sup> For more on this print see Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature*, 12-32; David Taylor, 168-175; Christopher John Murray, *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 421.



Instead of informing mothers about postnatal changes, they focused instead on the chaste affection they would receive from those around them: ‘a chaste and tender wife, with a little one at her breast’ Smith reassured expectant mothers, ‘is certainly, to her husband, the most exquisitely enchanting object upon earth.’<sup>230</sup> Those who followed the ‘silly doctrines, or the deceitful arts, of fashion’ on the other hand, Buchan warned, would see their ‘charms fade’, their constitution ‘ruined’ and their husband’s love ‘vanish with her shadowy attractions.’<sup>231</sup> These persuasive discourses encouraged women like Gillray’s fashionable mamma to take up breastfeeding, but failed to confront the realities of breastfeeding and maternal care. This had severe ramifications for some infants, who received insufficient care from mothers who – often through no fault of their own – were ill-equipped to meet their needs.<sup>232</sup>

Maria Edgeworth highlighted this danger in her 1801 novel *Belinda*, a work pitched as a ‘Moral Tale’ and published just two years prior to Buchan’s *Advice to Mothers*.<sup>233</sup> Scholars including Batchelor, Perry and Ula Klein have explored how Edgeworth uses the breasts of her character of Lady Delacour to explore the interlinking issues of fashion, maternal transgression, sentimentality and for Klein, ‘Sapphic feelings and connections.’<sup>234</sup> Batchelor notes that the novel associates fashion with ‘performativity and affectation’, construing it as an obstacle to Lady’s Delacour’s ‘fulfilment of the duties of a wife and mother.’<sup>235</sup> A character whom Perry writes is ‘driven by love of admiration to extravagance and affection’, Lady Delacour remembers choosing to breastfeed because it was in vogue and promised veneration: ‘it was the fashion at the time for fine mothers to suckle their own children’, she remembers, ‘there was a prodigious rout made about the matter; a vast deal of sentiment and sympathy, and compliments and inquiries.’<sup>236</sup> When the

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<sup>230</sup> Hugh Smith, 78-9.

<sup>231</sup> Buchan, 61.

<sup>232</sup> For scholarly work on maternal transgression in the eighteenth-century, see footnote 4 in chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>233</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801) ed. Linda Bree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>234</sup> Batchelor, 151-177; Perry, 231-2; Ula Klein, “Bosom Friends and the Sapphic Breasts of *Belinda*” *ABO Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts 1640-1830* 3, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>235</sup> Batchelor, 169.

<sup>236</sup> Perry, 231.

process doesn't go well, she forgoes using a wet nurse for fear of being labelled an 'unnatural mother.' The consequences are tragic:

After the novelty was over, I became heartily sick of the business; and at the end of about three months my poor child was sick too – I don't much like to think of it – it died. If I had put it out to nurse, I should have been thought of by my friends as an unnatural mother – but I should have saved its life. [...] if ever I had another child I would not have the barbarity to nurse it myself.<sup>237</sup>

In her discussion of Lady Delacour's failure to nurse and her later injured and supposedly diseased breast, Klein finds that *Belinda* 'challenges the view that a mother's own milk is the perfect solution for the child's and the nation's health.'<sup>238</sup> When viewed alongside prints like *The Fashionable Mamma*, Lady Delacour's experience suggests the recklessness of pressuring mothers to nurse regardless of their ability or commitment. Whilst Buchan proclaimed that it would halt the 'cruel ravages of death in early life', and voices like Rousseau predicted it would 'bring everything back together', late century representations of fashionable mothers breastfeeding demonstrates an anxious awareness of the precarity of maternal nurture.<sup>239</sup> *Belinda* joins with 1780s and 1790s prints which characterise the fashionable woman as incompatible with maternity. Those who revelled in excessive and dissipated fashionable lifestyles, Buchan deigned, would be cursed with 'unfruitful' nuptial beds or else able to produce only a 'puny race', their weak offspring 'hapless victims' of their parent's imprudence.<sup>240</sup> Raising the stakes of discussions about fashion corroding morality, these materials used the breast to point out the estrangement, falsity and inexperience which fashionable women brought to motherhood. Nurturing motherhood was cast as the touchstone for a stable, virtuous society; one which was endangered by women's absorption in the self-indulgent, impractical and fickle rhythms of fashion.

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<sup>237</sup> Edgeworth, 39.

<sup>238</sup> Klein, 4.

<sup>239</sup> Buchan, 62.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

## Conclusion

Although there is much in terms of content to separate fashion prints of the 1780s, the 1790s and those which focused on fashionable mothers, the anxieties which colour them are conspicuous in their continuity. One principal charge is levied against their targets; that they are estranged from the 'natural.' Whether due to excess, concealment or indecent exposure, women are presented as preposterous and perverse. Ever an enemy of nature, fashion emerged as a scapegoat in discourses which sought to remind women of their virtuous roles as wives and mothers. Whether such observations on the unnatural were productive is up for debate. In 1791, the German born, London dwelling pastor Frederick Augustus Wendeborn, declared that 'neither caricatures exhibited at the windows of printshops, nor satirical paragraphs in newspapers, against ridiculous fashions, prove of any effect. The former are stared and laughed at, on passing them in the streets... without effecting the least reformation.'<sup>241</sup> Images of breasts within fashion prints played their part in eliciting these reactions; ogled and laughed at, they offered entertainment under the guise of fashion advice or moral instruction. Moved to amuse with their wry observations on extreme dress, graphic satirists drew on entrenched concepts of race, class and gender to create playful portraits of aspirants in a variety of outrageous, compromising and comical positions which visibly confirmed their impressionable and immodest characters.

Satirical takes on fashionable and unfashionable breasts were also, however, explicitly political. Fashion is more than the material; it is an experience encompassing place, space, roles and identities. Whilst objects of fashion may impel it and make it physical, its meaning hinges on nascent social, political, medical, artistic and scientific discourses. The devoted makers and followers of fashion – as well as its most virulent critics – all participated in, and affected changes to, these discourses. In caricaturing the fashionable breast graphic satirists spoke to the contested realities of the female experience, especially as related to sex and motherhood - the two subjectivities mostly visible in the breast. In culturally representing sartorial, sexual and maternal transgressions they queried feminine ideals and drew attention to disparities between medical instruction, advice literature

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<sup>241</sup> Frederick Augustus Wendeborn, *A View of England Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. I (London: G. G. J and J. Robinson, 1791), 439.

and experience. In particular, their responses to fashionable mothers undermined dominant medical and moral claims scaffolded around the notion of nurture – and breastfeeding – as effortless and intuitive. Presenting fashion as a practical and metaphorical barrier to ‘natural’ maternal feeling, satirists drew attention to the gulfs between medical instruction, conduct advice and the maternal care women were willing to provide.

Above all, late century fashion prints reveal how graphic satirists fell back upon the breast to communicate transgressions. So pervasive were ideas about its ideal appearance and function that it was easily appropriated for admonishing agendas. Satirists avoided being too caustic, however, by only lightly - if at all - caricaturing the breast. Whilst undoubtedly expressions of anxiety, fashion prints provided an opportunity to titillate audiences, and there is a sense that satirists are seeking to draw in, rather than disgust, viewers. The most vitriolic characterisations of the breast were reserved for social and political satires, which employed the grotesque to relay the depraved threat of the old, the sick and the supernatural.

## Chapter Three

### The Grotesque Breast

The grotesque incarnates in eighteenth-century caricatures of the breast. Withered, baggy and bulging, grotesque breasts hold a satirical mirror up to the unpalatable, the threatening and the incomprehensible. Their presence in the following prints signposts that somewhere, somehow, something has gone wrong; social evils rage, the constitution is in chaos, regimes decline, and gendered orders are upset. Caricatures of breasts urge viewers to recoil from, sneer at and pity problematic bodies and behaviours, endorsing ideological positions by contrasting them with a grotesque other. To begin, this chapter turns to caricatures of mortal women, examining the breasts of old crones, drunken hags and rapacious fishwives as satiric symbols of social debility, decay and corruption. From here, it moves to consider mythological and supernatural representations, exploring how caricaturists imagined the grotesque breasts of gruesome gorgon Medusas, witches and demons. Foregrounding images of sexual manipulation and political meddling, it demonstrates how caricaturists made visual connections between female interference and the supposed latent monstrosity of the female body. Together, these two sections show how caricaturists collared the grotesque breast to emblematised broken, unproductive and unsettling aspects of eighteenth-century life. This discussion is deepened by consideration of the grotesque breast not solely as a symbol, but as a vehicle through which graphic satirists apportioned blame and shame. In positioning 'types' of women as responsible for social problems including addiction, maternal neglect, sexual depravity and masculine fragility, caricaturists worked to shift attention away from constitutional failures and towards individual accountability. As ever, satirising the breast meant making the political personal.

#### Notes on the Grotesque

What the grotesque *is*, what it means and how it functions has long been debated by theoreticians. Grotesque expert Geoffrey Harpham perhaps summed up the scholarly struggle best by declaring that 'in mastering the field, one watches it

atomise into fine mist.’ The grotesque, he mused later in his career, is ‘the slipperiest of aesthetic categories.’<sup>1</sup> What makes it so difficult to pin down is what makes it so compelling; it is steady in its provocation of the absurd, the unsettling and the ‘other’, but transmutes according to time, place, subject and medium of expression. What is experienced as grotesque hinges on the context in which it is presented and to whom it is presented. As Marina Warner remarks, the grotesque ‘is a mood, not only a style’ and its ‘special flavour’ is contingent on the cultural anxieties of any given moment.<sup>2</sup> The history of the grotesque is as slippery as its definition; that scholars are so divided about its origins, manifestations and legacies speaks to its mutable nature.<sup>3</sup> Some trace its roots back to antiquity, others situate its emergence in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, whilst another subset including the Shakespeare scholar Bernard McElroy and the early literary critic William Van O’Connor argue that the twentieth-century homed its ‘most characteristic expression.’<sup>4</sup>

Despite this dissensus, the geneses of the concept and term grotesque is typically attributed to fifteenth-century Italy, when the residents of Rome began reproducing the strange and fantastical decorative art found in the excavated ruins of underground chambers referred to as ‘grotte.’ These grotte or caves led to the literalisation of the word grotesque or ‘grotto-esque’, which was subsequently applied to that which intermingled with, but was separate to, known reality. Numerous scholars such as Philip Thomson, Michael J. Matt and Shun-Liang Chao have provided historical trajectories of ‘groteskology’ – the theoretical study of the grotesque – reviewing how the field has been shaped by philosophers, artists and literary critics including Charles Baudelaire, Wolfgang Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Harpham, “The Grotesque: First Principles” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 4 (1976), 461-68, 461; *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), 260.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia E. Swain, *Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau, and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard McElroy, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 16-17; William Van O’Connor, *The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962). The twentieth-century grotesque, Van O’Connor noted has ‘developed in response to our age, to atom bombs and great social changes’ (6).

Kristeva and Michel Foucault.<sup>5</sup> These histories do not require repeating, but it is worth signposting those works which, largely due to their interest in visual art and the feminine corporeal, inform how the present investigation approaches grotesque breasts.

For Kayser, the aesthetic category of the grotesque has three components, ‘the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception.’<sup>6</sup> In a thesis which is first and foremost an investigation of representations, this chapter is primarily interested in the grotesque as it manifests in the work of art itself. However, through close analysis of satirical prints it pays careful attention to how the creative process of caricaturing breasts was impacted by ideas about the public perception and reception of the grotesque. Before Kayser, the nineteenth-century poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire warned that the grotesque was not reducible to its visual phenomena. As Swain explains, Baudelaire approached the grotesque not just as a ‘graphic play’ or a ‘painter’s dream’, but as an intangible process which could only be represented indirectly and improperly. Visual creations should be understood as unfinished, metamorphic; Swain writes that they ‘can only hint at’ the ‘invisible and never-ending process’ of the grotesque.<sup>7</sup> The enigma, incessance and variability associated with the grotesque lends itself particularly well to aberrant visions of femininity. Reflecting on this long association, literary theorist Marry Russo connects the aforementioned ‘grotte’ or caves which triggered the term grotesque to historical assumptions about the cavernous and cryptic anatomy of the female body. Russo

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<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Matthis, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Grotesque: the Subjective Turn in Aesthetics from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020); Shun-Liang Chao, *Rethinking the Concept of the Grotesque: Crashaw, Baudelaire, Magritte* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2017); Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1972; New York: Routledge, 2018); Isabelle Hervouet-Farrar and Max Vega-Ritter (eds), *The Grotesque in the Fiction of Charles Dickens and Other 19th-Century European Novelists* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Grotesque* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 16-35.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1963), 180.

<sup>7</sup> Swain, 12. For more on Baudelaire and the grotesque, see Michele Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 1992), especially 21-3, 36-8, 192-4, 207-10.

argues that writers and artists have primarily – although not exclusively – located the terrible, excessive power of the primal, generative and visceral in the female body.<sup>8</sup>

Excess is an important motif in the grotesque; from Bakhtin's early assessment of the terracotta figurines of laughing, 'senile, pregnant hags' as the most forceful image of the grotesque, the physical extremes and surpluses of femininity have inspired reflection on the undisciplined nimety of womanhood more widely.<sup>9</sup> The grotesque body, Bakhtin proposes, is 'ugly, monstrous, hideous' because it jars with the classical aesthetic of the 'ready-made and the completed.' This image of completion stems from the notion of 'the completed man', who Bakhtin argues was perceived as 'cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development.'<sup>10</sup> Drawing further on Bakhtin's theory of 'grotesque realism', Russo argues that the grotesque body belongs to the carnival, construed as 'open, protruding, extended... secreting, the body of becoming, process and change.' It is connected, Russo continues, 'to the rest of the world', reaching outwards as opposed to the 'monumental, static, closed and sleek' body.<sup>11</sup>

Russo is not, but could be, describing breasts. Breasts protrude, are extensions to the archetypally masculine bound body, secrete fluids and are central to biological processes of 'becoming': they develop in puberty, can facilitate childrearing, and change with age.<sup>12</sup> Breasts, as the most visible and 'public' part of eighteenth-century female physicality, signpost all that is grotesquely open, generative and subject to change. Easily linked to sex, birth and renewal, death and decay, they are a point of exchange between the body and the world and can thus be lowered and degraded, as Bakhtin envisioned, like the mouth, anus, phallus and vagina.<sup>13</sup> As the scholar of shame J. Brooks Bouson points out, Russo 'places a positive value on the grotesque.' Certainly, Russo insists on its 'subversive, transgressive power', showing

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Russo, 63.

<sup>12</sup> The classical conception of 'the completed man', Bakhtin argues, was 'cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development' (25).

<sup>13</sup> Bakhtin, 20, 317.



how it offers new possibilities for normative female appearances, desires and roles.<sup>14</sup> The grotesque might be ‘used affirmatively’, Russo proposes, ‘to destabilise the idealisations of female beauty, or to realign the mechanisms of desire.’<sup>15</sup> This perspective has been challenged by feminists such as Erica McWilliams who contends that in glorifying the capacity of the grotesque female body to disrupt hegemonic narratives, scholars such as Russo have failed to recognise the extent to which the grotesque is weaponised against women. Its positive potentialities are curtailed, McWilliams continues, by its consignment of nonconformity to the alternative realm of the fantastic, a displacement which closes down ‘an essential politics of political emancipation.’ The space it opens for resistance is a space of indulgence rather than productive realism, and thus cannot further a progressive female identity.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, Russo’s positioning of the female grotesque as a functional aesthetic provides a useful lens through which to consider why grotesque breasts recur so consistently in eighteenth-century caricatures concerned with agency and transgression. In stressing the destabilising potential of the grotesque, Russo builds upon Kristeva’s theory of abjection as set out in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva holds that in rejecting the ‘other’ through expulsive processes, grotesque bodies can resist and subvert the gender codes which are associated with corporeality.<sup>17</sup> Placing fluids such as sweat, vomit and blood at the centre of abject expulsions, Kristeva identifies the maternal body as ‘the corporeal manifestation of horror.’<sup>18</sup> As literary scholar Joshua R. Eyler summarises in his study of aging women and disability, for Kristeva the maternal body is ‘the horror zone, the transgression zone.’<sup>19</sup> Breasts, and breast milk, can be considered abject: they blur the physical boundaries between interior and exterior, self and other and wield a distinctly feminised power that may be experienced as threatening or viscerally

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<sup>14</sup> J. Brooks Bouson, *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women’s Writings* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2009), 185.

<sup>15</sup> Russo, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Erica McWilliam, “The Grotesque Body as a Feminist Aesthetic?” *Counterpoints* 168 (2003), 213-21, 220.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Edwards and Graulund, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua R. Eyler, *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 205.

repulsive. The maternal function of the breast violates its sexual significance, displacing that which is familiar in moments of visible, sometimes involuntary, change such as lactation.

Feminist philosopher and theoretician Rosi Braidotti argues that the supposed reproductive potential of every woman provokes a 'unique blend of fascination and horror.'<sup>20</sup> Margaret Miles similarly recognises 'the collective male perspective of the public sphere' as associating the grotesque not with the non-human or monstrous, but with the female. Miles reasons that this is less to do with bodily form and more to do with generative acts, notably the 'quintessentially grotesque' and abject spectacles of childbirth and sexual intercourse. These events, Miles explains, have shaped suspicions about the 'irreducible element of monstrosity' lying latent in women. Such internal excesses were thought to materialise in threatening behaviours such as 'loquaciousness [and] aggressiveness' which supported discrediting discourses of undisciplined and unruly femininity.<sup>21</sup> As old structures were queried and new revolutions got underway in the second half of the eighteenth century, the admixed realism of grotesque breasts aided the recognition, understanding and management of threats to and transgressions of the world order.

In his study of art and the grotesque, Thomson observes that it dominates during periods of 'strife, radical change and disorientation.' The grotesque is a mode, he writes, through which societies negotiate the 'problematical nature of existence.'<sup>22</sup> Kayser similarly observed that the grotesque arises when collective belief in a 'perfect and protective natural order' ceases to exist. Belief in order is replaced by fear of disorder, a 'helplessness and horror', which artists articulate and even try to quell by 'attempting to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world.'<sup>23</sup> Harpham agrees with this first point, that conditions of disorder give rise to the grotesque: 'the plain assumption of the grotesque', he writes, is that 'the rules of order have collapsed; for this reason it is strongest in eras of upheaval or crisis,

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<sup>20</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines" in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* ed. Kate Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59-79, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Miles, "Carnal Abominations: The Female Body as Grotesque" in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections* ed. James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 83-112, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Kayser, 188.

when old beliefs in old orders are threatened or crumbling.<sup>24</sup> Kayser and Harpham differ, however, on the matter of its function. Kayser sees the grotesque as an escapist, exorcist mode which presents a separate yet familiar reality to its audience: ‘the grotesque world is – and is not – our world.’ It does not recommend, nor provide a way in to, escaping reality, Kayser suggests, but rather offers a pressure valve and coping mechanism for it.<sup>25</sup> Harpham proposes the opposite, arguing that the grotesque goads audiences about uncomfortable, troubling and threatening aspects of society, dramatising the threat of specific moments, notions or figures.<sup>26</sup> Others have related its ascendancy during periods of unrest to a systemic desire for control, a perspective which is particularly applicable to grotesque caricatures of the female form.

Eighteenth-century advancements in anatomical knowledge, developments in Enlightenment systems of thought and growing challenges to the gendered order left understandings of and anxieties about women’s bodies, behaviours and roles in flux. This volatility saw efforts to manage women intensify. ‘The primary strategy for the control of women’, Miles puts forwards, ‘is their public representation.’<sup>27</sup> Graphic satire then, served as a regulatory institution, and its representations can accordingly be read through the prism of Michel Foucault’s arguments about the power, self-discipline and management of transgressive bodies. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault shows how institutional power works to normalise bodies through strategies of containment and alteration in an effort to protect social order.<sup>28</sup> Whilst Foucault’s examinations revolve around the hospital, the prison and the asylum, his work provides a useful way in to viewing the governing mechanisms of material culture,

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<sup>24</sup> Harpham, “The Grotesque: First Principles,” 466.

<sup>25</sup> Kayser, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Schuy R. Weishaar, *Masters of the Grotesque: The Cinema of Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, the Coen Brothers and David Lynch* (Jefferson, London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), 38-39.

<sup>27</sup> Miles, “Carnal Abominations,” 112.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: an Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1973); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995); *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I. *Introduction* (1976), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990); *The History of Sexuality*, vol. II. *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990); *The History of Sexuality*, vol. III. *The Care of the Self* (1984), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

and caricature in particular. According to Foucault, disciplinary technology sought to produce docile bodies, those which could be 'used, subjected, transformed, and improved.'<sup>29</sup> This process unfolded publicly in mid to late eighteenth-century caricature, as female 'types' such as old women, prostitutes and monstrous mothers were made metamorphic through their material, imaginative representation. Representations of aberrant bodies who fell outside socio-political norms provided reassurance, Miles writes, 'that they could and should be managed.'<sup>30</sup>

Yet as we have seen, satirical representations offered space for resistance as well as regulation; by including subjects for destabilisation, they advertise and even augment their power. Discussing grotesque female corporeality, Elizabeth Hunt holds that 'whilst it is difficult to make progressive claims for work that so ruthlessly degrades the status of the female body', such negative images do establish the 'significance of transgressive women in our past.' The work that grotesque caricatures did, Hunt continues, was similar to that of fashion prints; in representing negative identities, both 'ultimately functioned as a feint that disguised the very real danger' that was posed by those who rejected social self-discipline in favour of individualism. If, as Hunt, Foucault, Russo and other theorists suggest, unnatural, monstrous and absurd women were experienced as 'vectors for the reproduction of culturally destructive desires', then paying close attention to how their breasts were represented as grotesque provides insight into the gendered threat that they posed.<sup>31</sup>

### **'Old' Breasts and Social Decline**

In 1777, the *London Magazine* published a letter proposing a tax on 'older' women. Those still single at thirty-five, the author suggested, should be immediately prevented from marrying. 'At that period', they reasoned, 'they shall be deemed incapable of performing any of the necessary functions incident to such happy state.'<sup>32</sup> As McCreery has noted, it is unclear whether this suggestion was sincere or

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136.

<sup>30</sup> Miles, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Hunt, "A Carnival of Mirrors," 107, 106.

<sup>32</sup> "To The Editor of the London Magazine," *London Magazine* (March 1777), 133.

satirical.<sup>33</sup> Other sources do, however, express similar attitudes. In a 1783 issue of the *Rambler's Magazine* a correspondent went even further in declaring that an 'old maid' was the 'opposite to everything that nature constituted amiable, generous, good, or true. She is the pest of society... a Pharisee in the eye of Heaven and a rank putrid abomination to the deity.'<sup>34</sup> This impression of 'old' single women as useless nuisances, McCreery writes, arose from presumptions about infertility.<sup>35</sup> In a culture that valorised maternity, women who had realised or unfilled their reproductive potential were considered redundant at best and a scourge on society at worst. As historian Bridget Hill explains in her investigation of early modern spinsters, not only did old women 'not help boost the population', they also 'drained precious social resources.'<sup>36</sup> Susannah Ottaway presents similar findings in her study on age and decline, demonstrating how women who were not 'actively engaged in producing or training children' were marginalised and maligned.<sup>37</sup> This condemnation is especially visible in graphic satire, where older women are presents as objects of suspicion and disgust.

In her discussion of 'old maids, merry widows and cosy wives' in eighteenth-century prints, McCreery surveys images of women over the age of thirty-five.<sup>38</sup> These women, McCreery argues, were in the minority; most of the actresses, artists, courtesans, sex workers, writers, politicians, wives and mothers featured in prints were younger. The reason for this was simple: older women were less attractive, and

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<sup>33</sup> McCreery, "Lustful Widows and Old Maids in Late Eighteenth-Century English Caricatures" in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century* ed. Katherine Kittredge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 112-32, 114.

<sup>34</sup> 'Sketch of an Old Maid', *Rambler's Magazine* (May 1783), 176.

<sup>35</sup> McCreery, "Lustful Widows," 113.

<sup>36</sup> Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Susan R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

<sup>38</sup> As McCreery explains in *The Satirical Gaze*, people were considered to be middle-aged or old earlier than they are today. McCreery notes that many social commentators marked thirty-five as the 'beginning of old age for women.' This categorisation, she shows, is even evident not just in cultural materials but in social policy: in the nineteenth-century, women over this age were denied assisted passages to Queensland 'on the basis that they were no longer marriageable' and were not good candidates for increasing the colonial population (214) See also Helen Woolcock, *Rights of Passage: Emigration to Australia in the Nineteenth-Century* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1986), 36-7.

therefore less likely to entice print viewers and purchasers. But as McCreery points out, their underrepresentation ‘does not tell the whole story.’<sup>39</sup> Whilst they did not appear so often and were treated differently to young women, they were a staple feature of personal, social and political satire. The very fact of their behavioural and aesthetic unattractiveness made them excellent candidates for caricature: across the century, their decrepit and degenerate bodies were enthusiastically wheeled out to signpost the sins of the female sex as well as that of society more widely.

Breasts were at the forefront of these reckonings – if, as Yalom maintains, the bountiful lactating breast became ‘sexy’ in the mid-to-late century, then the older breast was its unerotic other.<sup>40</sup> Older breasts that no longer lactated - or which were presumed to have never lactated - were figured as grotesque: pendulous, pale, parted and shrivelled, often with grossly distended nipples. Brazenly exposed, they highlighted the arid, used up woman whose wayward desires ran contrary to the patriarchal, pronatalist social order. How old grotesque breasts were represented in public spaces was inherently political. As Wagner puts it, ‘the breast became the bearer of signs about women’s limitations in the public sphere’, as well of the breakdown of that sphere’s social order itself.<sup>41</sup> This dualism of the breast lent itself particularly well to caricatures of the older female body, which sought to represent women as liabilities at the centre of civic disorder.

In 1788 Rowlandson designed a pair of contrastive prints critiquing the Regency Crisis.<sup>42</sup> *The Times* and *A Touch on the Times* were a homage to William Hogarth’s earlier set of plates *The Times* (1762), which ruminated on the corruption and chaos surrounding the rule of George III. Rowlandson’s works picture one reality in which the Prince’s ascension in the wake of his father’s illness is supported and successful, and another in which his suitability is doubted.<sup>43</sup> In the second print, a series of parodies show the coronation to be a disaster: the throne is cracked, Britannia has cloven hoofs and the patriotic figures of Liberty and Justice are

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<sup>39</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 212-251.

<sup>40</sup> Yalom, 120.

<sup>41</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 64.

<sup>42</sup> The second plate was not published until 1790 by John Boydell, when he collated a set of Hogarth’s engravings.

<sup>43</sup> For more on George III’s mental and physical illness, and its constitutional significance, see Colley, 195-236.

replaced by the manipulative duo Sheridan and Fox.<sup>44</sup> Breasts offer a further point of contrast between the two scenarios; the figure of Commerce (bottom left in each print) undergoes a grotesque transformation in line with the deterioration of the polity, and three grotesque female Furies (far right in each), are variously contained and uncontained according to the separate social realities.

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<sup>44</sup> Sheridan steals the Prince's handkerchief as he steers him by the shoulder. The depravity of their power is marked by a money bag inscribed 'virtue' which decorates the throne. George provides a comprehensive description of the pieces and their contents at BM Satires 7386 and 7387.



Fig. 4.1 Rowlandson, *The Times*, 1788. BM Satires 7386



Fig. 4.2 Rowlandson, *A Touch on the Times*, 1788. BM Satires 7387



In *The Times* the grotesque breasted, haggish Furies represent rebellion. Drawn as half-naked hags with pointy, hooked noses, sunken eyes and snaked hair, they are 'maniacal and screaming' visions of grotesque, hysterical femininity.<sup>45</sup> Banished by Britannia along with their failed protector William Pitt, they cower and choke in terror. In *A Touch on the Times* the scene is switched as Pitt becomes their assailant, declaring 'I could soon extinguish these Puppet Show Vapours if properly supported', eager to quash rebellions against a constitution he now has some chance of shaping. In each print the Furies' dangling, divided breasts embody the grotesque threat of unruly femininity. In line with Foucauldian ideas of representation, discipline and punishment, their bodies and behaviours are graphically penalised; Pitt stamps on one of their white-haired heads and extinguishes the 'rebellion' torch of another.



Fig. 4.3 Detail from *The Times*

Fig. 4.4 Detail from *A Touch on the Times*

<sup>45</sup> George, Vol. VI.

As a comparative device, the Furies' grotesque breasts are measured against the aesthetic ideal of Commerce's in *The Times*. As Michelle Hannoosh discusses of Baudelaire's nineteenth-century essays on caricature, the visual grotesque commonly 'functions as a means of contrast by which to perceive both the real... and the ideal, a term of comparison by which to gauge the beautiful.'<sup>46</sup> Such is the case in the juxtaposition of the Furies unsightly breasts and Commerce's attractive figure in *The Times*: her full breasts are demurely covered by a dress which falls seductively from one shoulder. This ideal, beautiful breast portends its grotesque inverse in *A Touch on the Times*, within which Commerce's appearance and behaviour has dramatically degenerated under a corrupt regime. Commerce is transformed from a comely young woman to a haggard old slattern; in 1880, Joseph Grego described her second character as a 'dissolute harridan, deep sunk in gin', whilst George notes her metamorphosis from a 'young woman' to a 'drunken hag.'<sup>47</sup> Neither Grego nor George remark on the change in her breasts, which visualise her fall from grace. Once full, covered and high, they are latterly bare and sagging.

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<sup>46</sup> Hannoosh, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Grego, *Rowlandson the Caricaturist: A Selection from his Works with Anecdotal Descriptions of his Famous Caricatures and A Sketch of his Life, Times, and Contemporaries*, vol. I. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1880), 232; George, vol. VI, 534.

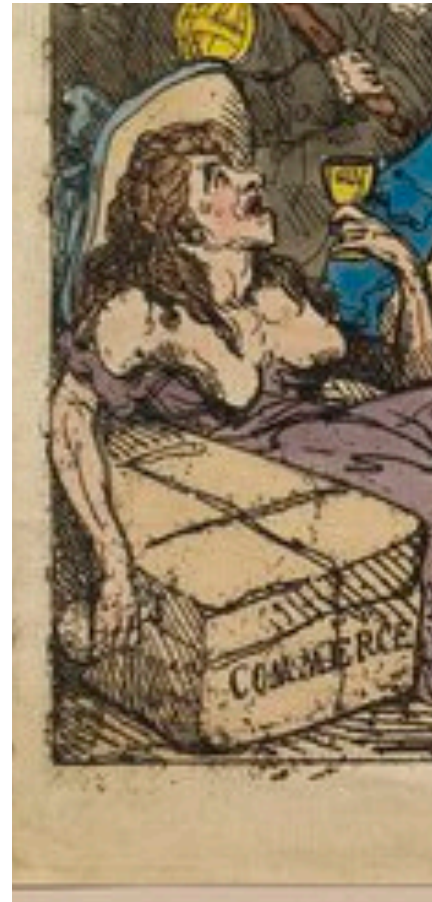


Fig. 4.5 Detail from *The Times*

Fig. 4.6 Detail from *A Touch on the Times*

Much of Commerce's transformation revolves around aging body; her pendulous breasts and lined skin suggest that time, poverty and poor behaviour have seen her formerly natural beauty decline. Apart from her drunkenness and sexual indiscretion, one of Commerce's main crimes is her attempt to cover up the ravages of time. Latching on to contemporary misgivings about artificiality and concealment, Rowlandson draws Commerce desperately trying to restore her youthful appearance by donning a fashionable hat, a girlish pink dress, overly curling her hair and using heavy cosmetics. An 'artificial visage' like this, the art historian Jennifer Van Horn explains, made some uneasy about women's ability to 'conceal defects and thus to disguise their true characters.' *A Touch on the Times* is in dialogue with aforementioned prints such as *Six Stages of Mending a Face* (1792), which showed the grotesque Lady Archer using makeup, false teeth and a wig to

transform herself from a bald and wrinkled crone to a 'sexually desirable' beauty.<sup>48</sup> Rowlandson's Commerce, however, is a less an object of scorn than of pity; her attempts at youth are unsuccessful, with her grotesque breasts most obviously giving the game away. A far cry from their former buxom selves, they are on full display to reveal the irreversible extent of her physical and moral decay, and analogously, the civic consequences of an ineffective and corrupt constitution. Sin and poverty, like age, cannot be plastered over.

Rowlandson's pathos-inducing characterisation of Commerce is reminiscent of Swift's poem 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed' (1731), a print discussed in chapter two for its reference to false bust-padding. A lament on a grotesque, diseased prostitute discarding her beauty aids at the end of the night, the poem prefigures Rowlandson's treatment of the sexually debauched aging female body. At least part of Commerce's corporeal and moral grotesqueness is bound up in sexual transgression; her haphazardly bared breast promotes her openly debauched and disorderly body, whilst the aptronym 'Commerce' advertises that she sells sex. As Laura Rosenthal shows in her study *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, sex work was increasingly understood as a transactional exchange rather than a process of pleasure. Across the century, Rosenthal argues, sex workers came to 'embody a new kind of commercial identity' which required the sacrifice of self to the demands of the marketplace.<sup>49</sup> The decline of Commerce's appearance then, and especially the change in her breasts, illustrates the erosion of the individual under the strain of an increasingly commercialised and commodified society. Rowlandson uses the dual role of the breast that Wagner observed to signal not just 'women's limitations in the public sphere', but the sicknesses of the sphere itself.

