

“Thinking your journal unimportant”: A feminist literary analysis of selected excerpts from Lady Anne Barnard’s Cape diaries

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Abstract

This article offers a feminist literary analysis of selected excerpts from the diaries that Lady Anne Barnard wrote during her stay at the Cape Colony from 1797 until 1802. Lady Anne was, by all accounts, an extremely productive writer and correspondent who left behind a wealth of material at the time of her death on 6 May 1825. The article argues that diaries can provide valuable insights about gendered constructions at different historical moments and about how individual women navigated such gendered structures in their daily lives. The textual specificities of diaries require that researchers adjust our reading strategies to meet the demands of these texts. Lady Anne emerges as a complex subject who is both subversive and constrained in her negotiations with gendered constructions of “proper” female roles and behaviour. Even as she challenges these constructions, she also appears to have internalized them, at least partly.

Keywords: Lady Anne Barnard; Diaries; Gender; Cult of true womanhood; Domesticity; Feminist literary criticism.

Introduction

Once more, once more, thou creature of omissions, always intending right, always forgetting, thinking your journal unimportant and what you have to say not worth paper pen and ink, yet always regretting afterwards that you did so...(Barnard, 1799).¹

The above epigraph is taken from the diaries that Lady Anne Barnard (see image 1) wrote during her stay at the Cape Colony from 1797 until 1802. These lines signal many of the concerns that will be addressed in this

¹ A Barnard, Diary entry, 1 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle and the vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape diaries* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2006), p. 25.

article, including the gendered dynamics that come into play when women write diaries as well as the ways in which these dynamics shape the reading strategies scholars employ in their engagements with such texts. Lady Anne's description of her writerly self as a "creature of omissions" immediately alerts us that we should pay as much attention to the words that did not find their way onto the pages of these diaries as to the lines that were actually written and preserved for posterity. The suggestion that she was "always forgetting" what should have been included in her diary further reminds us of the extent to which diaries, as daily reflections on a life, are always already compromised by the vagaries of memory. The diffidence that is implied by the notion that her experiences are not important enough to warrant written expression makes it all the more important that scholars should pay careful attention to the gaps and silences in the text when we read diary entries. This article will contend that Lady Anne's apparent reticence is a product of her gendered subject position and, in order to explore the complicated dimensions of local histories that are locked up in her diary entries, I have utilised the analytical tools of feminist literary analysis.

Image 1: Lady Anne Barnard



Source: Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lady_Anne_Andrew_Barnard.jpg

Before proceeding with the analysis, some explanation about Lady Anne's textual legacy is in order. Lady Anne was, by all accounts, an extremely productive writer and correspondent who left behind a wealth of material at

the time of her death in 1825.² In her edited collection of the diaries Lady Anne wrote at the Cape in 1799 and 1800, Lenta divides the surviving texts into categories of letters, memoirs, the Cape journals, the Cape diaries, the sea journal (written by Lady Anne on the passage home from the Cape in 1802) and *The Lays of the Lindsays* (Lindsay was Lady Anne's maiden name and this latter text was a collection of poetry by Lady Anne and her two sisters, the Ladies Margaret and Elizabeth).³ All references to Lady Anne's diaries in this article will be to this edited collection by Lenta, entitled *Paradise, the castle and the vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape diaries*, which was first published in 2006. This edition contains shortened and unrevised versions of the complete diaries that were published in 1999 as *The Cape diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1799-1800* under the editorship of Lenta and Le Cordeur.⁴

Lenta's useful division of the material in itself requires some terminological clarification, especially since the feminist theories on women's life writing that will be employed in the rest of the article tend to use the terms "diary" and "journal" interchangeably.⁵ Bunkers justifies this terminological choice by explaining that few texts "can clearly be labeled a diary *or* a journal" since they often exhibit features of diaries as well as journals. The former is characterised by, for instance, short descriptions and daily accounts of events while the latter tends to include extensive, self-reflexive entries, narratives and interpretations.⁶ While this is indeed an accurate description of Lady Anne's diaries, Lenta's distinction remains significant since the journals and the diaries were subjected to different levels of revision and external involvement. These editorial interventions reflect the different imagined audiences that Lady Anne likely had in mind when she wrote. According to Lenta, Lady Anne herself

2 AM Lewin Robinson (ed.), *The letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas from the Cape and elsewhere, 1793-1803, together with her journal of a tour into the interior and certain other letters* (Cape Town, AA Balkema, 1973), p. 3; K McKenzie, "Social mobilities at the Cape of Good Hope: Lady Anne Barnard, Samuel Hudson, and the opportunities of Empire, c. 1797-1824"; T Ballantyne & A Burton (eds.), *Moving subjects: Gender, mobility, and intimacy in an age of global empire* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 274-295.

3 M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle and the vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape diaries*, pp. 10-16. Lenta has done some of the most authoritative work on Lady Anne's writings in South African academe. See, for example, M Lenta, "All the lighter parts: Lady Anne Barnard's letters from Cape Town", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 22(2), 1991, pp. 57-71; M Lenta, "The shape of a woman's life: Lady Anne Barnard's *Memoir*", *Literator*, 14 (2), 1993, pp. 101-115; M Lenta, "Degrees of freedom: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape diaries", *English in Africa*, 19(2), 1992, pp. 55-68.

