

“Yr most obedt. Servt.”: Eliza Lucas’s Epistolary Voice and the Construction of a Southern Female Identity

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama
May 14, 2010

Keywords: Eliza Lucas Pinckney, colonial, epistolary
Southern, education

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Abstract

Since the first publication of her *Letterbook* in 1972, Eliza Lucas Pinckney has become one of the most anthologized southern women of America's early history. In addition to making an appearance in almost every historical and literary anthology of South Carolina, Lucas Pinckney's popularity also extends into many anthologies of early southern and early women's literature. Her letters show a woman who is using her position, both socially and within the family, to subtly challenge conventional gender limitations. In doing so, Lucas Pinckney attempts to articulate a female subject position which is distinct from that of men, yet always in dialogue with the other sex. On a larger scale, through an explication of Lucas Pinckney's work, this thesis will create new paradigms for discussing the unique features of early southern women's writing.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Hilary Wyss for all of her help and support throughout the researching and writing process and my committee for challenging me to think about this project in new and exciting ways. My colleague, Todd Aldridge, was also instrumental in helping me to complete this project. Last, but certainly not least, I could not have written this thesis without the day-to-day encouragement of my family, and more specifically, my husband Brian. Thank you for putting everything in perspective for me, especially when I couldn't see it.

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Introduction

Since the first publication of her *Letterbook* in 1972, Eliza Lucas Pinckney has become one of the most anthologized southern women of America's early history. In addition to making an appearance in almost every historical and literary anthology of South Carolina, Lucas Pinckney's popularity also extends into many anthologies of early southern and early women's literature.¹ One reason for her popularity is simply the breadth of writings that she left behind: in addition to the two hundred page letterbook, numerous loose letters (both published and unpublished) are housed at the South Carolina Historical Society, Duke University and the Library of Congress. As a product of the environment and time period in which she lived, Lucas Pinckney's letters do an excellent job of re-creating a "slice of life" from the perspective of a wealthy colonial planter.

While the publication of her letters gives scholars an opportunity to reevaluate and re-imagine the roles Lucas Pinckney played in early America, there are surprisingly few articles published on her writing.² In addition to Lucas Pinckney as mother, her letters cast her as writer, scholar, planter, businesswoman, gentry, slave-holder, and more. It is shocking then to see how few scholars have taken up a critical inspection of her work. And of those articles that are published on Lucas Pinckney, almost all are published by historians exclusively in journals dedicated to Southern studies. As a colonial woman with one of the largest known collections of letters, why doesn't Lucas Pinckney receive more attention?

¹ Some of the anthologies Lucas Pinckney appears in are: *American Women Writers to 1800*, Harris; *The Colonists*, Risjord; *South Carolina Women*, ed. Spruill, Littlefield, Johnson; *More than Petticoats: Remarkable South Carolina Women*, Perry; *Fire in the Cradle: South Carolina's Literary Heritage*, Aiken; *South Carolina Naturalists*, Taylor; *Southern Women's Writing*, Ed. Weaks, Perry.

² The notable exception to this is the *South Carolina Historical Magazine*. In addition to a few articles published in the 1970s, the entire July 1997 issue is dedicated to the letters of Eliza Lucas Pinckney. More recently, Emily Bowles 2004 article, "'You Would Think Me Far Gone in Romance': Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Fictions of Female Identity in the Colonial South" deals extensively with Lucas Pinckney's letter writing.

Part of this comes from a variety of general misconceptions about the South. When most people think about “Southern literature” they are referring to authors of the twentieth century; men like William Faulkner, who popularized a version of the South as the forgotten land of the “Lost Cause.” Or there is a tendency to picture the south in its antebellum “prime”: an aristocratic society of leisure, built with the blood of slaves, and replete with docile belles and men of power. Of course, these depictions of the South have incredible social, historical and literary value, yet they also tend to paint a picture of the South that is one dimensional. Rarely is the colonial South acknowledged as an area of intellectual production separate from New England, and when it is, the mention is brief. What has become increasingly apparent, however, is that the inhabitants of the American south prior to the Civil War practiced reading and writing in their own ways.

Catherine Kerrison’s groundbreaking work, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early South* illuminates this previously obscured area of historical study by showing that women of the early south were in fact producing and consuming a variety of texts. What Kerrison concludes (and what I would like to complicate through readings of Lucas Pinckney’s letters) is that southern women, inundated with advice literature and sermons which installed and perpetuated a highly stratified social hierarchy, accepted a subordinate social status. Kerrison argues that because the economy of the south was entirely dependent on slavery-- a system which insists upon stark delineations of those with power and those without-- white women, identifying with and desiring the protection of the white male, used reading and writing as a means to support the concept of naturalized hierarchies. Thus, in addition to securing the proliferation of slavery, white southern women also forced themselves into a tightly prescribed role as subservient to man, “They may have protested, squirmed, and struggled” Kerrison argues,

“nonetheless they acknowledged, however grudgingly, the hierarchy of authority on which they depended for security against the workforce the South enslaved” (144).

As compelling as Kerrison’s argument is, I argue that Lucas Pinckney, and colonial southern women in general, are not quite as hemmed into this social hierarchy as she makes it seem. The reason for this is simple: the American South simply was not well organized enough yet. And we see a perfect example of the instability of the early planter’s life in the biography of Eliza Lucas Pinckney. Despite her cosmopolitan background, Lucas Pinckney is almost always categorized as a Southerner because many of her letters reflect and are shaped by the unique experiences of a woman living in Carolina. Born in the West Indies and formally educated in England, Eliza Lucas moved with her family to one of her father’s South Carolina plantations as a teenager. Her father, a colonel in the British army, was forced to return to Antigua before the beginning of the War of Jenkins’ Ear in 1739. Suddenly, the management of three plantations and slaves became the responsibility of seventeen-year-old Eliza.³ With essentially no male authority over her, Lucas was responsible not only for the daily management of the plantations, but she became the head and spokesperson for the family in America. Later in her life, she reprised this role. After the sudden death of her husband in 1758, Lucas Pinckney was once again responsible for the management of a plantation though this time she also served as sole guardian to her three children. In addition to these experiences, Lucas Pinckney’s letterbook records fears of attacks by Native Americans, invasions of South Carolina by the French and Spanish, and the spread of deadly diseases. Lucas Pinckney’s experiences, and her ability to manage and lead, were undoubtedly amazing, yet they were not all that uncommon. The colonial South, though growing and flourishing, was nonetheless an incredibly unstable place. And because of this

³ The exact year of her birth is not entirely certain, but 1722 is the year indicated in her obituary. Lucas’s mother was alive and in South Carolina at this time, but an unknown illness rendered her unable to perform the role of plantation manager.

instability, some women (such as Lucas Pinckney) attained a significant level of both individualism and autonomy (Anzilotti 240-241).

Eliza Lucas Pinckney was not an unknown figure prior to the publication of her letters. Historians have credited her as being one of the first people to experiment with the cultivation of indigo in the colonies.⁴ But even more important in early accounts of Lucas Pinckney is the role she served as an idealized figure of republican motherhood. As the mother of two prominent Revolutionary War generals, early biographers took pains to tell Lucas Pinckney's story as that of a woman whose greatest accomplishment was raising great men. Evidence of this role appears beginning with her obituary, where Lucas Pinckney is described foremost as, "the amiable relict of the honorable colonel Charles Pinckney...and mother of brigadier general Pinckney, and of Mr. Pinckney, the present minister of the United States of America, at the court of Great-Britain" (159).⁵ It is also famously noted that George Washington, the father of the country himself, served as one of her pallbearers. This interpretation of Lucas Pinckney's life was further solidified by Harriet Ravenel's (Lucas Pinckney's great-great- granddaughter) 1896 biography, which according to Darcy Fryer, "...combines nationalistic fervor with the Victorian idea of separate spheres for men and women to produce a philosophy of patriotic domesticity" (220). In other words, men made history, while women trained the future history-makers.