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<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Van Horn, *The Power of Objects in Eighteenth-Century British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 312. In *The Satirical Gaze*, McCreery points out the Lady Archer was also the inspiration for 'Lady Rouge-Dragon' in Christopher Anstey's satirical poem 'An Election Ball' (1776), and for Gillray's satire on old women and vanity, *The Finishing Touch* (1791). Such persistent criticisms of a public figure, McCreery argues, demonstrates 'that public condemnation of an old women's beauty regime was considered justified and even humorous when that women persisted in exposing herself to public view' (236).

<sup>49</sup> Laura J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 2.

Devoid of any generative potential, no longer aesthetically attractive and in need of reform, Commerce, her breast and by extension the body politic, have degenerated under the corrupt and chaotic reign of George III and the Prince of Wales. As well as an eye-sore, she is an economic burden who will require rehabilitation assistance from a charity such as the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes, an institution established in 1758 in an effort to relieve the growing problem of prostitution. As McCreery notes, 'growing concern about the behaviour of old women in late eighteenth-century England coincides with the greater economic and social burden these women represented.'<sup>50</sup> Much of the grotesqueness of Commerce's body lies in this image of her indecent and uninvited public display of sexuality as an old woman. This supports the stereotype of the older woman as a source of what Hill refers to as 'abnormal sexual appetite' who roams the street looking for, or selling, sex.<sup>51</sup>

In her impressive work on the grotesque as it manifests in the figure of the aging drunk woman, Rosemary Barrow identifies aged female sexuality as a taboo imagery which was embraced by the grotesque mode. Barrow remarks that the 'open and evolving' aging female body is grossly at odds with the 'sealed and impenetrable' ideal of the young, demure nude in the eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup> This distinction is clear in the contrasting body language of young and old Commerce; the former raises one hand in a display of humility whilst her elder opens her arms and surrenders all modesty, leaving her body exposed and vulnerable. This motif of openness is further reinforced by her open dress and crudely parted legs, which suggest her careless disregard for, or lack of control over, sexual modesty. Together, these details remind of Russo's observation of the grotesque body as one that extends itself 'to the rest of the world', rather than being 'monumental, static, closed and sleek.'<sup>53</sup> Commerce's extension of her body to the public sphere is grotesque because it is unsolicited and undesirable. The female grotesque, Barrow argues, 'subverts the male gaze and the traditional power dynamics of representation.'<sup>54</sup> In this case, Commerce's breast simultaneously attracts and repels the gaze, as

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<sup>50</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 213.

<sup>51</sup> Hill, 101.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemary Barrow, *Gender and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture*, ed. Michael Silk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 73.

<sup>53</sup> Russo, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Barrow, 73.

Rowlandson figures her body as an unpalatable reality that, like the crumbling state of the polity, cannot be overlooked.

For contemporary print enthusiasts, the figure of Commerce would have likely been familiar. Rowlandson's prints are in declared dialogue with Hogarth's earlier *The Times*, but Commerce references another infamous caricature by Hogarth. Her bare breasts, slack slump and gormless expression recall the drunk mother in *Gin Lane* (1751), which like *A Touch on the Times*, places transgressive motherhood and the grotesque breast at the forefront of social decline. The similarities between Rowlandson's drunk Commerce and Hogarth's intoxicated mother are striking; the two women even have their left legs bent at the knee and their right outstretched, making their silhouettes near identical. In alluding to this image, and especially in replicating the bare breast, Rowlandson makes connections between political corruption, female vice, the anti-maternal body and the ruined body politic.



Fig. 4.7 William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*, 1751. BM Satires 3136

Fig. 4.8 Detail from *A Touch on the Times*

In an 1833 collection of anecdotes about Hogarth's life and works, the editor reminded their readers that the characteristic 'moral tendency' of Hogarth's prints was realised 'by painting Vice in those true and disgusting colours which, by leading the mind to reflection, will induce it to embrace with zeal the cause of Virtue.'<sup>55</sup> In *Gin Lane*, the grotesque breast serves as one of these 'true and disgusting colours', urging viewers to check their own virtue by noticing another's lack. It is unclear how old the mother-hag is, but her face and body have been ravaged by her addiction –

<sup>55</sup> William Hogarth, *Anecdotes of William Hogarth Written by Himself; with Essays on His Life and Genius, and Criticisms on His Works, Selected from Walpole, Gilpin, J. Ireland, Lamb, Philips, and Others, &c.* (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1833), iv.

she is haggard, covered in sores and her breasts sag like Commerce's. Perhaps they are sagged from protracted breastfeeding or perhaps their deflation indicates an absence of maternal identity – either way, her grotesque breast is measured against an implicit, ideal 'other' – contained, bountiful and fit for maternal purpose.

Like Rowlandson's *A Touch on the Times*, Hogarth's *Gin Lane* was designed to be viewed alongside its companion print, *Beer Street* (1751). Whilst *Gin Lane* mourns a degenerated London suffering the effects of the gin craze, *Beer Street* (1751) pictures a harmonious polity enjoying beer.<sup>56</sup> As with *The Times* and *A Touch on the Times*, *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* feature two contrasting images of the breast – one demurely covered and compact and the other grotesquely pendent and exposed – to didactically compare prosperity and peace with decay and disarray. Tellingly, and as with Rowlandson's *The Times*, there is no bare breast in *Beer Street* (1751). Instead, there is a romantic scene in which an attractive, visibly younger woman is flattered by a suitor who suggestively places his hand on her clothed bosom.

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the gin craze of the first half of the eighteenth-century, see Nicholas Rogers' chapter "Tackling the Gin Craze" in his monograph *Mayhem: Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain, 1748-53* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 131–157; James Nicholls' chapter "A New Kind of Drunkenness: the Gin Craze" in his monograph *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 34–50; Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason; Consisting of a tragicomedy in three acts in which high and low are brought together, much to their mutual discomfort* (London: Profile Books, 2003); Peter Clark, "The 'Mother Gin' Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38 (1988): 63–84.





Fig. 4.9 Hogarth, *Beer Street*, 1751. BM Satires 3126

Fig 4.10 Detail from *Beer Street*

Compared to the unequal breasts of the mother in *Gin Lane*, the nipples of which point outwards in different directions, the *Beer Street* lady's bosom is high, covered and forward facing. In the context of the celebratory print, the contained breast conveys that when the female body is well bound, so is the body politic. Unruly female bodies and appetites, Hogarth suggests, hold the potential to disrupt, or at least contribute to the degeneration of, peace and prosperity, whilst those that are regulated and contained contribute something attractive to the city's canvas. The male grasp of the breast in *Beer Street* presents men as entitled to treat women like objects, to choose what female bodies are on display in the public sphere and what

type of women can make money from sex. In this vision of an ideal society there is no place for the old, the unregulated, the ravaged or the desperate.

In *Gin Lane*, the mother's blighted and debauched body, including her breasts, visualise the consequences of irresponsible government policies which catalysed mass gin production and consumption by reducing spirit distillation taxes. As Odumosu notes, noxious mixes of gin became a 'devastating drug for the poor', who are shamed for their dependency in this print.<sup>57</sup> The hag's addiction to gin – also known as 'Mother's Ruin' - has thrust her into a life of delinquency, to the point that she is no longer willing or able to fulfil her maternal responsibilities. As Yalom reminds in her discussion of the politicisation of the breast in the eighteenth century, 'physical health offered a metaphor for the health of the state.' Breasts were 'metonymically targeted', Yalom argues, as literal and metaphorical carriers of polluted contents which would infect and weaken the polity.<sup>58</sup> The gin drunk woman's grotesque breasts inscribe her fall from grace, but also point to the impact her behaviour is having on others. Her breasts frame the descent of her infant, who plummets to his presumed death whilst his mother gurns in a drunken stupor.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Odumosu, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Yalom, 106.

<sup>59</sup> Schiebinger, 53.



Fig. 4.11 Detail from *Gin Lane*

In her analysis of the print, Bowers explains that this image makes reference to ‘dropped’ Augustan children who suffered at the hands of failed mothers in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The mother’s bare breasts, Bowers writes, imply ‘the lost possibility of maternal nourishment and tenderness’, as the mother chooses gin and snuff over her child. This loss is further emphasised, she argues, by the trajectory of the child’s fall; his feet encircle her breasts as if in a ‘futile effort to hold on.’<sup>60</sup> This image grotesquely burlesques the act of an infant stretching his hands up to his mother’s breasts; the gender historian Schiebinger argues the child’s descent is a broader metaphor for ‘humanity fallen from paradise.’<sup>61</sup> This connection between civic decline and transgressive maternity is reinforced by a secondary image of infant neglect: at the far right of the frame, a young woman, presumably a

<sup>60</sup> Bowers, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Schiebinger, 53.

mother, forces gin into her infant's mouth. The chalice takes the place of the breast, the child filled with poison instead of the goodness of maternal milk.



Fig. 4.12 Detail from *Gin Lane*

Incisive details like this lent another layer of colour and meaning to Hogarth's works. Horace Walpole wrote that Hogarth's prints were littered with a 'multiplicity of little incidents, not essential to, but always heightening the principal action.'<sup>62</sup> The mother pouring gin into her baby's mouth is one of these not so little incidents which informs the principal action of the print – maternal neglect. Not only will the infant be physically damaged by the alcohol – which might either kill it, make it sick or kick start a dependence which will blight its life – it will imbibe the bad behaviours of its mother and those around her, eventually perpetuating a damaging cycle of careless living and childrearing. The dire consequences of anti-maternal behaviours and bodies, Hogarth suggests, will be felt for years to come – in a physically weakened and morally lax population. This, combined with the central image of the gin-drunk and bare breasted mother, serves as a stark warning about maternal power. Instead of receiving nurture from the maternal body, these infants are poisoned, dropped and left to die. As Ludmilla Jordanova explains, an eighteenth-century mother's refusal or

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<sup>62</sup> Hogarth, 70.

inability to turn her breast over to her infant meant ‘symbolically, and sometimes literally, death or life.’<sup>63</sup>

The fact that Hogarth presents maternal transgression in *Gin Lane* as a symptom of addiction and lack of self-regulation is important. The mother surrenders her bodily control – her torn clothes, slack slump and ulcerated legs suggest she can’t care for herself, let alone a child. Her exposed breasts also indicate a loss of dignity; unsightly bare breasts, art historian Julia Skelly argues, became a synecdoche of the sexually disgraced, gin-crazed woman in eighteenth-century graphic satire.<sup>64</sup> As Skelly points out, Hogarth and Rowlandson were not the first eighteenth-century caricaturists to evoke the figure of the gin-drunk fallen woman, although their characterisations are perhaps the most iconic. Speaking on ‘wasted looks’ in prints satirising addiction, Skelly shows that the flailing, gin glass wielding, sometimes old and often bare breasted character of Madam Geneva appeared in works including *The Lamentable Fall of Madam Geneva* (1736), *The Funeral Process of Madam Geneva* and *To the Mortal Memory of Madam Geneva*.<sup>65</sup> In *To the Mortal Memory*, a drunk pregnant fishwife ignores her child whilst a toothless, grotesque old woman scowls at another. In *The Lamentable Fall*, the grotesque breast is one that is bare, bulging and overflowing, as a drunk woman lies flat on her back in the street, unable to control her body. The representation of old and unrestrained bare breasts, Skelly argues, is ‘inextricably tied to the centrality of the addicted mother in discourses related to addiction in the eighteenth century.’<sup>66</sup> Rowlandson recalls these familiar images of debauched breasts in *The Times*, connected the grotesqueness of aged femininity with discourses of anti-maternity, addiction and social decline.

Discussing caricatures of grotesque breasts that ‘overflow’, Hunt argues that they visualise how, if let loose, a woman’s ‘individual desire and caprice’ might invade the communal space.<sup>67</sup> The breasts of Rowlandson’s *Commerce* and

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<sup>63</sup> Jordanova, *Nature Displayed*, 181.

<sup>64</sup> Skelly, 22.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Hunt, “A Carnival of Mirrors,” 96. See also, for example *The Covt: Garden Morning Frolick* (1747), which pictures a woman sleeping in a carriage, unaware her dress has slipped aside to reveal her breasts. Hunt discusses this print in the context of women’s hidden desires and their overflow into the public space.

Hogarth's gin drunk mother spill out into the street in an image which evokes the mutable and uncontainable boundaries of the grotesque body. The motif of the overflowing breast reoccurred in eighteenth-century satire: in the February following the publication of *A Times* and *A Touch on the Times*, Rowlandson used it again. Turning once more to the before-and-after trope of the female breast to mark social decline, he designed another pair of prints which addressed the Regency crisis: *Britannia's support or the conspirators defeated* and *The Hospital for Lunatics* (1789). The first work shows Britannia being gallantly protected by the Prince of Wales whilst the second shows her as an 'incurable' invalid languishing in an asylum with Pitt.



Fig. 4.13 Rowlandson, *Britannia's support or the conspirators defeated* and *The Hospital for Lunatics*, 1789. BM Satires 7503, 7504

Youthfully flushed and poised for action in the first print, she is subsequently drawn chained by the neck with unkempt hair, and a furrowed, lined visage. Her bosom, which was once demurely covered by the ruffles of her dress, falls free. With her left hand she frantically itches her right breast, as a caption above reads ‘driven mad by political itching.’ This intimate image of an imprisoned woman agitatedly worrying at her breast is grotesque in its abjection: it makes what should be a private act a scene of abject humiliation, blurring the boundaries between self and other – especially considering that in this case, the self is institutionalised.<sup>68</sup> In line with Braidotti’s conception of the grotesque, it incites a ‘unique blend of fascination and horror’, providing the viewer with something they feel they should not be privy to but which they cannot turn away from. The sense of intrusion is heightened by the targeted personal nature of the print: George records that as well as standing in as Britannia, the female figure in *Britannia’s Support* is meant to resemble Jane Gordon, Duchess of Gordon, a Scottish woman who like the Duchess of Devonshire, attracted much criticism for her undue political influence and authority.<sup>69</sup> In 1789, at the time of the print’s publication, the Duchess would have been around forty years old, qualifying her for the category of old women over thirty-five, as set out by McCreery.

In her discussion of elite political women in late century visual culture, Carroll notes that Jane appears ‘in several correspondences’ during the Regency Crisis, ‘often relaying accounts of her admonishing those she felt were disloyal to the crown.’ Reported to ‘whip’ and reprove those who failed to attend the almost nightly dinners she hosted, she became an infamous example of a woman whose ‘itching’ or enthusiasm for politics violated gendered boundaries.<sup>70</sup> Political women like Gordon and the Duchess, Rowlandson suggests, are destined to end up in the mad

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<sup>68</sup> Naomi Segal discusses itching in the context of abjection in her article “A Petty Form of Suffering’: A Brief Cultural Study of Itching” *Body & Society*, 24 (2018), 88-102.

<sup>69</sup> Foreman, “A politician’s politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig party” in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 1997), 179-204, 180.

<sup>70</sup> Carroll, 164-5. Carroll discusses a number of other prints and portraits representing the Duchess of Gordon in her comprehensive chapter “‘Buxom Caledonian dame’: Politicising Jane, Duchess of Gordon visual culture,” 126-70.



house with a grotesque lack of control over their bodily and mental faculties. Carrol writes that by casting the bare breast as a 'sign of a travesty of polite culture', caricaturists called attention to how ill - or unmanaged female behaviours, bodies and identities 'threatened to flow into and possibly overwhelm a culture extremely anxious about the integrity and efficacy of the public space.'<sup>71</sup> This sense of overwhelm is conveyed (and named) in Isaac Cruikshank's *Lord Mum Overwhelmed with Parisian Embraces* (1796), an anti-revolutionary satire which sees James Harris 1st Earl of Malmesbury arriving in Paris as a peace negotiator. As the French Revolution got underway, loyalists became increasingly concerned that the radical conduct of French women would galvanise their comrades in other countries and subsequently set about demeaning and demonising their efforts. In *Lord Mum Overwhelmed*, Cruikshank offers the chaos of the street scene as a microcosm of malfunctioning France as a whole. Harris' carriage is surrounded by a cheering crowd of grotesque, sexually voracious old French poissardes, who clamour to get their hands on him.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>72</sup> For examples of English fisherwoman and wives in satirical prints see Thomas Kitchin, *The Mirrour: Or the British Lion's back friends detected* (1756); William Austin, *Hans Turbot quarrelling with a fishwoman. at Southampton in presence of Count Cork Screw* (1773); *Sal Dab giving Monsieur a receipt in full* (1776); *The battle royal between the prig Major and big Bess* (1788); Rowlandson *Billingsgate Brutes* (1789), Isaac Cruikshank, *A New Catamaran Expedition!!* (1805).



Fig. 4.14 Isaac Cruikshank, *Lord Mum Overwhelmed with Parisian Embraces*, 1796.

BM Satires 8830

Reproducing the stereotype of the overbearing sexual appetitive old woman, Cruikshank shows one fisherwoman invading the private space of the carriage to kiss Harris, whilst another old hag shouts 'my turn next.' Harris and his men appear foppish and feminine in the fisherwoman's wake; McCreery observes that fishwives were often shown 'intimidating morally and sexually unworthy men', exposing the effeminacy and weakness of upper-class society.<sup>73</sup> As 'exemplars of common people' – whether at home or abroad – they contrasted the coarseness of working-

<sup>73</sup> For more on perceptions of effeminacy in the eighteenth-century, see Declan Kavanagh, *Effeminate Years: Literature, Politics, and Aesthetics in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain* (Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2017); Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2002); "Manliness, effeminacy and the French: gender and the construction of national character in eighteenth-century England" in *English Masculinities 1600-1800* ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 44-62.

class life with the follies and softness of the aristocracy.<sup>74</sup> Two stocky women grin as they hoist Harris' delicate footmen on their backs. Gendered stereotypes are upset here; the women exhibit the masculine strength the men are missing. This image recalls an earlier print by Gillray titled *Le débarquement du chevalier John Bull et de sa famille a Boulogne sur Mer. The landing of Sir John Bull & his family, at Boulogne sur Mer* (1792) in which three burly French fishwives hoist fashionably dressed English visitors on their backs to carry them ashore from a boat.

In 1766, the Scottish conduct writer and poet James Fordyce warned in *Sermons to Young Women* that women should ideally avoid 'manly exercises' in order to preserve their softness.<sup>75</sup> His popular instructions, which were reprinted across many editions, advised that women were naturally of a 'more delicate construction' than men, and that this softness should be protected:

...in your sex, manly exercises are never graceful; that in them, a tone and figure, as well as an air and deportment of the masculine kind, are always forbidding; and that men of sensibility desire in every woman, soft features, and a flowing voice, a form not robust, and a demeanour delicate and gentle.<sup>76</sup>

Cruikshank's fisherwomen flout Fordyce's maxims of what the ideal women should be: hard faced, screeching, physically strong and aggressive, they are an intimidating inverse of the delicate, sexually reticent, domesticated woman. Eighteenth-century literature specialist Claude Rawson notes that masculine and 'asexual features' were habitually ascribed to contemporary images of 'cruel and rapacious old women.'<sup>77</sup> Although muscular and angular, the fisherwoman's sex is definitively demonstrated by their breasts, the most grotesque of which belong to two haggard women dressed in youthful yellow and pink, who tug on the reins of Harris' carriage in a further demonstration of aberrant authority. The overflow of their breasts as they enthusiastically pull the cart gestures to an unruly energy which,

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<sup>74</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 223.

<sup>75</sup> James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women, In Two Volumes*. The Thirteenth Edition. (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

<sup>77</sup> Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*, 112.

matched by a careless disregard for decorum, threatens to overturn the gendered social order.

As historian Fiona Price observes, and as shall be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis, the 1789 Women's March on Versailles stirred nerves about 'mobs' of radical working-class women being 'involved in or even precipitating the process of social transformation.'<sup>78</sup> Events like this curtailed male tolerance for female political participation, giving credence to conservative claims that women were full of uncontrollable and unconstructive rage. Hunt writes that female bodies which were 'indecently exposed to public view' – like Cruikshank's fisherwomen - expressed 'anxieties about a disturbing physicality that is assumed to mask a hidden and uncontrollable threat.'<sup>79</sup> In the case of *Lord Mum Overwhelmed*, grotesque bare breasts don't mask the threat of radical femininity but rather announce its arrival, picturing it unfolding in an uncontainable mass of flesh. Although Harris raises his hat in enthusiastic greeting, there is a sense that he is in over his head. Carried along on a sea of bodies which can't or refuse to self-regulate, he has little hope of negotiating stability and peace with the people of Paris.

As Wagner observes in her discussion of the propagandist use of the breast in caricature, French caricaturists seized upon the motif of the old, grotesque breast in a similar manner to English graphic satirists. French prints featured the 'voluminous, fleshy, sagging, breasts of clamorous fishwives and slovenly labouring women' to mark out political disaffection and disloyalty, and to question the future of the new republic.<sup>80</sup> Wagner offers the striking example of the anonymous image *L'Aristocrate: Maudite revolution; La Democrate: Ah l'bon decret* (1790), a print which captures the extent to which the grotesque breast was 'endowed with political value' in the late century.

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<sup>78</sup> Fiona Price, "Making History: Social Unrest, Work and the Post-French Revolution Historical Novel" in *Historical Writing in Britain, 1688-1830: Visions of History*, ed. Ben Dew and Fiona Price (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 145-62, 157.

<sup>79</sup> Hunt, "Carnival of Mirrors", 102.

<sup>80</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 66.



Fig. 4.15 Anonymous, *L'Aristocrate: Maudite revolution; La Democrate: Ah l'bon decret*, 1790. BM Satires 4204

The old, sour-faced aristocrat on the left has 'withered, milkless breasts' which hang over her belt. Their emptiness is verified by the money purse which the aristocrat clutches in front of her chest, turning it upside down in a show of its emptiness. Her grotesque sag of her breasts, Wagner writes, is due to 'lack of use rather than breastfeeding' – her 'elevated position' has taken her from the home into 'salons and society.' 'Desexualised and unproductive', the old woman signifies 'the decline of the old regime' and the rejection of domestic values. To her left, a young female democrat escapes the characterisation of grotesque breasts but is instead shown with a 'distinct lack of cleavage.' Whilst the British Museum entry for the piece describes her as a 'buxom peasant girl with a smiling face', Wagner more accurately recognises her as scowling, mannish and flat-chested. This representation, Wagner argues, registers her masculine-like participation in politics; she is a 'political Amazon', who has 'voluntarily traded for motherhood for politics.' She is thus

condemned, as her closed-off breast and masculine facial features suggest, to grow uglier and more useless with age. Although political rivals, these women are united by the fact that neither will have a 'proper role in the future of the new republic' due to their disinterest in domestic duty.<sup>81</sup>

This type of print illustrates how old women's breasts were subject to grotesque imaginings for political purposes. Caricaturists made old grotesque breasts salient symbols of decline and disorder by enmeshing aversions to aging femininity with anxious discourses about social and political deterioration. Punitive portraits of hags, drunks and masculine fishwives with limp, empty or unruly breasts visualised women as public disgraces, creating and aggravating constitutional breakdowns. A society that failed to control the grotesque authority of the aging female body, caricaturists suggested, was bound to fail itself. Sinful, sickened, chaotically exposed and anti-maternal, old grotesque breasts contributed to contentious debates about women's public limitations, duties and authorities. Old grotesque breasts – and by extension old grotesque women – were portrayed as threatening liabilities, fit for neither sexual nor maternal purposes.

That all but two of the prints discussed here are part of before and after paired works demonstrates how the grotesque breast was used to contrast productiveness and unproductiveness, peace and disorder, beauty and ugliness. Less humorous and more aggressive in nature than, for example, fashion prints, social satires featuring the old breast begged viewers' reflection on whether hags, fishwives, drunks and sex workers were symptoms of decaying societies or forces behind them. Elsewhere in British satirical prints, the old, withered grotesque breast filtered into satirical depictions of witches, devils and mythological creatures. With this, the monstrous spectre of female influence was anchored to unnatural lust, savagery, rebellion and once more, a rejection of the maternal.

### **Medusas, Devils and Witches**

'The monstrous figure', the architect, art historian and theorist Mark Dorrian wrote in 1996, 'has an erratic pulse – monstrosity erupts at specific historical

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<sup>81</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 64.

points.<sup>82</sup> It should come as no surprise that monstrosity erupted in print culture in the late eighteenth century, a period which was coloured by endemic changes, conflicts and corruptions. Diverse and deep-seated anxieties were animated in grotesque caricatures of demons, goblins, mythical beasts, sea monsters, faeries, and other otherworldly characters. A subset of these grotesqueries had a distinctly feminine flavour; Medusas, demons and witches functioned as allegories for the threat of female rage, interference and authority. They also dramatised suspicions about the latent monstrosity of the female body, picturing the visceral abjection of the mutable, the immodest and the unmanageable. Kayser's earlier observation that grotesque art attempted to 'invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world', maps well on to sinister caricature representations of monstrous female breasts and behaviour. In using non- or sub-human bodies as vehicles for ideas about transgressive femininity, graphic satirists made its threat simultaneously more and less material. Although grotesque, the breasts in the following prints are all recognisably human; whilst the monstrous bodies they belong to distance the threat and authority of disruptive women in the 'real' world, in their uncanny human semblance, monstrous grotesque breasts remind how close to home such monstrous visions of femininity can be.

This hybridity creates the sense that monstrosity is an extension to, rather than the essence of, womanhood: it takes only a nest of serpentine hair, a pair of wings, or a grotesque breast to transform a woman from a dutiful, domestic wife and mother to a meddling, rapacious villain. Viewing monstrosity through the lens of extension or metamorphosis evokes Russo's conception of the grotesque body as one that is as 'open, protruding, extended... secreting, the body of becoming, process and change.' That such relatively little extension or transformation is required to make women monstrous additionally speaks to contemporary impressions of women as inherently unnatural. Writing on the historical association of women with monsters, Braidotti argues that since antiquity, biological female sex has been represented and experienced as an inversion of the norm. Aristotle's fourth-century *On the Generation of Animals*, Braidotti suggests, set the precedent for imagining 'the human norm in terms of bodily organisation based on a male model.' The longest surviving ancient treatise on reproduction, *Generation* proposed the normative result of reproduction as a male embryo - a female was conceived

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<sup>82</sup> Mark Dorrian, "Monstrosity Today" *Artifice* 5 (1996), 48-59, 48.

only in the event of an error or failure in the process.<sup>83</sup> Sociologist Rose Weitz goes further to explain that according to Aristotle, embryos needed to receive enough heat upon conception to develop into ‘fully human form.’ Those that didn’t became a ‘misbegotten man’, a ‘monstrosity’ – in other words, a woman – ‘less than fully formed and literally half-baked.’<sup>84</sup> Schiebinger likewise states that a woman was perceived as a ‘misbegotten male, a monster or error of nature’, whilst Braidotti concludes that ‘as a sign of difference’, woman is synonymous with ‘monstrous.’<sup>85</sup>

These legacies of female monstrosity are key to understanding eighteenth-century representations of women’s bodies – especially those parts which, like breasts, were used as a physical touchstone of female sex. As philosopher Sophia M. Connell shows in her revisionist history of *Generation*, Aristotle’s scientific othering of women on the basis of their sex quickly developed into teleological estimations about their social natures.<sup>86</sup> Working to unravel present assumptions about Aristotle’s ‘sexism’, Connell shows that although he reckoned women to be inferior in almost all aspects to men, he also accorded them special status based on their reproductive capacities.<sup>87</sup> If, as feminist scholars such as Braidotti, Weitz and Schiebinger accept, Aristotle’s woman is monstrous, then she is *positively* monstrous, *dangerously* monstrous. The granting of special, generative status also granted agency, an ability to influence and disrupt hierarchal processes. Contributing a chapter to the recent, comprehensive monograph on monstrosity *Monsters, Monstrosities and the Monstrous in Culture and Society*, philosopher Andrea Torrano writes that the ‘monster is a figure of resistance: a political subject that breaks gender, racial and social class hierarchies.’<sup>88</sup> This power surrounding the generative

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<sup>83</sup> Braidotti, “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines,” 65.

<sup>84</sup> Rose Weitz, “A History of Women’s Bodies” in Rose Weitz (ed.), *The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-11, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Schiebinger, 53.

<sup>86</sup> Sophia M. Connell, *Aristotle on Female Animals: A Study of Generation of Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Connell provides a useful insight into Aristotle’s views on women and females in *Generation of Animals* and elsewhere in her introduction, 2-4.

<sup>88</sup> Andrea Torrano, “Politics over Monstrosity and Politics of Monstrosity. The Difference between Negative and Positive Consideration about Monsters” in *Monsters, Monstrosities and the Monstrous in Culture and Society* ed. Diego Compagna and Stefanie Steinhart (Delaware and Malaga: Vernon Press, 2020), 131-56, 141.



female body goes some way to explaining the ferociousness of caricatures of the grotesque breast: a site tied to sex, maternity and anti-maternity, it provided a salient vehicle through which to imagine the implicitly monstrous threat of non-conforming women.

The connection between the female and the monstrous, Braidotti notices, is 'particularly significant and rich in the genre of satire.' By virtue of their burlesque intent, she reasons, satirical modes are 'implicitly monstrous', and 'eminently transgressive;' since they themselves are 'deviant, an aberration', they are able to push the boundaries of acceptable representation.<sup>89</sup> The prints which follow all court attention by testing public tolerance of misogynistic representations of women. In 1793, Gillray was widely considered to have taken things too far when he designed a particularly provocative print of Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, queen consort to George III. Titled *Sin, Death and the Devil. Vide Milton*, it was later described by print historian Richard Godfrey as 'one of the most savage attacks ever sustained by a royal person.'<sup>90</sup> A work which was, like so many eighteenth-century caricatures, in dialogue with ancient mythology, *Sin, Death and the Devil* offers an apt starting point from which to consider how narratives of monstrosity and unnatural femininity were enmeshed in the emblem of the grotesque breast.

At the centre of Gillray's *Sin, Death and the Devil* Queen Charlotte (as Sin) desperately mediates a bitter battle between Prime Minister William Pitt (Death) and the Lord Chancellor Edward Thurlow (the Devil).<sup>91</sup> Recently, scholars including Haywood and Taylor have deconstructed this visual reworking of this 'Unholy Trinity', debating its complex engagement with earlier artwork, revolutionary politics, religious discourses and the epic narrative of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>92</sup> But despite rich critical discussion of the offence that the print caused, limited attention has been paid to Gillray's obscene rendering of Charlotte's body. A Medusian mesh of scales and bare skin, her legs finish in thick tentacles and her breasts hang flaccid before her, pointing north towards her paunched stomach. Her characterisation as Medusa is important; as the art historian W. J. T. Mitchell notes, Medusa was a 'potent and

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<sup>89</sup> Braidotti, 64.

<sup>90</sup> Richard T. Godfrey and Mark Hallett (eds), *James Gillray: The Art of Caricature* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), 105.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12-32; David Taylor, 168-75.

manageable emblem of the political Other' in graphic satire of the eighteenth century, perceived by conservatives as a 'perfect image of alien, sub-human monstrosity – dangerous, perverse, [and] hideous.'<sup>93</sup> Myth holds that Medusa seduced Poseidon in the temple of Athena, becoming pregnant with his children. Angered, Athena turned her into a snake-haired gorgon destined to repel men. When Medusa was later decapitated by Perseus, the winged horse Pegasus and the giant Chrysaor sprang from her neck. To contextualise this virulent vision of Queen Charlotte as an aging Medusa, it is necessary to consider her public reputation as both a queen and a mother.