4 M Lenta & B Le Cordeur (eds.), *The Cape diaries of Lady Anne Barnard 1799-1800, Vol. 1* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1999).

5 GR Davis, "Women's frontier diaries: Writing for good reason", *Women's Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, 4(1), 1987, pp. 5-14; M Culley, "'I look at me': Self as subject in the diaries of American women", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, pp. 15-22; SL Bunkers, "Diaries: Public and private records of women's lives", *Legacy*, 7(2), 1990, pp. 17-26.

6 SL Bunkers, "Diaries: Public and private records...", *Legacy*, 7(2), 1990, p. 24.

revised her journals and they were also “recopied by secretaries”. In addition, she uses pseudonyms when referring to people in her life. In her diaries, on the other hand, Lady Anne “felt no obligation to use assumed names, or to be reticent about people, or to conceal her own opinions and emotions”.⁷ This, however, does not imply that “the diaries represent a ‘real’ Lady Anne, who is obscured behind the social persona of the narrator of the revised journals”.⁸ On the contrary, the diarist, “even as he or she purports to inscribe an actual emotion or experience in the diary’s pages, in effect constructs that of which he or she writes”.⁹

Brief description of Lady Anne Barnard’s background and historical context

Lady Anne Barnard (nee Lindsay) was born in Fife, Scotland, in 1750 as part of the aristocratic, yet impoverished, Lindsay family of Balcarres. The paucity of Lady Anne’s dowry severely limited her marriage prospects. Despite familial, social and financial pressures to marry a partner who could provide economic security at the first possible opportunity, however, Lady Anne refused a number of proposals. Yet, Lenta notes that it was only through marriage that Lady Anne would have been able to “play the role in society for which her birth and abilities qualified her”.¹⁰ Although changes were afoot, Lady Anne’s was a society that was still very much organized according to rigid gender divisions. The groundbreaking feminist text, *A vindication of the rights of woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft, was published in 1792.¹¹ While understandings about women and their place in society were thus open to increasing challenge and were being reconceptualised during Lady Anne’s lifetime, it would take some time for these ideas to percolate to women’s daily lived realities.

For Lady Anne, a suitable marriage still presented her with the best option for a socially fulfilling future. One of Lady Anne’s suitors was Henry Dundas, who was the British Minister for War and the Colonies. After this courtship

7 M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 15.

8 M Lenta & B Le Cordeur (eds.), *The Cape diaries...*, p. xxxiv; D Driver, “A literary appraisal”, AM Lewin Robinson, M Lenta et.al, (eds.), *The Cape journals of Lady Anne Barnard, 1797-1798* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1994), pp. 1-13.

9 R Steinitz, “Writing diaries, reading diaries: The mechanics of memory”, *The Communication Review*, 2(1), 1997, p. 55.

10 M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 7.

11 M Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the rights of woman* (London, J Johnson, 1792).

came to naught, Lady Anne accepted an offer from Andrew Barnard and married him in 1793. He was twelve years younger than the then forty-two year old Lady Anne.¹² He had also “been invalidated out of the army” and was experiencing financial difficulties.¹³ Lady Anne promptly intervened on her new husband’s behalf and used her connection with Henry Dundas to secure the position of Secretary to the Cape for Andrew Barnard. After being founded and governed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) since 1652, the Colony was ruled by British forces from 1795, aside from a “short recession to the Dutch Batavian Republic from 1803 to 1806”.¹⁴ It was as part of the British settlement that Lady Anne and her husband travelled to the Cape. According to Lenta, “most ladies stayed at home during their husbands’ service abroad” but Lady Anne made the somewhat unusual decision to accompany Andrew Barnard to the Cape. During her tenure at the Cape, Lady Anne had “no official position, but much social experience”.¹⁵ In her diaries, she reflects extensively on her day to day experiences and she also comments most astutely on the actions and attitudes of the colonial officials with whom she is in regular contact because of her position as the wife of the Colonial secretary. A close reading of her daily experiences and interactions can be as revealing about the gender relations at the Cape as her descriptions of the colonial officials. Her diaries add a great deal to our understanding of the ways in which an obviously intelligent and very articulate woman negotiated gendered constructions at the Southern tip of Africa during the turn of the eighteenth century.

Gender and women’s diaries

Rather than reading diaries as some direct reflection of the real, readers must keep in mind that such texts, like any other “written representation[,] is always constructed, partial, mediated, even, to an extent, fictional”.¹⁶ Yet, this does not detract from the valuable insights that diaries can provide about gendered constructions at different historical moments and about how individual women negotiated such gendered structures in their daily lives. The

12 M Lenta, “Degrees of freedom...”, *English in Africa*, 19(2), 1992, pp. 55-68.

13 M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 8.

14 R Ross, *Status and respectability in the Cape colony, 1750-1870: A tragedy of manners* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7. For a synopsis of the social and political situation at the Cape during Lady Anne’s stay, see M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, pp. 2-5.