Because previous biographies have marginalized her as a woman who made great men, Eliza Lucas Pinckney's letters need to be studied independently from her historical legacy. This need for a separation of the biography from first-hand epistolary discourse is not uncommon. In Theresa Strouth Gaul's essay on the letters of Cherokee woman Catharine Brown, she too emphasizes the importance of studying letters "outside of the framework provided

⁴ Elise Pinckney's "Eliza Lucas Pinckney: Biographical Sketch" in the 1997 edition of *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney* provides background on Lucas Pinckney's indigo experimentation.

⁵ "Marriage and Death Notices." *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 21.1 (1920): 159. Print.

by...controlling biographical narrative” and considering “letters *as* letters within the contexts that informed their production and reception” (140). Since previously so much emphasis has been put on her role as a mother, Eliza Lucas Pinckney needs to be reconsidered within the context of her early life.⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the letters that I will be discussing appear in Lucas’s published *Letterbook* and span a period of approximately three years, from 1740 to 1743.⁷ What these letters reveal is a bright and intellectually curious young woman; a woman not interested marriage and family, but rather in exploring the major philosophical, religious and scientific ideas of the time. This was not a solitary pursuit, as Lucas shared these ideas with a variety of people, from her father to friends to slaves. Perhaps the reason that Lucas was so successful in raising her children is because she was, in fact, invested in the educational process all along.

This is not to argue that Lucas was a “feminist” in the way many contemporary scholars use the term. As Tamara Harvey explains in the article *Feminist Theory in Seventeenth-Century America*, the term “feminism,” as associated with sexual equality through activism, is a term developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: long after Lucas was writing. Lucas was not trying to overthrow a misogynistic social system through her writing, and to suggest that she was is to all but ignore the historical period in which she lived. Her letters do show a woman who is using her position, both socially and within the family, to subtly challenge and operate within conventional gender limitations through the acquisition of knowledge. In doing so, Pinckney attempts to articulate a female subject position which is distinct from that of men, yet always in dialogue with the other sex. On a larger scale, through an explication of

⁶ For this reason, when referring to Eliza I will use her maiden name (Lucas) only.

⁷ With the exception of one small entry on May 20th, 1739, the *Letterbook* begins in March 1740. Entries taper off significantly after 1743, and Lucas was married to Charles Pinckney in 1744.

Pinckney's work, this thesis will create new paradigms for discussing the unique features of early southern women's writing.

Reading the Letters

With the exception of a recipe book, all Pinckney's writings that we have today are in the form of letters. It is important then, that scholars read her works with an epistolary framework in mind. Epistolary correspondence was particularly effective for Lucas is that it afforded her a socially sanctioned, semi-public audience in which to circulate her ideas. Letters were not only consumed by those they were addressed to, but were often read out loud to the family. Because of this, writing in a letter gave the author a level of influence that was impossible in private writing. How effectively Lucas was able to enact this influence was not dependent on rhetoric alone. Depicting herself as a naïve girl worked in a playful letter to Pinckney, but this persona would not have the same effect in a letter of a more serious tone. For this, Lucas utilized her extensive education as a tool to enter into, and establish authority in, critical dialogues with others.

As a woman challenging conventions while still grounding herself within the realm of social acceptability, the form of letter writing proves particularly valuable for Lucas. What scholars reading her letters must recognize is the distinction between Lucas the woman and Lucas the writer. This split between letter writer and culturally constructed letter narrator closely mirrors the Foucaultian "author function" which argues for the plurality of egos within an author. As an accomplished writer, Lucas understood that her position in relation to others (daughter, wife, mother, plantation owner) regulated the consumption of her text by the recipient. We cannot assume that the contents of Lucas's letters simply articulate her unadulterated thoughts and feelings; rather we must think of her writings within the context of a letter's particular audience.

Formerly, scholars relegated letter writing, and women's letter writing in particular, to little more than the insular practice of sentimental scribbling (Stanton 3-6). More recently letter writing has been reevaluated as a structured, rhetorical, and highly literary act. As Eve Tavor Bannet explains in *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820*,

A good familiar letter can make its readers forget for the duration of reading that they have heard the same sentiments and ideas before, and overlook the insistence of the class of letter to which it belongs, rather than read it in the proper way with a view to enjoying the new twists that they have been given. A good familiar letter was what we would call a 'literary familiar letter,' insofar as we expect the 'literary' to involve defamiliarization (57).

In addition to the substance or "plot" of the letter, an integral part of the job for the writer was to create an epistle with a unique and personal style. Thus, the letter writer should be viewed as just that, a writer. What the above quote hints at (and what Bannet's book details so well), is that letter writing was also a prescriptive exercise that had a popular and fairly rigid set of rules and conventions. In light of this, it is vitally important that one understand the conventions of 18th century letters in order to adequately analyze the purpose(s) and motive(s) behind a particular letter.

Throughout the eighteenth century letter manuals were popular both in England and in the colonies. "Steady sellers" in New England went through at least five publications in fifty years and "even the least regarded manuals generally managed three or four London editions" (Bannet 22). With such prolific publication there were obviously varieties in the specific style of letter manual, but for the most part, they followed a general pattern. Within the manual, letters

were generally organized by “classes” or types of correspondence. According to the manuals, the tone, rhetoric and phrasing changed (sometimes dramatically) depending on the situation which prompted the letter as well as the intended recipient. Bannet lists an impressive number of class types (for example: letters of advice, letters of praise, letters of complaint, etc.), which further indicates the nuanced approach that was required for epistolary correspondence (55-56).

Within these classes there were sets of conventions that the letter writer should follow, and these conventions were modeled in example letters. One popular convention in letter manuals was using the phrase “Your Servant” at the end of a letter; a closing that appears in almost all of Lucas’s letters. While this phrase seems to be a simple rhetorical indication of deference on the part of the writer, for an 18th century audience using the closing “Your Servant” actually implies a position of superiority on the part of the author. If one were writing to an equal, the subscription changes to something like, “Your humble and affectionate Servant,” and to someone who is a superior, it may read, “Your most humble and obedient Servant” (Bannet 66). In her letters to her father, her mentor Mrs. Boddicott, or the Pinckneys, Lucas *always* signs with some form of, “Yr most obedt. Servt.” or “Your most D[utiful] and obt. D[aughter]. When corresponding with someone above her rank, Lucas acknowledges the social space between her and those above her. In letters to her friend Miss Bartlett the subscription is more variable. At times she is “Yr. m o S,” but she also goes by “yr humble Servt.,” and sometimes simply, “Yrs. &c.”. While manuals stressed the importance of maintaining all social stratification in correspondence, Lucas employs these conventions more loosely. This suggests that Lucas and Bartlett had a friendship that was close enough to negate the necessity of this convention.

Letter manuals were not merely comprised of lists of conventions; rather, the manual had model letters that showed the writer how a multitude of conventions were to be employed.