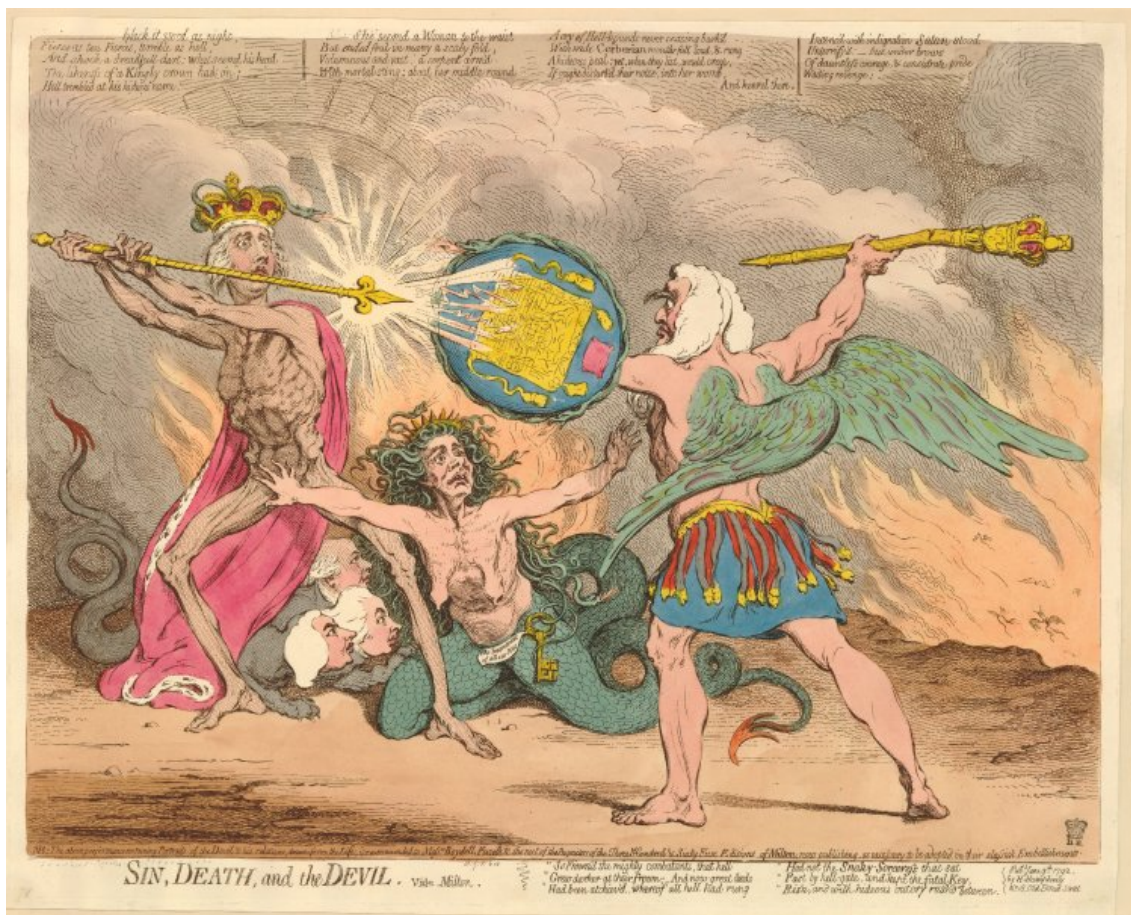


Fig. 4.16 Gillray, *Sin, Death, and the Devil*. Vide Milton, 1792. BM Satires 8105

<sup>93</sup> W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 175.

Queen Charlotte married King George in 1761 and went on to have fifteen children, thirteen of which survived to adulthood. In her study of maternal authority in the period, literary scholar Rebecca Davies notes that Charlotte ‘based her public identity on her maternity.’ She emphasised her royal role, Davies continues, as secondary to her familial duties: as the female figurehead of the nation, she became ‘the ideal role model for eighteenth-century British femininity.’<sup>94</sup> Colley similarly recognises her as deeply cognisant of her maternal identity, recording that she ‘delighted in having her smiling and abundant maternity commemorated in art’, and was drawn posing with childcare manuals and other mothering paraphernalia.<sup>95</sup> McCreery concurs: ‘numerous grand-manner portraits and reproductive engravings’, she notes, ‘celebrate the Queen’s tenderness towards her young children’, portraying her as a ‘superb maternal model.’<sup>96</sup> Images such as the 1775 engraving *The Royal Dozen; or the King & Queen of Gr. Britain, with the 10 Royal Children* show Charlotte as an attractive, adoring wife and mother who delights in being hands-on with her large brood. Responding to these sources, historians have tended to fixate on Charlotte as a triumphant maternal model. Yet in her excellent case study of Charlotte’s portrayal in visual culture, Carroll shows that these accounts overlook some of the unhappier circumstances of her reign, neglecting to recognise a steady decline in her reputation.<sup>97</sup>

Carroll argues that histories of Charlotte by scholars including art historian Marcia Pointon, Colley and McCreery have provided an affirming picture of Charlotte’s time as queen consort. She is commonly positioned, Carroll notes, as ‘scandal-free and benevolent’, a foil to her ‘extravagant French counterpart’, Marie Antoinette. From Pointon’s perspective Charlotte was presented in portraiture as an ‘emblem of femininity;’ for Colley she served as a ‘totem of morality;’ and McCreery describes her as a ‘morally upright woman’ who enjoyed a ‘happy domestic reputation’ across textual culture.<sup>98</sup> These accounts, Carroll continues, offer a ‘prevailing narrative of a stoic and enlightened queen’, sidestepping the fact that by

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<sup>94</sup> Davies, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Colley, 276.

<sup>96</sup> McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 198.

<sup>97</sup> Carroll, 173.

<sup>98</sup> Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 159; Colley, *Britons*, 368; McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 104, 179.

her death in 1818, many British citizens held her in such contempt that they refused to mourn the monarch.<sup>99</sup> Contemporaneous and earlier biographies of Charlotte support Carroll's argument, remembering public support for her dropping-off after the 1780s. Walley Chamberlain Oulton's *Authentic and impartial memoirs* (1819) for example, records: 'she seemed to outlive those people by whom she was thus idolised...her popularity declined previous to her decease.'<sup>100</sup> This reputation demise can be traced to her age, her spent fertility and increasing political participation. She had gone, Carroll observes, from a 'benevolent mother' of the nation to an 'untrustworthy usurper.'<sup>101</sup>

In 1909 the historian Alice Drayton Greenwood chronicled that 'the mirth of London was provoked by her presentment in some of the cleverest caricatures of the day, and a kind of tepid unpopularity gathered about her name, destined to be intensified by her old age.'<sup>102</sup> A vicious caricature campaign joined with inflammatory and humorous satirical broadsheets poke fun at Charlotte's declining looks and increasingly pushy nature. Amongst them were Gillray's *Anti-sacchararites, -or- John Bull and his family leaving off the use of sugar* (1792), Newton's *Louis dethron'd; or Hell broke loose in Paris!!!* (1792), *A Batch of Peers* (1792) and *Psalm Singing at the Chapel* (1792), the anonymous *The diamond eaters, horrid monsters!* (1792) and Williams' *The interview- or Miss – out of her teens* (1816). Gillray's *Sin, Death and the Devil* is one of the lewdest examples of how Charlotte's perceived failings were inscribed in her body, and especially in her breasts. Descriptions of the piece note how Charlotte's breasts are figured as grotesque, but neglect to develop these observations into critical analysis. Haywood for example notes Charlotte's 'dangling, wrinkled breasts' as a 'satirical riposte to the idealisation of female beauty in sublime and classical tradition', but extends this point no further.<sup>103</sup> Taylor marks their presence in passing, writing that the queen is 'hideously caricatured' with 'haggard

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<sup>99</sup> Carroll, 173.

<sup>100</sup> Walley Chamberlain Oulton, *Authentic and impartial memoirs of Her Late Majesty, Charlotte, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: J. Robins and Co., Albion Press, 1819), iii-v. For more discussion of her as a contested and sometimes negative figure in the public imagination, see Michael Levey, *A Royal Subject: Portraits of Queen Charlotte* (London: National Gallery, 1977), 4.

<sup>101</sup> Carroll, 174.

<sup>102</sup> Alice Drayton Greenwood, *Lives of the Hanoverian Queens of England* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1909), 132.

<sup>103</sup> Haywood, 12, 17.

features; her ‘flaccid breasts swinging before her.’<sup>104</sup> In her catalogue of the piece for the British Museum, George similarly describes her as a ‘hideous hag with pendent breasts’, but then moves on.<sup>105</sup> These observations can be deepened by reflecting on Charlotte’s public identity as a mother, aged woman and political persona.

By the time of the print’s publication in 1792, Charlotte was forty-eight. She had given birth to her final issue close to a decade earlier, and many of her surviving children were now adults. This post-maternal period of her life is embodied in her breasts; although she didn’t breastfeed, their emptiness and sag model the toll that such intense childbearing has had on her body, as well as advertising her expired fecundity.<sup>106</sup> This image is corroborated by her paunched stomach which is loose and puckered from repeated pregnancies. As Amanda Gilroy notes, ‘female fertility was conceived of as a national resource’ at this time, with reproduction associated with a populous and strong polity.<sup>107</sup> This was particularly the case with Charlotte – her fertility, Pointon notes, was the subject of much public interest, and even ribaldry; during her childbearing years she was shown in caricatures with a ‘swollen belly’ which gestured to her various gestations.<sup>108</sup> Carroll writes that by bearing so many children, and by dedicating herself to them so publicly, she ‘did more than follow the moral code of women: she became the exemplar for it through her avoidance of profligate pursuits and her domestic *métier*.’<sup>109</sup> But by 1792 her maternal productivity was long gone – her children no longer needed her, her body was used up and she fell outside the bounds of ideal femininity.

As Carroll shows, rather than retreating from public in old age Charlotte upped her political involvement as her years advanced. In the final two decades of the century, she was widely suspected of exerting unnatural influence over the king and harbouring unnatural ambitions. Despite having been instructed upon her marriage to George III not to meddle in public affairs, and initially striving for an ‘apolitical queenship’, Carroll writes that by the second half of the 1780s Charlotte was ‘seen

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<sup>104</sup> David Taylor, 171.

<sup>105</sup> George, Vol. VI.

<sup>106</sup> McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, 198.

<sup>107</sup> Amanda Gilroy, “‘Candid Advice to the Fair Sex’: or, the politics of maternity in late eighteenth-century Britain” in *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality* ed. Avril Horner and Angela Keane (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 17-28, 18

<sup>108</sup> Pointon, 184.

<sup>109</sup> Carroll, 175.

not only to wield political power but to actively seek it.<sup>110</sup> As well as criticising Charlotte's political interference, Gillray suggests that she is guilty of sexual corruption. Her bare breast advertises her immodesty, whilst the right hand which she stretches out to protect Pitt falls strategically over his genitalia. The cultural historian Christopher John Murray argues that through this image the queen is 'grasping at Pitt's genitals, seizing the "root" of political power.'<sup>111</sup> With this Gillray connects female political transgression with sexual promiscuity, suggestions women's limitations in the public sphere. In line with the decline of her reputation, Charlotte has undergone a grotesque mutation from mother of the nation to Medusian-monster, her rotten, debauched body designed with careful attention to John Milton's conception of Sin in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Milton's Sin, Haywood argues, is 'the mother of all monsters', 'the unhallowed source of dark materials' for the grotesque imagination.<sup>112</sup> Milton describes the character of Sin as follows:

The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair  
 But ended foul in many a scaly fould  
 Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd  
 With mortal sting...<sup>113</sup>

As the literary scholar Maria Magro observes in her study of Milton's sexualised women, in this passage Sin's genitalia serve as 'a trope of inversion, misrule and grotesque deformation.'<sup>114</sup> Aligned with Braidotti's discussion of Aristotle's impression of women as an inverted norm, Magro writes that Milton's vision of Sin as female exemplifies an inheritance of a 'misogynist tradition.'<sup>115</sup> Gillray is an inheritor of this attitude too; in *Sin, Death, and the Devil* he even quotes the opening of Milton's extract, but makes one change. The second column at the top of print begins 'She seemd a Woman to the waist/But ended foul in many a scald fold.' As Taylor points out, the omission of the original 'and fair' after 'Woman to the waist'

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 183-95, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Murray, 421.

<sup>112</sup> Haywood, 24.

<sup>113</sup> Milton, 54.

<sup>114</sup> Maria Magro, "Milton's Sexualized Women and the Creation of a Gendered Public Sphere" *Milton Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2001): 98-112, 105.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

removes any ambiguous insinuation of beauty, presenting 'only the clarity of physical corruption.'<sup>116</sup> Charlotte is the allegorical embodiment of Sin, but she is also the physical embodiment of her own sin. Her inhuman lower half and serpentine hair imply that she can no longer be considered a woman, but rather one of the 'perverse', 'monstrous' and 'abominable' beasts born of Milton's hell. Her very human breasts, however, remind that her threat, and the threat of women like her, does not belong to the remote world of myth and monsters, but rather exists at the fringes of acceptable femininity.

Gillray was practiced in drawing grotesque breasts as part of images of unnatural, monstrous femininity. In his 1782 print *Ecce!*, an illustration which served as a frontispiece to the satirical poem 'Beauties of Administration', he embellished a demonic female figure with floppy, flaccid breasts which swung from her body like empty pockets. In her description of the piece, George identifies the allegorical character as Corruption; she is an 'evil spirit, a hag with serpents in her hair and bat's wings.'<sup>117</sup> Swiping the crown off the head of George III, she emblematises the corrupt comings and goings of the constitution; elsewhere, politicians sinisterly surround the forlorn king who weeps into a handkerchief.

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<sup>116</sup> David Taylor, 172.

<sup>117</sup> George, Vol. V.



Fig. 4.17 Gillray, *Ecce!*, 1782. BM Satires 6033

In his nineteenth-century *A History of Caricature and Grotesque*, the antiquarian Thomas Wright noted that the ‘tendency to burlesque and caricature’ was ‘a feeling deeply implanted in human nature.’ ‘An appreciation of, and sensitiveness to, ridicule, and a love of that which is humorous’, Wright wrote, was something which all creeds of men, across history, had in common.<sup>118</sup> Works like *Ecce!* suggest that enthusiasm for ridiculing and burlesquing the body – as opposed to, for example, facial features, or clothes - was skewed towards the female form. Although men’s faces are heavily caricatured in this piece, the rest of their bodies remain covered up and closed off.

Although *Ecce!* advertises the corruption of real, widely known men including Lord Frederick North and Lord Jeffrey Amherst, it is the female body which bears the

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature & Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Virtue Brothers & Co., 1865), 2.



brunt of this vice. This is familiar in prints from the period; Gillray took a similar approach in his later print *Lieut goverr Gall-Stone, inspired by Alecto; -or- the birth of Minerva* (1790), a print which attacks the lieutenant and author Philip Thicknesse, a much-caricatured supporter of the slave trade.<sup>119</sup> Gillray recycles the trope of the devil upon the shoulder to picture a Black Alecto as Thicknesse's wicked conscience. Alecto is a hideous, naked, interfering hag, a manipulative muse who goads him into committing many of his infamous crimes. Careful attention to Gillray's engagement with racialised, mythologised and misogynistic narratives reveals how the grotesque breasts of this half-woman half Medusian-monster are used to satirically shift blame away from Thicknesse and towards a narrative of female monstrosity, influence and corruption.

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<sup>119</sup> For other prints of Thicknesse, see for example: Isaac Cruikshank, *The quarrelsome fellow* (London: James Aitken, 1789) BM Satires 7588; *Lieut gover Gallston's monkey breaking of Sir Sydney's ape* (London: 1790), BM Satires 7723; Dent, *The cutter cut up, or, the monster at full length* (London: Hames Aitken, 1790), BM Satires 7725; Rowlandson, *Philip Quarrel the English hermit and beaufidelle the mischievous she monkey, famous for her skill on the viol de gamba* (London: S. W. Fores, 1790), BM Satires 7724; *Philip Thicknesse Esqr.* (London: James Ridgway, 1790), BM Satires 7722.



Fig. 4.18 Gillray, *Lieut govern Gall-stone, inspired by Alecto; -or- the birth of Minerva*, 1790. BM Satires 7721

In their nineteenth-century explanation of the piece, Thomas Wright and R. H. Evans wrote that Thicknesse was famed for 'his personal quarrels, and the violent effusions to which they gave rise.'<sup>120</sup> Philip Gosse, who wrote a biography of the

<sup>120</sup> R. H. Evans and Thomas Wright, *Historical and descriptive account of the caricatures of James Gillray, comprising a political and humorous history of the latter part of the reign of George the Third* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), 33.

'querulous life' of the author and eccentric in 1952, observed that 'to anyone who has made a close study of Philip Thicknesse, there come occasions when he can but marvel that nobody ever shot him or bludgeoned him to death.'<sup>121</sup> Gillray's print is dedicated to some of his most prominent enemies including Lord Thurlow, William Villiers and his own children. He is drawn surrounded by demonic ghouls which symbolise his transgressions, whilst above him Minerva holds a shield displaying some of his misdeeds. Amongst other things, he is accused of shirking command in Jamaica 'for fear of Black-a-moors', swindling money from his son, 'debauching' his own niece and 'horsewhipping' his daughter to death for looking out of a window.<sup>122</sup> Thicknesse is writing at his desk surrounded by a number of his inflammatory books, letters and pamphlets; propped up against a pile of books is an open manuscript titled 'Man-Midwifery Analyzed, or a new way to write Bawdy for the instruction of Modest Women – With an Emblematic Frontispiece.' The frontispiece pictures a man midwife violating a woman whilst professing to examine her.<sup>123</sup> This references Thicknesse's text *Man-Midwifery analyzed; or the tendency of that indecent and unnecessary practice detected and exposed*, a treatise first published in 1764 as an attack against what he considered to be an interventionist and violating custom. Thicknesse's medical expertise was dubious; amongst the life-prolonging practices he endorsed was the frequent inhalation of 'the breath of young women.'<sup>124</sup>

In *Man-Midwifery analyzed* Thicknesse assures his readers that his authorial intention is not 'to indulge my fancy in impure thoughts, or indecent expressions.'<sup>125</sup> In *Lieut goverr Gall-stone* Gillray presents impure thoughts and indecent expressions as Thicknesse's lifeblood, with Alecto, one of the three Greek furies or Erinyes, emblematising the evil forces which give rise to them. As in *Ecce!*, Gillray represents Alecto as an officious, corrupting influence who spurs on Thicknesse's production of critical, defamatory, sadistic and blackmailing materials. McCreery notes that satirical prints often presented women as muses who inspired male genius whilst remaining

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<sup>121</sup> Philip Gosse, *Dr Viper, the Querulous Life of Philip Thicknesse* (London: Cassell & Co., 1952), 213.

<sup>122</sup> George, Vol. VI, 719.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Isaac Disraeli, *The Works of Isaac Disraeli*. Vol. I. ed. Benjamin Disraeli (London: Routledge, Warned and Routledge, 1859), 321.

<sup>125</sup> Philip Thicknesse, *Man-Midwifery analysed; or the tendency of that indecent and unnecessary practice detected and exposed. Addressed to John Ford, late surgeon and man-midwife* (London: S. Fores, 1790).

passive themselves.<sup>126</sup> *Lieut goverr Gall-stone* is a threatening take on this, portraying Alecto as an agent participant in Thicknesse's nefarious conspiracies. Perched on Thicknesse's knee with the rest of her body resting on a cloud raised up from the jaws of hell, she smiles coyly as she whispers into his ear. Thicknesse casts a suspicious sideways glance in her direction; there is a sense that even he is uncomfortable with her recommendations, or with the force with which they are delivered. Although her influence does not excuse his crimes, her presence does imply that he has a conscience, and has been moved by forces beyond his control. Alecto's classical standing as mythological Fury compounds this; her whisper in his ear suggests that to some degree, his sins were predetermined.

In her seminal study of Africans in English caricature, Odumosu shows that eighteenth-century graphic satirists used the Black female body to mark out venality and vice. As the final chapter of this thesis will explore in more detail, the Black body was commonly used to symbolise the threatening social and political 'other', particularly in anti-revolutionary prints. It commonly featured, as in *Lieut goverr Gall-stone*, as part of a monstrous characterisation. Odumosu notes that out of the thousands of prints from the Georgia era, only a few hundred designs feature Black bodies, or reference the slave trade. On average, Odumosu estimates, their representation makes up less one percent; this 'rarity and uniqueness' alone makes a convincing case for the 'subversive intent.' Images of African women, Odumosu observes, 'embodied the ideological othering of blackness as non-beauty and non-human (being both antitypical women and enslaved)', their presence in prints 'calling into question the choices and values of those they were in contact with.'<sup>127</sup>

Thicknesse's ironic partnership with Alecto – ironic considering he was a vocal supporter of the slave trade - gestures to his immorality and questionable decisions. In her discussion of the grotesque sexualisation of interracial colonial encounters in British satire, Odumosu examines the rarely discussed anonymous print *The Treaty of Peace or Satisfaction for all Parties* (1791). A work littered with bare breasts, it pictures a scene in which 'women's varying forms of persuasion' are the primary negotiating tools in a political seraglio.<sup>128</sup> *Treaty of Peace* holds an interesting parallel to *Lieut goverr Gall-stone* – at the front of the frame the King sits with a large

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<sup>126</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 116.

<sup>127</sup> Odumosu, 26, 129.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

'Negress' on his lap in an image which recalls the persuasive Alecto sat astride Thicknesse's knee.



Fig. 4.19 Anonymous, *The Treaty of Peace or Satisfaction for all Parties*, 1791. BM Satires 7851

The 'unusual inclusion of the King in the arms of a fat African woman, and about to exchange a kiss', Odumosu argues, 'presents a notable symbolic disruption.'<sup>129</sup> Images like this sounded off a visual alarm about the 'much maligned 'slavery problem' of the 1790s; it was during this period that British artists 'programmed the Black body into a permanent visual commodity.'<sup>130</sup> Both the

<sup>129</sup> Odumosu points out that 'as far as we know, no other foreign subject (man or woman) touches the King in satirical print; neither do they hold him in an intimate embrace. In this alone, *Treaty of Peace* likely represents the ultimate act of subversion, a significant breach in the intangible concordance governing the relationship between monarch and citizen, high and low' (129).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 203. For a more detailed analysis of this print see Odumosu, 128-9.

anonymous artist of *Treaty of Peace* and Gillray represent the Black woman as sexually aggressive, persuasive and deviant. In her analysis of *Lieut gover Gallstone* Katherine Hart argues that Alecto is sexually manipulative. She drapes one leg over Thicknesses' thigh and wraps a controlling arm around his shoulder, his breeches open and body tensed.<sup>131</sup> As Hart observes, this depiction of Alecto corresponds with Neil Hertz's argument that images of transgressive women often presented 'a political threat as if it were a sexual threat.'<sup>132</sup> Alecto's breasts play an important role in this presentation. In her catalogue description George notes how one snake coils around Thicknesses' arm and touches his pen with its poisoned fang.<sup>133</sup>



Fig. 4.20 Detail from *Lieut gover Gall-Stone*

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<sup>131</sup> Katherine Hart, "James Gillray, Charles James Fox, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Caricature and Displacement in the Debate over Reform" in *No Laughing Matter: Visual Humours in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity*, ed. Angela Rosenthal (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2016), 76-103, 95.

<sup>132</sup> Neil Hertz, "Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria Under Political Pressure" *Representations*, no. 4 (Autumn, 1983): 27-54, 27.

<sup>133</sup> George, Vol. VI, 719.

Whilst scholarly analyses of this piece have observed this detail, they have not recognised that the serpent originates from Alecto's breast. The two ends of the creature are of a notably different thickness to the serpents which make up her Medusian hair, and the arc of its body can be traced as it winds around her right arm and curls over her left to her breast. This considered, it is not just any poison that infects the pen, but the poisoned contents of the breast which have imbibed, carried and injected by the snake. The poisonous breast is a vector which presents women polluting and perverting the masculine domain of public authorship. Such concerns about female influence, and political writing in particular, persisted into the nineteenth century.

Twenty-four years following *Lieut governr Gall-Stone*, Charles Williams' returned to the trope of the serpentine woman in his print *Lady P aragraph Championizing* (1814). Picturing Viscountess Lady Bridget Perceval at a writing desk surrounding by books and pamphlets, one which is pointedly labelled 'Politicks.'<sup>134</sup> Perceval was perceived by many as a meddling woman – she was most criticised for creating a publicity campaign to support her friend Princess Caroline, who found herself separated from her daughter after the breakdown of her marriage to the Prince Regent. Later, she was pilloried in the press for her part in a newspaper scandal, having become embroiled in the trial of the journalist John Mitford, who she employed to help her place fraudulent notices in popular newspapers. Williams' satire on Perceval uses the monstrous and the grotesque to underscore the

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<sup>134</sup> In a January 2021 seminar given for the Institute of Historical Research, Amanda Vickery argued that 'Politicks' (as opposed to 'politics') signalled unnecessary strife and ugly faction, rather than the usual dealings of parliament and politicians. Amanda Vickery, Hannah Grieg (speakers), "The Political Day in London, 1697-1834" (January 27 2021).

unattractiveness of female interference, to contest women's authorial authority and to make clear their limits in the public sphere.<sup>135</sup>



Fig. 4.21 Charles Williams, *Lady P aragraph Championizing*, 1814. BM Satires 12194

In her study of female poets, the literary scholar Donna Landry writes that women who interfered in public affairs were perceived as having been influenced by French radicalism to transgress 'all "natural" female-feeling' in favour of

<sup>135</sup>*Lady P aragraph Championizing* is remarkably similar in appearance and theme to a satirical print by Henry Wigstead, titled *I'll tell you what!* (c. 1790). The print pictures the author Elizabeth Inchbald seated at a desk writing on a piece of paper which says, 'Puff Puff Puff Puff Puff.' As McCreery observes, this inscription denotes she is 'composing promotions, known as 'puffs', for her own literary works – proof of both her ambition, and ironically, her lack of literary talent.' Wigstead derides Inchbald's literal capabilities and drive, criticising her masculine role as a writer and the aggressive tack she takes to promoting her work. McCreery goes as far as to suggest that Wigstead portrays her as a sexual disgrace to discredit her work – it is implied that she is 'literally as well as figuratively prostituting herself' in order to improve her chances of literary success. See McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 130-1.



'licentiousness and defiance.'<sup>136</sup> Such 'natural' feelings were founded upon familial affection and devotion, and so it is apt that Williams' print represents Lady Perceval's immorality in her breast. Serpents emerge from her chest, wrap around her arm, and touch their tongue to the tip of her pen. Through this, her political transgression is literally and symbolically connected to her unnatural femininity. As in Gillray's *Lieut goverr Gall-stone*, the breast, a traditional site of nurture, is instead the place of perverse discharge. To reinforce her depravity, Williams draws a large portrait entitled 'ALECTO' hanging behind her pen. Alecto is drawn naked and smothered in serpents, her breasts hanging low and also covered in snakes. She is poised to attack with her muscular, masculine body, and in an image mirroring Lady P.'s wielding of a pen, she brandishes a whip and firebrand.



Fig. 4.22 Detail from *Lady P Championizing*

As was by this point surely expected by viewers, snakes can be seen hanging off Alecto's chest in a monstrous tangle, feeding off the depraved contents of her breast. The image is visually similar to the 1778 frontispiece to volume three of John

<sup>136</sup> Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 255.

Bell's 'The Poets of Great Britain from Chaucer to Churchill', which shows Envy as a grotesque Medusian gorgon. A snake is firmly latched on to her withered breast, the nipple just visible between its jaws.



Fig. 4.23 Frontispiece to Cowley volume III from Bell's Edition of 'The Poets of Great Britain complete from Chaucer to Churchill', 1778. BM no. 1865,0520.897

Serpents and women have a long association; they are most discussed in the context of the Edenic fall, whilst classicists have made much of the scene in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in which Clytemnestra dreams of giving birth to a serpent and suckling it at her breast.<sup>137</sup> More recently, attention has turned to folklore narratives; Hans E. A. Boos tells that in some African communities people worry about snakes sneaking up on women who have fallen asleep breastfeeding, believing that they will push infants aside to suckle from the mother. In Italy, restlessness in young babies is sometimes attributed to 'a serpent suckling the mother's breast', whilst Welsh folklore is also rich in stories 'of intimate relations between women and serpents.'<sup>138</sup> In nineteenth-century Wales, it is the fantastical properties of maternal milk that colour tales of serpents suckling women. According to Elias Owen's 1877 compendium *Welsh Folk-Lore*, tradition holds that 'flying snakes were once common in all parts of Wales', after creatures which 'having drunk the milk of a woman, and by having eaten of bread consecrated for the Holy Communion, became transformed into winged serpents or dragons.'<sup>139</sup> Other Welsh stories voice concern that snakes surreptitiously scan the ground beneath a breastfeeding woman, hoping to lap up spilt milk in order to turn themselves into winged vipers. Speaking on these superstitions, the early Celticist John Rhys records that to this day, many Welsh people harbour suspicions about serpents sprouting wings.<sup>140</sup> The imagery of the milk-guzzling, infant-ousting, half-animal, half-monster serpent is grotesque in the flesh and immaterially; William Whallon writes that it is a leitmotif for 'love replaced by cruelty in the relationship between a mother and a child.'<sup>141</sup> Anything other than an infant or a man at the female breast emblematises the unnatural.

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<sup>137</sup> See K. O'Neill, "Aeschylus, Homer, and the Serpent at the Breast" *Phoenix* 52, no. 3/4 (1998), 216–229; William Whallon, "The Serpent at the Breast" *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 89 (1958), 271-5.

<sup>138</sup> Hans E. A. Boos, *The Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago* (Texas: A&M University Press, 2001), 134.

<sup>139</sup> Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-Tales and Legends of North Wales* (Woodall: Minshall and Company, 1887). Quoted in John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. II, first published 1901 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 690.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Whallon, 271.

To this end, an unknown artist used the image of a cat suckling a witch's grotesquely distended breast in the 1783 print *The Air Balloon or a Trip to the Moon*, one of many works which questioned the sagacity of the modern balloon ascents.<sup>142</sup> Powered to the moon by the 'inflammable air' she expels from her behind, the smiling witch is watched by three pseudo-scientific observers, one of which notes her journey will merit a 'Lunatick journal', and another which asks her to deliver a card to Uranus – recently named 'Georgium Sidus' after George III.<sup>143</sup> She is fully clothed except for her breast, which protrudes from her body as it is held between the paws of the cat.



Fig. 4.24 *The Air Balloon or a Trip to the Moon*, 1783. BM Satires 6335

<sup>142</sup> See for example, *The aerostatick stage balloon*. (1783), BM Satires 6284; *General alarm of the inhabitants of Gonesse* (1783), BM Satires 6334; *The grand British balloon*. (1784), BM Satires 6710; William Wells, *English credulity of the chevelere Morret taking a French leave* (1784), BM Satires 6652; William Dent, *Grand Irish Air Balloon* (1784), BM Satires 6659; Rowlandson, *Madam Blubber's last shift or The aerostatic dilly*. (1794), BM Satires 6561; *A new mode of going to the house* (1795), BM Satires 8692.

<sup>143</sup> Nick Rawlinson, *William Blake's Comic Vision* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 107.



Fig. 4.25 Detail from *The Air Balloon*

This image would've been familiar – but still grotesque - to contemporaries; the fact that witches breastfed their familiars became common knowledge in the mid-sixteenth century. The practice was thought to leave a distinctive mark on the breast, and consequently the area was searched when suspicions arose. Witches' bodies', music historian Sarah F. Williams states, became 'the location of grotesque scrutiny.'<sup>144</sup> A testimony given against a witch during one of the Salem witch trials read:

She had been a witch ten years and then she opened her breast, and the black man gave her two little things like young cats and she put them to her breast and suckled them they had no hair on them and had ears like a man.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Sarah F. Williams, *Damnable Practices: Witches, Dangerous Women, and Music in Seventeenth-Century English Broadside Ballads* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 40.

<sup>145</sup> Bernard Rosenthal (ed.), *Records of the Salem Witch Hunt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 293.

Witches were also believed to suckle puppies, imps and changeling children, having snatched them from their mothers or wet nurses.<sup>146</sup> Their unnatural bodies were presumed to transmit dangerous or ugly physical characteristics and corrupt qualities to those they nursed; a process which once again recalls Russo's conception of the grotesque body as one that reaches out to and impacts 'the rest of the world.' This emphasis on the social and the connective - of the cause and effect of the grotesque body - is centralised in Rowlandson's 1784 print *The Pit of Acheron, or the birth of the plagues of England*, which provides another satiric vision of witches and their distasteful breasts. The title is lifted from *Macbeth* Act III Scene 5 in which Hecate arranges to meet the witches to discuss the fate of Macbeth. Rowlandson's allusion to Hecate, the Greek goddess of necromancy, and to Acheron, the ancient Greek river which was believed to lead to the underworld, establishes an atmosphere of sin and death. The print pictures a trio of witches gathering in a cave meant to symbolise the House of Commons. They collude to summon the spirits of Fox, Lord North and Edmund Burke.

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<sup>146</sup> John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 179-80.



Fig. 4.26 Rowlandson, *The Pit of Acheron, or the birth of the plagues of England*, 1784. BM Satires 6364

As the witches toss in scraps of paper emblazoned with labels such as 'deceit', 'pride' and 'rebellion' into their cauldron, emblems of the corrupt coalition rise from the flames. Taylor remarks that the conjuring alludes to 'government scaremongering' with the three weird sisters implying a Shakespearean level of constitutional conspiracy.<sup>147</sup> That three grotesque breasted women brew this corruption is significant; it suggests the ugly consequences of political meddling. Civilised women, Rowlandson implies, would do best not to interfere in politics. Although the male preserve is permeable, it is the furtive realm of frightful witches and evil spirits. The breast further serves to expose the witches' savagery. The two

<sup>147</sup> David Taylor, 112.

witches at the fore and far right of the scene have bare and dirt-smudged breasts, and their failure to cover themselves indicates that they exist readily beyond the social mores of virtuous femininity. This disassociation from accepted feminine appearance, behaviour and identity forfeits their chance of an attractive appearance. Although they still resemble humans, their supernatural meddling has rendered their bodies grotesque. Compared to the restorative maternal bosom, the witches' sagging, muddied and bare breasts convey the capacity of the transgressive woman to upset the political and social order.