15 M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 11.

16 R Steinitz, “Writing diaries, reading diaries...”, *The Communication Review*, 2(1), 1997, p. 55.

textual specificities of diaries require that we adjust our reading strategies to meet the demands of these texts. To this end, Hampsten offers the following suggestions:¹⁷

... private writings of women ask of us, if we wish to read them knowingly, a special inventive patience. We must interpret what is not written as well as what is, and, rather than dismiss repetitions, value them especially. “Nothing happened” asks that we wonder what, in the context of a particular woman’s stream of days, she means by something happening.

Diary writing as a genre has gained increasing popularity amongst scholars over the last few decades. The number of women who kept diaries has made this an especially attractive area of research for feminist academics who are interested in uncovering the often hidden histories of women and in heeding their all too frequently muted voices. Diary studies form part of the burgeoning interest in the larger corpus of women’s life writing which accompanied the second wave of feminism and the increasing academic respectability of feminist theory and Gender Studies.¹⁸ Rich¹⁹ goes so far as to describe diaries as “that profoundly female, and feminist genre”. Although men certainly write diaries as well, Hogan²⁰ rightly contends that, for various reasons, diary writing has emerged as a favoured mode of autobiography for large numbers of women and the last century has witnessed what she terms the “historical ‘feminization’ of the diary”. Even as the next section of this article explores the extent to which diaries have become feminized, I am sensitive to Ledwon’s²¹ salutary caution that “we must be wary of essentialism when it comes to making generalized statements about women and diary-keeping, for there will always be exceptions”. This warning is echoed by Hogan,²² who notes that the insistence on “some kind of ‘feminine essence’” runs the risk of erasing “differences among a large and various body of women’s texts – differences of class, race, historical period, intentions and motivations”. When considering the gendered nature of the diary as a literary form, it is useful to keep in mind that this is a matter of culture rather than biology. Ledwon²³

17 E Hampsten, *“Read this only to yourself”: The private writings of Midwestern women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 4.

18 SL Bunkers & CA Huff (eds.), *Inscribing the daily: Critical essays on women’s diaries* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 2.

19 A Rich, *On lies, secrets, and silence* (New York, Norton, 1979), p. 217.

20 R Hogan, “Engendered autobiographies: The diary as a feminine form”, *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 14(2), 1991, p. 96.

21 L Ledwon, “Diaries and hearsay: Gender, selfhood, and the trustworthiness of narrative structure”, *Temple Law Review*, 73, 2000, p. 1210.

22 R Hogan, “Engendered autobiographies...”, *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 14(2), 1991, p. 100.

23 L Ledwon, “Diaries and hearsay...”, *Law Review*, 73, 2000, p. 1195.

formulates this question as follows: "Is there something about the form and structure of a diary that is encoded with the cultural sign of the 'feminine'?" Some feminist theorists argue that the diaries tend to be regarded as "women's traditional literature" simply because they were often the only type of writing women were able to engage in.²⁴

Regardless of its origin, there is a strong association between diaries and women in the popular imagination and this conceptual link has implications for the ways in which readers engage with diaries. Feminist literary scholars generally agree that "the diary as a form has been marginalized in large part because it is perceived as feminine". As a result, diaries are regarded as tainted with the stereotypical gendered characteristics that are assigned to women, namely emotion, frivolity, inconsistency, interruption, triviality and a lack of rigour and form.²⁵ Prior to the feminist reclamation of diaries, all these associations disqualified diaries from the realm of "proper" literature. The mere fact that diaries were often "composed by that 'inferior' sex, women" was sufficient to have them "excluded from the literary canon".²⁶ Hogan²⁷ phrases this slightly differently, but the gendered dimensions remain clear when she notes that "[w]omen write letters [or diaries] – personal, intimate, in relation; men write books – universal, public, in general circulation". Gannett explains these gendered dynamics as follows:²⁸

As the diary or personal journal became increasingly affiliated with the rigidly demarcated women's sphere of the nineteenth century, it probably suffered a loss of prestige, which may well have hastened the departure of men from the ranks of its practitioners and contributed to the pejoration of the term diary.

According to Ledwon,²⁹ patriarchal culture tends to dismiss both the diary form and women's lives as "emotional, fragmentary, interrupted, modest, not to be taken seriously, private, restricted, daily, trivial, formless, concerned with self, as endless as their [women's] tasks". By means of a close reading of Lady Anne's diaries, I will show that such misogynist assumptions about diaries are not only inaccurate but that they also cause one to lose out on the immense value of diaries as not just a private documentation of a life, but as a shared

24 C Huff, "'That profoundly female, and feminist genre': The diary as feminist practice", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, pp. 9-10.

25 L Ledwon, "Diaries and hearsay...", *Law Review*, 73, 2000, p. 1195.

26 C Huff, "'That profoundly female...'", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, p. 10.

27 R Hogan, "Engendered autobiographies...", *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 14(2), 1991, p. 96.

28 C Gannett, *Gender and the journal: Diaries and academic discourse* (Albany, State University of New York, 1992), p. 141.