Sample letters functioned as instructional material, but writers were also encouraged to imitate the examples that they saw (Bannet 19-20). As an example, Bannet actually reprints one of Lucas's letters to her father in which she rejects his proposal that she marry one of the men of his choice.⁸ But before her letter, Bannet also prints two model letters, each from different letter manuals (95-99). The similarities between the three are striking and as Bannet notes, "Eliza can run rapidly and almost breathlessly through the proper forms and objections because she knows that she and her father are both familiar with these other fuller arguments—that other letters resembling these models and other writings like this—exist (98-99).

Just because Lucas and her letter writing contemporaries relied on these forms, does not mean that epistolary communication should be dismissed as mere transcription. Instead, it becomes the reader's task to critically examine letters for breaks and disjoints in convention. It is within these gaps (and sometimes silences) that most interpretive work can be done. For example, in Gaul's study of Catharine Brown's letters, she notes that despite the fact that Brown's audience of Northern women was considered socially superior to her, she rejects this distinction by referring to them as "friend" and "sister" despite the fact that "there was a firm insistence on the maintenance of the distinction between helper and helped; any blurring of that distinction threatened to collapse the hierarchy upon which the rhetoric of benevolence relied" (146). Gaul uses this breach of epistolary etiquette to argue that Brown purposefully cast off this convention in an effort to assert her equality as a follower of Christ.

While most of Lucas's letters are similarly subtle when they test the boundaries of feminine behavior, others directly address epistolary convention and the rules that govern its participants. These letters assist the modern reader by illustrating how the rules of the manual were implemented in real-world conversation. In addition, such letters reveal the extent to which

⁸ This often cited letter is discussed in-depth later in this essay.

writers were expected to shape the contents of a letter around a particular recipient. In a 1743 letter to Charles Pinckney, Lucas describes, in an unusual amount of detail, an occurrence in which her caged mocking birds were being fed by a wild “warbleing Benefactress” (66). Lucas finds the scene captivating, and defends its inclusion in the letter with a qualifying paragraph immediately following, “I see you smile while you have be[en] reading this to Mrs. Pinckney, and she replys, the dear girl forgot she was not writing to little Polly when she indulged her descriptive vein and that the subject of her birds is too trifling a one to engage your attention. Be it so, but tis your own faults you will have me write and as my Ideas are trifling my subject must be conformable to them” (67). By acknowledging her deviation from acceptable subject matter, Lucas displays an awareness of the multiplicity of selves that letter writing creates: her fanciful musings on birds are appropriate for another young girl to read, but in a letter to an older, socially superior man, it comes off as “trifling” and “indulgent.” Therefore, this depreciation of her writing reads as an affirmation of her esteem for Pinckney.

In fact, Lucas is not as deferential as she originally appears. She blames Pinckney’s insistence on written correspondence as the cause for the production the letter, reasoning that she could not create anything other than pedantic observations. To use a contemporary idiom, he got what he paid for. The fact that Lucas can make such a critique belies her supposed ignorance, yet by playing into the persona of naïve adolescent she allows herself the ability to step outside of her position and blame the results on youthful indiscretion. That being said, Lucas does not appear to be challenging convention just for the sake of doing so. It is important to note that in the above passage Lucas is not the one that calls the bird passage trifling and indulgent, she instead puts these words into Mrs. Pinckney’s mouth. The smile she imagines on Mr. Pinckney’s face also implies that his thoughts mirror those of his wife. This, coupled with the enthusiasm

and detail that Lucas uses in the bird passage, reveals that Lucas's criticism is not aimed at herself, but at the conventions of epistolary performance which command a person in her position express herself in a certain way. Letter writing was thus a process of constant negotiation between expression and convention, the perfect form for a colonial woman attempting to articulate an identity for herself.

Education

Eliza Lucas's formal education was typical for a girl of her social position during the colonial period, yet the breadth and depth in which she pursued the acquisition of knowledge sets her apart from her female contemporaries.⁹ Leaving her birth land of Antigua around the age of nine or ten, Lucas travelled to London to obtain a formal education at a boarding school. While there, she most likely learned a variety of ladies' accomplishments such as sewing and dancing in addition to English literature, history and possibly some botany.¹⁰ Lucas was also looked after by a kind of surrogate family, the Boddicotts, who were friends of her father while in London. Although Lucas only spent holidays with the Boddicotts, she formed a lasting friendship with the family, and Mrs. Boddicott in particular.

What stands out about Lucas's early education was the increased role that her father took. Because of her mother's long-standing poor health, it is likely that Col. Lucas tutored her extensively, despite it being a role traditionally assigned to the mother.¹¹ Harriet Simons Williams suggests that Col. Lucas's influence in his daughter's education is present through her mirroring of his intellectual values, "One of his most distinctive traits, which his daughter acquired, was a desire to see himself and those around him usefully employed. She had his taste for trying 'schemes.' She also acquired from him a devotion to his library and a high estimation of London schooling" (265). This emphasis on continually employing oneself in "useful" activity comes across in a letter to Lucas's friend Miss Bartlett, "Now you may form some judgment

⁹ For more information on educational practices for women in the colonial period, see Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. For a specifically southern view of women's education, see Kerrison's *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (2006), Cynthia Kierner's *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South* (1998) and Julia Spruill's classic *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (1938).

¹⁰ Williams, Harriet Simons. "Eliza Lucas and Her Family: Before the Letterbook" *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76.3 (July 1975). Williams's article utilizes a variety of primary documents in order to establish a fairly complete timeline of Eliza Lucas's early travels from Antigua to England to South Carolina.

¹¹ Lucas's letters indicate that eventually she was responsible for educating her younger sister, Polly.

what time I can have to work my lappets.¹² I own I never go to them with a quite easey conscience as I know my father has an aversion to my employing my time in that poreing work, but they are begun and must be finished...I have begun a piece of work of a quicker sort which requires nither Eyes nor genius—at least not very good ones. Would you ever guess it to be a shrimp nett? For so it is” (35). Noteworthy in this passage is the Lucas’ dismissal of lappet making—a domestic activity that would have been suitable for a young woman like Eliza Lucas to be accomplished in. Instead, she has turned her attention to the more utilitarian activity of making a shrimp net. What this passage seems to suggest is that Col. Lucas’s (heavy?) hand in his daughter’s education was at least partly self-serving. Col. Lucas and his son’s disposal overseas coupled with the chronic illness of Mrs. Lucas made Eliza Lucas’s intellectual and practical training not simply a mark of accomplishment, but an investment necessary for the survival of his property in the Carolinas.¹³ Whatever the motivation behind the instruction, a 1741 letter from Lucas to her father thanks him for, “the pains and money you laid out in my Education, which I esteem a more valuable fortune than any you could have given me” (69).¹⁴ Col. Lucas’s decision to give his daughter an education that was typically reserved for young men subverted gender roles as defined by British and colonial society. The encouragement Lucas was given by her father to continue in the worthwhile pursuit of learning not only allowed her to explore her intellectual interests, but also put her in a position from which she could push the boundaries of her prescribed roles.

Supplied with “a little library well furnished (for my papa has left me most of his books),” Lucas read both classical and contemporary texts, which she references frequently in

¹² A decorative flap or fold on a garment.

¹³ Lucas not only keeps the plantations afloat during the absence of her father (who never returns to Carolina), but pioneers the cultivation of indigo in the colonies.