## Conclusion

In 1788 the celebrated antiquarian, lexicographer and art critic Francois Grose called attention to graphic satire's function as a technology of moral improvement. Writing in his 1788 *Rules for Drawing Caricaturas*, a work later published in Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* (1791), Grose explained to his readers:

‘the art of drawing caricature... may be most efficaciously employed in the cause of virtue and decorum, by holding up to the public notice many offenders against both, who are not amenable to any other tribunal; and who, though they contemptuously defy all serious reproof, tremble at the thoughts of seeing their vices or follies attacked by the keen shafts of ridicule.’<sup>148</sup>

Grose spoke from a place of experience; caricaturist John Kay recalls his corpulence earned him a place in the satirical print *The British Antiquarian* (1791) as a ‘fine fat fodgel’ of ‘stature short.’ But Grose, Kay continues, was practiced at ‘rally[ing] himself with the greatest humour on the singular rotundity of his figure’ – experiencing his size not as a moral failure, but rather a characteristic which reflected his jolly nature.<sup>149</sup> Whether he was privately touched by shame or feared satire's ‘shafts of ridicule’ is impossible to know, but his proposal that caricature moved audiences to examine their own ‘virtue and decorum’ rightly points towards its

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<sup>148</sup> Francois Grose, *Rules for Drawing Caricaturas: with an Essay on Comic Painting* (London: Printed by A. Grant for S. Hopper, 1788), 4.

<sup>149</sup> John Kay, *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings, with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes*, vol. II (Edinburgh: Hugh Paton, 1842), 46-7.



intent to inspire critical introspection, comparison and change. Grose's differentiation between 'serious reproof' and caricature's comical derision of 'vices or follies' – which audiences 'trembled' to see represented - suggests that satire spooked, rather than reformed, its subject types. In her discussion of old women in satire, McCreery acknowledges that viewers were unlikely to see prints solely (or even primarily) as didactic instruments.' Rather, she continues, 'contemporaries regarded satirical prints of old women as entertainment, as expressions of anxiety... satirical prints let off society's steam as well as expressed its criticism of old women.'<sup>150</sup> Grotesque representations of fantastical female figures served as an outlet for concerns about the monstrous authority of the female body, racial difference and the corrupting influence of women.

But as well as providing a satirical release, the grotesque breasts of decrepit old hags, manic fishwives, terrible Medusas and ugly witches were nonetheless designed to rouse reflection on how one's own body, behaviours and attitudes aligned with prevailing cultural ideologies, social practices and aesthetic standards. Images of grotesque breasts gestured didactically to women's waning domesticity, maternal lassitude, sexual inhibition, lack of bodily control and their unnatural interference in supposedly male domains. Grose makes a distinction between caricature's criticism of 'vices and follies' and the 'serious reproof' of other social discipline, yet the outrageous, outlandish and humiliating representations of grotesque female bodies did impact upon public perceptions of women. As we have seen, the vicious caricature campaign which hounded Queen Charlotte in the late 1700s expediated and intensified her unpopularity with her subjects. As Katherine Crawford shows in her investigation into the demonisation of foreign queens by the British, negative portrayals of Charlotte were bound up in broad political restiveness as well as specific concerns about women who had 'extraordinary access to power.' Caricaturists saw themselves as 'educating' the public about unsavoury truths, Crawford argues, and their prints allowed for the open discipline of specific figures as well as broader 'types.'<sup>151</sup>

Certainly, misogynist caricatures displaying older women's grotesque bodies and inappropriate sexual behaviours sought to educate about the unsavouriness and

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<sup>150</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, 251.

<sup>151</sup> Katherine Crawford, "Constructing Evil Foreign Queens" *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 393-418, 394.

unproductiveness of aging femininity. The mock-horror surrounding the threat of aged women was rooted on the one hand in begrudging discourses about their requirement of socio-economic support, and on the other in anxieties about their social and political disruptiveness. Older women presumed to fall outside the paradigm of procreative femininity were construed as contributing little of value either privately or publicly. Queen Charlotte's merciless transformation into a shrivelled, monstrous Medusa in Gillray's *Sin, Death, and the Devil* captures this hostility towards meddling old women; Charlotte's exerting of power not only costs her her attractive femininity, but her humanity too. In visualising monstrosity in the grotesque breast – especially in images of mythological creatures or witches suckling snakes or cats – caricaturists seized upon anxieties about the atrocious authority of the reproductive female body, and its capacity for maternal transgression. In the wake of the French Revolution, this association between the anti-maternal breast and social disorder was tightened; caricatures used the breast to express the grotesque and threatening reality of radicalism. Building upon understandings of grotesque breast, the final chapter of this thesis turns its attention to the French breast as it appears in British anti-revolutionary satires. Identifying two chief incarnations - the seditious breast and the violent breast – it shows how the snake suckling, polluted or physically threatening breast was used in an effort to underscore the dangerous false promises of the new, radical Republic.

## Chapter Four

### The Revolutionary Breast

After some initial enthusiasm, public sympathy for the French Revolution waned in Britain in the late eighteenth century. Growing violence stirred suspicion that revolutionary principles were giving way to radical despotism, and that anarchy was imminent. As Romanticist Daisy Hay reminds, popular publications such as the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and its short-lived predecessor *Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* fanned the flames of fears that sedition was rampant and spreading in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Warning its readers that enemies lurked among them', the Prospectus for the *Anti-Jacobin Review* read:

The existence of Jacobin faction, in the bosom of our country, can no longer be denied. Its members are vigilant, persevering, indefatigable; desperate in their plans and daring in their language. The torrent of licentiousness, incessantly rushing forth from their numerous presses, exceeds, in violence and duration, all former examples.<sup>2</sup>

The *Anti-Jacobin's* emphasis on the multiplicity, tenacity, infectivity and speed of this particular breed of licentiousness spoke to coexisting concerns about female Jacobinical insurgence. Satirical prints captured unease that monstrous radicalism was catching, particularly amongst more easily influenced members of society. 'Women, the lower classes and children', Haywood notes, were all considered vulnerable to forms of persuasion and pleasure.<sup>3</sup> Caricaturists including Gillray, Isaac Cruikshank, Rowlandson and William Dent repeatedly turned to women's bodies to develop Britain's disillusion with the revolution, advertising the unnatural

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<sup>1</sup> *The Weekly Examiner* was published weekly from November 1797 to July 1798, before *The Anti-Jacobin Review* was launched by George Canning in July 1798. Gillray lent his talent for the frontispiece to the first issue of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, providing *A Peep into the Cave of Jacobinism* (1798), BM Satires 9243.

<sup>2</sup> Daisy Hay, *Dinner with Joseph Johnson* (London and New York: Penguin Random House, forthcoming 2021). Manuscript page number, 330; 'Prospectus' *Anti-Jacobin Review* I (1798), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, 59.

depravity of the French through twisted caricatures of the female form. A colourful cast of cannibalistic crones, haggard fishwives and monstrous viragos whipped up alarm about the corrupt and violent potentiality of the French, coupling the threat of Revolution with the threat of radical femininity more widely. The breast in particular became a key symbol of French unnaturalness - it appeared bare, bulbous, sagging, shrivelled and even suckling snakes. But despite its prevalence, its presence is seldom discussed in critical literature. Focusing on British loyalist prints from the 1790s, this chapter explores how caricaturists used the transgressive breast as an emblem of Jacobin sedition and violence. Satirists subverted the positive meanings attached to the nurturing maternal breast, it demonstrates, in order to visualise France as Britain's dangerous and degenerate 'other.'<sup>4</sup>

Outwardly, late-century burlesqued French breasts resist categorisation; although almost always grotesque, their appearance differs in shape, size and colour. There is less variation, however, in how satirists show them functioning. Drawing connections between how the breast is represented and cultural anxieties about the disruptive authority of female bodies and behaviours, this chapter identifies two chief ways in which the breast operates within prints from the 1790s. As the first section of this chapter examines, some satirists foregrounded the breast as a site of seditious transmission. These interpretations call attention to how political subversion spreads through the body politic, infecting immoral and vulnerable citizens. Exploiting beliefs that physical impurities, character flaws, bad habits and debase qualities could be transferred via breast milk, prints showed French female figures sustaining sinister snakes on their spoilt insides, or implied that they had been nursing naïve liberal members of the British constitution. The second section turns its attention to representations of the breast as an emblem of revolutionary violence. A small but significant portion of anti-revolutionary prints present the French breast as a physical threat - flaming, reinforced by weapons such as guns or daggers, or shooting poisonous discharge. Functioning as a weapon or as a channel

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<sup>4</sup> As Moores observes, the concept of the 'other', and 'othering' has a 'long, influential history' and the accuracy, consistency and productivity of its use requires troubling. Moores provides a nuanced discussion of this, as well as a useful interrogation of Colley's seminal use of the 'other' as a methodological framework in *Britons: Forging the Nation*, in *Representations of France in English Satirical Prints*, 20-4.

for a weapon, satirists pictured it as a site which inflicted death and devastation on its own as well as its enemies. This image provided a distinctly feminised argument against the combative chaos that radicalism was perceived to provoke. As Wagner records, conservatives had long been framing the female political Amazon as a biological atrocity; in a 1711 issue of *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison reminded his readers that nature had intended women to be ‘tender Mothers and faithful Wives, rather than as furious Partizans.’<sup>5</sup> As foils to the protective and nurturing British maternal breast, transmissive and violent French breasts designated everything with the French Republic and the women who embodied its values. Investigating their depiction offers a fresh perspective on the politicised status of the female body in late century visual culture, deepening historical understanding of its satirical appropriation for propagandist means.

In the following prints, malfunctioning breasts feature as part of the characterisations of French female figures. Often the most visible signifier of subject’s sex, warped breasts remind of the gender transgression that radicalism has caused. Anti-maternal and filled with fury, they display how virtuous and attractive femininity has corrupted because of women’s increasing political participation. Showing how satirical depictions of gender transgression followed moments of female activism, this chapter explores how caricaturists contributed to admonitory cultural discourses which sought to direct women’s energies towards their families and away from the public sphere. Whilst it does not pretend to capture the reality of British and French women’s actual roles in, or lived experiences of the Revolution, it turns to other print culture materials alongside graphic satire in an effort to determine how and why female bodies and behaviours were perceived and represented as threats during this period of immense social and political instability. Measured against the implicit ideal of the all-giving nursing maternal body, transgressive-breasted and masculine female figures emerged as antiheroes in counterrevolutionary political prints.

1790s Britain and France were marred by disruption and disaffection; a combination of political disorder, mass riots, military conflict and rapid advancements in science, medicine and technology created an atmosphere of changeability and

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<sup>5</sup> Wagner, “Anatomy and Interiority,” 243; Addison, “No. 81, June 2, 1711” *The Spectator*, vol. I ed. John Morrison (London: Macmillan, 1915), 346-9, 347.

unrest. Whilst the aims, identities and structures of both nations were being reassessed, nurturing motherhood emerged as a touchstone for social stability and growth. The figure of the nursing mother, and the mythologised ethic of instinctive, unerring care that she symbolised, shored up promises for a return to a more unified, principled and prosperous polity. For decades, Western European physicians had admired the positive effect that breastfeeding itself had on neonatal mortality rates.<sup>6</sup> It also mapped well on to emerging Enlightenment philosophies of the child that stressed the importance of early development and was widely celebrated for its socially restorative potential. As early as 1762, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously insisted in his treatise *Emile: Or Education* that the breastfeeding mother could be depended upon to 'bring everything back together.'<sup>7</sup> In her study of how Rousseau appeals to the corporeal in his writings, the political theorist Elizabeth Wingrove argues that this rhetoric inscribed women's bodies with 'a dynamic of care and control that figure[d] the body politic.'<sup>8</sup> The stakes of reconciliatory maternal nurture ramped up in line with rising revolutionary conflict, as the presence of a robust, united and numerate populace became more essential in both Britain and France. The nursing mother was the bedrock of a future-founding female identity which would support the morality, health and fortune of the polity, with her breasts serving as the backbone of a body and soul of goodness. Consequently, bountiful maternal breasts routinely appeared as part of patriotic iconography of Charity, Mother Nature or Liberty, becoming familiar emblems of social stability and success.<sup>9</sup> This 'iconographic status of the breast, and the ideology about nature and nurturing that supported it', Wagner observes, 'owed much to Rousseau's mid-century writing.'<sup>10</sup>

As gender scholar Anne K. Mellor has convincingly argued, mothers were regarded as honour-bound to serve as 'mothers of the nation' in the second half of

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<sup>6</sup> Fildes, "Neonatal feeding practices and infant mortality during the 18<sup>th</sup> century" *Journal of Biosocial Science* 12, no. 3 (1980): 313-323; *Breasts, Bottles, and Babies*, 87-91.

<sup>7</sup> Rousseau, *Émile*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>9</sup> See Kukla, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 54.

the century, a position which afforded them great social authority.<sup>11</sup> In Britain and France, a strong rhetoric of national duty infused discussions about maternal responsibility. In 1792, the women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft wrote that the mother who 'neither suckles nor educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of wife, and has no right to that of a citizen.'<sup>12</sup> Literary scholar Prytula describes the influx of materials lauding the virtues of maternal breastfeeding as an 'explosion', recognising that everything from 'medical and moral literature' to 'aesthetic treatises [and] scientific theories' encouraged women to do their part.<sup>13</sup> In 1799, the conservative poet Hannah More made the connection between maternal duty and responsible citizenship very clear.<sup>14</sup> Addressing mothers in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, she explained:

On YOU depends in no small degree the principles of the whole rising generation.... Your private exertions may at this moment be contributing to the future happiness, your domestic neglect, to the future ruin, of your country.<sup>15</sup>

'In this moment of alarm and peril', she wrote, mothers must 'exert themselves with a patriotism at once firm and feminine, for the general good.' They should 'come forward', she coaxed, and 'contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country [...] without blemishing the delicacy of their sex.' This delicacy could be maintained through women's enactment of motherhood, 'the best and most appropriate exertion of their power.' It could not, More made sure to emphasise, be preserved through militant or political means: 'I am not sounding an alarm to female

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<sup>11</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Janett Todd and Marilyn Butler (eds), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004), 217.

<sup>13</sup> Prytula, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Haywood insightfully troubles Hannah More's critical conception as a 'counter-revolutionary feminist' in his chapter "The Pax femina? Hannah More, counter-revolution and the politics of female agency" in *The Revolution in the Popular Literature*, 56-78. The fact that some women 'participated vigorously' in creating political propaganda does not mean, Haywood observes, 'that all such writing was progressive or emancipatory' (3).

<sup>15</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1799), 60.

warriors, or exciting female politicians', she promised. 'I hardly know which of the two is the most disgusting and unnatural character.'<sup>16</sup> It was against this backdrop that the corrupt and threatening bodies of French radical women proliferated in print culture; unruly, aggressive and anti-maternal, they were disturbing inversions of the archetypal 'good' mother.

### The Spread of Seditious

By the end of the century, the transmissive function of the breast was a familiar notion. As Wagner explains in her study of its pathologisation, the breasts' contents were understood by physicians to be similar to blood and semen in that they could impart 'physical, moral, and political qualities.'<sup>17</sup> Capable of diffusing dangerous diseases as well as desirable and undesirable characteristics, breast milk became a locus of medical investigation and public unease. As early as 1635, the obstetrician Jacques Guillemeau warned parents of the risks of sending infants out to nurse, advising that a stranger's physical or moral defects 'may communicate some imperfection of her body into the child.'<sup>18</sup> This discourse of contagion seeped into political discourse; as Wagner observes, 'paradigms of biological transmission became tied to politics in striking ways.'<sup>19</sup> Just as rallying cries for maternal nursing pooled the medical benefits of breast milk with the proper function of the polity, propagandists used the model of the deviant breast and its spoiled insides to portend the decline and corruption of the body politic. In counter-revolutionary caricature, corporeal rot motioned to constitutional rot; sedition was pictured as an embodied depravity capable of ripping through those exposed to it. The suspicions surrounding breast milk - and maternal authority more generally - offered satirists a fitting mechanism through which to state and explore the political perils of unseen threats, unequal power relations and the lure of false promises.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Guillemeau, *Child-birth; or, the happy delivery of women. Wherein is Set Downe the Government of Women, Together with the Diseases, which Happen to Women in Those Times, and the Meanes to Help Them. With a Treatise for The Nursing of Children.* (London: A. Hatfield, 1635), li2.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 50.



*James Gillray, Alecto and her Train at the Gates of Pandemonium: or–The Recruiting Sarjeant Enlisting John Bull, Into the Revolution Service (1791): inviting and supporting sedition*

In 1791 S. W. Fores published a print questioning the revolutionary sympathies of Whig politicians. Drawn by Gillray, *Alecto and her Train at the Gates of Pandemonium: or–The Recruiting Sarjeant Enlisting John Bull, Into the Revolution Service* pictured a grotesque French Liberty tempting Sheridan, Fox, Lord Stanhope and John Bull to join the liberal cause. A Black gorgon dressed in rags, Liberty looms over the diminutive men who appear as ruddy-faced fools. There is no mistaking her Medusian identity; her head crawls with serpents which rear up to hiss at the impotent men. She is violent, unrestrained and grotesque; as previously discussed, Medusa provided an alarming visual prophecy of the transgressive power of generative women. Announced by Gillray to be Alecto - one of three female Furies in Greek myth who violently pursued vengeance, the figure provides a monstrous allegory for the French republic.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Grant and John Hazel (eds), *Who's Who in Classical Mythology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 222-3.



Fig. 5.1 Gillray, *Alecto and her Train, at the Gate of Pandaemonium:—or—The Recruiting Sarjeant Enlisting John Bull, Into the Revolution Service*, 1791. BM Satires 7721

Many contemporary viewers would have been familiar with Alecto's significance, having likely encountered her in other artwork and literary texts of the period. Alecto appears in the Latin epics such as Dante's *Inferno* and Virgil's *The Aeneid*, both of which were translated, read, performed and interpreted visually in the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> According to ancient myth, Alecto punished humans for moral crimes committed against each other – in this case, war. Dressed in military style costume, Gillray's Alecto is meant to resemble a recruiting sergeant. Sheridan

<sup>21</sup> Antonella Braidà, *Dante and the Romantics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 9-26.

and Fox help her to enlist soldiers for the Revolutionary cause whilst the dazed John Bull looks on. Behind them, Lord Stanhope, a well-known member of the Revolution Society, sneaks away from the scene. In the background the Crown and Anchor is drawn as the fiery entrance to hell: Christina Parolin has shown how the tavern was construed as a 'central site of London radicalism', with its very name becoming a 'form of shorthand in the language of politics.' In popular political prints, Parolin argues, it was an integral 'part of the caricaturists' palette of symbols' which communicated the developments of radicalism.<sup>22</sup> In *Alecto and her Train*, imps and demons escape from its smoke-obscured doors; in his study of the eighteenth-century tavern, Ian Newman writes that the monsters form a 'hellish pestilence', visualising the seditious infestation of pro-radical meetings held in the tavern.<sup>23</sup>

Gillray uses Alecto's monstrous body to inspire what literary critic Marilyn Butler has described as a 'zeal to defend John Bull against the Gallican enemy.'<sup>24</sup> Caricatured as an ignorant and shambolic farmer, John Bull is shown being taken advantage of by the dominating Alecto and her foolish Whig supporters. Exhibiting some of the confusion which must have dogged many British citizens, Bull scratches his head and looks dazed. Attentive to the hypnotising beat of the radical drum, he dithers between the allure of French Liberty and his loyalties to his British master.

and yet I is half in love with the sound of your drum, & wishes to leave off  
Ploughing & dugging, & wear one of your vine cockades, & be a French  
Gentleman; - & yet, dangs it, it goes against ones heart to leave the Varmer; -  
ah Varmer George has been a rare good Measter to !!

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<sup>22</sup> Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790 c. 1845* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2010), 107-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ian Newman, *The Romantic Tavern: Literature and Conviviality in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85. Emma Major notes the 'ubiquitous references to the French Revolution and the infernal' in her study of visual responses to the French Revolution, arguing that these must be considered within the context of contemporary moralising, religious discourses. See Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 235.

<sup>24</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54.

‘Ah me! I dozes’nt know what to, not I!’ he finally cries in his moronic accent. Whilst Bull may be torn, it is clear that those viewing the print shouldn’t be – he has come dangerously close to being sucked into the Revolutionary cause. As imperial historian Colley notes, designs like this entreated men and women ‘to decide who they were by reference to who and what they were not.’<sup>25</sup> Scholars including Moores – who investigates the impact that ‘low’ forms of art such as caricature had on eighteenth-century culture - have since troubled Colley’s emphasis on British graphic satire’s ‘antagonism towards the French ‘other.’ The xenophobic slant of British prints, Moores argues, has been oversimplified and overstated in the critical literature. Despite some ‘impressive continuities’, Moores continues, British representations of the French are far from static; they are ‘complex, ambivalent, and multifaceted.’<sup>26</sup> Whilst Gillray’s *Alecto and her Train* warns that Britain must be protected from Revolutionary powers, it also apportions blame to its own weak constitution. Even when faced with the hideous Alecto, John Bull, Fox and his men are too easily persuaded and corrupted by the false allure of Liberty.

George describes Alecto as a ‘fantastic hag’, noting her ‘webbed wings’ and the ‘hissing serpents’ which encircle her head.<sup>27</sup> Her fraternisation with Sheridan and Fox, the curator and art historian Katherine Hart writes in her analysis of the piece, ‘smacks of treason and betrayal’, suggesting the weakness and corruptibility of the gullible government officials.<sup>28</sup> Her power is reflected in her masculine physicality; as well as having muscled arms and a chiselled face roughened with stubble, she towers over Fox, Sheridan, and John Bull. Her wide stance and the tall, Phrygian cap-topped staff which she wields means that she takes up much of the space in the centre of the print, asserting her presence in an otherwise male domain. What makes her sex clear, however, is her nefarious breasts. Dangling to her waist with snakes attached at the nipples, they are a far cry from the patriotic bosoms of French Liberty which advertised the liberal ideological rationale of Republican ideologies.

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<sup>25</sup> Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Moores, 20-4, 20, 23.

<sup>27</sup> George, Vol. VI, 807.

<sup>28</sup> Katherine Hart, “James Gillray, Charles James Fox, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Caricature and Displacement in the Debate over Reform” in *No Laughing Matter: Visual Humour in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity*, ed. Angela Rosenthal and David Bindman (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2016), 76-103, 87.

Uncovered by her torn clothes, their withered and pendent appearance contributes to her characterisation as a crone; they have dropped with age and the effects of breastfeeding. As well as their surface, their contents are corrupted too – the milk the snakes drain is not the restorative and reformatory nectar celebrated by Rousseau and his followers, but rather the spoiled contents of Alecto's murderous body. Thriving off this, the snakes create an anxious image of mother-to-child transmission; Alecto is not just recruiting supporters for the revolution but breeding and nurturing them herself.



Fig. 5.2 Detail from *Alecto and her Train*

Hart observes that Gillray draws Alecto as a 'dark skinned Fury', a characterisation which is announced by Lord Stanhope as he refers to her as the 'Black Sarjeant'.<sup>29</sup> For literary scholar Emma Major, Alecto's skin is supposed to appear as if 'blackened by hellfire' from the tavern behind.<sup>30</sup> Odumosu observes that from Hogarth onwards, eighteenth-century caricaturists like Gillray animated Black bodies with 'formulaic consistency, producing a physiognomy that evoked 'lowness' through references to the subhuman.'<sup>31</sup> Gillray's Medusian, bent-bodied Alecto with grotesque, threatening breasts contributes to a cultural stereotype of the Black body as a site of physical and moral corruption. As David Dabydeen has shown in his important study of race representation in William Hogarth's prints, Gillray's racialised depiction was not novel in the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting on 'The Black Man' in Britain in an issue of *All the Year Round* from 1875, Charles Dickens observed that eighteenth and early nineteenth-century caricatures offered an insight into the lives of non-white races:

Caricatures, a generation or so old, abound in representations of the black man. And from the caricaturists, very much is to be learned touching a nation's manners and customs, ways and fashions, and other interesting matters too trivial for record at the hands of dignified history.<sup>33</sup>

As Odumosu notes, this reminds us that graphic satire 'was and always has been considered a low art form, too trivial for 'dignified history', awkwardly idiosyncratic', and therefore for Dickens, a fitting medium for the expression of ignoble racial narratives.<sup>34</sup> The Black person, Dabydeen explains in *Hogarth's Blacks*, was widely disseminated as a satiric device and offered as an embodiment

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>30</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 256.

<sup>31</sup> Odumosu, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Odumosu observes that Dabydeen's work 'set a critical discussion in motion' nuancing the discussion of Hogarth's iconography and influencing 'scholarly sensitivity to the fiction of race theories and slavery within Georgian visual culture' (23).

<sup>33</sup> Charles Dickens, 'The Black Man', *All the Year Round* 13. 327 (March 1875), 489-93, 492-3.

<sup>34</sup> Odumosu, 22.

of 'sexual and cultural savagery'.<sup>35</sup> This savagery is illustrated in Alecto's body; by her bare feet, torn clothes, skeletal body and significantly, her breasts. The way in which she instinctively, openly and effortlessly suckles snakes reminds of her bestiality; she is missing the socialisation which should have prevented the inhuman exchange in the first place, but also shows an animalistic lack of shame despite engaging in such an intimate and aberrant public display. Her breasts function savagely, and their appearance is represented accordingly. In her study of the relationship between cultural understandings of science and gender, Schiebinger argues that the breast has long been subject to racist physiognomic style interpretation. Just as anthropologists measured skulls to determine intelligence, they ascertained the value of the breast and a woman's maternal performance from its shape. Schiebinger references a diagram included in *Woman: An Historical, Gynæcological and Anthropological Compendium*, first published in Germany in 1855 and later reproduced in numerous editions and translations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 79.

<sup>36</sup> Schiebinger, 64-5; Hermann Heinrich Ploss, Max Bartels, Paul Bartels and Eric John Dingwall (eds), *Woman: An Historical, Gynæcological and Anthropological Compendium* (London : W. Heinemann Ltd., 1935), 398, 432, 399.

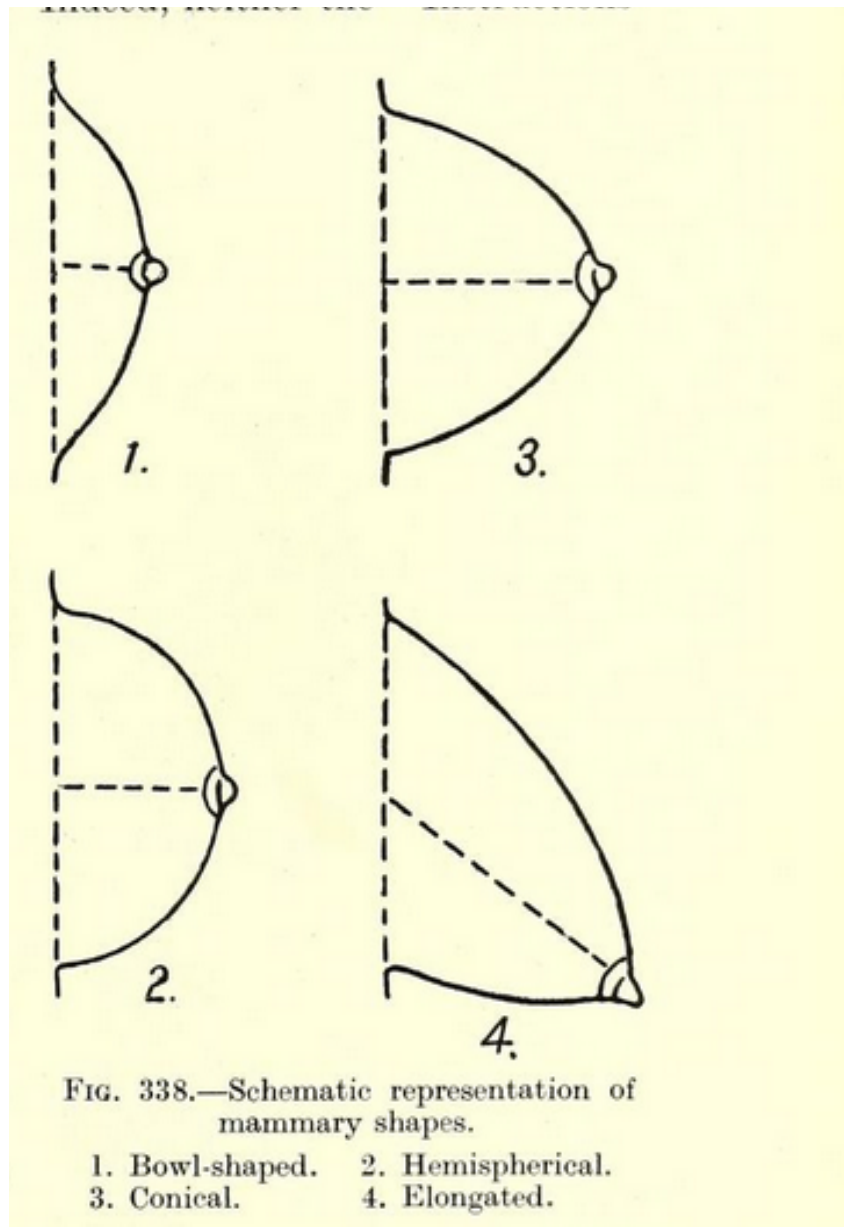


Fig. 5.3 “Schematic representation of mammary shapes” *Woman: An Historical, Gynæcological and Anthropological Compendium*

Breast number four is closest in appearance to the breasts which feature in British caricatures of the French breast. The authors write that it belongs primarily to the ‘coloured races.’ As the literary and visual scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackon shows, materials like this naturalised racial hierarchies, with pendulous breasts long being used as a ‘distinctive marker of the African female, and as signifiers of her savagery



and cannibalism.<sup>37</sup> Described by the authors as ‘flaccid, tubular, elongated’ with a ‘flabby’ and ‘slack texture’, breast four is compared to the conical and firm breasts of white and Asian woman and found to be unfavourable; like ‘the udder of [a] goat.’<sup>38</sup> In *Alecto and her Train*, Alecto’s breasts are literal udders, hanging low and being milked by animals. The cartographer John Ogilby recorded in 1670 that the women he came across in West African territories were ‘slender body’d, and of cheerful disposition, but have such breasts, that they can sling them over their shoulders, and give their chiden suck that hangs at their back.’<sup>39</sup> Schiebinger points out that the pendulous breast was not just considered less aesthetically pleasing by contemporaries – it was also thought to produce worse milk than ‘moderately sized, nicely oval breasts.’<sup>40</sup> Coupled with beliefs that physical characteristics – including those specific to race - and behavioural traits were passed on through milk, this assumption makes Alecto’s breasts undesirable as a site of nurture. Intertwining the threat of radicalism with racial degeneration, Gillray frames Alecto’s blackness as one of the corrupted elements of her body which risks transmitting to others.

In her exploration of Gillray’s engagement with abolitionist narratives, Hart argues that Alecto’s black skin and ragged clothes indicate that she is a slave. Whilst the handful of cash she extends to John Bull could be a bribe to persuade him to enlist, it could also be an offering to secure her freedom. Either way, a power balance has been exploited and empty promises made. Hart proposes that the white Medusian face that is replicated on Fox’s drum raises the argument ‘against embracing or promoting change’, with Fox ‘blithely inviting the mayhem of revolution’ by sporting such a symbol.<sup>41</sup> The inversely twinned white face emphasises the racialised encounter between the subjects of the print; Odumosu writes that ‘blackness was either overemphasized or semantically reversed through antiphrasis’ – with the ‘whiteness’ of a character being mentioned in speech bubbles.<sup>42</sup> Distilling this discourse into a grotesque caricature, Gillray questions whose side Fox is on.

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<sup>37</sup> Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 183.

<sup>38</sup> Ploss et al., 398, 432, 399.

<sup>39</sup> John Ogilby, *Africa: being an Accurate Description of the regions of Ægypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid, the land of Negroes, Guinee, Æthiopia, and the Abyssines, with all the adjacent islands* (London: T. Johnson & J. Ogilby, 1670), 451.

<sup>40</sup> Schiebinger, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Hart, 94, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Odumosu, 29.

Drawing attention to his sympathy for the republican ideals of abolitionism, Gillray presents Fox as a traitor to a British empire whose successes have been predicated on systems of class and race hierarchies.