29 L Ledwon, "Diaries and hearsay...", *Law Review*, 73, 2000, p. 1196.

or communal record of social, public events.³⁰ Lady Anne's diaries support Steinitz's contention that diaries have the potential to "offer their readers not only the self made textual, but also history, a broader cultural experience, made personal". The richness of Lady Anne's diaries can best be appreciated by reading them as "elastic, inclusive texts, which mix chronicle, historical record, reflection, feelings, descriptions of nature, travel, work accomplished, and portraiture of character rather haphazardly together".³¹

An analysis of selected excerpts from Lady Anne's diaries

Representing race and class in travel diaries

A further salient dimension of Lady Anne's diaries is the fact that they can be classified as travel diaries. This specific sub-genre of diaries allows readers to gain insights into the nature and processes of "British exploration and imperialism".³² Particularly revealing is Lady Anne's descriptions of slaves. In her diary entry dated 1 January 1799, she explains that new years' day was "the only day in the course of it [the year] when slaves are free" and when they "have liberty to leave the master's house" for a few hours. It is clear both that Lady Anne has comprehensively othered the Cape's slave population and that she connects this othering with her gendered class position. She describes how her husband, to whom she variously refers as "Mr Barnard" and "Mr B", dropped a pocket book containing a "large packet of letters" she had written. She assumes that the slaves, on this day of "liberty," would have picked up the letters but she doubts whether "any of that society will be able to read them – or if they could, drinking, dancing, etc they will think much better fun than reading what an English Ladyship says to her friends".³³ In her research on the travel diaries of women who emigrated to the American West in the nineteenth century, Davis contends that such diaries performed a mediating function "between the author's self-perception as a Victorian lady and her feared loss of that identity in the wild".

While Lady Anne is obviously located in a different temporal and geographical space, this diary entry does suggest that her status as a British woman of a certain class, and the extent to which this differentiates her from the slaves

30 R Steinitz, "Writing diaries, reading diaries...", *The Communication Review*, 2(1), 1997, p. 44.

31 R Hogan, "Engendered autobiographies...", *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 14(2), 1991, p. 100.

32 R Steinitz, "Writing diaries, reading diaries...", *The Communication Review*, 2(1), 1997, p. 50.

33 A Barnard, Diary entry on 1 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 26.

she mentions, constitutes an important part of her identity. By the nineteenth century, keeping a diary, “especially travel logs or records of special events, was a well-accepted sign of gentility”.³⁴ Culley³⁵ similarly notes the association between diary keeping and gentility. In fact, diary writing was regarded as among a “‘lady’s’ accomplishments”. This brief entry contains a number of additional references to the Barnards’ upper class status and their cumulative effect is to suggest both an awareness of class and the ways in which Lady Anne’s negotiations with class are racialised as well as gendered. Lady Anne, for instance, notes that Mr B was sorrier about the “loss of [her] letters than for his money”³⁶ and she refers to the players in her narrative as “master” and “housekeeper”. All these terms are heavily loaded with very particular class connotations. Culley correctly contends that the “basic requirements of literacy and a modicum of leisure are the strongest determinants of who did and did not keep journals” and diary authorship is thus necessarily shaped in terms of class, race and gender. Lady Anne’s description of the slaves who may have picked up her letters suggests that they likely lacked basic literacy skills and their single day of “liberty” clearly signals an almost complete absence of leisure time. The mere fact that Lady Anne kept a diary thus distinguishes her from most of her fellow residents at the Cape and she emphasises the extent of her difference in her writing.

Diaries and domesticity

While this diary entry provides insight into how members of a colonising nation constructed racialised others, the entry dated two days later, on 3 January 1799, apparently deals with matters that are much more mundane. Here Lady Anne provides a detailed description of a morning she spent “settling [her] henhouse”.³⁷ She continues to describe her preparations for a dinner party that was scheduled for that same evening and she includes extensive lists of both the guests and the planned “bill of fare”. The seeming ordinariness of this diary entry does not, however, mean that scholars should gloss over it. On the contrary, Hacking³⁸ contends that diaries can grant the attentive researcher access to aspects of subjects which are secreted in the “little dramas,

34 GR Davis, “Women’s frontier diaries...”, *Women’s Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, 4(1), 1987, p. 7.

35 M Culley, “‘I look at me’...”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, p. 16.

36 A Barnard, Diary entry, 1 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 26.

37 A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 27.

38 I Hacking, “The archaeology of Foucault”, DC Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A critical reader* (Cambridge, Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 28.

unimportant events, unpromising places”. Similarly, Tamboukou³⁹ encourages researchers to pay “attention to unimportant details”. A “henhouse” certainly seems like an “unpromising place” for a researcher who is trying to access the variegated gendered texture of a woman’s life as the eighteenth century made way for the nineteenth century. Neither does a dinner menu of “roast mutton” and “stewed vegetables” appear to constitute important details. Hogan⁴⁰ argues that diary writing is based on a method “of inclusion, not exclusion” since “the diary often treats ‘small details’ at the same length as ‘big’ events”. She goes on to explain:

Diaries are not so inclusive because they contain *everything* from a given day, as they are inclusive in the sense that they do not privilege ‘amazing’ over ‘ordinary’ events, in terms of scope, space, or selection [emphasis in original].