¹⁴ Ravenel, Harriet Horry. *Eliza Pinckney*. New York: Scribneris, 1896. Print.

correspondence. Corresponding with others about outside texts had a variety of purposes, but one of the most popular explanations for intertextual references was that it proved a kind of civility on the part of Americans. As many other historians have already established, there was a desire for elite Americans (particularly the landed gentry of the South) to live like their British counterparts. And one way to achieve the semblance of British civility was to engage in the popular intellectual conversation of the time. As Eliza Lucas was strongly tied to England throughout her life, it is more than likely that this was one of her motivations for engaging with major authors such as Virgil, Homer, Locke and Pope. While her interest in these texts can be explained by a larger trend in transatlantic exchange,¹⁵ the ways in which Lucas engages with these texts in her correspondence highlights her awareness of the ways in which gender conventions shaped her participation in critical conversations.

During the colonial period, both men and women had an interest in revisiting the artistic, intellectual and political accomplishments of antiquarian societies, but how one participated in this culture, Caroline Winterer argues in *The Mirror of Antiquity*, varied according to gender. For elite women, who were largely denied a voice in the public domain, classicism imbued them with a cultural capital which they then used to enter into critical conversations among other women, as well as with men (5).¹⁶ After being introduced to Virgil by Mr. Pinckney, Lucas writes to Miss Bartlett about her initial opinion of the work:

I have got no further than the first volume of Virgil but was most agreeably disappointed to find my self instructed in agriculture as well as entertained by his charming pen; for I

¹⁵ See *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*, Davis; *Learning to Stand a Speak*, Kelley; *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, Kerrison; *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition*, Winterer.

¹⁶ It is important to note that it is only elite women who have the luxury to undertake this conversation in the classics. As Winterer notes, “unlike most other women in their time and place, these women could call upon servants and slaves to relieve much of the toil and drudgery of daily life” (4).

am persuaded tho' he wrote in and for Italy, it will in many instances suit Carolina. I had never perused those books before and imagined I should immediately enter upon battles, storms and tempest that puts one in a maze and makes one shudder while one reads. But the calm and pleasing diction of pastoral and gardening agreeably presented themselves" (35-36).

What is most immediately noticeable about Lucas's reading is that she relates it to her own time and situation. By doing this, Emily Bowles explains, Lucas, "deploys the same feminine tropes to comment on Virgil's language and on the rural scenes within his works that writers use to sexualize Southern landscapes. [She] discerns that in Virgil's works agriculture, literary achievement, and femininity are not irreconcilable quantities" (43). Bowles notes that Lucas explicitly elevates Virgil's "calm and pleasing diction" in describing the pastoral, while marginalizing the more masculine aspects of writing, in an effort to re-conceptualize the text. By highlighting the feminine nature of Virgil, Lucas uses his status as literary elite to position traditional feminine discursive topics as worthy of analysis.

Also popular during the colonial period were advice articles and books for women, which instructed young ladies on proper behavior. One of the most popular advice books was Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* which was published in 1773 in London. Though this book came out too late to influence the behavior of young Eliza Lucas (she would have been in her fifties at the first publication) we know that Eliza Lucas Pinckney owned a third edition copy of the book, which implies that its contents held at least some credence for her.¹⁷ Given the popularity of prescriptive literature (not only in books, but also in the form of pamphlets and newspaper articles), in addition to Lucas's penchant for

¹⁷ The South Carolina Historical Society has this book, with the signature of "Eliza Pinckney" at the top. The front cover of the book is reprinted in the 1997 edition of *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*.

reading, it also seems logical to assume that Lucas had some kind of similar instructional material as a young woman. The book certainly appears to encourage the “young lady” to focus on education; including chapters on such topics as politics and the economy. But the author’s choice of printed inscription on Lucas’s edition exemplifies colonial attitudes on the purpose of women’s education:

I consider a soul without education, like marble in the quarry, which shews none of its inherent beauties till the skill of the polisher fetches out the colours, makes the surface shine, and discovers every ornamental cloud, spot, and vein that runs through the body of it. Education, after the same manner, when it works upon a noble mind, draws out to view every latent virtue and perfection, which without such helps are never able to make their appearance.¹⁸

From this quote by British writer Joseph Addison, we see that colonial education for girls and women was not focused on creating critically thinking beings; rather, it was to be a shine on the *surface* of the soul. Education was an ornament to add to long list of accomplishments (singing, sewing, French) which made a woman a desirable wife and eventual teacher of children. In other words, a woman should have an education, but not too much of it. Winterer cites a particularly illuminating passage from *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, “The danger of pedantry and presumption in a woman—of her exciting envy in one sex and jealousy in the other—of her exchanging the graces of imagination for the severity and preciseness of a scholar, would be, I own, sufficient to frighten me from the ambition of seeing my girl remarkable for learning” (17). Note the use of the word “danger”: for a woman to display too much education is something that Chapone (and other earlier advice tracts) found particularly threatening for the stability of both intra- and inter-gender relations. A woman too invested in her education gives up “the graces on

¹⁸ Chapone, Hester. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Vol. II* (3rd edition, London, 1774).

imagination”: essentially, her femininity.¹⁹ As Kerrison rightly points out, however, “it is a mistake...to assume that prescription dictated behavior; that is, the advice books probably tell us more about men’s ideas of women’s proper behavior than about how women actually behaved” (19).

For Lucas, the sometimes hostile climate surrounding an educated woman is an issue she addresses through her rhetoric of her letters: rhetoric which changes depending on her audience. Particularly when corresponding with older people, or people she would consider above her socially, Lucas’s makes self-effacing comments about her intellectual skills. In a letter to Mrs. Pinckney, Lucas writes that a “pensive humour” has induced her to consult the works of John Locke regarding personal identity.²⁰ She immediately qualifies this statement by explaining, “I don’t affect to appear learned by quoting Mr. Lock, but would let you see what regard I pay to Mr. Pinckney’s recommendation of Authors—and, in truth, I understand enough of him to be quite charmed. I recon it will take me five months reading before I have done with him” (19). Lucas’s desire not to “appear learned” to Mrs. Pinckney highlights how the colonial woman needed to carefully phrase her philosophical inquiries so as not to seem as though she were putting on airs, or acting outside of her position. This reading is further confirmed by Lucas’s comment that she is “charmed” by Locke’s philosophy; a word which mirrors Chapone’s description of women as embodying the “graces of imagination.” Yet all of these statements appear to be subverted by the last sentence when Lucas estimates it will take her another five months of reading before she is done with him. Five months of reading Locke does not comply with a passing or ornamental interest in philosophy. Lucas intended to engage with Locke’s

¹⁹ *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*, also address this pressure for women to present themselves as intellectually non-threatening, noting that 18th century women were increasingly willing to see themselves as shining ornaments (34).

²⁰ The fact that Lucas would think of consulting Locke as a remedy for brooding behavior suggests that education was more for her than a mere ornamental accomplishment.

texts in a depth which could have been viewed with distain by others; hence, this careful description.