Fig. 5.4 and 5.5 Detail from *Alecto and her Train*

The fact that Alecto breastfeeds – albeit snakes – further supports Hart’s claim that Alecto is a slave. Scholars have recognised the many, long and tortured links between breastfeeding and slavery, reflecting on how, especially in Europe and North and South America, Black women worked as wet nurses for white children to the disadvantage of their own offspring.<sup>43</sup> Others have observed how Black nurses provoked anxiety because their breast milk, like other women’s, was thought to contain a concentrated and contagious essence of themselves, including their status-based character traits and physical impurities. The latter, scholars including Mariselle Meléndez have observed, was of particular concern; Black, Asian and

<sup>43</sup> Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were her Property: White Women Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 101-22-; Robyn Lee, *Ethics and Politics of Breastfeeding: Power, Pleasure, Poetics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 38-9; Emily West and R. J. Knight, “Mothers’ Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South” *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (February 2017): 37-68; Margaret Hunt, 139-42.

other minority ethnic women were thought to be more likely carriers of disease than white women.<sup>44</sup>

One physician, Robert Thomas, warned his British readers in 1790 not to employ a 'negro, or mulatto woman' as a nurse because there was a great chance she harboured 'many dreadful disorders, such as the yaws, leprosy, or a venereal taint.'<sup>45</sup> As gender and race historian Jennifer L. Morgan points out, Black women's breasts were repeatedly evoked as icons of 'monstrous and fecund bodies', with their pendent appearance meant to represent a base bestiality as well as a contaminated body.<sup>46</sup> Observing the women of Guinea in 1735, the abolitionist John Atkins wrote that 'Childing, and their Breasts always pendulous, stretches them to so unseemly a length and Bigness that some [...] could suckle over their shoulder.'<sup>47</sup> Gillray took advantage of this visual often to imagine the dark forces of Republicanism. His 1795 mock-heroic satire *Light Expelling Darkness, - evaporation of Stygian exhalations, -or- The sun of the constitution, rising superior to the clouds of opposition* similarly shows a Black Medusian fury with extraordinarily elongated, snake-like breasts luring people into the underworld of radical Republicanism. Looming in apocalyptic darkness, the fury tries to tempt Sheridan, Fox and Stanhope into a hellish void just like Alecto tries to tempt Sheridan, Fox and John Bull into the hellish Crown and Anchor in *Alecto and her Train*. In a further similarity, Gillray draws both furies with pendent, snake-carrying breasts; in *Light Expelling Darkness*, the French monster is either suckling writhing snakes, or they are meant to appear as extensions of her body. Blurring into the dark tendrils of clouds and smoke which

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<sup>44</sup> Mariselle Meléndez, *Deviant and Useful Citizens: The Cultural Production of the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Peru* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), 169.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Thomas, *Medical Advice to the Inhabitants of Warm Climates, on the Domestic Treatment of All the Diseases Incidental Therein: With a Few Useful Hints to New Settlers, for the Preservation of Health, and the Prevention of Sickness* (London: J. Strahan and W. Richardson, 1790), 315. For more on representations of the relationship between race and sexual disease, see Seth Suman, *Difference and Disease: Medicine, Race, and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 167-207.

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology," 1500-1770" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 167-92, 188-9.

<sup>47</sup> John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the west Indies* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1735), 50.

escapes from a firebrand she holds, they serve as an antithetical image to the full, high and chastely covered breasts of Justice, who flies angelically above.



Fig. 5.6 Gillray, *Light Expelling Darkness, - evaporation of Stygian exhalations, -or- The sun of the constitution, rising superior to the clouds of opposition*, 1795. BM Satires 8644

As Colley notes, the French were frequently presented by the British as the 'Hyde to their Jekyll.' Comparisons like this contrived a flattering domestic identity which assured the masses that 'they had drawn the long straw in life', and went someway to deflecting concerns about Britain's approach to, and interference in, the events of the revolution.<sup>48</sup> But in addition to measuring Britain against its foreign enemy, loyalist satirists valorised the anti-revolutionary work of the Tories by using members of the opposition as scapegoats for unpopular or uncomfortable decisions.

<sup>48</sup> Colley, 368.

As in *Alecto and her Train* and *Light Expelling Darkness*, Whig politicians including Fox, Sheridan and Stanhope were paraded as extremist idiots whose liberal aspirations needed to be quashed if Britain was to remain an authoritative European power and a united, moral national body under Tory ministry. Constitutional crackdowns on radicalism and vast spending on war efforts against France were presented as necessary to contain the spread of seditious sentiment which was foolishly imbibed by and embodied in Whiggish radicals. In 1798, an anonymous satirist expanded upon this motif to create a comical caricature of French 'Democracy' as a mother-figure revered by Fox and his Whig rival John Horne Tooke.

*The Hopes of the Party! Or the Darling Children of Democracy! (1798): nurturing sedition*

Described by George as 'one of many indications of the sinister connotation of 'democracy', *The Hopes of the Party! Or the Darling Children of Democracy!* inverts the narrative of the tender, breastfeeding mother in the guise of Charity or Mother Nature to picture a sinisterly masculine French female figure holding Fox on one knee and Horne Tooke on the other.<sup>49</sup> The implication is that as the 'children' of Democracy, they have just been – or are about to be - nursed by the French hag. Wearing miniature bonnets-rouges and gazing with adoration at the figure who cradles them close to her breasts, the satirist implies that they blindly idolise French forces just as an infant unquestionably worships its mother. Democracy is a blend of the monstrous, the masculine and the aberrant feminine; she boasts a beard, muscular limbs and downwards pointing breasts with distended nipples resembling her taloned nails. The tip of a dagger touches the side of her right breast, reminding of the militant motivations which have rendered her so deformed in the imagination of anti-revolutionaries.

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<sup>49</sup> George, Vol. VII.



Fig. 5.7 *The Hopes of the Party! Or the Darling Children of Democracy!*, 1798. BM Satires 9178

The print takes inspiration from an earlier satirical image of Fox and Lord North as plump infants suckling from a figure labelled as Hibernia – the Latin name for Ireland. As George explains, William Dent's *Hibernia in the Character of Charity*

(1784) addresses the tension surrounding William Pitt's proposed commercial resolutions between Britain and Ireland in the 1780s.



Fig. 5.8 William Dent, *Hibernia in the Character of Charity*, 1784. BM Satires 6785

Cradling the Whigs just like Democracy does in *The Hopes of the Party*, the mother-monster Hibernia mutters ‘Bless the little Innocents!’ whilst breaking the back of Britannia, who has dropped her spear and shield to support the trio as a seat. Lord North can be seen guzzling Hibernia’s milk, whilst Burke, wielding scroll labelled ‘faction’, kneels at her feet. As in *The Hopes of the Party*, Hibernia uses her transgressive breast as a persuasive tool – as a figurehead for Ireland, she comforts Fox and North and provides them with sustenance that they cannot get elsewhere. Troubling this relationship, the inscription reminds that both parties will want something more than what they first offer to exchange:

These sweet Babes by Britannia quite cast out,  
At length have found a Parent brave and stout.  
They'll good children prove, she a fond mother,  
Because, hence they may assist each other.

Along Hibernia’s skirt is written ‘Pro-tecting Duties’, a demand for which George notes was made in Ireland in April 1784. As political historian Tamara Hunt observes in her analysis of the print, Dent warns Irish leaders ‘against accepting Fox’s support for Irish legislative independence.’ As it does in *The Hopes of the Party*, the breastfeeding exchange highlights the exploitative potential of the relationship, advising of the perverse political corruption at the heart of the Whig party. The motif of the vulnerable child and domineering mother lent itself well to political prints asserting power imbalances; twenty years following *Hibernia*, Gillray drew France as a grotesque, bloodied virago playing with a diminutive Napoleon like a puppet on her arm in *The Genius of France nursing her darling* (1804).<sup>50</sup> Like *The Hopes of the Party and Hibernia*, the satire capitalised on contemporary anxieties about male political impotence.

Misogynistic motifs of scolding spouses, cuckolding wives, sexually disgraced political patrons, conspiring seductresses and the masculine monster-woman conceptualised the fear that women were eager to take advantage of weak men and seize control for themselves. The events of the French Revolution aggravated these

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<sup>50</sup> For description and analysis of *The Genius of France nursing her darling* (1804) see George, Vol. VIII.



anxieties; Colley observes that British satirists characterised such imperiousness as ‘peculiarly French’:

Describing 'inappropriate' female behaviour as French in this way was a partially polemical tactic: a means by which British moralists could stress how alien and unwelcome they found such behaviour to be. A woman who tried to act like a man was manifestly unnatural. And what better way could there be of making this clear to a British audience than by characterising such improper conduct as being peculiarly French?<sup>51</sup>

Prints publicised Revolutionary France as producing gender deviant citizens: weak men and strong women who upset the stability of established institutional hierarchies. This message was clearly conveyed in the recurring image of the all-powerful, bare-breasted woman sat atop a plinth being worshipped by sycophantic men. The hag on a stump adored by Fox and Horne Tooke in *Hopes of the Party* reminds of Isaac Cruikshank’s earlier representation of French Liberty as a debauched idol in *A Peace Offering to the Genius of Liberty and Equality* (1794). Employing the trope of the domineering woman - and the men without the mettle to oppose her – Cruikshank dedicates the print to ‘those Lovers of French Freedom who would thus Debase their Country.’ Among those French lovers are Sheridan, Fox and a stooped Lord Stanhope; George records that the print responds to Stanhope’s 1794 motion to acknowledge the French Republic, during which he argued that Britain had underestimated the enemies’ military prowess.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Colley, 252.

<sup>52</sup> George, Vol. VII, 76; Mary Thrale (ed.), *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 118. See Richard Whatmore, “Shelburne and Perpetual Peace: Small States, Commerce, and International Relations with the Bowood Circle” in *An Enlightened Statesman in Whig Britain: Lord Shelburne in Context, 1737-1805*, ed. Nigel Aston and Clarissa Campbell Orr (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 249-76, 273.



Fig. 5.9 Isaac Cruikshank, *A Peace Offering to the Genius of Liberty and Equality*, 1794. BM Satires 8426

Masculine and monstrous, Liberty has claws, a five o'clock shadow, a maniacal grin, bulging eyes and a crown of serpents which hiss her abhorrent radical thoughts: 'Rapine', 'Murder', 'Famine', 'Atheism.' Seated on a throne made of gin barrels, she is offered mighty gifts: Stanhope presents a model of the House of Lords as well as a bible, sceptre and crown whilst Sheridan balances 'The Bank' on his head - Fox follows with the 'India House' and the royal arms. Prepared to lay down their own government and sovereignty at the feet of radicals, they sacrifice their own constitution to support the debased aspirations of another. Turning a blind eye to – or scared to confront – the atrocities that Liberty and her republic have committed, Stanhope and his band bend to her exploitative demands. Unseen to them is the dagger she clutches behind her left breast, in readiness to stab them in the back. This barbarity and lack of respect for Britain is underscored by the decapitated body of Justice. Like Liberty she is bare chested, but rather than crudely exposing herself

to others, she has been defiled. For Emma Major, the petite feminine figure of Justice reminds viewers of the delicacy and virtue that French Liberty lacks.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 5.10 Detail from *A Peace Offering*

Liberty's body – but especially her breasts - are used to frame the atrocity of Jacobin femininity. Heavy and sagging with distended nipples, her breasts are suspended over a band around her waist, bracketing an engraving which reads 'Republiq[ue].' In between Liberty's breasts is a green creature which Mary Dorothy

<sup>53</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 258.

George records as a snake.<sup>54</sup> Sandwiched underneath Liberty's left breast having perhaps snaked down from her hair, it touches the tip of its tongue to her right breast. Whilst not actively nursing the snake, its open mouth and proximity to her breast suggest it is ready to latch, like the snakes in Gillray's earlier representation of a Medusian Liberty in *Alecto and the Train* (1791). Overturning traditional iconography of Marianne as a protective mother of the people, Cruikshank depicts Liberty as a caretaker for the corrupt. As well as signifying her transgressive maternity, Liberty's vulgar breasts signal her sexual dissipation. The bare breasted woman, Kromm argues, was an analogue for 'frenzied unreason'; exposed breasts demonstrated 'disregard for the apparel of civilised behaviour' and thus hinted at 'sexualising physical abandon.'<sup>55</sup> Despite her grotesque Gorgon appearance, scholars have argued that Medusa was historically conceptualised as a sexual threat.<sup>56</sup> Paradoxically, the peril that forbade people looking upon her rendered the possibility of doing so seductive. Cruikshank imbues Liberty with some of this raw yet repellent allure - her crudely parted legs, bare breasts and the attractive, prostrate murdered figure of Justice make the scene sexually grotesque. Liberty's breasts invite the sexual gaze whilst simultaneously repelling it, invoking feelings of shame and vulnerability in the viewer. Connecting the threat of radicalism with the

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<sup>54</sup> George, Vol. VII, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Jane Kromm, "'Marianne' and the Madwomen", *Art Journal* 46, no. 4 (1987): 299-304, 299. Kromm draws attention to Robert Edge Pine's portrait *Madness*, c. 1771, which provides a particularly striking example of the bare-breasted madwoman, see page 299. Other prints including Cruikshank's later work *Lord Mum Overwhelmed with Parisian Embraces* (1796) used the breast to illustrate the looseness of Frenchwomen. James Harris, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Malmesbury, is pictured being met upon arrival in Paris as a peace negotiator by a crowd of grotesque French poissardes who clamour to get their hands on him. One fisherwoman muscles her way to kiss Lord Malmesbury as another shouts 'my turn next', with two gurning, bare and pendent-breasted hags standing expectantly nearby.

<sup>56</sup> In his posthumously published essay "Medusa's Head," Sigmund Freud proposed that Medusa was a symbol of masculine insecurity, of men's fears about women's ability to usurp their power by targeting them where they were at their most sexually vulnerable. Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head" (1922) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII (1920-1922): *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 273-74. More recently, the criminologist Harriet Burgess has argued that Medusa can be perceived as a 'monstrous beauty', whose 'power and violent capacity lay in her sexuality.' Burgess, "The Framing of the Shrew: A Study of the Sexualisation of the Female Criminal," *Trinity College Law Review*, vol. XVII (2014), 165-81, 167.

misandrist might of Medusa and the biblical sins of Eve, Cruikshank imbues the female Jacobin with an authority which threatens to destroy the impotent men lining up to appease her.

Recently, Esry Contogouris has argued that Medusa's popularity in the eighteenth century should be understood as a symptom of patriarchal insecurity surround gender hierarchies. Reflecting on the agency of female figures in eighteenth-century European art, Contogouris notes that Medusa 'functioned as a strong symbol of aristocrats' fear of losing political, social and economic power.' 'Her ability to disempower men', Contogouris continues, tapped into anxieties about excessive female influence.<sup>57</sup> Medusa prophesised the violent consequences of power in the hands of women, which conservatives mooted as one of the many costs of the French pursuit of liberty. As Mitchell remarks, she provided conservatives with the 'perfect image of alien, sub-human monstrosity – dangerous, perverse, hideous, and sexually ambiguous.'<sup>58</sup> Epitomising the dangers of uncontained female agency and corruption, the myth of Medusa provided a fitting vehicle through which to advertise the inexorable authority of radical women - an authority which contemporaries warned against underestimating. 'In France', the Scottish minister and poet James Fordyce alerted as early as 1778, 'the women are supreme: they govern all from the court down to the cottage.'<sup>59</sup> Whilst corrupt breasts with contagious insides went some way to conceptualising the peril of this misplaced power, some caricaturists created even more extreme visions of the maternal breast's ideal function gone awry. Dabbling in death rather than nourishing life, it provided a striking image of the danger of French Jacobinism to the gendered social and political order.

### **Violent Discharges: the Breast as a Physical Threat**

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<sup>57</sup> Esry Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2018), 58.

<sup>58</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 175.

<sup>59</sup> James Fordyce, *Character and Conduct of the Female Sex, and the Advantages to be derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1776), 27.

Speaking on the satirical ‘othering’ of Frenchwomen in the eighteenth century, Moores explains that caricature depictions of the French ‘evolved and transformed according to the threat that French power posed to Britain.’<sup>60</sup> These threats were multiple, diverse and acute from 1789-99, and always coloured, to some degree, by violence. A network of bloody satirical images relayed this; lamppost lynchings and the guillotine captured the morbid cultural imagination and remain emotive emblems of the dark days of the Reign of Terror today. Yet despite its remarkable imagery, the violent Jacobin breast has been overlooked as a symbol of revolutionary conflict. Whilst Wagner has recognised the ‘bloody breast’ – that which produced and nursed infants on blood instead of milk – as a symbol of ‘the dark side of republicanism’, its’ function as or proximity to a weapon requires closer attention.<sup>61</sup>

On 5 October 1789 the women of Paris took to the streets to protest the extortionate price and scarcity of bread. The event escalated into a riot as revolutionary agitators merged with the angry mob, and the crowd determined to walk the six miles to storm the palace of Versailles. Before long, the market women or ‘poissardes’ were leading tens of thousands of people – dragging cannons and armed with axes, kitchen knives, pikes, pitchforks, muskets and pistols - to besiege the palace.<sup>62</sup> Intent on capturing the royal family and returning king Louis XVI to Paris where he would be forced to answer to the public discontent, the women used their weapons to intimidate, assault and even behead the king’s guards. The women’s demand for bread, historian Madelyn Gutwirth claims, was a ‘mere metaphor for the variety and ramifications of their displeasure’, a displeasure which was vocalised so powerfully that it sent shockwaves throughout the city and across the channel.<sup>63</sup>

‘Eyewitness accounts and visual documentation of the procession’, feminist historians Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite record, tell again and again of ‘feminine empowerment’, of a ‘world turned upside down;’ women seated astride

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<sup>60</sup> Moores, 205.

<sup>61</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 63-4, 65.

<sup>62</sup> The women claimed more weapons, as well as ammunition for their pistols, at the Hôtel de Ville. Here, they agreed to let the revolutionary activist and national guardsman Stanislas-Marie Maillard lead them to Versailles and be a spokesperson for their grievances. For an account of Maillard’s address to the women at the Hôtel, see George Long, *France and Its Revolutions: A Pictorial History 1789-1848* (London: Charles Knight, 1850), 67-8.

<sup>63</sup> Gutwirth, 239.

canons, 'women marching with swords in hands, women waving the branches of trees, women threatening the captured royal bodyguards and fraternising with the National Guardsman... women shouting and chanting as they marched.'<sup>64</sup> The success of the Women's March on Versailles stoked fears about women's readiness to express and act upon social frustrations. As Joan Landes observes in her account of the March, it was a significant moment of mobilisation for French women who 'asserted their right' to participate in affairs which ran alongside, or contrary to, their domestic duties.<sup>65</sup> *The Times* of October 1789 recorded that most of the women that stormed the palace were of the labouring class, 'chiefly Fisherwoman.'<sup>66</sup> In loyalist sources, fisherwomen were synonymous with dangerous proto-feminist, democratic desire. Hannah More famously wrote of her shock in 1789 that 'the throne of the grand monarch ha[d] been overturned by fisherwoman', an occasion she saw marked by 'despotism' and 'anarchy.'<sup>67</sup> William Dent's print depiction of the march, *Female Furies or Extraordinary Revolution* (1789), imparts a sense of their fierce revolt.

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<sup>64</sup> Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, "Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris" in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* ed. Sarah E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 79-101, 84.

<sup>65</sup> Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 107.

<sup>66</sup> *The Times* (12 October 1789).

<sup>67</sup> William Roberts (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah Moore*. Vol. I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845), 328.



Fig. 5.11 Dent, *Female Furies or Extraordinary Revolution*, 1789. BM no. 1948,0214.464

Discussing the ‘vituperative antipathy to France in the 1790s’, Josephine McDonagh explains that ‘the mob of licentious women’ became a stock image in Francophobic presentations of social and political disorder. ‘Various figures of female debauchery’, she notes, frequently emblematised the riotous radicalism of the revolution and cautioned of the gender corruption it had caused.<sup>68</sup> In his analysis of *Female Furies* the art historian David Bindman notes that the women can be seen ‘routing’ the guards and even ‘chopping off some of their heads’, comically upsetting ‘the natural order of things.’ The print is unusual, he argues, in the way that it dwells ‘on the violence of the assault’, showing the women maiming, murdering and generally terrorising the men at Versailles.<sup>69</sup> Other prints including the anonymous *A Versailles, à Versailles* (1789), Isaac Cruikshank’s *Le roi escalve ou les sujets*

<sup>68</sup> Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.68.

<sup>69</sup> David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1989), 93.



*rois/Female patriotism* (1789) and John Wells' *The Paris militia setting out for Versailles* (1789) present more sanitised versions of the event.<sup>70</sup>

Dent's particularly bloody depiction shows a succession of women dominating over men and mercilessly bringing them to death. With axes, muskets and swords operating as extensions to their aggressive bodies, the female figures foreshadow later satirical depictions of the weaponised Jacobin breast. Dent does feature the breast in *Female Furies*; two particularly eye-catching details illustrate it as a site of callousness and unruly abandon. In the first, an executioner gets ready to bring down an axe onto a partly decapitated gentleman whose head is held against a cartwheel. Her outstretched arms have forced aside the gauze front of her dress so that her large breasts spill crudely out, designating her sexual and aggressive unruliness as well as her coarseness as a working-class woman. With her weapon raised, she inverts propagandist insignia of bare breasted Marianne brandishing a flag, staff, sword or olive branch. With her weapon raised, she inverts propagandist insignia of the bare breasted French Liberty – also referred to as Marianne – brandishing a flag, staff, sword or olive branch. This paralleling exposes the treachery of radical claims that political liberation was being affected fairly and systemically; the noble and composed figure of French Liberty is false, with the true corruption and chaos of the new republic embodied in the violent market woman. In the second image, a dying man reaches his hand up to a woman, who slits his throat in a desperate attempt to save himself. His hand grasps at her breast, a site supposed to symbolise the benevolent principles supposed to guide femininity. But instead of charity, nurture and compassion, the man is met with the merciless murderousness of the Jacobin woman. Her breast, just like her heart and head, are closed off to the suffering of others.

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<sup>70</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie; BM Satires 7560; BM Satires 2955.



Fig. 5.12 and 5.13 Detail from *Female Furies*

Hart has recognised the aggressive female as ‘a stock character’ during the late eighteenth-century, with the ‘fierce and large breasted women’ in Dent’s *Female Furies* serving as ‘famous examples of the French mob.’<sup>71</sup> ‘Fury’ was a popular epithet used to describe French radical women; in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke referred to the women who marched upon Versailles as ‘unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women.’<sup>72</sup> According to Hay, Burke’s position on the revolution was not fixed before the march: it was the horror he felt upon witnessing the Parisian peasant women mannishly driving the Royal family from the palace, Hay writes, that ‘firmly

<sup>71</sup> Hart, 76-103, 94.

<sup>72</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. A. J. Grieve (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), 69. For more on Burke’s accounts of Versailles, see Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Signifying woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke and Mill* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 60-94.

entrenched' his opposition.<sup>73</sup> In his discussion of the radical diffusion of knowledge amongst plebeian people in the 1790s, Haywood shows how Burke's highly visible contemporaries questioned the accuracy of his reactive record.<sup>74</sup> Thomas Paine in particular, Haywood notes, perceived *Reflections* to be oversimplified and sensationalised: a 'hysterical and overheated' theatrical dramatisation spotted with 'evasions, elisions and misrepresentations.'<sup>75</sup> As a riposte to *Reflections*, Part One of Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) finds Burke's account to be a 'rhapsody of the imagination' 'written in a frenzy of passion' superseding that of the march itself.<sup>76</sup> Haywood argues that Paine's alternative version of events instead uses 'neutral, functional vocabulary' to restore 'some dignity to' and even evoke sympathy for, the procession of poissardes.<sup>77</sup> Burke's 'furies of hell' become Paine's 'very numerous body of women' in a move which turns away from the lurid energies and imageries which fuelled populist loyalist propaganda and towards an enlightened narrative of

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<sup>73</sup> Hay, manuscript page number, 187.

<sup>74</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and The People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18. Haywood directs his readers to a number of works which examine eighteenth-century responses to Burke's version of the march, including Tom Furniss, "Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft" in *Revolution in Writing: British Literary Responses to the French Revolution* ed. Kelvin Everest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 65-100, 71; *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 115-63; "Cementing the Nation: Burke's Reflections on Nationalism and National Identity" in *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary* ed. John Whale (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 114-44; Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*; Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale, Yale University Press, 1989), 124-52. More recently, others have examined Burke's alarmist reaction to the March on Versailles and to other mob events alongside responses by contemporaries including Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine and the inventor James Watt. See Daniel I. O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilisation and Democracy* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); 157-94; Larry Stewart, "James Watt's Paine: Mob Rules, Democrats, and Demons" in *James Watt, 1736-1819: Culture, Innovation and Enlightenment* ed. Malcom Dick and Caroline Archer-Parré (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 83-108.

<sup>75</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London: Penguin, 1984), 39, 49-56. Philp discusses the complex dialogue between Paine's Part One and Two of *The Rights of Man* and Burke's *Reflections* in "Paine, *Rights of Man*" in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s* ed. Pamela Clement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31-46.

<sup>77</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, 18.

aspirational political ascendancy.<sup>78</sup> Whilst blatantly sensationalist in the minds of people like Paine, the violent fury figure presented in Dent's *Female Furies* and Burke's *Reflections* nonetheless supplied loyalist sources with a salient symbol through which to connect radical inversion and monstrous femininity.

French fisherwomen appeared often in visual satire as maniacal crones with grotesque features such as warped bodies and Medusian hair. Whilst Dent's print doesn't depict the women of Paris as monstrous figures, Burke does state their 'abused shape' in his version of the events. Burke's emphasis is significant – in transgressing ideal femininity, the women have been rendered physically vile. The following prints take a similar tack, visualising radical women's bodies as grotesque mutations of the soft and shapely aspirational female form. Transformed by rage, women become physically masculine and morally beyond the pale; Burke wrote that at Versailles, the militant women were 'lost to shame' having merged with, and even dominated, 'a mixed mob of ferocious men.'<sup>79</sup> Scholars have cautioned against taking such condemnations of gender transgression too seriously; Gatrell has argued that high incidence of such parochial complaints merely attest to its 'unremarkable prevalence.'<sup>80</sup> However, this chapter makes the case that female masculine behaviour was experienced and presented as a real threat, particularly when connected to radical Jacobin politics. Reflecting in 1806 on events in France, the arch-conservative conduct writer Jane West warned that women's gender transgression had caused national ruin:

...the state of manners in France itself, as far as related to our sex, has obtained such dreadful publicity, as allows us to ascribe the fall of that country in a great measure to the dissipated indelicate behaviour and loose morals of its women.<sup>81</sup>

West's strong and 'astonishing' responses, literary scholar Robin Jarvis argues, should be understood as 'symptoms of a backlash against new thinking on

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.,; Paine, 62.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, 66.

<sup>80</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 357.

<sup>81</sup> Jane West, *Letters to a Young Lady in which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered Chiefly with a Reference to Prevailing Opinions* (New York: O. Penniman and Co., 1806), 27.

matters of gender' in the wake of the French Revolution. West's 'designation of women as moral legislators', Jarvis continues, is indicative of a wider response to perceived domestic crises which posed 'larger threats to the social order'.<sup>82</sup> Conservative moralists like West propagated fears that French women's political participation had and would continue to galvanise their like-minded British counterparts, causing comparable disruption. Following the March on Versailles, hostility towards women's political involvement grew. In France, women were asserting their social and political dissatisfaction more than ever and had organised outlets for their activism. Cultural historian Lynn Hunt notes that between 1791 and 1793 alone, French women formed political clubs in at least fifty provincial towns and cities. Radical women including Olympe de Gouges, Madame Roland and Théroigne de Méricourt set a precedent for political women, publishing on, protesting against and challenging the criticisms and limitations that were imposed upon them. As Hunt explains in her discussion of the active roles that women played during the revolution, 'whenever women were prominent in some way, their participation elicited some kind of remarks.'<sup>83</sup> The prints which follow distil this anxiety, providing violent visual prophecies of the cost of radical political power, rather than familial authority, in women's grasp. The remainder of this section closely considers three satirical prints etched by three renowned caricaturists at the end of the century: Rowlandson's *The Contrast* (1792), Isaac Cruikshank's *A Republican Belle* (1794) and Gillray's *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798). Analysing the prints in chronological sequence will illustrate how, as revolutionary conflict intensified, so did the characterisation of French female bodies as violent.

*Thomas Rowlandson, The Contrast (1792): female domination over men*

In 1792 Rowlandson published a satirical print titled *The Contrast* – a work which Bindman notes as 'probably the most widely disseminated design of the whole anti-radical campaign.'<sup>84</sup> Reproduced on mugs, jugs and broadside sheets, the satire

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<sup>82</sup> Robin Jarvis, *The Romantic Period: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1789-1830* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 87.

<sup>83</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>84</sup> Bindman, 118.

capitalised upon the growing anti-revolution sentiment in Britain; Landes has observed that the work reflects 'the British public's shift away from its initially positive view of the Revolution', hammering home the terrible vices of the French.<sup>85</sup> The print pits the peace and prosperity of British conservatism against libertine French disorder and ruin, posing the strapline question 'Which is best?' The values and consequences of each are listed beneath two medallions, one featuring a romanticised figure of Britannia and the other a grotesque caricature of French Liberty, the figurehead of the Republic's new regime.



Fig. 5.14 Rowlandson, *The Contrast*, 1792. BM Satires 8284

The anarchy of the Revolution is encoded in the body of Liberty. Hostile from top to toe, a crown of hissing serpents appears in place of her hair and her feet rest

<sup>85</sup> Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 125.

upon a mutilated corpse, the head of which she brandishes on a pike. The corpse is intended to represent Perseus, and his murder explicitly alludes to Liberty's transgressive masculinity. Perseus' death is a gendered role reversal of the ancient Greek myth in which Perseus beheads Medusa. This reversal suggests, as Burke imagined, that the revolutionary spirit had created a topsy-turvy world in which women, instead of men, sought and secured vengeance. In the left panel Britannia appears as an emblem of ideal femininity. Instead of a crown of snakes she wears the helmet of Athena. As Marina Warner explains in her exploration of the female form as allegory, Athena provided the 'principal model for the monumental conception of Britannia.'<sup>86</sup> Symbolising heroic endeavour, she helped Perseus in his quest to kill Medusa by gifting him with a reflective shield. Allowing him to advance on Medusa without looking directly at her and thus avoiding petrification, he was able to kill her. Upon this success, Perseus gratefully delivered her severed head to Athena. The image of Medusa holding Perseus' head in *The Contrast* inverts this narrative to suggest what happens when ideological feminine behaviours – such as the protection exemplified by Athena – are transgressed; men's heads end up on spikes. As the inscriptions below the French medallion proclaim, this violent female transgression lays the foundation for 'anarchy', 'murder' and 'cruelty.' It is significant that Rowlandson's two female figures face each other in a standoff, their eyes aligned, and arms raised in parallel. For Rowlandson, the radical, violent and masculine woman doesn't just put men in jeopardy; she pits herself against her own sex.

In her analysis of the print, art historian Janis Bergman-Carton has described Liberty as a 'wild-eyed furie' whose 'exposed breasts' ratify her sexual depravity and unruly passion.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Landes describes her as a 'frightening old crone' whose 'snaky hair', 'muscular arms' and 'scantily clad body' stress the threat of her transgressive femininity.<sup>88</sup> Her exposed flesh is important; in rejecting the constraints of conservative clothing, she exemplifies sexual liberation, but her ragged dress and sinewy muscle reveals this release not as attractive to men, but rather as ugly and depraved. McCreery argues that concerns about women's 'sexual independence'

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<sup>86</sup> Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, 47.

<sup>87</sup> Janis Bergmann-Carton, *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830-1848* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1995), 213.

<sup>88</sup> Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 125.

were amplified as the revolution approached, in part due to 'acute public disorder.'<sup>89</sup> Liberty's rejection of sexual propriety hints at her lack of physical restraint. As Mellor has noted, her depravity is made plainer by the reserved and 'modestly dressed' British Liberty, who is draped in feminine pink.<sup>90</sup> Liberty's sexualised, sinful and violent body makes her threatening to men, whilst Britannia's modest appearance and association with Athena emphasise her as a guardian of them. The 'sexually voracious woman' emerged as a symbol for the 'political disorder and social mayhem' of revolutionary France, her bodily abandon frequently associated with murder.<sup>91</sup> Moving beyond discussions of their sexualised exposure, the breasts of Rowlandson's Liberty carry an even more significant symbolism.

Rowlandson represents Liberty's loss of femininity through his depiction of her breasts, which are smothered by fire. Encased in and obscured by flames which rise as a gauze from her dress, they are a hostile other to the milky bosoms of the ideal mother-woman. A pair of snakes uncoil and hiss from their base, affirming their aggressive function.

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<sup>89</sup> McCreery, 'Moral Panic in Eighteenth-Century London? The "Monster" and the Press' in *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England*, ed. David Lemmings and Claire Walker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 198.

<sup>90</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, 144.

<sup>91</sup> McDonagh, 68.





Fig. 5.15 Detail from *The Contrast*

Liberty's anti-maternal breasts and murderous actions recall William Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*; first performed in 1606, *Macbeth* remained a popular text in the eighteenth-century.<sup>92</sup> In Act 1 Scene V, Lady Macbeth pleads to be divested of the feminine and invested with the masculine. As follows:

unsex me here,  
 And fill me from the crown to the top full  
 Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;  
 Come to my woman's breasts,

<sup>92</sup> David Taylor, 115.