For the feminist researcher, the inclusion of these details can indeed reveal a great deal about gendered structures and pressures as well as the complex ways in which Lady Anne variously internalises and resists these pressures. What, for instance, can we learn from Lady Anne’s comment that she “[w]as also *obliged* to bestow much of [her] morning in the kitchen”? [emphasis added].⁴¹ Why should she “be sorry to give a bad one [dinner]” to the sixteen guests she was expecting? Why does she deem it necessary to enumerate all the different dishes that she will be serving to her guests?

Readers should immediately be alerted to the gendered implications of all these questions by the fact that such entries are highly unlikely to feature in a man’s journals. The domesticity that is implied in the activity of hosting a large dinner party was one of the central characteristics of “true womanhood”. This particular gender ideology had gained such currency by the nineteenth century that scholars coined the phrase, the “cult of true womanhood”.⁴² The sense of obligation with which Lady Anne went about displaying her domestic prowess is understandable when one keeps in mind that “a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society” according to her ability to conform to this idealized “true woman”.⁴³

39 M Tamboukou, “Writing feminist genealogies”, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 12(1), 2003, p. 8.

40 R Hogan, “Engendered autobiographies...”, *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 14(2), 1991, p. 103.

41 A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 27.

42 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood: 1820-1860”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, pp. 151-174.

43 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 152.

Along with domesticity, Welter identifies three other “cardinal virtues” that determined this cult of true womanhood, namely “piety, purity [and] submissiveness”. In Lady Anne’s written negotiations with this ideal on her diary pages, readers catch glimpses of the ways in which “[r]eal women often felt they did not live up to the ideal of True Womanhood: some of them blamed themselves, some challenged the standard, some tried to keep the virtues and enlarge the scope of womanhood”.⁴⁴ It is from “this mixture of challenge and acceptance, of change and continuity” that the most interesting insights can emerge. Women’s tendency to doubt whether they lived up to the domestic ideal is, for instance, suggested by Lady Anne’s description of her dinner as merely “very tolerable”.⁴⁵ In contemporary parlance, this would be described as damnation by faint praise. In this phrase, Lady Anne seems to be expressing some doubt in the value of her domestic accomplishments. Furthermore, her reticence may be a product of the pressures on women to be meek, mild and wary of being overly confident. This apparent self-censorship in a diary entry is in itself significant, since it invites comment on a common misconception about diary writing, namely that it is a fundamentally secretive and solitary enterprise. In fact, the notion that a diary is some “‘secret’ record of an inner life” is a distinctly modern development.⁴⁶ In her own research on the writing and reading of women’s diaries, Steinitz⁴⁷ demonstrates that “our cultural conception of the diary as a private and secret space ... is actually inaccurate, both historically and today”. Diaries often “served a number of semi-public purposes” and “[w]omen diarists in particular wrote as family and community historians”.⁴⁸ The potential reader of a diary thus inevitably becomes an “audience hovering at the edge of the page”.⁴⁹ This imagined audience results in “self-policing and self-scrutiny” which in itself “has a gendered element”.⁵⁰ Ledwon explains that women are more likely than men to “feel compelled to ‘watch’ themselves, given women’s historical objectification”. Ledwon bases her argument on John Berger’s still influential text, *Ways of seeing*, in which he explains the gendered dimension of the gaze as follows:⁵¹

44 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 174.

45 A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 29.

46 M Culley, “I look at me’...”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, p. 16.

47 R Steinitz, “Writing diaries, reading diaries...”, *The Communication Review*, 2(1), 1997, p. 47.

48 M Culley, “I look at me’...”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, p. 16.

49 LZ Bloom, “I write for myself and others: Private diaries as public documents”, SL Bunkers and CA Huff (eds.), *Inscribing the daily: Critical essays on women’s diaries* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 23.

50 L Ledwon, “Diaries and hearsay...”, *Law Review*, 73, 2000, p. 1201.

51 J Berger, *Ways of seeing* (London, Viking Press, 1977), p. 46.

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across the room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

To “walking” and “weeping” one can add “writing”. When Lady Anne enumerates the dishes she will be serving at dinner and then dismisses her efforts as merely “tolerable” she is thus performing her gendered role for the benefit of her imagined readers or audience. In terms of the gendered expectations as prescribed by the cult of true womanhood, she is meeting these expectations both by being a paragon of domestic accomplishments and by being too humble to assert the value of her efforts.

Understanding and resisting gendered expectations

In her reading of American women’s frontier diaries, Davis⁵² describes women “who had fully internalized the prescriptions of genteel behavior in a society enamored of the Cult of Domesticity.” Although Lady Anne’s diary entries do suggest that she internalized gendered prescriptions to some extent, she certainly did not fully internalize them. In fact, the very same diary entry contains both subtle and scathingly explicit challenges to the cult of true womanhood. She notes that the dinner “cost [her] too much trouble”⁵³ but it is her description of one of her dinner guests, Mrs Baumgart, which is particularly revealing. Mrs Baumgart clearly embodies true womanhood. She is, according to Lady Anne’s description, the epitome of the “Angel in the House”. This latter phrase has its origin in the poem by Coventry Patmore, entitled “The Angel in the House”. Patmore⁵⁴ encapsulates the ideal woman in lines that include the following: “The gentle wife, who decks his board/ And makes his day to have no night,/ Whose wishes wait upon her Lord,/ Who finds her own in his delight”. According to Hartnell,⁵⁵ “[t]he poem heralded a change of direction in representation of the domestic sphere, especially in terms of creating a pivotal role for the wife/ homemaker.” Mrs Baumgart tells Lady Anne “that she is in the kitchen all the morning and makes the puddings

52 GR Davis, “Women’s frontier diaries...”, *Women’s Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, 4(1), 1987, p. 8.