Another way in which Lucas was able to discuss intellectual ideas without arousing fear or admonishment from her correspondents was to direct her analysis of texts towards a moralistic reading of women's issues. We see this in Lucas's much quoted letter in which she discusses novel *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson.²¹ In general, novels were viewed with trepidation by colonials because of their ability to corrupt by sparking the reader's imagination. The colonial woman was considered particularly susceptible to this danger because they supposedly lacked the control and reasoning skills of a man (Kelley 182). Katherine Kerrison claims that more so than in the North, the reading of novels in the southern colonies worked as a form of resistance because the female characters of novels provided women readers with alternative lifestyles than the one posed in the advice manuals that were weighted with such authority. She suggests that for southern women, novels were also a type of advice literature which "exposed the insufficiency of the typical female ornamental education and the failure of the "Lords of Creation" in their duty to protect women" (110).

Lucas at least partly conforms to this argument as she finds in the character of Pamela a female she can relate to, "She [Pamela] is a good girl and as such I love her dearly, but I must think her very defective and even blush for her while she allows her self that disgusting liberty of praising her self..." (47). Here the character of Pamela is discussed by Lucas as though she were a friend. Besides forming a genuine affection for her, Lucas says the character's actions elicit a physical response (blushing) from her. This identification with Pamela shows the power that this

²¹ Also noteworthy about Lucas's discussion of *Pamela* is that it shows how reading and writing were very much social activities for women. *Pamela* is loaned to Lucas by Mrs. Pinckney, yet the letter is addressed to Miss Bartlett. It is also apparent from the letter that Lucas is continuing a discussion about *Pamela* because at times she refers back to comments Bartlett made in a previous letter.

relatively new genre, the novel, had on its readers. Lucas's letter quickly changes tone from personal opinion to an analysis of both characters and the author himself. Lucas respectfully disagrees with Miss Bartlett's dismissal of Pamela's behavior as a product of her being a "young Country Girl," instead holding Pamela accountable for her vanity, "True, before she was Mrs. B it be excusable when only wrote to her father and mother, but after she had the advantage of Mr. B's conversation and others of sence and distinction I must be of another oppinion" (47).²²

Lucas's reading of *Pamela* seems to be informed by her own background not only as an educated woman, but as someone constantly accountable for others. As Emily Bowles explains, "Pinckney invokes her own authority by identifying herself able to 'acquit' the author and to engage in critical debates concerning the text's moral value. To reconcile her critical position with her position as a Southern colonial woman, Pinckney reinserts herself into the domestic fiction, suggesting that she learns criticism from Pamela's 'example'" (42). For Lucas, gaining education and knowledge comes with great personal responsibility; once you know better, you are expected to *act* better. As Lucas reasons, the character of Pamela is "a reflection upon the vanity of our sex," an indictment which, for Lucas at least, warrants amelioration. In this way, the novel *Pamela* does serve as an alternative to the conduct manual, though maybe not in the radical way that Kerrison suggests.

Rather than fashioning the novel into another apparatus designed to repress women, Lucas uses the novel, and the critique it provides her, as a way to critically discuss other texts—giving her yet another opportunity to exercise her intellectual faculties, "I have run thus farr before I was aware for I have nither capacity or inclination for Chritisism tho' Pamela sets me the example by critisizeing Mr. Lock and has taken the liberty to dissent from that admirable

²² What constitutes a person of "sence and distinction" is not elaborated on by Lucas; the impression is that it is class based.

Author” (48). Here Lucas underestimated her abilities as a critic (a rhetorical move that is discussed in-depth later on), as we see that she not only has much say about the implications of *Pamela* on the female gender but also asserts that the moral framework Richardson created in the novel can be used to explicate and complicate the ideas of Locke, a philosopher for whom she holds great admiration. In writing about these connections she is making between these two texts, Lucas demonstrates not only a dedication to learning, but a desire for intellectual improvement through her challenging of an accepted philosophy. The rigor and zeal with which Lucas undertook studies is impressive, a habit which was not met without criticism from others.

The most striking (and entertaining) example of this is in a letter from Lucas to her friend Miss Bartlett in which she tells of a well-meaning neighbor who warns her of the dangers of mental over-exertion,

An old lady in our Neighbourhood is often querrelin with me for riseing so early as 5 o'clock in the morning, and is in great pain for me least it should spoil my marriage, for she says it will make me look old long before I am so...I send herewith Colo. Pinckneys books and shall be much obliged to him to Virgils works; notwithstanding this same old woman (who I think too has a great friendship for me) has a great spite at my book and had like to have thrown a volume of my Plutarchs lives into the fire the other day. She is sadly afraid, she says, I shall read myself mad and begs most seriously I will never read father Malbrauch (33).

Though the warnings seem to be warm-heartedly conveyed to the young Lucas (she makes a special point to mention that the woman is fond of her), that she mentioned the incident to her friend indicates at least an acknowledgement on Lucas's part that there is a potential stigma against the learned woman. Of particular interest is the neighbor's description of Lucas as

becoming potentially “spoiled” an indication of her primary position as a (damaged) commodity of man.²³

Once again, Lucas’s handling of the situation illustrates the fine line she routinely navigates between pursuing her intellectual aspirations and working within the system of acceptable colonial behavior. Lucas notes that she accepts the motivation behind the neighbor’s concerns, but then “reason[s] with her thus: If I should look older by this practice I really am so; for the longer time we are awake the longer we live. Sleep is so much the Emblem of death that I think it may be rather called breathing than living. Thus then I have the advantage of sleepers in point of long life...” (33). Though certainly not scientific to the modern reader, Lucas’s desire to “reason” with her opponent shows her investment in Enlightenment principles, and the significance she invests in both waking early and reading seem to reflect Locke’s idealization of educational experience. Yet she does not cite Locke to the neighbor (a move that would only serve to confirm her madness), rather, she playfully agrees that waking early has made her older—because she is both literally and figuratively living more than others.

But Lucas does not include this anecdote in her letter simply for entertainment; she uses it as an opportunity to guide her young friend towards a more virtuous and autonomous way of life. Lucas supports Miss Bartlett in her conquest of “the Lazey diety Somnus” by advising her not to be, “frightened by such sort of apprehensions as those suggested above and for fear of your pretty face give up your late pious resolution of early rising” (33). Lucas’s advice to her friend positions her as a mentor figure in the relationship, a status she frequently assumed in correspondence.

²³ This comment from the neighbor also brings to mind the popular 19th century derogatory term for an intellectual woman: bluestocking. A chapter of Kelley’s *Learning to Stand and Speak* addresses the origins and implications of this term and its application.

Education of Others

As the letter to Miss Bartlett shows, Lucas used both her knowledge and experiences with others to instruct her correspondents on a variety of topics from current events to Christian virtue. In fact, many of her letters focus on the latter subject, particularly when she writes to her sons. It is the themes of these letters that Harriet Horry Ravenel highlighted in her biography of Lucas Pinckney, idealizing her as a domestic mother of America.²⁴ Unfortunately this notion that “her intelligence helped her only in her ambition to make her husband and child happy” persists, keeping many scholars from receiving Lucas’s letters as the complex and nuanced documents that they are (Bowers 17). This is not to argue that Lucas did not care about educating her children. On the contrary, much of the second half of her *Letterbook* is devoted exclusively to them: either letters directly addressed to the boys, or letters addressed to their caretakers in England. In one of the few letters to her mother, Lucas writes, “Grant, Great God, that I may spend my whole future life in their Service and show my affection and gratitude to their [her children’s] dear father by my care of those precious remains of him, the pledges of the sincerest and tenderest affections that ever was upon the Earth” (100). There is no doubt that the role of mother was one that Lucas took very seriously, a responsibility she bore with the utmost care.