And take my milk for gall<sup>93</sup>

In this scene, Lady Macbeth is preparing herself to murder Duncan. To see it through, she resolves that she must be stripped of feminine, maternal qualities and their attendant weaknesses, and filled instead with masculine cruelty. She identifies her womanhood as contained within her breast and determines to be rid of its milk. In rejecting her milk Lady Macbeth refuses her role as a maternal nurturer; for Shakespeare and his later readers, this amounts to an unsexing. Impeded by her milk, Lady Macbeth asks to be filled with gall, a bitter substance associated with masculine audacity. In her feminist analysis of female warfare, Ellen O’Gorman argues that Lady Macbeth ‘strikes a universal chord of recognition’, her maternal callousness, physical violence and instigative power making her the embodiment of fears about femininity.<sup>94</sup> As Yalom notes, in wanting to swap her milk for toxic gall Lady Macbeth ‘betrays a primitive fear that the nurturant breast can change into an agent of destruction.’<sup>95</sup> In her exploration of the print, Mellor has stated that Liberty appears as an ‘Amazonian harridan’, a ‘savage revolutionary’ whose fury suggests a wider matriarchal aggression directed towards men.<sup>96</sup> Perseus, symbolising man, has his power violently usurped, and lies passive and disembodied in death. Famed for reputedly cutting off their right breasts in order to better wield a bow and arrow, the mythical Amazons symbolise a violent break from the maternal, and a misappropriation of the masculine.<sup>97</sup>

Lady Macbeth is an early modern Amazon, aspiring to purge the nurturing breast and replace it with masculine arms. Her Amazonian sensibilities are underscored in Act I Scene VII, with her infanticidal admission that she would wrench

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<sup>93</sup> William Shakespeare, ‘Macbeth’ (1606) in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. Nichols Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 113.

<sup>94</sup> Ellen O’Gorman, ‘A Woman’s History of Warfare’ in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Miriam Leonard and Vanda Zajko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 189-207, 191.

<sup>95</sup> Yalom, 82-3.

<sup>96</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, 143.

<sup>97</sup> For more on the Amazonian myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660-1750* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 41-56.

her baby from her breast and dash out its brains.<sup>98</sup> Almost two hundred years later, Rowlandson's reproduces this tension between the maternal and the militant, and especially the sense of masculinity as integral to murder, in his representation of Liberty. A threatening departure from the ideal maternal body, Liberty's flaming breasts suggest she has been purged of nurturance and instead made dangerous. Traditionally, fire has been understood as an opposite to water, a feminine element comparable to breast milk. Fire has connotations of sin and hell, as well as suggesting licentious, unbridled sexual passion. Liberty is the eighteenth-century incarnation of what Lady Macbeth longed to be, free from her femininity and able to murder like a man. What should be – ideally speaking – her balm-filled maternal breast is filled with fire, which is masculine and destructive like gall. The hostility and threat embodied in Liberty's breast is underscored by her warrior pose and open-mouthed war-cry, as well as the pike and dagger which she wields. Free from her femininity, she is able to murder like a man.

For Rowlandson, female appropriation of masculine power results in a loss of peace, order and morality, causing 'anarchy', 'murder' and 'misery.' These latter circumstances are encoded in Liberty's transgressive body, and especially in her inflamed and viperous breasts. Britannia, who represents the virtues of polite, domesticated British femininity, is presented as supporting men and thus facilitating national progression. She is the picture of patriotic femininity; seated beneath an oak tree, she watches a ship which celebrates the colonial and commercial prospects of the British navy. Whilst the radicalism of French femininity is constructed as a forerunner to 'national and private ruin', Rowlandson advocates that British feminine values will encourage 'obedience to the laws', 'industry' and 'national prosperity.' This discourse of honourable and productive femininity drew heavily upon the virtues of maternity. Anne Mellor has remarked that Rowlandson's Britannia is one manifestation of the 'mother of the nation' figure evoked by More. Her 'capacity for

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<sup>98</sup> Shakespeare, 'Macbeth', 120. For further explanation of awareness of Amazonian male infanticide, see Louis Adrian Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture' *Representing the English Renaissance* ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 36.

maternity' and care of others, Mellor argues, makes her immune to the licentiousness of French women.<sup>99</sup>

Liberty's murderous intentions and hostile body make her incompatible with maternal nurture; in refuting this feminine ideal she puts national welfare at stake. Remarking on Rowlandson's body of work, Gatrell has stated that his prints were 'never judgmental or satirical', but rather highlighted the 'comic potential of disaster and disorder.'<sup>100</sup> Whilst Rowlandson's exaggerated and absurd depiction of Liberty can be conceived of as comic, it is difficult to read *The Contrast* as morally neutral and value-free. Its venomous depiction of the female body, and the breast in particular, unambiguously emphasises the unattractive and deadly consequences of women's misappropriation of a masculine, combative role. As John Richard Moores has pointed out, Liberty's role in satirical prints was to emphasise 'the revolutionaries' dangerous perversion of the concept of liberty.'<sup>101</sup> *The Contrast* is a textbook example of this; for Rowlandson's French virago, liberty means gender violation, murder, and mayhem. In 1794, Isaac Cruikshank similarly employed the monstrous figure of Liberty to capture the threat of the French and of the female revolutionary spirit.

*Isaac Cruikshank, The Republican Belle: A Picture of Paris for 1794 (1794): refutation of the maternal*

By 1794, Britain was firmly engaged in war with France and anti-French sentiment was high. In her study of the popular press in the early 1790s, Hannah Barker has noted that after the bloody massacres in Paris in 1792, the 'general euphoria which had greeted the revolution' gave way to 'intense trepidation.'<sup>102</sup> This feeling was expressed in satirical prints including Isaac Cruikshank's *A Republican Belle: A Picture of Paris for 1794*, which examines women's part in the violence of the revolution. The carnivalesque caricature serves as a projection of public disgust

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<sup>99</sup> Mellor, 'Romantic bluestockings: from muses to matrons' in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830* ed. Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15-38, 28.

<sup>100</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 45.

<sup>101</sup> Moores, 191.

<sup>102</sup> Hannah Barker, *Newspapers and English Society, 1695-1855* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 179.

and concern with masculine women and expresses unease about the non-nurturing potential of the female body. French Liberty is a dominating virago with masculine features and a gurning grin of fanged teeth. The print is filled with images of death; Liberty wears miniature guillotines as jewellery, bones litter around her feet, and behind, a corpse hangs from an inn sign.<sup>103</sup> Her apron is adorned with skulls and cross bones, the deathly symbolism of which Peter T. Leeson explains was established in the Georgian era with the black Jolly Roger flag.<sup>104</sup> Whilst the scene at the centre provides the fundamental action, its wickedness is best understood alongside Cruikshank's distortion of her body and physiognomy.

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<sup>103</sup> For the symbolism of the guillotine in the French Revolution see Regina Janes, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 67-96.

<sup>104</sup> Peter T. Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 91.



Fig. 5.16 Isaac Cruikshank, *A Republican Belle. A Picture of Paris for 1794*, 1794.

BM Satires 8436

Liberty is positioned front and centre, her body eclipsing the diminutive male figures. In her analysis of the print Adriana Craciun records that Liberty 'looms larger than life', her masculine and 'muscular frame' taking up much of foreground.<sup>105</sup> As with Rowlandson's characterisation in *The Contrast*, Cruikshank renders Liberty's appearance with such symbolism that there can be no doubt of her body as a source of violence and disorder. Her head is crowned with a daggered tiara, which is entwined with a ribbon inscribed 'War War Eternal War.'<sup>106</sup> Her unruliness is indicated by her long, loose tendrils of hair; these billow like black clouds of smoke, and her tattered, tricolour dress reveals patches of her skin. Craciun observes that she appears sexually corrupt and, as evident in her clawed feet and distorted facial features, bestial and deformed. This representation is in keeping with what Craciun records as the 'ubiquitous British vision' of French women which presented the figure of Liberty as a 'vision of debased female agency.'<sup>107</sup> The vicious violence at the centre of *A Republican Belle* invites deeper analysis of this debased gendered agency, which unfolds around the breast.

The breast is the site from which the authoritative violence of the print – the shooting – stems. Liberty's arms are folded over to directly conceal her chest. Against its flat, masculine surface, she grips a phallic pistol which she fires downwards. As with Rowlandson's Liberty and Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, in order to murder, she has rejected the nurturing breast. Correspondingly, she has also substituted something threatening and masculine in its place – in this case a gun, rather than fire or gall. Liberty's misappropriation of the gun, a symbol of masculine power, underscores her transgressive femininity. Reflecting on the work of Wahrman, Gatrell has noted a shift in attitudes towards gender transgression in the mid to late century. Gatrell argues that women performing masculinity, whether superficially or overtly, were begrudgingly 'tolerated' in the mid-1700s. However, as the French Revolution approached, conditions of military conflict and particularly male 'martial failure' in the context of the American war catalysed a sense of alarm at male effeminacy and female masculinity.<sup>108</sup> In this context, Liberty's control of the

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<sup>105</sup> Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 47.

<sup>106</sup> George, Vol. VII, 81.

<sup>107</sup> Craciun, 47.

<sup>108</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 354.

gun feeds into anxieties about women recognising male weakness and assuming power for themselves. The gun affords Liberty a masculine agency analogous to the Amazonian woman who replaced her right breast with a bow and arrow. It is significant that in *A Republican Belle* the gun is expelled from the place where, if visible, her right breast would be.



Fig. 5.17 Detail from *A Republican Belle*

For the eighteenth-century literary specialist Felicity Nussbaum, the trope of the domineering Amazonian ‘exemplifies man’s fears of uselessness’ whilst scapegoating women as a source of destruction and disarray.<sup>109</sup> Wagner similarly recognises the Amazonian woman as an emasculating figure in the 1790s, embodying disgust at women’s refusal to be ‘subservient to male authority’, at the same time as casting the independent, politicised woman as ‘unnatural, violent and

<sup>109</sup> Nussbaum, 56.



perverse.<sup>110</sup> The Amazonian Frenchwoman, Wagner adds, was used by loyalists to ‘incite a deep distrust of the republican cause’, aligning the corrupt female body with corrupt politics.<sup>111</sup> Prytula has argued that the Amazonian woman symbolised not just the rejection of ‘all masculine forms of government’, but also of ‘idealised traits’ of femininity, including ‘maternal devotion.’<sup>112</sup> In Cruikshank’s print, the breast represents this rejection – not only is her chest smothered and her right breast covered by a gun, a dagger protrudes at her left breast. In weaponising the breast in this way Cruikshank constructs it as antagonistic to the nurturing maternal bosom.

Cruikshank’s anti-maternal characterisation comes into closer focus when considering the relationship between the two figures in the foreground. In her description of the piece, Mary Dorothy George identifies the figure being shot as a man.<sup>113</sup> However, he is physically different to the wiry and angular sans-culottes in the background. Rather, his plumpness, curly hair, reddened cheeks and smooth features suggest childhood. The probability of this is compounded by two further details, each external.<sup>114</sup> Firstly, Cruikshank’s companion print to *A Republican Belle, A Republican Beau. A Picture of Paris for 1794* (1794), also features an image of child murder. Secondly, other prints in circulation at this time regularly reproduced the images of French radicals as murderous brutes with children as victims.

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<sup>110</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 71.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-3, 75.

<sup>112</sup> Prytula, 175.

<sup>113</sup> George, Vol. VII, 81.

<sup>114</sup> My sincere gratitude goes to Professor Christoph Heyl, who kindly suggested this evidence to support my argument when I presented it at the ISECS International Congress on the Enlightenment in 2019.



Fig. 5.18 Isaac Cruikshank, *A Republican Beau. A Picture of Paris for 1794*, 1794.

BM Satires 8435

Fig. 5.19 *A Republican Belle*

*A Republican Belle* is the female equivalent to *A Republican Beau*, and the details in each are mirrored. It spotlights a 'French ruffian', similarly attired and dishevelled to the belle.<sup>115</sup> Similarly to the belle, the ruffian holds a bludgeon in one hand and a dagger in the other, stands amidst a bone-littered landscape, and a corpse hangs behind. From his right pocket protrude the legs of a dead infant, whose impassive face can be glimpsed from a tear below. The dead infant foreshadows the same fate for the child in *A Republican Belle*, and the doubling of this motif symbolises the damage callously inflicted upon the next generation by radical republicanism.

<sup>115</sup> George, Vol. VII, 80.



Fig. 5.20 Detail from *A Republican Belle*

Fig 5.21 Detail from *A Republican Beau*

Child murder was a familiar image in anti-revolution prints, with French sans-culottes routinely represented as cannibalistic monsters. Perhaps the most renowned is Gillray's 1792 print *Un Petit Souper Parisienne* which shows a French family gathered to viscerally and viciously feast on members of the aristocracy.



Fig. 5.22 Gillray, *Petit Souper, a la Parisienne; - or - a family of sans-culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day*, 1792. BM Satires 8122

Focusing on the hag who bastes a body of a dead infant impaled on a spit, Wagner has observed that print presents a 'twisted version of maternal protectiveness.'<sup>116</sup> The monster mother "bathes" the sacrificial child', Wagner argues, in an image which bastardises tender images of routine maternal care. The woman's nurturing, maternal role is still evident in this 'act of domestic labour', Wagner notes,

<sup>116</sup> In her analysis of the print Wagner rightly recognises the youthful, bare-breasted woman in the print as another image which makes a 'monstrous mockery of a long history of maternity portraiture.' Inverting representations of Madonna Lactans, it draws attention to the lack of 'nourishment, comfort, and regeneration' which the bountiful youthful breast usually offered to the next generation, as well as undermining its erotic allure – in France, the degenerate, asexual men experience it as a piece of the furniture, fit only for a seat, 6.

but it has 'become horribly deformed by revolutionary principles.' Transforming a scene of communal eating and 'domestic felicity' into a 'monstrous communion of shared depravity', Gillray offers a sinister take on the French republican family.<sup>117</sup> This sharedness is important; whilst the hag readies the baby's corpse, the sans-cullote children gather around a bucket to inhale the entrails of the adult victims. Literally imbibing the fallout of their custodian's violence, this frames the radical's crimes as an inter-generational, dual transgression; the murdered infant represents their violence *towards* children, whilst their cannibalistic progeny exemplifies their indoctrination of violence *in* children.

Dorothy Johnson has recently shown how Gillray's print was published following specific, well-recorded instances of Revolutionary violence – which included the dismemberment of bodies – in France. Demonstrating how consuming and digesting food was used as political imagery in satirical prints, Johnson argues that 'cannibalism persisted as metaphor in French counter-Revolutionary caricatures from the period of the Terror', with prints such as the anonymous *The Devil's Supper or Souper du Diable* (1793) picturing a man roasted on a spit.<sup>118</sup> In *A Republican Beau*, the dead baby stuffed into the Frenchmen's pocket is labelled as 'for a stew.' Given this representation of the Frenchman as a cannibal it seems likely that those viewing *A Republican Belle* alongside it would have recognised the shooting as a deliberate slaughter.

Further testimony that the victim is a child stems from Hogarth's crest for The Foundling Hospital. Kukla has identified how patriotic images of the 'infinitely bountiful' maternal breast appeared across visual propaganda – in portraits, books, and as parts of crests and monuments.<sup>119</sup> In Britain and in France, the figure of Charity or Nature as a bare-breasted, nursing mother advertised female nurture as steeped in ancient, naturalised discourses of virtuous femininity. As Bowers has observed motherhood was put to 'new political uses' during the second half of the century, as the importance of upholding the 'tender, noble, self-sacrificial' maternal

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<sup>117</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 66.

<sup>118</sup> Dorothy Johnson, "Food for Thought: Consuming and Digesting as Political Metaphor in French Satirical Prints" in *Gut Feeling and Digestive Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature, History and Culture* ed. Manon Mathias and Alison M. Moore (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2018), 85-108, 94.

<sup>119</sup> Kukla, 163.

ideal increased.<sup>120</sup> The Foundling, literary scholar Andrew Rudd writes in an examination of charitable culture in the mid-century, 'boasted England's first art gallery with canvases by Hogarth, Highmore and Hayman', and was one of a series of associational charities which 'evolved into places of fashionable resort and the public performance of virtue.'<sup>121</sup> Hogarth lent his talents to such displays and created the crest for the newly opened hospital in 1747, choosing the multi-breasted figure of Mother Nature to front the design. In the middle of Hogarth's shield is a naked orphaned child, flanked on either side by Nature and Britannia.

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<sup>120</sup> Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew Rudd, "Knights Errant of the Distressed: Horace Walpole, Thomas Chatterton and Eighteenth-Century Charitable Culture" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 44, no. 1 (2020), 74-97, 79.



Fig. 5.23 Hogarth, *Arms for the Foundling Hospital*, 1747. Courtesy of the MET.

Accession Number:32.3581

He holds his right hand up for assistance, lying above a banner which reads 'help.' The figure he looks up to for aid and protection is the multi-breasted figure of Nature, and Britannia guards him from his other side. The image of child-murder in *A Republican Belle* is a travesty of the model of feminine, maternal hospitality that The Foundling Hospital crest boasts. Both children look upon the female breast; the gaze of the Foundling child falls upon those which symbolise his salvation, whilst the boy in *A Republican Belle* looks straight at the cold breast of his killer.

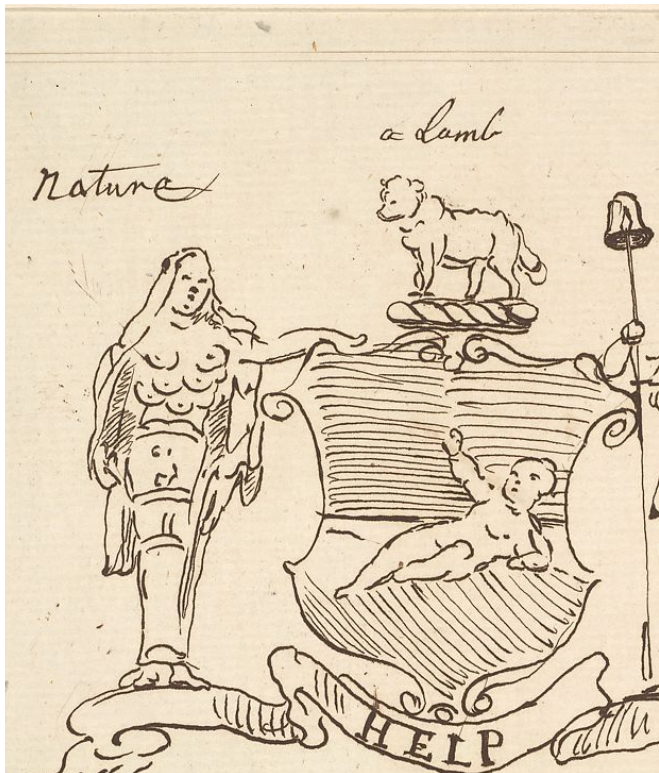


Fig. 5.24 Detail from *Arms for the Foundling Hospital*

Fig. 5.25 Detail from *A Republican Belle*

In 1791 More referred to the eighteenth-century as ‘the Age of Benevolence’, an epithet which avowed the widely held notion of Britain’s charitable identity.<sup>122</sup> The multi-breasted Mother Nature was one emblem of this ideal, symbolising the British feminine virtues of generosity, self-sacrifice and altruism. Her appearance on the Foundling Crest indicates the ambitions of the hospital to support the security and strength of infants. This motivation stemmed not just from ethical concern, but from the nation’s increasing military, colonial, and commercial interests. In 1762, the hospital’s chief administrator, Jonas Hanway, linked the salvation of children to a more populate and prosperous polity. He wrote that the empire’s ‘Power in Riches’ needed to be matched by an increase in men, particularly considering the threat of

<sup>122</sup> Hannah More, *An estimate of the religion of the fashionable world. By one of the laity*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Dublin: P. Wogan, 1791), 132.



war.<sup>123</sup> This impetus to grow and fortify the population was used to promote breastfeeding. The physician Hugh Smith, for example, promised that nursing would beget a 'more healthy, strong, and vigorous' race, and shamed the 'selfish' women who refused their civic duty.<sup>124</sup> Cruikshank's *Liberty* is an inversion of the multi-breasted mother who graces the Foundling crest. Thus, *A Republican Belle* vilifies revolutionary women who resisted or refused to use their bodies for the benefits of the state, picturing them as harming national prospects as contained in the next generation.

Although the majority of reflections on *A Republican Belle* identify the victim as a man, one art historian, William L. Pressly, also considers it to be a child. Describing the print as a 'grimly hilarious look' at the 'new specimens' of masculine women, Pressly goes further and suggests that the belle is the child's mother.<sup>125</sup> Pressly's proposal reframes the shooting as infanticidal, with the figure rejecting the maternal for the militant. The print's connection with the Foundling Hospital supports Pressly's interpretation. As an image of parental infanticide, *A Republican Belle* becomes even more convincing as a reversal of the model of maternal nurture presented in the Foundling Hospital crest. One of the priorities of Thomas Coram's foundation was to assuage the excess of infant abandonment and murder in London. In 1713, the essayist and politician Joseph Addison wrote of the importance of a 'provision for foundlings' in *The Guardian*, the short-lived forerunner to *The Gentleman's Magazine*. He hoped that the hospital would prevent the infant exposure to 'the barbarity of cruel and unnatural parents.'<sup>126</sup> As Lisa Zunshine notes in her exploration of illegitimacy in the eighteenth-century, by the 1720s the public were distressed by the slew of dead or dying infants which were commonly found in 'parks, ditches, and garbage heaps' as well as floating in the waterways of the

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<sup>123</sup> Jonas Hanway, *Serious Considerations on the Salutary Design of the Act of Parliament For a regular, uniform Register of the Parish Poor Infants in all the Parishes within the Bills of Morality* (London: Printed for John Rivington, 1762), 26.

<sup>124</sup> Hugh Smith, 65.

<sup>125</sup> William L. Pressly, *The French Revolution as Blasphemy: Johan Zoffany's Paintings of the Massacre at Paris, August 10, 1792* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 85.

<sup>126</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Guardian* (11 July 1713) as quoted in *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.*, vol. IV (Birmingham: Printed by John Baskerville, for J. and R. Tonson, 1761), 150.

Thames.<sup>127</sup> Providing motivation for social and political valorisation of nurturing motherhood, conditions like this render infanticidal representations like *A Republican Belle* all the more galling.

The child in *A Republican Belle* is a boy, which further upholds Pressly's interpretation of the shooting as infanticidal. In depicting Liberty killing a boy, Cruikshank, represents her as an Amazonian figure. As William Blake Tyrrell points out in his study of the Amazonian myth, it was renowned that their type went 'to war and refuse[d] to become mothers of sons.'<sup>128</sup> In rejecting the boy from the breast, the belle embodies this Amazonian ambition to spurn men in favour of matrilineal society. Marilyn Francus ventures that the 'refusal to mother' is experienced and represented as universally threatening not just because of society's investment in the child, but because such behaviour 'challenges the validity of the social order', putting forwards alternatives to patriarchal systems.<sup>129</sup> For Marina Warner, the Amazonian Liberty typifies effective female government and order, a menacing 'outsiderdom' which is executed at the expense of patriarchal structures and values and suggests the possibilities of female autonomy.<sup>130</sup> The fact that the violence stems from Liberty's chest in *A Republican Belle* makes her threat specifically female and anti-maternal; her threatening breast is antithetical to the maternal bosom which strengthens and repairs patriarchal society. In aligning maternal rejection with revolutionary radicalism and depicting it, crucially, as emerging grotesquely from the breast, Cruikshank cautions against women's encroachment upon traditionally masculine territories.

*A Republican Belle* is one of many eighteenth-century satires which frame maternal transgression as a consequence of increasing female desire to participate in masculine activities, arenas, appearance and behaviours.<sup>131</sup> The infanticidal

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<sup>127</sup> Liza Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 46, 43.

<sup>128</sup> William Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), xiv.

<sup>129</sup> Marilyn Francus, "'A-Killing Their Children With Safety": Maternal Identity and Transgression in Swift and Defoe' in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century* ed. Katharine Kittredge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 258-82, 275.

<sup>130</sup> Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, 292.

<sup>131</sup> See *The Devonshire Amusement*, 1784, BM Satires 6625; James Gillray, *La Promenade en Famille – a Sketch from Life*, 1797, BM Satires 9009; Rowlandson, *Political Affection*.

shooting symbolically exemplifies public concerns about the derailing of women's domestic and maternal devotion and taps into pronatalist anxieties about population. French Liberty's masculine misappropriation of the gun jeopardises the next generation, weakening the wider polity. The murder of a male child makes the print particularly effective, tapping into anxieties about matrilineal authority. The violence at the belle's breast represents the deadly consequences of female usurpation of male power, positioning the Jacobin woman as a violent misandrist.

*James Gillray, The Apotheosis of Hoche (1798): the corruptible and uncontainable breast*

Selected by Gatrell as Gillray's 'most fantastic extravaganza', *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798) has attracted scholarly attention for its detailed depiction of the horrors of France under Jacobin rule.<sup>132</sup> Mocking how the French grandiosely mourned the death of General Lazare Hoche, it imparts a sense of the frenzied and violent terror which often typifies the close of the century in France. In 1851, Thomas Wright and R. H. Evans recorded that Gillray had crowded all of the 'crimes' of the uprising into one 'vast emblematical panorama', affirming the disorientation prompted by mass political and military conflict.<sup>133</sup> The most literal print representation of the French breast as a physical threat, *The Apotheosis* extends and expands upon the motif of the violent breast visualised in Rowlandson's *The Contrast* and Cruikshank's *A Republican Belle* to picture the breast and its contents as a weapon of war.

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<sup>132</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 284.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Wright and R. H. Evans, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray, Comprising a Political and Humorous History of the Reign of George the Third* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), 177.

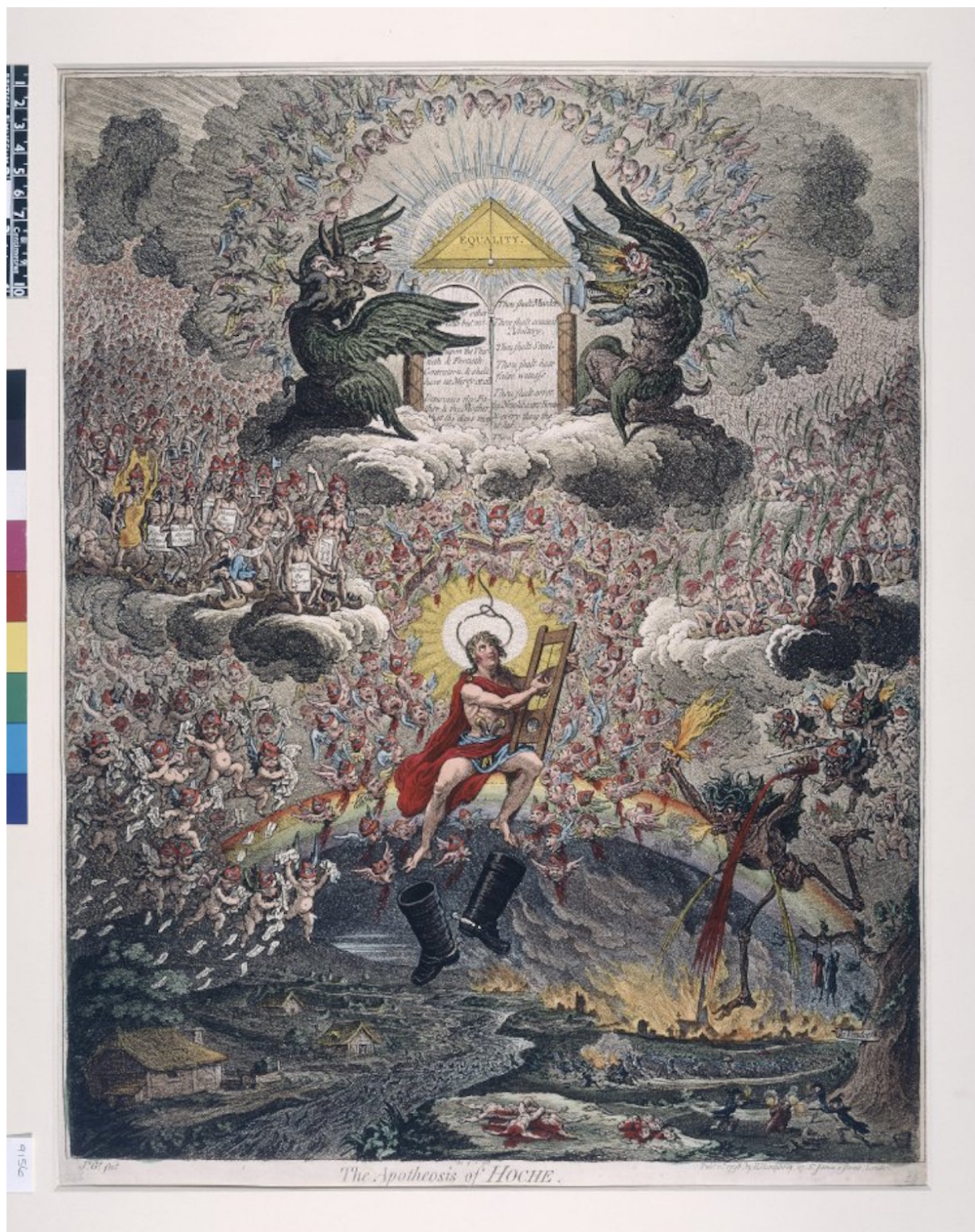


Fig. 5.26 Gillray, *The Apotheosis of Hoche*, 1798. BM Satires 9156

Gillray is famed for his depictions of the French Revolution as chaotic and bloodthirsty. As the cartoonist and art critic Draper Hill and other scholars have observed, Gillray's conservative political affiliation was increasingly conspicuous

from the mid-1790s onwards. Hill writes that whilst, like most, Gillray appears to have been initially enthusiastic about the French Revolution, the Reign of Terror ‘cured him of any lingering sympathy.’<sup>134</sup> Following a commission from King George III in 1793, his work steadily sided with the Tories. In 1795, his official employment by William Pitt’s government made these loyalties contractual.<sup>135</sup> In her history of Romanticism, Marilyn Butler recalls that the engraver John Landseer presented a different side to the story in the 1830s, suggesting that Gillray was reluctant to take up the appointment and was in fact bribed and blackmailed to do so.<sup>136</sup> Regardless, from the mid-1790s until Pitt’s resignation in 1801, Gillray’s prints viciously assail members of the opposition – Vic Gatrell notes the ‘unashamed partisanship’ of his work during this time.<sup>137</sup> In March 1798, the same year in which *The Apotheosis of Hoche* was published, the *Morning Herald* jibed about ‘the *Loyal Labours* of his pencil.’<sup>138</sup> Gillray responded to such jibes by defending his place in the print market. ‘Now the Opposition are poor’, he wrote, ‘they do not buy my prints and I must draw on the purses of the larger parties.’<sup>139</sup> *The Apotheosis of Hoche* is significant for the virulence of its attack on French radical femininity; from the bottom right-hand corner emerges what Gatrell termed a ‘nightmare creation, and what Mary Dorothy George has described as a ‘corpse-like Fury.’<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Draper Hill, *The Satirical Etchings of James Gillray* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), xxii.

<sup>135</sup> Gillray accepted a ‘secret’ government pension of £200 per annum from December 1797 until Pitt’s resignation in 1801. Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 268.

<sup>136</sup> Butler, 53.

<sup>137</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 268.

<sup>138</sup> *The Morning Herald* (March 1798).

<sup>139</sup> *London und Paris*, Vol. I (1798) in Hill, *The Satirical Etchings of James Gillray*, xxii.

<sup>140</sup> George, Vol. VII, 412.