53 A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 29.

54 C Patmore, *The angel in the house* (Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1856), p. 94.

55 E Hartnell, “‘Nothing but sweet and womanly’: A hagiography of Patmore’s Angel”, *Victorian Poetry*, 34 (4), 1996, p. 473.

and pies with her own fair hands”.⁵⁶ In this seemingly mundane description of a domestic routine, the attentive reader glimpses “the intersection of class and gender ideologies in a Victorian icon – the ‘Angel in the House’”.⁵⁷ By using the adjective “fair” to describe Mrs Baumgart’s hands, Lady Anne is invoking a number of loaded connotations. Firstly, “fair hands” suggest that the skin is light-coloured. The owner of light-coloured hands would, by implication, be middle to upper class as she would not have skin that has been exposed to the elements whilst undertaking manual labour. The other relevant meaning attached to “fair” in this context is being beautiful or pleasing to the eye.

References to beauty, light skin colour, class and women’s work in the domestic sphere also interweave in Lady Anne’s description of her “cousin Anne” in the same diary entry. She asks herself what her cousin would have done in her “situation”, which refers to her catering for sixteen dinner guests and she comes to the following conclusion: “She would look very well and dress very well and lay her white marble arms across and starve herself, her husband and his friends, in the most properest manner, preserving all dignity and decency in her last moments”.⁵⁸ This description casts Anne as the “delicate creature” that Welter⁵⁹ identifies as an example of a woman’s adherence to the prescriptions of true womanhood. Like Mrs Baumgart’s “fair hands”, Anne’s “white marble arms” imply a middle class existence in which women are highly prized for “look[ing] very well and dress[ing] very well”. However, the tone with which Lady Anne describes both these women suggests that she resists these gendered expectations of middle-class women’s proper roles. She is most explicit in her rejection of Mrs Baumgart’s domestic self-abnegation when she states that making all one’s own “puddings and pies” is something “[t]hat does very well when a woman cannot employ herself better”. This seems to be a wholesale rejection of the idea that a woman’s highest calling is her work in the domestic sphere of the home and her comment invites readers to speculate about what she would consider a better way to “employ herself”. If Mrs Baumgart’s culinary industry is dismissed, Lady Anne is quite damning in her sarcastic depiction of her cousin Anne as a completely helpless being whose only contribution lies in looking pretty and dressing as befits her class status. Amid the sarcasm, Lady Anne’s words do suggest the harm that could potentially result from women playing up to the gendered stereotype that

⁵⁶ A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 29.

⁵⁷ E Langland, “Nobody’s angels: Domestic ideology and middle-class women in the Victorian novel”, *PMLA*, 107(2), 1992, p. 290.

⁵⁸ A Barnard, Diary entry, 3 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 162.

regards them as “more vulnerable, more infirm, more mortal than man”.⁶⁰ She is too frail and feeble even to feed herself and would apparently starve rather than doing any actual domestic work. The contempt in Lady Anne’s portrayal of her cousin is unmistakable.

Lest the reader think that this rejection of female frailty is absolute or straightforward, Lady Anne’s diary entry of 31 January 1799 offers some explanation of why she is forced to be more useful than her cousin and she also expresses some hesitation about taking on domestic tasks that should, according to middle-class ideology, be the province of servants. According to Langland,⁶¹ women were in charge of “running the middle-class household, which by definition included at least one servant”. Lady Anne is clearly used to a great deal more domestic help as she notes that she is doing “without cook ... without housekeeper, lady’s maid, butter-dairy maid”.⁶² The exception to this is “two black slaves” but Lady Anne notes that they “understand nothing, above the roast and boil, that [she does not] teach them”. As a result, she has “much of all this to do [her]self”. This becomes a repeated motif in the diaries and she often mentions it with a tone that manages to combine complaint and a sense of stoical suffering. On 9 February 1799, for instance, she declares: “With my own hands (for lack of a better housemaid) had I with milk white linen decorated the couch”.⁶³ She makes it clear that she is depriving herself of domestic help for the sake of her husband’s financial situation and she is uncertain about whether this is the right way to serve her husband’s needs when she reflects: “I am not sure if I am right in making myself so very great a slave to saving the money of my dear Secretary [her husband, Andrew Barnard, was the Secretary of the Cape Colony]”.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that his needs are paramount. Lady Anne notes that “there is trouble and some fatigue to [her]” because she does not have servants and she describes the result as follows:⁶⁵

The leisure for all the little elegancies or singularities which by drawing or describing I could fix on my paper and on my memory for the amusement of others are lost.