But the importance Lucas placed on her role as educator throughout her life is much greater in both scope and significance than scholars have acknowledged. It was not just her children that benefited from Lucas’s knowledge, nor was her position as teacher contingent upon a status that already carried a degree of authority (i.e. mother over children). Lucas’s identification as an educator allowed her to assume a position of power and influence that was not available to women and she used this influence to encourage other women in similar pursuits.

²⁴ Fryer points out that not only is this reading of Lucas’s letters simplistic, it is also historically inaccurate as she died before the ideology of “republican motherhood” was a fully developed concept (217).

For her male audiences, assuming the teacher role gave her the opportunity to display her intellectual abilities. Because Lucas invoked this authority through the medium of the letter, she could use her adept language skills to construct palatable arguments for these different types of audiences. Thus, educating others became a feminist act for Lucas in that it allowed her to choose a role for herself as well as compelled others to recognize her outside of her socially appointed positions.

Exactly how Lucas was able to educate her correspondent was a process influenced by the gender of the recipient. A frequent recipient of Lucas's letters, Miss Bartlett corresponded with her friend on a variety of subjects, from daily life to poetry to science. Regardless of the subject, these letters are almost always filled with teachable moments, much like the letter above. From the tone of Lucas's letters, the two women had a close friendship, though Lucas frequently assumes a position of mentor. One short letter in particular illustrates much about the how the women related to each other. In a March 1742 letter, Lucas comments on a poem Miss Bartlett has written about her. Though flattered by compliment and admiring of her style, Lucas argues that she, "take[s] the poets licence to raise your heroine much above her deserts" and advises her to, "chuse a subject for the future more worthy of your muse than a penekerick on Yr humble Servt. E. Lucas" (28). From this letter, more than any other, the reader can surmise the respect and admiration Miss Bartlett must have felt for Lucas to write a poem about her many virtues. The prose in the letters to Miss Bartlett is conversational, sometimes humorous, and always affectionate: a notable difference from the letters she writes to others. It certainly indicates a high level of familiarity and comfort, at least on the side of Lucas.

Lucas's teaching authority was not contained to the fields of instruction that women typically occupied, however. In addition to literature, philosophy and botany, Lucas also found a

great deal of interest in Newton's scientific discoveries and sought not only to disseminate her own knowledge, but to encourage Bartlett to explore the field herself. The exact role that women were supposed to play in the scientific community was variable somewhat precarious, as Susan Scott Parrish explains in *American Curiosity*, but by the eighteenth century, Parrish asserts that women's writing "shows them both manipulated by and manipulating the divide that placed women on the side of nature and men on the side of knowledge production" (177). Lucas's letter to Miss Bartlett about Newton's comment substantiates this claim effectively by establishing woman as a source of scientific knowledge while simultaneously enforcing a code of conduct.

In a letter to Miss Bartlett, Lucas reports that she has seen a comet Newton predicted would appear in 1741. This observation was apparently made with the intention of arousing a scientific passion in Miss Bartlett because in the next letter, Lucas professes some disappointment that, "your curiosity has not been strong enough to raise you out of your bed so much before your usual time as mine has been" (31).²⁵ Nonetheless, Miss Bartlett must have had at least some interest in hearing about the comet (or at least a feigned interest) as Lucas proceeds with a scientific-sounding description of what she saw: "...to answer your querie: The Comett has the appearance of a very large starr with a tail and to my sight about 5 or 6 foot long- its real magnitude must then be prodigious. The tale was much paler than the Commet it self and not unlike the milkey way" (31). Though she professes that she is looking at it with "unphilosophical Eyes" the brief description itself is quite scientific in tone; she attempts to give supply the reader with empirical evidence, and from this draws her conclusions. The tone of this paragraph is further emphasized by the contrast in next paragraph where Lucas gives an almost poetic description,

²⁵ It should be noted that this letter directly precedes the letter in which Lucas expresses happiness that Miss Bartlett has decided to wake up earlier. This certainly shows the effect that Lucas had on her younger friend.

I could not see whether it had petticoats on or not, but I am inclined to think by its modest appearance so early in the morning it wont permit every Idle gazer to behold its splendor, a favor it will only grant to such as take great pains for it- from hence I conclude if I could have discovered any clothing it would have been the female garb. Besides, if it is any mortal transformed to this glorious luminary, why not a woman (31).

Lucas's gendering of the comet as female is significant for a variety of reasons. On the most basic level, it serves as a metaphor: just as very few people would see a woman in her petticoats (no one, except for her husband and servants), so too is the comet elusive from the sight of the "Idle gazer." One must have a great affinity for and dedication to the comet to be able to see its "splendor." Interestingly, Parrish notes that astronomy was "often encouraged to imbue women with a reverence for God's great design," yet Lucas's comments on the comet serve to elevate (both figuratively and literally) the status of women (185). Because she describes the change as from mortal to a "glorious luminary" the association here is a positive one. Her choice of the word "luminary" instead of comet is also telling, as it has the double meaning of something that is not only physically bright, but mentally as well. In a world where overwhelmingly men were the ones publicly celebrated while women were relegated to quiet lives of domesticity, Lucas asks her friend (and herself as well), why can a woman not be celebrated for her intellectual genius as well?

In the letters to Miss Bartlett, Lucas seems to constantly ask this question, subsequently pushing the boundaries of what was viewed as acceptable behavior for a woman. At the same time, this interest in science also provided women with a virtuous alternative from "the socially disruptive acts of prying, wandering, and gossiping" (Parrish 189). In this way, scientific study

became another site of negotiation for women like Lucas because it allowed her challenge social customs while still operating within a larger moral sphere.

Lucas's letters to others, particularly to men, are much more subtle in how they question the status quo. Whereas Lucas is already viewed as a mentor by Miss Bartlett, to her father and brothers, she occupied a subordinate status. The second note in Lucas's letterbook, from March 1740, is an abbreviated record of a letter she wrote to her father, Col. Lucas,

Wrote to my father on business of various sorts desiring he will not insist on putting my sister to school. I will undertake to teach her French. Also gave him an account of my poor cousin Fanny Fayweather's melancholy and her bad state of health. Also of Colo. Pinckney's friendly offices with her Uncle when he was in New England with regard to her (5).

From this short note, two things become apparent: first, that from a very young age, Lucas believed she had the knowledge and capacity to teach. Her petition must have worked because Polly did stay under the tutelage of Lucas for the next three years until 1743 when Polly was sent to a boarding school. This move also came at the request of Lucas, who wrote to her father in April 1742 that, "Mama's indulgence now makes her going to school necessary" (58).²⁶ Lucas's instruction of her younger sister is not particularly unique. What is unique, however, is Lucas's position in regards to her father as a keeper of information he is not able to obtain. Some of the information was personal, such as the health of Cousin Fanny, but she also sent him letters about the state of his plantations, the condition and sale of crops, and military happenings in the colonies.²⁷ While he probably could have obtained news on current events from other sources, his

²⁶ Cited from both the main text and the footnotes of the *Letterbook*.