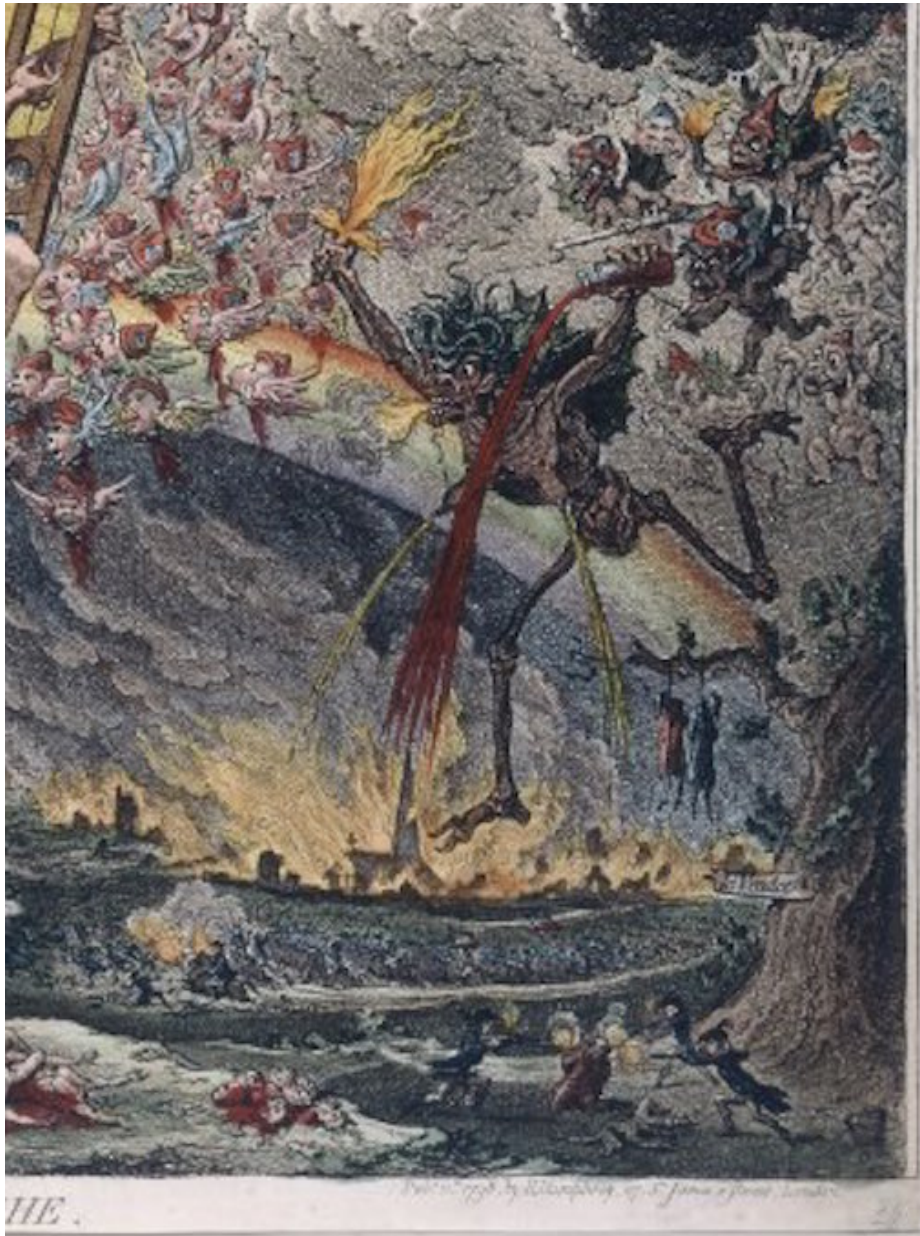


Fig. 5.27 Detail from *The Apotheosis of Hoche*

In her study of women within political caricature, the art historian Jane Kromm notes that using ‘female horrors of Greek legend’ as emblems of Republican violence was an ‘increasingly common satiric device’ in the 1790s.<sup>141</sup> Interrogating this more closely, the curator Karl Janke question why they so effectively captured the British zeitgeist as the century came to a close. ‘Personified nightmare visions of

<sup>141</sup> Jane Kromm, “Representations of Revolutionary Women in Political Caricature” in *The French Revolution Debated in English Literature and Culture*, ed. Lisa Plummer Crafton (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 123-36, 126.

the Republic', Janke proposes, exploded in graphic satire as it became clear that the French Revolution was as much about public thirst for democracy as constitutional reform.<sup>142</sup> Bringing the demonic to the everyday, satirists sought to shock the public with the part-woman part-monster figure whose corrupt breasts designated her descent into depravity. Drawing upon the motif of the grotesque, they used the unsightly and physically threatening breast to scaremonger about the disruptive potential of non-conforming female behaviours and bodies. As with *The Contrast*, Gillray's *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798) is indebted to the Greek mythology of the 'Erinyes' or 'Furies', which were famously evoked by Burke in his description of the women at Versailles in 1789. Whilst Gillray doesn't name the Fury in *The Apotheosis of Hoche*, the similarity of the figure to the Furies in a number of his other prints - including the earlier discussed *Alecto and Her Train at the Gates of Pandemonium* - suggests that he expected his audience to recognise her as Alecto.

Like in *Alecto and Her Train*, the fury in *The Apotheosis of Hoche* is Black. This racist characterisation of the French reminds of Burke's contemporaneous reflections on the fisherwoman 'Furies of hell' who marched on Versailles. For Hunt, Burke not only condemned the erosion of an imagined male/female divide, but assimilated women to savage beasts, exposing their 'pre-social nature as furies.'<sup>143</sup> Building upon this, Kirsten Raupach observes that Burke's rhetoric relies on anxieties about the blurring of racial boundaries. Discussing representations of Black resistance in revolutionary texts, Raupach argues that 'in their uncontrollable wildness', the market women are depicted like 'other races' and "subhuman" creatures.' Writing of 'horrid yells', shrill 'screams' and 'frantic dances', Burke exploits 'traditional representations of devil-figures and witches', to create a menacing portrait of 'dark powers' ruling over good. As Raupach notes, Burke's propagandist *Reflections* were intended to 'quell pro-French sympathies' but also to 'stifle any challenges to Britain's own *ancien regime*', and this meant asserting the colonial, as

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<sup>142</sup> Karl Janke "Counter-Image, Anathema, Vision of Terror: Republic and Popular Rule in English Caricature of the Eighteenth Century" in *Loyal Subversion*, 92-122, 107.

<sup>143</sup> Lynn Hunt, 116.

well as class-driven and gendered, domestic order.<sup>144</sup> Taking this approach in *The Apotheosis of Hoche*, Gillray extended the mythically monstrous, base, Black and destructive female body as an invitation to his viewers to remember their loyalty to their own, and to reevaluate any allegiance they felt towards social and political 'others.' Such bodies, Gillray suggests, should warrant suspicion and enmity rather than public sympathy.

Corpses hang from a tree branch behind Alecto whilst an army of winged beasts hover wielding chains, daggers, firebrands and other arms. Beneath her, people flee across the Vendée to avoid her wrath but are caught, beheaded or shot by soldiers. Skeletal except from her pendent but fleshy breasts, Alecto is armed with four weapons. In her left hand she pours a bottle of red poison, in her right she brandishes a flaming sword above her head, and fire blazes from her mouth. Her most striking weapon though, is her breast, which shoots a yellow substance. The breast here is a literal weapon, an icon of destructive and corrupted femininity. George's description of *The Apotheosis of Hoche* identifies the breast discharge as a 'liquid', recording that it 'gushes' from her breasts. Its off-white, yellow tone, and expulsion directly from the nipples suggest it is breast milk. Its presence alongside the bottle of vitriol indicates that it is poisonous. Rather than fortifying and nurturing the nation's people with her maternal body, this monster weakens and damages the polity.

Gillray's picture of the anti-maternal breast in *The Apotheosis of Hoche* was published in the same year as Richard Polwhele's famous poetic tirade 'Unsex'd Females.' The poet and clergyman feared that French philosophical and political ideals were migrating to Britain, causing radical female behaviour and smothering maternal femininity:

Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw,  
A female band\* despising NATURE's law,  
As "proud defiance" flashes from their arms,

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<sup>144</sup> Kirsten Raupach, "When We with Magic Rites the White Man' Doom Prepare": Representations of Black Resistance in British Abolitionist Writing During the Era of Revolution" in *Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Memory* ed. Joanne M. Braxton and Maria I. Diedrich (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 19-28, 22.



And vengeance smothers all their softer charms.  
 I shudder at the new unpictur'd scene,  
 Where unsex'd woman vaunts the imperious mien  
 \*the Amazonian band, the female Quixotes<sup>8</sup>

As eighteenth-century literary scholar Susan J. Wolfson suggests, Polwhele was likely referencing Lady Macbeth's cry to abjure her natural maternal femininity - her 'woman's breasts' and milk - in his title 'Unsex'd Females.'<sup>145</sup> His mention of 'softer charms', which he regrets have been suffocated, provide a further reference to this maternal unsexing - the practices of motherhood and nursing were commonly referred to as 'soft' in the eighteenth century.<sup>146</sup> In this context, the breast of the 'unsex'd woman is a malign inversion of the ideal maternal body - its attractive softness is replaced with a hard masculine 'rage.' A contributor to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, Polwhele mourned that British women were becoming frenzied in their intent on public governance, like the 'Gallic freaks.' Polwhele's positioning of the breast as a site of anti-maternal, unsex'd femininity becomes explicit alongside consideration of his designation of the 'female band' of women radicals as 'Amazonian.' The women writers who Polwhele savaged for being too publicly political are weaponised in an Amazonian fashion; scaffold was 'every day bathed with the blood of women.'<sup>147</sup> An eye-witness account of the Revolution which was read widely in Britain, Williams' Letters included a galling recollection of a young, breastfeeding Parisian mother who was beheaded in the streets. Having been overheard remarking that the swathes of people executed had died for so little, the peasant woman had been sentenced to death as a counter revolutionary. Conjuring the violence of the guillotine alongside the affecting image of the nursing breast, Williams remembers:

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<sup>145</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 96.

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, the physician Hugh Downman's 1774 didactic poem *Infancy: or The Management of Children*, which asserts that women who avoid nursing forfeit their 'female Softness', and a column in *The Lady's Magazine* for the same year, which situates the 'bosom of a mother' at the heart of the 'soft empire' that is motherhood. Downman, *Infancy: Or, The Management of Children; a Didactic Poem in 3 Books* (Edinburgh: John Bell, 1776), 9; 'The Friend to the Fair Sex. Chapter X. On the Management of Children' in *The Lady's Magazine* (March 1774), 147.

<sup>147</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, vol. III, ed. Janet M. Todd (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975), 214.

'when she received the fatal stroke, the streams of maternal nourishment issued rapidly from her bosom, and, mingled with her blood, bathed her executioner.'<sup>148</sup> As Deborah Kennedy observes in her study of Helena Maria Williams' work, this disturbing anecdote 'enacts the Jacobin defilement of the Republic through the defilement of the mother-figure', a figure which was 'key to Republican iconography.'<sup>149</sup> The splashing of milk and blood from the maternal breast reminds of the Fountain of Regeneration, a monument erected in 1793 on the site of the Bastille for The Festival of Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic. At the head of the fountain the Egyptian Goddess Isis, representing Nature, shoots regenerative waters from her breasts into the mouth of the president of the Convention.<sup>150</sup> instead of the bow and arrow replacing their breast, it is the pen which marshals their descent into masculine behaviour. In each of these cases the breast's nurturing role has been supplanted by a destructive agenda. As a result, women enact behaviour which disrupts and endangers patriarchal systems and structures, as symbolised by the Fury's distinctly feminine threat in *The Apotheosis of Hoche*.

Whilst Gillray unmistakably draws the Fury as a violent threat, the substance which rains down on to the Vendée from her breasts also evokes the violence exercised *against* French women during the Revolution. In her *Letters from France*, novelist and poet Helen Maria Williams gruesomely recorded that the executioner's

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>149</sup> Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (London: Associated University Press, 2002), 199.

<sup>150</sup> Mary Jacobus, "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution" in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54-78, 65.

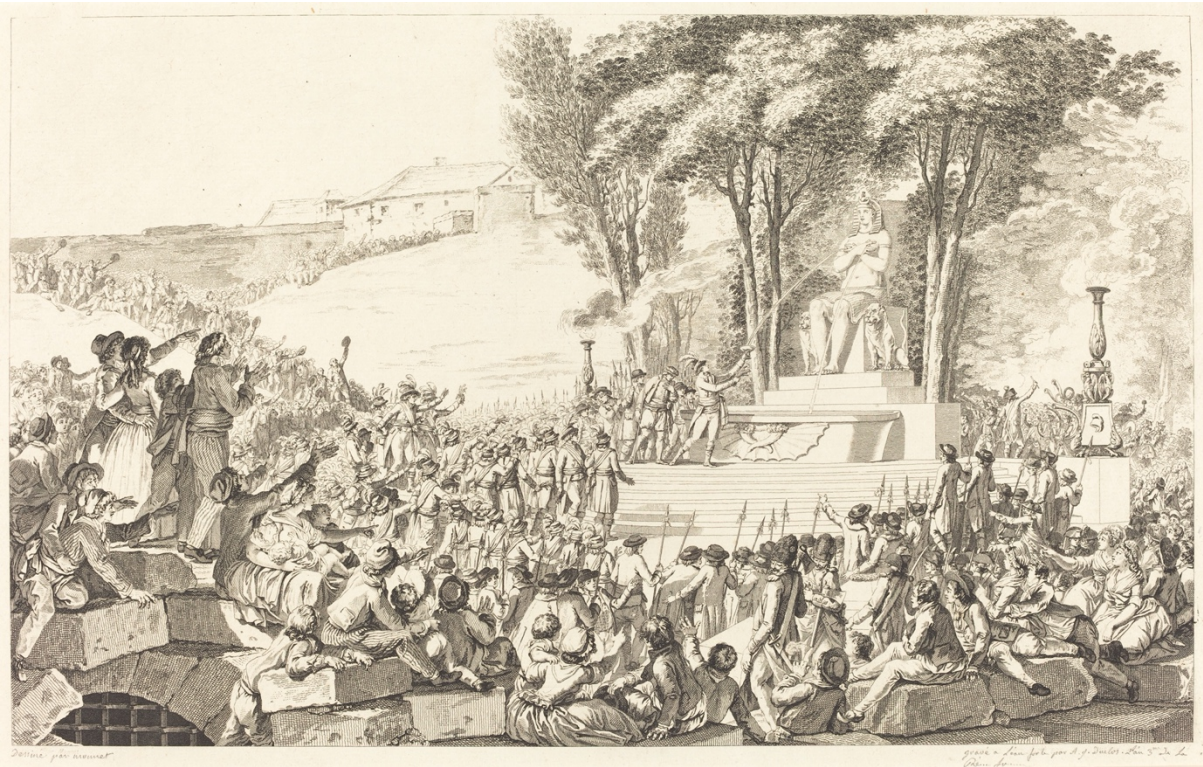


Fig. 5.28 Isidore-Stanislas Helman, *La Fontaine de la Régénération sur les débris de la Bastille, le 10 avril 1793, 1794*. BNF Accession Number: 1943.3.6.252

Gillray engages with this Revolutionary iconography in *The Apotheosis of Hoche*, which was published a year after the erection of the fountain in Bastille. The prominent bare-breasted figure of the Republic provided an arresting image when inverted; in Gillray's print, rather than regenerative waters, it is a deadly, noxious liquid that springs from the Fury. The exultant image of the nurturing Republican bosom, Gillray suggests - and Williams remembers - could be troubled by the violent bloodshed at the heart of the French Revolution. Gillray's representation of the Fury's spoiled breast milk echoes contemporary anxieties about the corrupt maternal body. As Kukla notes, the fact that maternal milk was thought to be 'spoiled' or 'disordered' so easily and by so many circumstances required women to be 'unendingly vigilant in their self-control.'<sup>151</sup> Women's bodies and behaviours were carefully policed and governed by 'principles of duty, virtue [...] and social obligation',

<sup>151</sup> Kukla, 95, 79.

and condemned if they transgressed the moral and medical boundaries which set the standards for these principles.<sup>152</sup>

'Good' milk production was one of the many facets of maternity which interested the philosopher Rousseau. For Rousseau, the perfect nurse was the mother. If she could or would not breastfeed, however, or if her milk was spoiled, he recommended a wet-nurse.<sup>153</sup> This nurse, Rousseau advised, should lead a life above reproach; she should be 'as healthy of heart as of body.'<sup>154</sup> Of course, this was hard to guarantee, and caution abounded over exposing infants to a strangers' milk. As Gal Ventura explains, the 'contaminated milk' of wet-nurses was thought to be 'dangerous to children like poison that slowly penetrates their veins.'<sup>155</sup> This concern stretched beyond the physical. In 1774 *The Lady's Magazine* warned that class characteristics could be transferred in a mother's milk: 'we see daily the children of the most opulent citizens, nursed by the very dregs of the people, whose inclinations they not only imbibe, but likewise retain.'<sup>156</sup> Gillray's *Fury* embodies suspicions about the threat of sullied milk from bodies other to the white, British, middle-class and virtuous feminine ideal. Her breast is a site of slaughter, recalling the maternal body's capacity for corruption and destruction by streaming deadly, poisonous discharge.

*The Apotheosis of Hoche* suggests unease with the mutable, permeable breast which Kukla observes – that which has the tendency to 'leak, drip, squirt [...] sag, dilate, and expel.'<sup>157</sup> The threatening discharge of the breast serves as a reminder of the undisciplined excesses of femininity. More widely, the displacement and distortion of the female breast within caricature constituted an attempt to monitor and police these boundaries. In making the breast appear threatening, graphic satirists voiced and made visible the worst of radical femininity – and thus diminished its threat. The social and cultural historian Madelyn Gutwirth has argued that women's bodies 'embody in legend the most sensational aspects of French Revolutionary murderousness.'<sup>158</sup> The simulation of violence in satirical renderings of

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>153</sup> Rousseau, 45.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>155</sup> Ventura, *Maternal Breast-feeding*, 52.

<sup>156</sup> "On the Management of Children" in *The Lady's Magazine*, 147.

<sup>157</sup> Kukla, 3.

<sup>158</sup> Gutwirth, 307.

the female breast substantiate this claim; women are bloody, unruly and motivated by fury. The mass murder depicted in *The Apotheosis of Hoche* gestures to the intensity of conservative anti-revolution sentiment in the late 1790s, as well as a rising alarm about the violent potential of the radicalised, spoiled female body.

That weapons are so often found close to, as part of, or in place of the female breast in satirical prints in the late eighteenth-century is no accident. Caricaturists including, but not limited to, Rowlandson, Isaac Cruikshank and Gillray used the threatening French breast in order to visualise anti-maternal femininity as a consequence of Revolutionary radicalism. Their representations betray specific concerns about the disturbance radical women and their bodies could generate. These concerns bled into and intersected with each other; amidst this messiness, they can be organised into three broad categories. These consist of domination over men, refutation of the maternal and anxieties about the corruptible and uncontrollable body.

The first of these concerns, that of masculine women dominating men, was expressed through the allegorical female who murdered men. Most explicit in Rowlandson's *The Contrast*, where Liberty can be seen stamping on the corpse of Perseus, this motif exemplified suspicions that radical women wanted to usurp male power and fatally damage patriarchal structures. Part of the chilling monstrosity of the women in each of the above prints is the unapologetic determination and glee with which they execute their crimes. The defiant war-cry of Liberty in *The Contrast*, the smug grin of Cruikshank's republican belle and the belligerence of Gillray's Fury suggest that radical women have no shame, modesty or regard for propriety - they storm forwards whilst their male victims lie inert, mutilated and maimed. The second anxiety, concerning women's refutation of the maternal, was illustrated - as in Cruikshank's *Republican Belle* - by the substitution of the maternal bosom with the physically threatening breast. This crystallised concerns that women's interest and participation in radical politics was corroding the institution of motherhood and putting population strength at risk. Rowlandson, Cruikshank and Gillray each represented the consequences of this gender subversion as catastrophic for civic society, crippling the next generation. Finally, the toxic milk which gushes from Gillray's Fury in *The Apotheosis of Hoche* provides a visceral suggestion of the contemporary unease with the corruption of the maternal body. Along with Rowlandson's Liberty's wild blazing breast and Cruikshank's belle's careless

discharge, this symbolic gesture signposts the destructive capacity of the maternal body.

## Conclusion

Racist, sexist and classicist affirmations colour late-century satirical depictions of the radical French female body.<sup>159</sup> Within these, transgressive breasts provocatively announce the savagery, unnaturalness and hostility of the French, estranging their citizenry and politics from any British sense of respectableness or security. Discernible as one of the many corrupt and bloody insignia which dominated counter-revolutionary prints, the recurring representation of the breast as a malfunctioning source of femininity expressed deeper, cross-continental concerns about the upturning of gendered order. Graphic portrayals of mannish, monstrous Frenchwomen not only incited mistrust of the enemy, but encouraged Britain's to look to themselves and those around them for evidence of aberrance. Subverting the breast was to subvert the gendered body, an act which in turn upset the social roles upon which its value was predicated. Refusing or weaponising its maternal function and devoid of sexual attraction, the breast was nothing more than a seat of radical contamination which risked infecting those foolish enough to look to it for nourishment or gratification. Those who suckled on its depraved and bloody contents became lost to the cause, standing little chance of being weaned off the empty promises and corrupt ambitions on which they had come to rely for survival.

As Wagner rightly recognises, caricatured French breasts became 'visual indicators of women's political unsuitability', as well as reminders of their dangerous corporeal authority.<sup>160</sup> Grotesque, carnivalesque and violent caricatures of the French female breast rendered radical women monstrous in the public imagination, warning that political participation was incongruous with systematic, constructive and tender maternal femininity. In locating this loss of femininity in the breast – which is drawn in these prints as flaming, smothered, serpentine, flat, pendent, leaky –

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<sup>159</sup> For more on the 'othering' of French Black bodies in British satirical prints, see Alexandra M. Wellington's unpublished PhD thesis "Internal and External "Others": French, Female, and Black Bodies in British Satirical Prints, 1789-1821" (University of North Carolina, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> Wagner, *Pathological Bodies*, 76.

caricaturists sought to stymie radical and revolutionary-minded womanhood. Claimed as a patriarchal and patriotic tool, the breast furthered efforts to safeguard nationalistic, familial ideologies by demonising that which was 'other' to the domestic ideal. The threatening breast synthesised political, medical and philosophical suggestions that the woman who aspired to radical politics was not a woman at all, but rather an anti-maternal abomination. An effective emblem of radical femininity precisely because it subverted the archetypal image of the nurturing maternal breast, the violent, degenerate and unruly breast encapsulated everything wrong with the French Republic and the women who embodied its values.

Recently, the scholar of women's writing Stephanie Russo has noted that the relationship between women and the stability of the nation was 'ever more urgently assessed' in the period under discussion.<sup>161</sup> Dialectical images of the nurturing and threatening breast demonstrate that women were perceived as potential saviours from, and sources of, revolutionary violence. Whilst devoted mothers were ideologically revered by Rousseau and his contemporaries as the 'guardians of morals and the gentle bonds of peace', the anti-maternal woman was presented as inherently disruptive and subversive of the moral order.<sup>162</sup> In figuring the exterior, contents and function of the breasts as transgressive, Rowlandson, Cruikshank and Gillray reminded their late century audiences of the profound and ambivalent power of the maternal body; just as it gives and sustains life, so it can corrupt, starve and take life away.

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<sup>161</sup> Stephanie Russo, 'My mite for its protection': the conservative woman as action hero in the writings of Charlotte West' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 1 (2018), 43-60, 44.

<sup>162</sup> Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses and The Social Contract* ed. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 37-50, 50.

## Conclusion

This thesis is about bodies: maternal bodies, fashionable bodies, grotesque bodies, revolutionary bodies and the Georgian body politic. As the first substantial study of the breast in British satirical prints, it mobilises a body part and a body of work rarely combined. By wedding the two it answers it responds to the need for synthesis of research on the history of the body and the study of visual satire. Its focus was encouraged by two seminal monographs – Yalom’s *The History of the Breast* and McCreery’s *The Satirical Gaze*. Both these works investigate images of bodies from ideological perspectives, tracing the messy cultural mechanisms that have informed artistic representations of the female form. Methodologically, this thesis takes the same approach; but in taking the breast as a subject and satire as a source, it forms an original interpretation of the politicisation of the female body in eighteenth-century visual culture. Offering a new frame of reference for the cultural resonance of both the breast and graphic satire, it illuminates a series of neglected histories: caricature constructions of selfish mothers; conflicts between natural and artificial fashionable bodies; the rendering of old, poor and aberrant bodies as grotesque; and propagandist preoccupations with the seditious and violent imagery of the transgressive breast. Taken together, these shed light on the complex social, medical, philosophical and political discourses which shaped female representations and experiences in eighteenth-century Britain.

‘Paps’, ‘diddleys’, ‘cat heads’, ‘Tipperary fortune’, ‘love hillocks’, ‘cupid’s kettledrums’, ‘apple dumpling shop’ – the many colourful Georgian names for breasts gesture to their pre-eminence in the cultural imagination. Most are pejorative, comical, vulgar or crudely functional – the term pap, Mark Morton observes, arose from the ‘smacking sound’ of an infant suckling – and reflect the myriad meanings, values and judgements attached to the eighteenth-century breast.<sup>1</sup> An equally characterful tapestry of breasts is to be found in graphic satire, a medium which featured a kaleidoscopic constellation of bosoms. Concealed, exposed and everything in between, they appear globular, engorged, bolstered by pads, pendent,

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Morton, *The Lover’s Tongue: A Merry Romp Through the Language of Love and Sex* (London: Ontario: Insomniac Press, 2009), 152.



withered, flat, smothered, snaked, encased in fire and reinforced with weapons. This variability reflects the perceived mutability of the female body whilst also gesturing to the gamut of social, cultural and political tensions which caricaturists turned to the breast to express. Recast and reshaped to point to a diverse assortment of ills, issues and aesthetic expectations, breasts emerge in no two prints the same.

This leads us on to the function of graphic satire: this thesis shows that caricaturists variously worked to provoke, entertain, teach, warn, assure, unsettle and encourage their viewers. In *Africans in English Caricature* Odumosu write that ‘nothing ruins a good joke like an explanation of why it should be funny, and even more so when the artfulness of its construction is picked to shards.’<sup>2</sup> Perhaps for this reason, intellectual debates tend to avoid sustained and granular readings of satirical prints, preferring to let the pieces speak for themselves. However, as Odumosu concludes, the intense topicality and intertextuality of Georgian satire necessitates close analysis; if the function of prints are to be appreciated from a twenty-first century viewpoint, then the specific allusions, subjects and iconographies they deploy must be elucidated. This is not to say that their meanings can be definitively understood; our removed positionality excludes us from ever being fully ‘in’ on the joke.

With this in mind, this thesis does not attempt to join caricaturists, subjects and print audiences in what Odumosu refers to as their ‘laughing space’, but rather asks how and why they got there.<sup>3</sup> Through close analysis of individual works it leads us closer to understanding prints as products of - and responses to - disorienting shifts in contemporary attitudes, ideologies and social orders. Engaging with conduct discourses, scandal narratives, emergent technologies, changing tastes, political positions and philosophical outlooks, caricaturists used visual satire as an outlet for keenly felt pressures, frustrations and anxieties. ‘And if I laugh at any mortal thing’, Lord Byron famously wrote in 1789, ‘Tis that I may not weep.’<sup>4</sup> Prints featuring transgressive breasts served as a kind of pressure valve and comical salve for concerns about the slippage of gender roles, rising levels of falsity, civic decay and international conflicts. They were one device through which satirists deployed

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<sup>2</sup> Odumosu, 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>4</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*. Canto IV. (1789) in *The Illustrated Byron. With Upwards of Two Hundred Engravings* (London: Henry Vizetelly, 1854), 206

what Hallett refers to as 'the pictorial negative', asserting and reinforcing normative bodies, behaviours and values by stigmatising undesirable alternatives.<sup>5</sup> Breasts which advertised anti-maternal, destructive, selfish, uncontained and radical female realities valorised normative, prototypical visions of femininity – and humanity more widely – which were structured around the principles of nurture and support.

The first thematic chapter of this thesis examines the trope of the selfish mother. To begin, it introduces a number of medical and moral debates which advanced the alignment of altruism with female identities. Grounding the discussions which follow, it explores how the concept of female nurture was distilled in the symbol of the nursing breast, an image which gained powerful cultural currency in the eighteenth century. Nursing mothers, it shows, were construed as 'angels of the state', their milk promised as a population-boosting, morality-inducing, community-uniting formula. To sacrifice one's body, time and energy to motherhood was judged as the ultimate act of female devotion, a special yet rudimentary contribution which would have lasting effects beyond the family. Women who fell short of this paradigm were characterised as self-absorbed, pathologically distracted or emphatically unnatural. In *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, psychologist and philosopher Erich Neumann observes that breasts are the clearest symbol of the 'giving-outward' behaviour we expect of women.<sup>6</sup> It is no surprise then, that caricaturists upturned this symbolism to indicate the self-serving; mothers were pictured sex-crazed egotists who suckled cats or foxes but ignored their infants, performative posers using nursing to improve their public image, or bare-breasted harlots privileging fame, fortune and political power over family life.

Modern Western women, feminist theorist Donna Haraway argues, undergo 'much trouble counting as individuals.' 'Their personal, bounded individuality', she writes, 'is compromised by their bodies troubling talent for making other bodies, whose individuality can take precedence over their own.'<sup>7</sup> This tension is especially

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<sup>5</sup> Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. by Ralph Manheim. Bollingen Series XLVII. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1955), 123.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse" in *Knowledge, Power and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life* ed. Shirley Lindenbaum and Margaret M. Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 364-410, 405.

visible in the breast: recently, gender sociologist Charlotte Faircloth has argued that by breastfeeding, especially for extended periods of time, a woman becomes doubled into a 'body/self', her breasts a constant reminder of her reproductive and transgressive abilities.<sup>8</sup> The construction of the breast as a site of bodily and emotional sacrifice blurred the boundaries between self and other; Helen Maria Williams wrote that maternal instinct should override 'selfish feelings' and that a new mother's 'life one aim' becomes 'to make another's blest.' Figuring the breast as the hearth of this devotion, she asks; 'When her lov'd infant to her bosom clings', 'Will she, for all ambition can attain, / The charms of pleasure, or the lures of gain, / Betray strong nature's feelings, will she prove/ Cold to the claims of duty and love?.'<sup>9</sup> In prints such as *Political Affection*, *The Devonshire Amusement* and *Triumph of Hypocrisy* mothers are exposed as cold to the claims of maternal love; they neglect to prioritise the 'unfettered consumptive demands of an infant' above their own desires, and so compromise the archetype of the selfless mother.<sup>10</sup> The maxims of eighteenth-century maternity overpromised and underdelivered, accepting women's pleasure only when it derived from another's; they supported investment in the self but only when it supported the family and state. Those unable or unwilling to dedicate themselves ardently to motherhood forfeited any privileges a 'natural' motherly identity might have earned them. In a society which idolised the 'good' mother, many women were misunderstood, condemned and left behind.

Whilst chapter one recognises women's struggles for corporeal and social freedoms within frameworks of familial duty, it complicates third-wave feminist histories of the maternal body by illuminating stories of subversion. Satirical images of selfish mothers with aberrant breasts, it argues, indicate that eighteenth-century efforts to channel female energy into family life were not entirely successful – they were ideological, not actual. To support this, it considers the caricature catalogue of two publicly maligned mothers, Georgiana the Duchess of Devonshire and Mary

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<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Faircloth, "'Doing the Right Thing for My Child': Self Work and Selflessness in Accounts of British 'Full-Term' Breastfeeding Mothers" in *Selfishness and Selflessness: New Approaches to Understanding Morality* ed. Linda L. Layne (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 123-40, 134.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, 'Paraphrase' *Poems on Various Subjects: with introductory remarks on the present state of science and literature in France* (London: G. and B. Whittaker, 1823), 287. Lines 11, 12, 13, 17-20.

<sup>10</sup> Kukla, 190.

Robinson. The biographical material available on these women offers an opportunity to consider how public representations and social worlds collided in caricature. Knowledge about the obstacles Robinson and the Duchess encountered, the public networks they relied on, and the shared communities they inhabited clarifies demonstrates that criticisms did not exist in a vacuum; they were contingently constructed with careful attention to circulating gossip and public opinion.

Discussing how women's virtues and vices have been historically conceptualised in visual media, Jordanova observes a 'gap between women and female bodies on the one hand and the abstractions with which they were associated on the other.'<sup>11</sup> Considering how the bodies of 'real' women like the Duchess and Robinson were abstracted in accusatory satirical prints helps to bridge this gap, shedding light on the emancipatory politics of eighteenth-century womanhood. Claims that individual, well-known women were unnatural, Jordanova argues, were 'particularly effective rhetorically and mobilised a powerful sense of opprobrium.'<sup>12</sup> The Duchess and Robinson were made examples of in graphic satire, their bodies used in an attempt to shame them and others into subservience. But as well as evidence of criticism, what emerges from satirical attacks on the Duchess and Robinson – and that of white, upwardly mobile middle and upper-class British women like them - is evidence that mothers resisted and reworked expectations. They lived their lives defiantly, dynamically and with non-maternal or extra-maternal intent. The selfish mother's body and behaviours were ideologically unacceptable, but they did take up public space.

Chapter two turns to fashion focused in final two decades of the century. Tracing a dramatic move from breast-boosting pad fads in the 1780s to body-baring neoclassical dress in the 1790s, it explores the interrelationship between social changes, developments in fashion technology and cultural anxieties about artifice, immodesty and immorality. As Vincent observes, dramatic deviations in fashion are always 'connected with wider cultural imperatives.'<sup>13</sup> The semiotic significance of the breast intensifies this connection; expectations about its fashionable display reveal the types of shared social knowledge and aspirations that were assigned to and passed between women. In the late century, the fashions associated with the breast

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<sup>11</sup> Jordanova, *Nature Display'd*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Vincent, xvi.

were entangled with debates about artifice, nature, attractiveness, sex, class, aging and the morally loaded role of motherhood. Building upon the discussion in chapter one, the final thematic section of this chapter considers the fashions of the 1780s and 1790s from a maternal perspective.

The excessive, inconvenient and uncomfortable silhouettes fashionable in the 1780s, it shows, were used to make moralising judgements about the detached, capricious and impractical nature of middle and upper-class mothering. Not only did elaborate fashions distract women from their maternal destinies, moralists warned, they also physically encumbered their performance, preventing them from picking up, playing with or feeding their infants. By the 1790s, the social and medical glorification of maternal breastfeeding and the reverence for nurturing mothers drove a set of contrasting concerns. Perry has shown how, by the end of the century, devoted motherhood had become a 'banner under which the newly constituted middle class marched', with breastfeeding paying lip-service to the diligence and self-denial the role required.<sup>14</sup> Exasperation that motherhood wasn't attractive enough for women was supplanted by fears that it had become too fashionable and was undertaken insincerely as a result. The fashionable display of the bare breast augmented these concerns; the push to make motherhood more 'natural', moralists worried, had in fact made it artificial. Together, satirical visions of foolish fashionistas from the late century demonstrate how caricaturists connected sartorial transgressions to women's moral failings. Stoking disapproving suspicions that style was subsuming sense, caricaturists observed, invented and exaggerated scenarios which saw women's breasts at the centre of fashionable faux pas, corrupt cover-ups, sexual indignities and maternal transgressions.