In this apparent reference to diary writing she also undermines the idea that diaries are secretive texts since she laments that the opportunity to cater to

60 RW Emerson, “Woman”, *Complete writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, William H Wise and Co., 1875), p. 1180.

61 E Langland, “Nobody’s angels...”, *PMLA*, 107(2), 1992, p. 291.

62 A Barnard, Diary entry, 31 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 37.

63 A Barnard, Diary entry, 9 February 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 42.

64 A Barnard, Diary entry, 31 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 37.

65 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 163.

“the amusement of others” is lost because she does not have sufficient leisure time to “fix” her experiences on paper. Her main concern in this diary entry is whether she is adequately meeting her husband’s needs, yet she is also very aware that, in her attempts to do so, she is paying a price. She weighs up the costs and benefits thus: “nor am I sure that what I save him [in money] is equal to what I lose to myself [time and the space this provides for writing]”. The suggestion is that, regardless of the personal price she is paying, her husband’s comfort must come first. As a woman, she was, first and foremost, “expected to dispense comfort and cheer”. Her role as a wife trumps her aspirations as a writerly subject as she seems aware that a “wife who submerged her own talents to work for her husband was extolled as an example of a true woman”.⁶⁶

It is with some sense of pride that she reports that “Mr B seems quite happy and delighted to see his table well furnished, his dinner good and well served, and although I cook part of it and put it down myself, I am rewarded by his sweet words”.⁶⁷ Lady Anne seemingly finds herself in the situation that Welter⁶⁸ describes in her exploration of the cult of true womanhood: “The woman who had servants today, might tomorrow, because of a depression or panic, be forced to do her own work. If that happened she knew how to act, for she was to be the same cheerful consoler of her husband in their cottage as in their mansion.” The earlier description of her cousin Anne’s anticipated ineptitude reveals her suspicion that she would stumble at this obstacle. Lady Anne, however, rises to the challenge and ensures her husband’s domestic happiness and delight despite reduced financial resources.

Responding to a crisis along gendered lines

For a woman to conform to the gendered expectations that were prevalent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, she needed to be in a relationship in which the husband was “properly masterful [and] she properly domestic”.⁶⁹ The masterly role that the husband must fulfill in this gendered performance of domestic bliss, is one that Lady Anne obviously understood. Both her understanding of and subtle resistance to this masculine mastery is revealed in her diary entry of 28 June 1799, in which she describes

66 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 160.

67 A Barnard, Diary entry, 31 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 37.

68 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 168.

69 B Welter, “The cult of true womanhood...”, *American Quarterly*, 18 (2), 1966, p. 167.

a rather frightening evening when a rain storm “continued more and more violent” to such a extent that Lady Anne reflects: “Water has now let us see its powers and terrified us in its turn”.⁷⁰ The diary details conversations between Andrew Barnard, Lady Anne, her cousin Anne and Colonel Crawford⁷¹ about how best to respond to this crisis and a careful reading exposes the gendered assumptions that underlie this interaction. Lady Anne ensures that she casts Andrew Barnard in the role of the masterful protector by referring to him as “my hardy husband”.⁷² Colonel Crawford similarly divides the response to the danger along gendered lines as he recommend that they “send off the ladies” and that he and Mr Barnard “will stay and see what good can be done”. Mr Barnard, however, insists that an “escape to the town” makes little sense since, as they “are higher in it”, the “town must be less safe than the Castle”. Lady Anne is of a different opinion and, in this moment of fear, she assertively articulates her contrary opinion: “I was clear for going off”. Lady Anne and her cousin are mostly ignored and their fears and suggestions are treated with patronizing dismissal. In fact, Lady Anne angrily notes that she overheard a discussion about the magnitude of the danger when Colonel Crawford “pulled Mr B out of the room, for to the *ladies* he foolishly said that there was no danger and begged us not to discompose ourselves” [*italics in original*].⁷³ Mr Barnard responds to her suggestions by saying “Good God, how idly you talk, my dear life and soul”. In this context, a synonym for “idly” would be “frivolously”, which means that Mr Barnard comprehensively dismisses the value of his wife’s “talk” even as he seemingly elevates her position as his very “life and soul”.

In Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A vindication of the rights of woman*,⁷⁴ she critiques the notion that frivolity is an attractive attribute in a woman which should be encouraged. Contemporary feminists would balk at seeing a woman’s opinion trivialized as frivolous in the diary entry, since this amounts to patriarchal silencing of the female voice. More remarkable, though, is the fact that Lady

70 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 93.

71 The younger Anne Barnard married a Lieutenant Colonel James Catlin Crawford of the 91st regiment on 14 February 1799. See AM Lewin Robinson (ed.), *The letters of Lady Anne Barnard...*, p. 183. In her diary entry of 8 February 1799, Lady Anne mentions “the other Anne Barnard” and she notes that “[t]omorrow will probably see her Mrs Crawford”. A Barnard, Diary entry on 8 February 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 41. The discrepancies in the spelling of the surname can be traced back to the fact that Lenta standardised spelling in her abridged edition of the diaries. For an explanation of her editorial intervention in this regard, see M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. xi. For more on the specificities of Lady Anne’s spelling, see M Lenta & B Le Cordeur (eds.), *The Cape diaries...*, pp. xii- xiii.