²⁷ The early letters to her father are focused around Gen. Oglethorpe (whom Lucas seems to despise) and the threat of the Spanish.

daughter was the sole channel through which he could receive intelligence on his economic interests in Carolina.²⁸

Though never explicitly expressed, Lucas was also at least subconsciously aware of the relative power and freedom she held in her father's absence. In her letters to others, she lays out a variety of "schemes" she is planning to undertake: "schemes" seeming to mean experiments she has thought of on her own. In one such letter to Miss Bartlett, she details her scheme of planting a plantation of oak trees, "which I look upon as my own property, whether my father gives me the land or not; and therefore I design many years hence when oaks are more valuable than they are now- which you know they will be when they come to build fleets. I intend, I say, 2 thirds of the produce of my oaks for a charity (I'll let you know my scheme another time) and the other 3rd for those that shall have the trouble of putting my design in execution" (38). We never learn what this scheme within a scheme is, but from the tone of the letter (and the lack of a previous letter to her father), the entire oak tree plan was unbeknown to Col. Lucas.²⁹

Using this background, Lucas's letter to her father regarding her marriage becomes even more remarkable. In response to a letter from Col. Lucas suggesting two potential suitors for his daughter, Lucas pens the following reply which is respectful yet firm, in addition to humorous. She opens her letter with an expression of filial devotion, "Your letter by way of Philadelphia which I duly received was an additional proof of that paternal tenderness which I have always Experienced from the most Indulgent of Parents from my Cradle to this time, and the subject of it is of the utmost importance to my peace and happiness" (6). In a fairly obvious rhetorical move,

²⁸ This is not to say that Col. Lucas's sole interest was economic. Lucas's letters indicate that the two had an affable relationship (by 18th century standards).

²⁹ Lucas's use of the word "scheme" can be somewhat of a misnomer: her ideas never seem haphazard, but rather the product of much planning. As the footnote in her *Letterbook* states, "The live oak was valued in shipbuilding. Robert Johnson reported to the Board of Trade, January 2, 1729, that it "is much wanted in his Majesty's Docks and is the best Oak in the World for that Service, and of all his Majesty's Dominions in America, only grown in Carolina." Records in British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina..., microfilm, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, S.C., 16: 29. 30" (38).

she opens the letter with a note of thanks to the man that has raised her; an attempt to soften the blow for the news that is coming. Thus, not only does Lucas control the news that reaches her father, but her rhetoric also controls how this news is consumed. Her reference to her parents as “Indulgent” can be read in a variety of ways. Bannet notes that phrases like, “the indulgence you have always shewn me” are stock markers of deference in letters from dutiful children to parents (71). Yet while it seems to be a compliment (or at least a convention showing respect) here, as we have already seen other letters from Lucas condemn what may be called indulgent behavior.³⁰ By referring to their parenting as indulgent, Lucas could be subtly implying that they have no one to blame but themselves for their daughter’s headstrong behavior. Further on in the letter she repeats the word “indulgence,” once again referring to her father’s treatment of her as a child.

Lucas addresses both men her father has proposed individually. The more humorous of the two is Mr. L of whom she says, “I can’t have Sentiments favourable enough of him to take time to think on the Subject...[I] must beg you to say the favour of you to pay my thanks to the old Gentleman for his Generosity and favourable sentiments of me...and beg leave to say to you that the riches of Peru and Chili if he had them put together could not purchase a sufficient Esteem for him to make him my husband” (6). Of the other man, she confesses she knows very little, but excuses herself from his side by declaring to her father, “a single life is my only Choice and if it were not as I am yet but Eighteen, hope that you will [put] aside the thoughts of my marrying yet these 2 or 3 years at least” (6). This section of the letter is quite forceful in its wording; she does not say she would prefer not to marry, she all but insists that she will remain single. Furthermore, she instructs her father to abandon the subject for at least a couple of years (whether this “hope” is for her sake, or for his, is left up to the reader). The remainder of the letter reverts back to the tone of the opening, with Lucas assuring her father both of her

³⁰ See pages 29, 45 and 47-49 of Lucas’s *Letterbook*.

obedience and affection. Her point, it seems, was duly noted as there is no record of Col. Lucas bringing up the idea again. Part of the reason behind this silence could be for practical reasons: there was not much he could do thousands of miles away in Antigua (a fact Lucas was obviously aware of as well). Regardless, it is from this absence that Lucas was able to assume a role of information holder and teacher, a role which granted her a powerful voice.

This reading is further supported when we look at the letters Lucas wrote to her brothers. Based on the content of Lucas's letters, they were not as invested in the business of the plantations or of the colonies in general, and as a result, the letters take on a different tone and subject matter from those addressed to her father. Lucas's letters to her brothers are decidedly more abstract and have an ethical and moral focus. Whereas with her father Lucas could assume some sort of authority as an information holder, she does not carry this same influence in the topics that she discusses with her brothers. Her statements are thus couched in self-deprecating statements, "Wrote to my Eldest brother upon his going into the Army. After and appoloigy for a girl at my early time of live presuming to advise and urge him to beware of false notions of honor. That he makes proper distinctions between Courage and rashness, Justice and revenge" (17). Though she makes apologies for her forwardness (which suggests an awareness that she is speaking above her position), she still gives the advice. Why, if she is knowingly in an inferior position, would she write such a letter to her brother at all?

This simultaneous denunciation and acceptance of her own voice is a common trope in texts written by early American women. For example, as early as 1650, Anne Bradstreet established this duality in her collection of poetry, the first ever published by a woman in the English colonies. In the opening stanza of *The Prologue* Bradstreet writes, "To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,/ Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,/ For my mean pen are too

superior things:/ Or how they all, or each their dates have run/ Let poets and historians set these forth,/ My obscure line shall not so dim their worth (13). Bradstreet also begins her writing with a kind of apology that positions the woman poet below her male counterpart. While men can write of grand public events, Bradstreet seems to suggest that an ordinary woman such as herself would be out of place to put her humble scrawl up against these poems. Subsequent stanzas reveal, however, that this humility rings false. Despite her claim of relative ignorance and skill, stanza four reveals Bradstreet's knowledge of Greek mythology and skilled poetic voice, "Nor can I, like that fluent sweet tougued Greek,/ Who lisped at first, in times speak plain./ By art he gladly found what he did seek,/ A full requital of his striving pain./ Art can do much, but this maxim's most sure:/ A weak or wounded brain admits no cure" (13-14).

Following this tradition, Lucas also shows off her intellectual "chops" in a letter to her brother. Lucas's June 1742 letter to George Lucas, which addresses her opinions on Christianity and the Enlightenment, is one of the lengthiest letters in the collection. The letter is an interesting mixture of Lucas's statement of her beliefs (and the rationale behind them) coupled with moral advice. The first part of her letter contains many of the conventions of previous letters: self-deprecation, awareness of humility and a positive enforcement of the virtue of her correspondent (52). What makes this letter stand out from others in which Lucas talks about religion and virtue, is the addition of "expert" support. To offer proof as to how the rational and religious can work together, Lucas cites the work of Robert Boyle, a seventeenth century natural philosopher and chemist. Lucas's choice of a scientist instead of a theologian (though admittedly, these interests were more closely related then than they are now) indicates her close reading of the situation at hand. Because women were viewed as the moral and spiritual authority in the family, Lucas does not need to strengthen her argument with a published authority on Christianity. Her

decision to appeal to reason has prompted the use of a publically recognized authority to corroborate her claims. After making her argument that one must believe in the Christian god despite its seeming illogical, she uses an extended metaphor from Boyle as support,

If a diver should ask you what you can see on a deep sea, You would answer you could see the depth of some yards and no further. If he should further if you could see what lay at the bottom of the sea, You would answer no. If then the Diver should bring up mussels or Oysters with perls in them, you must acknowledge that lay beyond your sight- and consequently must argue a common tho' not personal imperfection- and that the perls have the genuine colour and luster of such gems. But if the diver should pretend each of these perls as big as a Tennis ball or larger than the shell it was inclosed in, not round but cubical, and not white and orient but black or scarlet, you would conclude his assertion undesernable by your Eyes; and would therefore deny what he asserted because it would argue your sight imperfect and false though the organ was qualified to receive its proper object^x” (53).