The third thematic chapter of the thesis explores how the grotesque breast served as a visual repository for problems of social disaffection, decline and disruption. Beginning by examining pendent, uncontainable and used-up breasts, it considers monstrous and mythological renderings of Medusian, demonic and witchy figures. On images of grotesque sub-human figures, Warner writes that 'such metamorphoses can provide release from self: they are a form of joking, of storytelling, and they offer supple resources for transforming anxiety into pleasure.' 'Inventing faces for terrors', she continues, 'or redrawing their features in a changed

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<sup>14</sup> Perry, 214.

shape represents a way of coping with them, of making them familiar, of turning them into sources of pleasure and even merriment.’<sup>15</sup> Eighteenth-century caricaturists invented breasts for terrors: the errant and failed maternal bosom of Hogarth’s drunken hag-mother emblematises the evils of gin consumption; the paunched, swinging breasts of fishwives exteriorise the social menace of aged, disorderly femininity; and the uncanny flaccid or snake-nursing breasts of Medusian crones make material the corrupt power of transgressive women. But in addition to serving as the face of social ills, grotesque breasts worked to reassure about the primacy of ideological positions, behaviours and bodies. Such extreme visions of aberrant femininity distanced its threat, resigning disruptive figures to the grotesque imagination.

Finally, this thesis examines how French breasts appeared in anti-revolutionary satires. Building upon the discussion of the grotesque breast as a barometer of social discord, it illustrates how intense political conflict animated recurring caricatures of masculine, monstrous French female figures. Drawn with unsightly and threatening breasts, French viragos or Medusas both agitated and assuaged anxieties about the spread of sedition and violence abroad and at home. Odumosu suggests that British satires served as a ‘cultural method of defence’ towards the end of the century, a period which witnessed an ‘increasing patriotism, engendered by foreign wars and the challenges of national unification at home.’ Tired typologies such as sans-culottes Frenchmen, Odumosu argues, worked to ‘carve clear imaginative lines between national characters’, estranging British and French identities.<sup>16</sup> This chapter contends that whilst scholars such as Hart, Wagner and Moores have recognised hostile French female figures as stock satirical foils to idealised icons of liberty and peace, they have overlooked the significance of their breasts.

Having begun by exploring the French breast as a site of depravity and transmittable corruption, it ends by highlighting the satirical motif of the physically threatening French breast. Amidst news of violent conflict in France, British caricaturists figured female flesh as a weapon; breasts flamed, supported pistols and blasted contaminated milk. These images conflated the threat of Jacobinism with

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<sup>15</sup> Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, 18, 265.

<sup>16</sup> Odumosu, 28.

radical female bodies and behavior, twisting the positive, nurturing symbolism of the breast into graphic images of death and devastation. Breasts served as storehouses of sedition and violence instead of loyalty and affection, advertising the corrupt reality of radical pursuits of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. Suggestive of cultural insecurity rather than supremacy, these satires simplified a complex and disturbing political present which was otherwise difficult to comprehend and relate to. But in characterising Jacobinism as absurd, extreme and general in its monstrosity, caricaturists stymied understandings of Britain's political position towards and engagement with the events of the French Revolution. Propagandist prints portray radicalism and those which embody its values as farcical, and in doing so diminish its impact. Politics became detached from reality, belonging instead to a remote world of myth and monsters.

### **Future directions**

The pages of this thesis are full of breasts – selfish breasts, fashionable and unfashionable breasts, grotesque breasts, threatening breasts, but not *all* in between. The representations explored are divided into four thematic categories, each reflecting a major issue or motif that attracted the attention of Georgian graphic satirists. The interrelated nature of debates about gender, appearances and revolutionary crises means that these categories necessarily overlap; late century criticisms of unnatural motherhood for example, speak to wider debates about inauthenticity, the grotesque authority of the generative body, and investment in the family in the face of conflict. This study makes valuable inroads in taking satirical images of the breast seriously as a site of historical enquiry, but it has been unable to devote space to many 'types' that deserve further investigation. It offers a starting point for further consideration of the diseased breast, the hyper-sexualised breast, the fat breast, the injured breast and the male breast – incarnations which are sometimes enmeshed in, but also stand separately to, the representations featured here. There are two further important motifs which must be expanded upon in future scholarship; governed to some degree by the sources, this thesis contributes little to questions of sexuality or race.

Whilst the analysis of prosthetic padding in chapter two's *A Pig in a Poke* touched upon experiences and depictions of cross-dressing and camp culture, the

debates explored throughout the thesis have been quintessentially heteronormative. The eighteenth-century breast requires queering; Klein's research on queer embodiment in the breasts of *Belinda* and her forthcoming *Sapphic Crossing* is setting the precedent for discussions about the role of the breast in queer desire and self-fashioning.<sup>17</sup> Collections such as Thomas Rowlandson's erotic engravings are important here. Produced between 1790 and 1810, they offer an excellent opportunity to collect more information about representations of same-sex and bisexual desire, the hyper-sexualisation of breasts and communal sexual ventures. Prints such as *Lonesome Pleasures* (1810) for example depict breasts in the context of non-reproductive, solo sexual satisfaction, their sapphic potential alluded to by the topless female statues which gaze towards the woman at its centre.

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<sup>17</sup> Klein, "Bosom Friends and the Sapphic Breasts of *Belinda*"; *Sapphic Crossings: Cross-Dressing Women in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming 2021).





Fig. 6.1 Rowlandson, *Lonesome Pleasures*, 1810. V&A E. 124-1952

Sally O’Driscoll’s work on eighteenth-century breasts as a sign of sex in women’s otherwise male-passing presentations provides another point from which to consider the relationship between queer representations and the breast. In her article “The Pirate’s Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body”, O’Driscoll positions the eighteenth-century breast as a ‘prototypical marker of the body’s female truth’, which was used across culture to tie gender and sex non-

conforming women to narratives of heterosexual romance and the family. The ambiguous eroticism and ‘theatrical, repeated unveiling of the breast’ in otherwise masculine representations of women sailors, O’Driscoll argues, served to conflate sex with gender. Subsequently, it moved to ‘foreclose unruly behaviour’, asserting women’s inability to stray too far from ideals. This ideal as it related to the breast, O’Driscoll reminds us, was embodied in the woman who exchanged the ‘erotic pleasure of the dry, firm breast for the satisfaction of the dripping, lactating breast of patriotic motherhood.’<sup>18</sup> Although this ideal left little sanctioned space for non-heterosexual identities and desire, the breast emerged as a site through which women resisted and reworked experiences and representations of queer subjectivities.

Equally, whilst the Black breast has been analysed in the context of efforts to position social and political ‘others’ as foreign, grotesque and threatening, its presence merits a full-length study which is sensitive to ongoing Black feminist scholarship and decolonial discourses. A number of prints offer an important source base from which to consider the racist satirical treatment of the Black female breast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century. Gillray’s *Philanthropic Consolations, after the Loss of the Slave-Bill* (1796), Gillray’s *Cymon and Iphigenia* (1796), Rowlandson’s *Rachel Pringle of Barbadoes* (1796), Isaac Cruikshank’s *The Humours of Belvoir Castle or the Morning After* (1799) and *The Breaking up of the Union Club!* (1801), George Cruikshank’s *The New Union Club* (1819), *The Antiquarian Society* (1812) and *How happy could I be with either* (1818) and Charles Williams’ *That was a Monstrous Droll Story, now Was’nt it?* (1810) all engage with key themes including sex, motherhood, bodily beauty, politics, wealth, slavery and more. Cruikshank’s *The New Union Club* is of particular interest to the present study; a grandiose reimagining of Gillray’s earlier *The Union Club* (1801), it attacks the Abolitionist movement from the perspective of West Indian plantation owners. A chaotic scene set in a dinner hall, it deploys two infant-mother images in an effort to undermine the civility and morality of Africans, who are grotesquely stereotyped as

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<sup>18</sup> Sally O’Driscoll, “The Pirate’s Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body” *The Eighteenth Century* 53 no. 3, Essays in Memory of Han Turley (2012), 357-79, 360-1. Another of O’Driscoll’s earlier studies is of interest here, see “The Lesbian and the Passionless Woman: Femininity and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century England” *The Eighteenth Century* 44, no. 2/3 (Summer-Fall 2003), 103-31.

drunken, debauched, promiscuous and aggressive. Below the pink canopy, a couple flank an infant drawn with its skin the colour of its mother on one side and the colour of its father on the other. Another detail at the base of the print shows two Black women wrestling – the lady on the floor clutches a baby who opportunisticly suckles at the exposed dangling breast of the woman on top of his mother; neither women appear to notice or care.

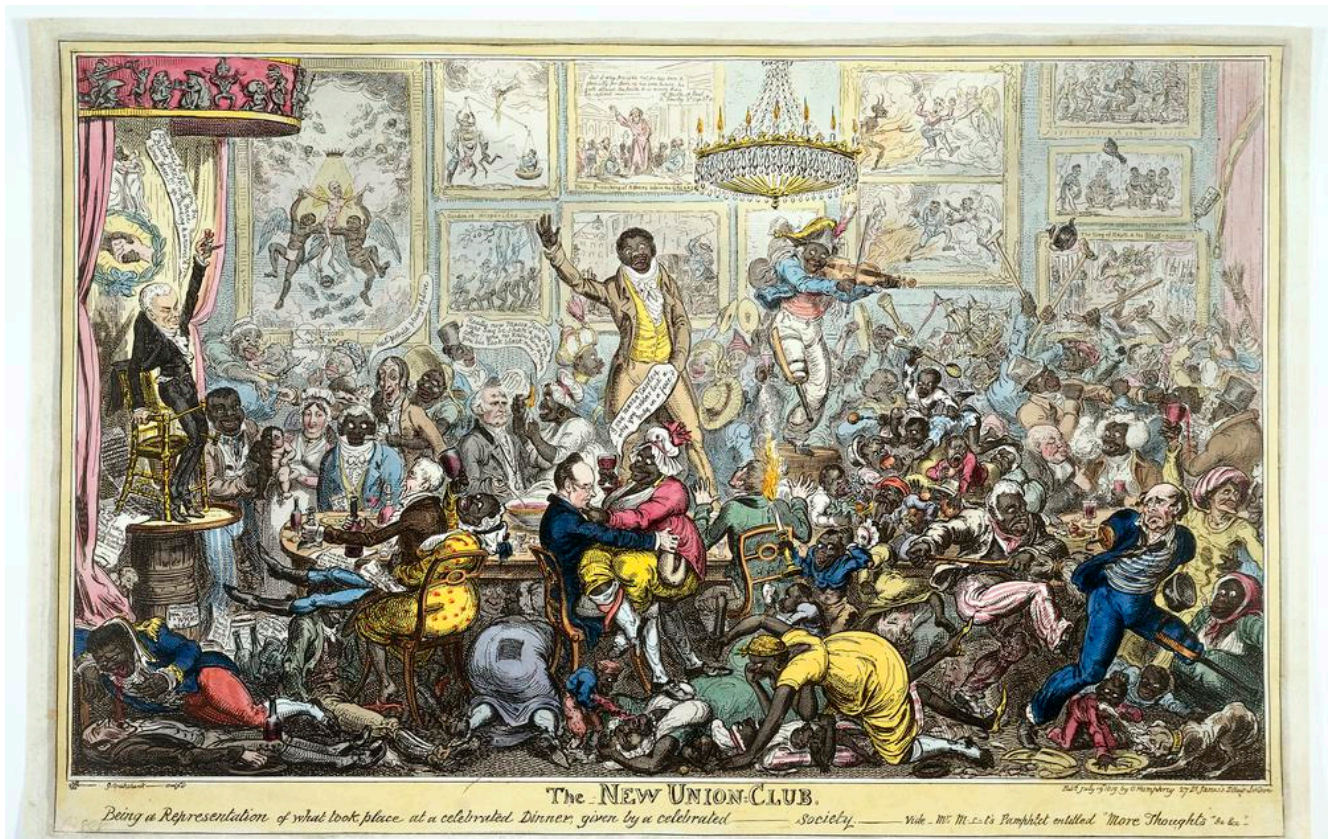


Fig. 6.2 George Cruikshank, *The New Union Club*, 1819. BM Satires 13249

Fig. 6.3 and 6.4 Details from *The New Union Club*

The wealth of material in this early nineteenth-century work also indicates the advantages of extending the chronological focus of this thesis forwards. As Haywood has shown in *The Rise of Victorian Caricature*, historiography has perpetuated the 'long-standing misconception' that graphic satire declined after the 'golden' Georgian period.<sup>19</sup> Rather, as Haywood's work establishes, caricature flourished during the 1800s, retaining its cultural authority alongside other textual mediums. 'A witty caricature may produce impressions', historian and civil servant Richard R. Madden remarked in 1835, 'which a dozen of books may not remove.'<sup>20</sup> The lasting impact that caricature offered ensured its evolution as satirical images transmuted from the dominant single-sheet design to 'a variety of comic formats.'<sup>21</sup> Print historian Brian Maidment sees the political and comical illustrations published in wide-reaching household almanacs, periodicals and serials as having arisen from eighteenth-century graphic satire, noting how they drew on 'the new information culture of the 1830s to form something at once traditional and radically new.'<sup>22</sup> Experienced satirists including Rowlandson and George Cruikshank worked well in to the nineteenth century, whilst new artists such as Charles Jameson Grant, William

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<sup>19</sup> Haywood, *The Rise of Victorian Caricature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Richard R. Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies During the Transition From Slavery to Apprenticeship*, vol. I (London: James Cochrane and Co., 1835), 138.

<sup>21</sup> Haywood, *The Rise of Victorian Caricature*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Maidment, "Beyond usefulness and ephemerality: the Discursive Almanac, 1828-60" in *British Literature and Print Culture*, ed. Sandro Jung (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 158-94, 178. See also "Graphic Satire, Caricature, Comic Illustration and the Radical Press, 1820-1850" in *Journalism and the Periodical Press in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 84-103.

Heath, Theodore Lane and Robert Seymour set new satirical standards.<sup>23</sup> There was no lack of scandal in the Victorian era; the increasingly troubled marriage of Queen Caroline and King George IV, for example, inspired reams of satirical material. Gossip about alleged adulteries, the couple's estrangement and a potential royal divorce fuelled a print campaign which saw the aging Queen viciously caricatured as a drunk, witless, sexual slattern. Many of these prints – amongst them Lane's *Mother Cole* (1812), *Bat- Cat & mat. How happy I could be with either* (1821), *Modesty!* (1821) and *The Long and the Short of the Tale* (1821) and Heath's *A Royal Salute* (1820) - are notable for their grotesque distortion of the Queen's breasts, and would make for an interesting study on satire, shame and the graphic grotesquery of the royal female body.

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<sup>23</sup> For more on Charles Jameson Grant, see Godfrey, *English Caricature, 1620 to the Present: Caricaturists and Satirists, Their Art, Their Purpose and Influence* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984), 21-2, 106-7; Haywood, *The Rise of Victorian Caricature*, 99-152; for a study on William Heath, see Julie Mellby, "William Heath (1794/5-1840): 'The man wots got the whip hand of 'em all'" *The British Art Journal* 16 no. 3 (2015/16), 3-19; for scholarship on Theodore Lane, see David Taylor, 128, 146; Graham Everitt, *English Caricaturists and Graphic Humourists of the Nineteenth Century: How They Illustrated and Interpreted Their Times* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893), 86-8; for more on the life and work of Robert Seymour, see Alfred Crowquill, *Seymour's Humorous Sketches: Comprising Eighty-Six Caricature Etchings* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1878); Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order 1820-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 5; "Beyond Pickwick: Seymour's Sketches and Regency Print Culture" in *Studies in Victorian Modern Literature: A Tribute to John Sutherland* ed. W. Baker (Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 141-52; "The Draughtsman's Contacts – Robert Seymour and Periodical Illustration in 1832" *The Journal of European Periodicals Studies* (2016), 37-52; *Robert Seymour and Nineteenth-Century Print Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

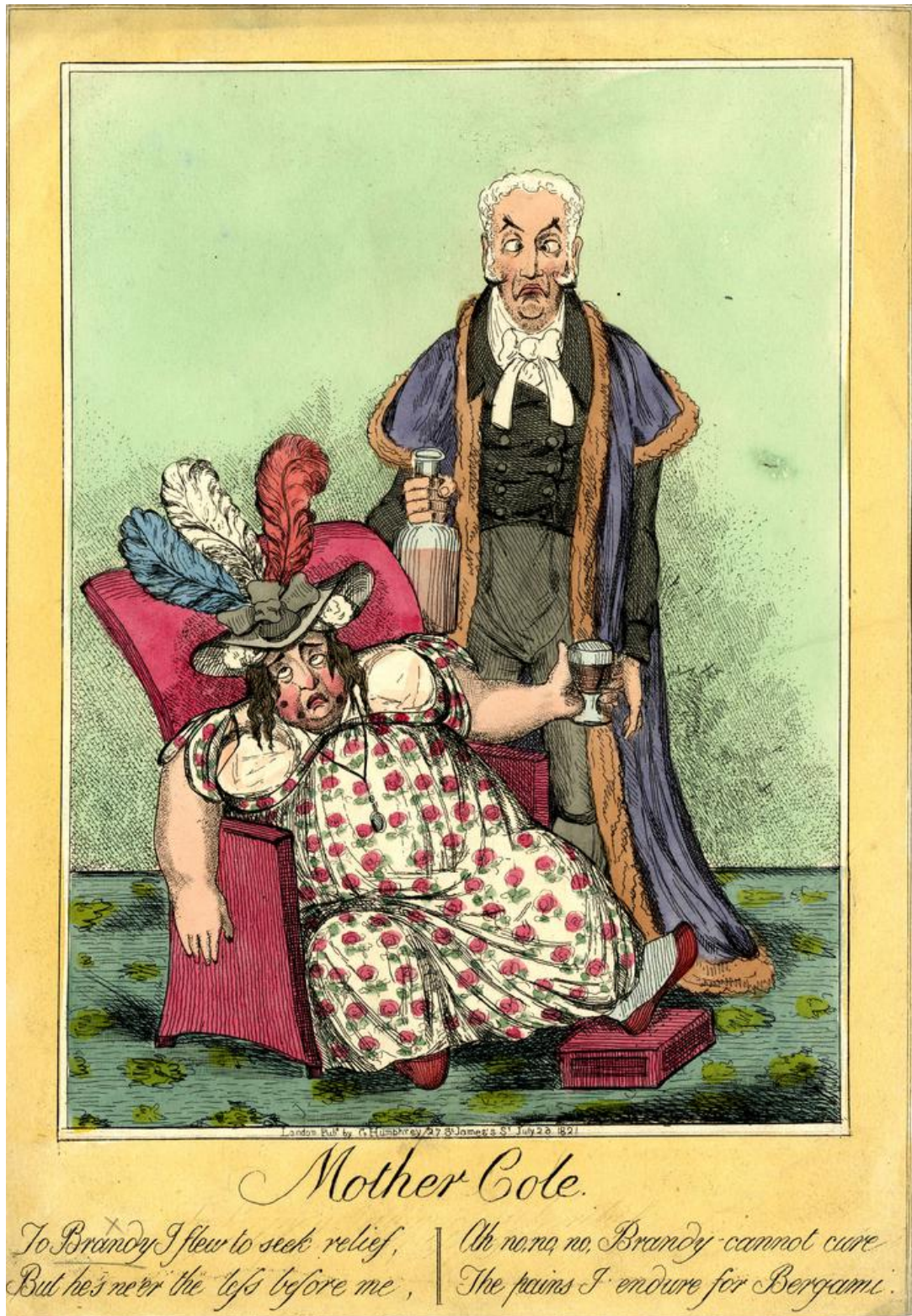


Fig. 6.5 Theodore Lane, *Mother Cole*, 1821. BM no. 1983,0305.44



Fig. 6.6 Lane, *Bat- Cat & mat. How happy I could be with either*, 1821. BM no. 1975,0118.30

Elsewhere, a keyword search for breasts in the British Museum's catalogue of social and political satires brings up many nineteenth-century works which could be used to expand, nuance and diversify the arguments made in this thesis. Important collections such as Rowlandson's raucous *Characteristic Sketches of the Lower*

*Orders* (1820) for example, contain several prints which employ the breast to express the colourful and coarse realities of working-class urban life.<sup>24</sup> In one print titled *Sweet Lavender*, a mother touts lavender to well-dressed passers-by. An infant at her hip lets out an angry cry, clutching desperately at her bare breast. The breast functions similarly in Rowlandson's earlier work *Love and Poverty* – also known as *Wet Nurse Interrupted*, which shows a poor mother juggling her children whilst she desperately tries to sell pamphlets. The wailing babies, hollering mothers and naked breasts purposefully peppered throughout Rowlandson's prints illustrate the unrefined, tragic and unfair realities of nineteenth-century London life.



Fig. 6.7 Rowlandson, *Sweet Lavender*, 1820. BL BLL01003178074

Fig. 6.8 *Love and Poverty*, undated. RCIN 810976

<sup>24</sup> Rowlandson's characteristic *Sketches of the Lower Orders*, intended as a companion to the *New Picture of London: consisting of fifty-four plates ... coloured*. (London: 1820). Exhibited: "Discovering literature: Romantics and Victorians" (online), 20 February 2014-.



Future research on breasts in graphic satire would benefit from a wider spatial – as well as chronological – reach. Comparing how breasts appear across an international corpus of caricature would extend understanding of how women's bodies, experiences and behaviours have been mapped on to political debates and discourses. Discussions of the breast and breast milk as sites of inter-generational political transmission, for example, could be developed further through analysis of prints like the American *Infant Liberty nursed by Mother Mob* (1808), engraved by Elkanah Tisdale. As David Hackett Fischer explains, Tisdale's work shows 'the mother of all Jeffersonians nursing a dirty baby at her swollen breasts, which are marked "whisky" and "rum."' <sup>25</sup> This image has strong parallels with prints such as Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751), the anonymous *The Hopes of the Party! Or the Darling Children of Democracy!* (1798) and Isaac Cruikshank's *A Peace Offering to the Genius of Liberty and Equality*, all of which satirise suspicions about the literal and metaphorical toxicity of some mother's milk.

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<sup>25</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 206. For further scholarly discussion of this piece, see Ross Barrett, *Rendering Violence: Riots, Strikes, and Upheaval in Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 32-3.



Fig. 6.9 Elkanah Tisdale, *Infant Liberty nursed by Mother Mob*, 1808. LOC LC-USZ62-128518



Fig. 6.10 Detail from *Infant Liberty nursed by Mother Mob*

An international study would also benefit greatly from the addition of French caricature, which captures many understudied images of the breast. The theatrical breast, fat breast and injured breast are all represented, for instance, in the anonymous *Funeste Mort d'une Puissante Renommée a Paris le 3 Janvier 1812* (*The Mortal End of Potent Fame*), which personifies Fame as a fat woman being speared through her nipples by a Jesuit.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 6.11 Anonymous, *Funeste Mort d'une Puissante Renommée a Paris le 3 Janvier 1812* (*The Mortal End of Potent Fame*), 1812. BM Satires 8699

<sup>26</sup> In the same year in Britain, Charles Williams' drew a similarly spherical set of bosoms on the quasi-classical character of Calypso in his *The modern Calypso; or the matured enchantress. Vide Telemachus* (1812) (BM Satires 11879), a figure meant to resemble the Prince Regent's mistress, Lady Hertford. A tiny cupid straddles one of Hertford's breasts whilst aiming a bow and arrow at the other, ready to pop the balloon-like bulge.

A comparative analysis of French and British prints from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century would also be productive; it could expand, for example, understanding of how caricatures of the breast are used as tools for political 'othering.' French satirists gave as good as they got when it came to caricatures of the breast; in the oppositional print *L'Angleterre démontée par la perte de ses deux meilleurs chevaux de bataille, François II et Alexandre* (1805), the anonymous artist personifies England as a masculine Medusa woman with deflated money bags for breasts. Their sagging weight, lumpy, coin-dimpled surface and puckered drawstring nipples - from which three gold pieces drip, like breast milk - capture the nasty corruption dismantling English peace and prosperity. This grotesque, forensically executed vision of the enemy's body evokes England's own oppositional prints: Gillray's *Alecto and her Train* (1791), *Light Expelling Darkness* and *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798) all contain comparably caustic caricatures of the French female breast.



Fig. 6.12 *L'Angleterre démontée par la perte de ses deux meilleurs chevaux de bataille, François II et Alexandre*, 1805. BM Satires 10451

Such derogatory depictions of female flesh proliferated in the early 1800s. Speaking on the varied readings of 'ostensibly misogynist images' which circulated in caricature, Gatrell draws attention to the prurience of works such as *Nymphs Bathing* (1810 and 1824). Designed after Richard Newton, the prints show women completely naked, gathered in a quasi-classical landscape by the banks of an estuary and a lake. In her description George writes that the 1810 version shows the women 'grossly burlesqued', with many figures either 'clumsily fat or painfully thin.' The later, less extreme rendition, George notes, is a 'crude copy of a school boyish print' which depicts the frolicking women as ungainly and uninhibited. Breasts are as heavily caricatured as the women's gormless faces - either ludicrously globular or wilted and withered like arms, they provoke a mix of titillation and disgust.

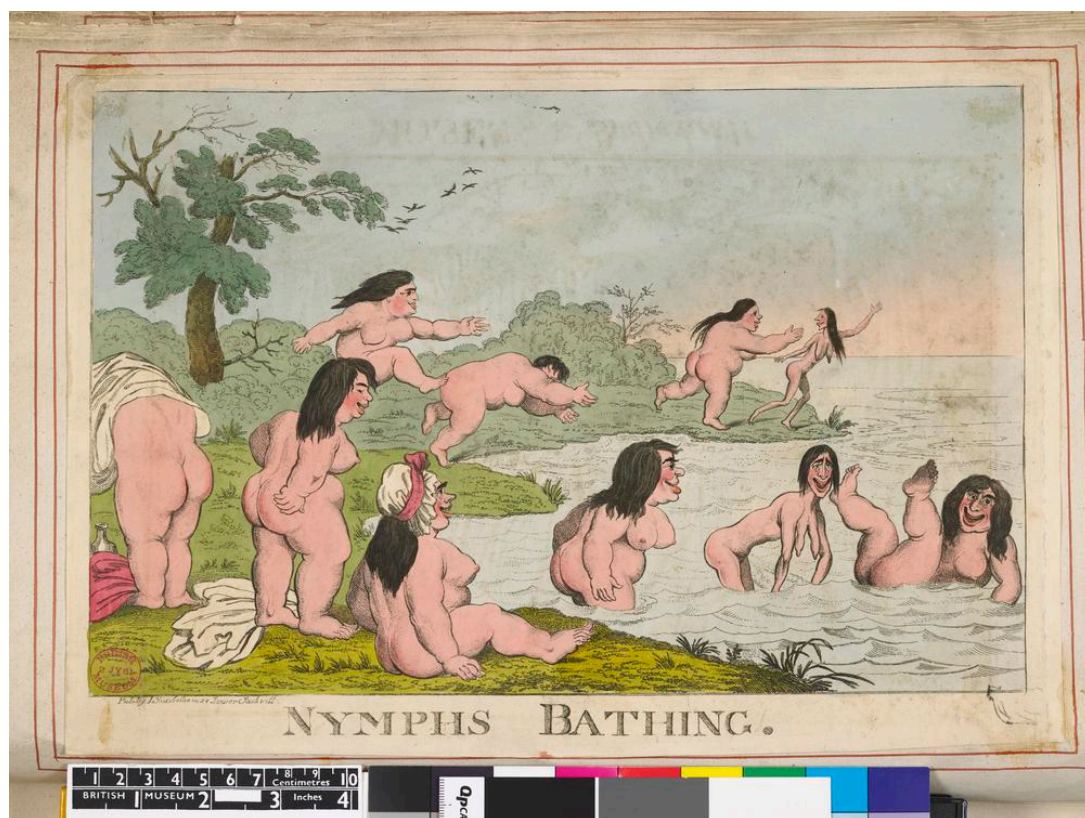


Fig. 6.13 J. Sidebotham after Richard Newton, *Nymphs Bathing*, 1810. BM Satires 11696



Fig. 6.14 J. Lewis Marks after Richard Newton, *Nymphs Bathing*, c. 1824. BM Satires 14098

Gatrell argues that despite their vulgarity, satirical works like *Nymphs Bathing* cannot be considered straightforwardly chauvinistic. Interrogating the interplay between humour, objectification and art, he asks: ‘is the male gaze on sagging female bodies too cruel to be witty, or too witty to be cruel?’<sup>27</sup> This question can be posed to almost every print in this thesis, filled as it is with witty and often cruel caricatures of female bodies extracted from the male satirist’s imagination and formulated in the eye of the male gaze. Mocking, moralising and ultimately taking advantage of an unavoidably eye-catching motif, eighteenth and nineteenth-century caricaturists set in motion a graphic prioritisation of the breast which persists today. Present conversations concerning the breast have seen it caricatured in the context of debates about ‘lactivism’, the free the nipple movement, breastfeeding in public, ‘extended’ breastfeeding and attachment parenting, cosmetic surgery and topless tabloid modelling, to name a few.

Twenty-first century caricatures featuring the breast are not so different from their Georgian predecessors. In his 2013 *The Incredible Shrinking President* Daryl Cagle used the topless figure of French Liberty to critique the nation’s degeneration under President Francois Holland and in 2018 Steve Bell employed an image of false breasts to attack the seeming closeness of Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron in *If...Trump deploys his attack poodle Macron*. In 2012, a syndicate cartoon published in the *Los Angeles Times* titled *Lady Liberty Breast Feeds the Privileged* pictured the Statue of Liberty begrudgingly nursing four stout men, their greedy reliance on her milk meant to criticise state subsidisation of rich industries and military groups. One man turns to another to complain: ‘Did you see the shocking Time Magazine cover with the mother who was still breastfeeding her child long after he had grown? Disturbing.’ The line is a response to a controversial *Time Magazine* cover published earlier that year, featuring a photograph of a woman, Jamie Lynne Grumet, nursing her three-year-old son. Just as caricature has continued using the breast to make political points, the points it addresses have remained remarkably similar. Motherhood in particular dominates as a satirical subject; social discomfort with certain facets of maternal bodies and identities is rife. To illustrate this, it is worth reading Gillray’s *The Fashionable Mamma – Or – The Convenience of Modern*

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<sup>27</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 384.

*Dress* (1796), alongside a more recent cartoon which graced the cover of *The New Yorker's* Mother's Day edition in 2000 - *Mother Nature* by Carter Goodrich.

Produced over two hundred years apart, the parallels between the two caricatures are striking. Both use the trope of fashion to compare unnatural and natural women – the fashionable mamma in Gillray's print is matched by Goodrich's glamorous, anti-maternal fashionista, who shirks away from the wholesome display of nurture in front of her. Equally, the idealised blushing nurse in Gillray's picture-within-the-print 'Maternal Love' – who is drawn surrounded by green, dressed in loose garments and with bare feet – is duplicated in Goodrich's bountiful Mother Nature, who likewise appears flushed, in loose dress, shoeless and immersed in a pastoral scene. Goodrich's ideal mother is surrounded by infants – the two babies at her breast and the two children on her lap recall traditional representations of Charity nursing or caring for multiple children. As in 1796, anxiety abounds that women are desiring of a life shaped by personal desires rather than one modelled on a self-sacrificial ideal. Although to a different and arguably lesser extent, the pressure to be more like the bountiful and glowing mother nature and less like the unnatural fashionable singleton remains.





Fig. 6.15 *The Fashionable Mamma*

Fig. 6.16 *Mother Nature*, 2000. Courtesy of *The New Yorker Magazine*

This thesis argues for the close examination of images like these, which use women's bodies to make moralising claims about ways of living. In tracing the emergence of breasts as satiric symbols, it tells a particular historical story about the politicisation of the female body. Caricaturists strategically reached for breasts to build a sophisticated apparatus of discipline. Feminising existent and hypothetical threats to preferred ways of being, they shifted responsibility for healthy, peaceful and productive societies onto women. When breasts appear 'wrong' or operate waywardly then the wider community is at risk: the next generation are neglected, modesty is compromised, conflict looms, or artificiality is on the rise. As well as identifying, assuaging and redirecting popular anxieties, caricaturists used the breast to advance and celebrate particular ideological models; recommending shared values, goals and social practices. Used to negotiate provocative pinch points around questions of female duty, natural and unnatural appearances, inappropriate influence and bodily authority, the breast plays a major part in satirical processes of critique, defence and comic release. Moving forwards, closer attention to how

satirical representations of breasts intersect with moralising reckonings on health, sex, parenthood, bodily beauty, civic prosperity and political conflict could offer scholars valuable insight into the gendered mechanisms which underpin understandings of the complex relationship between the self, society and the body.

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