72 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 94.

73 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 95.

74 M Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of women* (London, J Johnson, 1792).

Anne questions her husband's comment, located as she is on the cusp of the nineteenth century. While the diary entry starts with Lady Anne focusing on her husband's robust resilience, as implied by the adjective "hardy", her description now changes to one that is much less complimentary:⁷⁵

Mr B I settled in my own mind as much too foolhardy, very manly for being so, but someone says 'the best part of valour is discretion' and I thought him more valiant than discreet.

Lockridge notes the assumption that women are associated with the "credulous and the corruptible, the frivolous and the fleshy self".⁷⁶ In a gendered system that functions on the basis of binary oppositions, men would then be linked to all that is shrewd, resolute, serious and rational. In this diary entry, however, Lady Anne's descriptions of her husband suggest a subversion of the conventional gendered dichotomies which valorize masculine associations while denigrating feminine ones. She explicitly couples being "foolhardy" with being "manly" and, in this context, the lack of discretion she attributes to her husband implies a lack of good judgment, which is typically seen as a female trait. She insists on being given full information about the crisis rather than being "protected" from alarming facts and she points out the faulty logic of the men's impulse to shield her. Rather than "saving [her] from alarm", their patronizing obfuscation succeeds only in "throwing [her] into the greatest [alarm] by denying facts which [she] had already heard".⁷⁷ She cogently reflects that she is "very fond of hearing a little truth in matters which regard life and death and all matters, and am much more afraid of what is *not* told me than of what is". She is here suggesting that knowledge is empowering rather than distressing to her as a woman. In doing so, Lady Anne offers an explicit and lucidly articulated challenge to the common eighteenth century notion that "women's intellectual capabilities were inferior to men's" and that they possessed lesser reserves of "natural reason".⁷⁸

Yet, the diary entry also illustrates that a woman paid a price for resisting established gendered structures. Lady Anne does "not think the noble Colonel has forgiven [her] interrupting" his response to the crisis and he tells her "how disagreeable and intrusive [she] had been".⁷⁹ In her reflections on this

75 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 96.

76 KA Lockridge, *On the sources of patriarchal rage: The commonplace books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the gendering of power in the eighteenth century* (New York, New York University Press, 1992), p. 44.

77 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 96.

78 L Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the closet: The first illustrations of the female skeleton in eighteenth-century anatomy", *Representations*, 14, 1986, p. 43.

79 A Barnard, Diary entry, 29 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 99.

judgment, the reader notices the complexity and constrained nature of Lady Anne's negotiations with gendered constructions of "proper" female roles and behaviour. Even as she challenges these constructions, she also appears to have internalized them, at least partly. She seems to feel it necessary to justify her behaviour and suggests that "a matter of life and death is not to be put on the same footing of duels or other quarrels and secrets amongst men, where a woman has no business to be curious". This line suggests that she "knows her place" as a gendered subject, but she pleads for an exception to be made in such an extreme situation where she feared for her safety and she concludes that she "had a very good right to get all the truth of the matter that was within [her] reach".⁸⁰

Conclusion

Over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the increasingly rigid demarcation between the public and private spheres had an ever greater impact of the ways in which men and women were able to live their lives.⁸¹ Culley notes that those facets of culture that were "associated with the private" realm, such as diary writing, "became the domain of women". The rich analytical possibilities offered by diary scholarship can partly be traced to the fact that they engage in an "almost *a priori* troubling of private/ public boundaries by including all aspects of 'a life'".⁸² In addition to explicit descriptions of political affairs, Lady Anne's diaries contain reflections on her private experiences and thoughts, which in themselves reveal a great deal about the gendered structures of the public realm. Colonel Crawford asserts that, as a woman, she opens herself up to severe disapprobation for "wish[ing] to consult on a matter of public emergency with her husband" [emphasis added].⁸³ She is seen to be transgressing gender boundaries by concerning herself with matters beyond the private sphere of the home. Even as Lady Anne insists that she "had a very good right" to do so, she justifies her actions by arguing that she was indeed acting in proper accordance with the gendered public/private division. She explains this by noting that "when there is public danger to the whole, there is enough of private danger to the

80 A Barnard, Diary entry, 28 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 96.

81 M Culley, "I look at me'...", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17(3/4), 1989, pp. 15-22.

82 L Stanley & H Dampier, "Simulacrum diaries: Time, the 'moment of writing', and the diaries of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo", *Life Writing*, 3(2), 2006, p. 27.

83 A Barnard, Diary entry, 29 June 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 99.

individual” to warrant a woman venturing into the public domain. Feminist theorists have long argued that “the personal is political” and this rejection of a strict separation between the personal/ private and political/ public domains has informed my reading of Lady Anne’s diaries. A close gendered reading suggests that this journal was anything but “unimportant” and that it was certainly “worth paper pen and ink”.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ A Barnard, Diary entry, 1 January 1799, M Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the castle...*, p. 25.