The argument itself is fairly straightforward: just because one cannot see something (god) that does not mean it does not exist. Lucas's repetition of cause and effect statements (if this, then this) emphasizes her desire for the metaphor to be taken as a logical, and even scientific, argument. The most unique feature of this passage is the footnote (denoted with a superscript x) that Lucas includes at the end. The footnote reads, “Thus farr Mr. Boyle and I can perceive” (54). Though Lucas has no knowledge of Boyle outside of the texts she has read, including this footnote suggests to the reader that the two share an intellectual relationship. This rhetorical move raises Lucas's intellectual capital, thus temporarily allowing her the authority to make a rational argument to a man.

Education and the “Other”

This study and others of Lucas have been, for one reason or another, largely celebratory of her abilities as a planter, writer, and colonial subject. What most other studies have ignored (or at least glossed over) is that Lucas was able to experiment, write and learn through the exploitation of slave labor who cultivated crops on land taken from Native Americans.³¹ It is the influences of these people which allow her speak, arguably just as much as her correspondents. In her letters, Lucas is silent on her feelings about slavery as an institution, though talk of specific slaves does surface in several letters. For Lucas, the subordinate status of slaves and Native Americans provided her with an immediate claim to authority—an authority she had to diligently cultivate and negotiate with her epistolary correspondents. But it was not just a position of authority that Lucas coveted. In keeping with her view of herself as educator, Lucas used her position as a means to distribute knowledge to others.

Perhaps the most useful information we can take from Lucas’s silence on the subject are the limitations of epistolary correspondence. Though teaching slaves to read was not yet legally prohibited, the idea was never a popular one, particularly among the conservative landed gentry that largely comprised Lucas’s correspondents. Lucas’s letters indicate that she was aware that the endeavor would be viewed negatively. Even in her letter to Miss Bartlett, Lucas assures her that she will get approval from both of her parents before proceeding with her “scheme.” That Lucas still refers to her plan of instructing of slaves as a “scheme,” despite her parents’ knowledge of the idea, further alludes to the potential subversive nature of such a plan.

³¹ Lucas does discuss Native Americans in her letters (specifically the Cherokee and Mohawk tribes), but not until 1759. Lucas’s relationship with Native Americans is quite contentious and more explicitly stated than her relationship with slaves, feelings which seem to stem from the lack of control that she could exert over them. Since these letters reside outside the scope of this project, they will not be addressed here.

As the acting head of her father's three plantations, Lucas came into contact with slaves daily. Though her letters do not reveal the depth or extent of her interactions with the slaves (either as a group or as individuals), Lucas does appear to view them as rational beings. In a letter to Miss Bartlett where she is asked to describe her daily activities, Lucas explains, "...I rise at five o'Clock in the morning, read till Seven, then take a walk in the garden of field, see that the Servants are at their respective business, then to breakfast" (34). Even in this small segment of her day, Lucas's description reveals a strict, self-imposed regimen both for herself and for those under her direction. Referring to the "servants'" work as "their respective business" elevates the tasks from enforced physical labor to the virtuous employment wealthy people like Lucas perform every day, thus neutralizing the brutality of the institution. For Lucas, work of any kind serves to mold rational and sensible people; one does not need to be an intellectual to be educated in this way.

Lucas goes far beyond this general moral education by undertaking to teach some of her slaves to read, a practice unusual for its time. As she continues with the description of her morning, Lucas reveals it as another one of her "schemes," "...I devote the rest of the time till I dress for dinner to our little Polly and two black girls who I teach to read, and if I have my paps' approbation (my Mamas I have got) I intend [them] for school mistres's for the rest of the Negroe children—another scheme you see" (34). Several things stand out in this short passage, most remarkably, that she teaches the two female slaves alongside her own sister. By grouping them together, Lucas gives no indication that her instruction of the slaves is any different than that of her sister. Also noteworthy is that Lucas intends to make the slave girls into teachers in their own community making this scheme both long-term and far-reaching in its scope. While the reason behind this could be convenience-driven, as Lucas probably did not have the time to

teach her sister separately, or to teach a large group, her decision to teach the three girls together implies a belief that the slave girls had a similar intellectual capacity to that of a white girl.

Unfortunately, Lucas's letters do not reveal any more details as to how, what or why she taught these two slave girls, and without solid textual evidence, any attempt to explain Lucas's motivation for teaching these girls is largely based conjecture. While Gary Hewitt suggests that it could be "yet another outlet for her seemingly boundless energy," this answer is not very satisfying, nor does it explain why Lucas would be willing to undertake such a potentially precarious task. Although Constance Schulz does not address this topic directly, she does note that the plantation slaves could potentially have been a source of information for Lucas when she was first attempting to cultivate indigo (86).³² This sets up a unique relationship of reciprocity between Lucas and her slaves: they provided her with their expertise in indigo production, and in turn, she taught them to read. Yet this answer is almost too satisfying because it depicts the institution of slavery as give-and-take between master and slave; something it was not. For Lucas, slavery was not just topic of epistolary conversation, but a vital part of her social and economic existence. Her views on the slavery and race relations were undoubtedly complex and still hold much for scholars to discuss.

³² Schulz explains that Africans from the Cape Verde Islands and the Senegambia would have had experience with the indigo plant, though there is no record of where Lucas's slaves were originally from.

Conclusion

Far from being the woman behind great men, Eliza Lucas Pinckney worked throughout her life to establish herself as a strong and independent-thinking individual. In her early life, Lucas used her intellectual curiosity to question the constraints placed on her because of her gender, and through her epistolary correspondence we see that she encouraged others to follow this lead. Her letters depict a woman that was intensely cognizant of the social confines of her gender, but her epistolary discourse also advocates a re-examination of these limits. After her marriage to Charles Pinckney, Lucas assumed the roles of wife and mother with enthusiasm, and it is this facet of her life that has endured in popular history. The focus placed on her post-marriage letters is often directed towards those that illustrate this devotion to her family. But just as it does an injustice to reduce Lucas Pinckney to an idealized republican mother, so too is it unfair to completely cast aside her married life as a simple acceptance of patriarchic superiority. Much has been made of the success of Lucas Pinckney's sons, yet that she also had a daughter, and it was in the education of this child that she assumed a primary role. In a February 1762 letter, Lucas Pinckney reveals how prominently her daughter figured in her life,

I love a Garden and a book; and they are all my amusement except I include one of the greatest Businesses of my life (my attention to my dear little girl) under that article. For a pleasure it certainly is to cultivate the tender mind, to teach the young Idea how to shoot, &c., especially to a mind so tractable and a temper so sweet as hers. For, I thank God, I have an excellent soil to work upon, and by the Divine Grace I hope the fruit answerable to my indeavours in the cultivation (181).

The instruction of her daughter was not just an entertaining diversion for Lucas, but a task that she saw as vital to the young woman's development. Her decision to highlight this instruction in

letters to others shows Lucas Pinckney's ongoing commitment to female education and the value she placed on the "fruit" of such labor.

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