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AN ALTERNATIVE WOMAN: BREAKING FROM THE BINARY OPTIONS OF SIR
WALTER SCOTT'S HEROINES AND THEIR SUCCESSORS IN HISTORICAL
FICTION

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We hereby approve this thesis

For

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ABSTRACT

Inaugurated in historical fiction by Sir Walter Scott, the dichotomy of the virgin/whore or wife/spinster has long been ingrained in culture and continues to be perpetuated throughout literature. In contrast, two contemporary female historical novelists, Suzannah Dunn and Tracy Chevalier created female protagonists who break from that binary and present an alternative version of womanhood in *The Queen of Subtleties* and *Remarkable Creatures* respectively. The heroines in these two novels demonstrate personal agency through successful professions, and with the support of older, female mentors, their characters offer a representation of women and femininity that is not dependent upon men or marriage. Further, these two novelists use metaphorical imagery and visual punctuation to narrate interiority for their heroines and subsequently reclaim feminine identity for this third type of woman in history.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Georg Lukács coined the term “historical fiction” as he examined Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*, penned almost 150 years before. Combining the imagery and details of a historical backdrop and using past events to provide commentary on current ones, *Waverley* easily connected 1814 readers to the 1745 Jacobite rebellion and idiosyncratic Scottish Highlands. Subsequently termed the father of historical fiction, Scott was the first author to fully explore the relationship between history and the present while exploiting the dichotomy between fact and fiction. He created, with *Waverley*, a new way for readers to examine their own society against the backdrop of the past’s politics, events, and culture.

Critics, like Lukács and Andrew Hook, recognized Scott’s unique relationship with readers created through the use of a “middling hero” or a protagonist who looked, spoke, and thought more like the average person than had been encountered in literature before. Lukács argues that

Scott’s greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types. The typically human terms in which great historical trends become tangible had never before been so superbly, straightforwardly and pregnantly portrayed. And above all, never before had this kind of portrayal been consciously set at the centre of the representation of reality. (35)

His ability to identify and connect with what made his readers particularly human facilitated Scott's reclamation of the average man's history, understood to be marginalized in previous works of literature by the luminescent dominance of political and public figures. Epics and other heroic literature featured larger than life protagonists like Achilles, Beowulf, and Odysseus, with stories set on a grand national or worldly stage. *Waverley*, was one of the first novels to focus on a hero whose story was not directly tied to the fate of the nation or the world, but who was rather insignificant in the grand scheme of the political and social world around him.

Lukács believes this transition from epic to novel, from national hero to average protagonist, occurred in response to the Enlightenment and a shift in how writers and readers saw their own contributions to history. Mark Salber Phillips, too, saw the Enlightenment as a critical juncture for writers and consumers of history as they began reexamining history in relation to a newfound interest in the social contexts of the past and present:

Eighteenth-century social analysis no longer permitted a definition of history that restricted itself to the conventional narrative of politics—the story of the public actions of public men. . . History did not abandon its traditional concern with public life, but it significantly widened its scope as it created a new social narrative that could stand beside and even subsume the conventional account of political action. (xii)

An expanded scope of social history, it seems, allowed for a reclamation of authority and masculinity (Hook 10), and Andrew Hook asserts that “After Scott the novel was no longer in danger of becoming the preserve of the woman writer and the woman reader. Instead it became the appropriate form for writers’ richest and deepest imaginative explorations of human experience” (10).

This “reprieve” of the historical novel from the grasp of feminine influence was apparently short lived, and the 1930s marked another substantial shift as women writers took to creating historical novels, many with romantic themes. Like the Enlightenment before it, the First World War is frequently credited as a catalyst for the massive shift in readers and writers’ preferences; many theorize that the public’s need for an escape from such a prevalent nightmare was a major factor in the rise of female-dominated historical fiction, which continued into the thirties. Diana Wallace believes women used these stories as a new means of expression following their record-setting involvement with the war efforts, and “A second reason was the emergence of the first generation of university-trained women novelists, a substantial number of whom... had studied history” (79).

Regardless of the explanation, the result was a new market where the works of female historical novelists like Georgette Heyer, Barbara Cartland, and Norah Lofts, along with the more literary Helen Waddell, Hilda Reid, and Rose Macaulay, could flourish. And flourish they did, with Georgette Heyer alone selling tens of millions of copies of her fifty plus novels, published between 1921 and 1975, worldwide.

The influx of women’s historical fiction and historical romance, coinciding with Lukács’ culturally-defining publication on the historical novel, still received scant critical attention. Lukács himself, rather than investing any interest in the popular works of the time, completely ignored the literary revolution taking place around him: “As several critics, including Janet Montefiore,⁷ have pointed out, there are problems with Lukács’s work, including his lack of attention to questions of gender: he discusses no texts by women writers” (Wallace 78). His attitude, coincidentally, seems mirrored in the actions

of other critics as well, and the wealth of historical novels by women that emerged between the 1930s and 1960s were largely dismissed as unliterary.

It was not until later in the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century that scholars, namely feminist critics, such as Janice Radway, Janet Montefiore, and Diana Wallace began looking at historical romance with renewed interest. Radway's in-depth study on romance readers explored exactly how and why they read romance while Wallace saw it as a form that challenged previous histories and created a new space for the marginalized characters of the past:

The historical novel attracted women writers as a genre which they could use to explore, and indeed recover, their past as a 'prehistory of the present'. Moreover, it is in historical fiction, even in the 'popular' kind, that some of the most radical ideas are to be found during a decade which was in many ways retreating into conservatism where gender was concerned. (80)

Though the historical novel may provide a platform for those marginalized voices, Miriam Elizabeth Burstein notes that "Since the 1980s, feminists pondering the historical romance and its immediate cousin, the erotic historical, have complained that even when the heroine is uniquely powerful, 'the majority of the novels...end, as do the traditional formula romances, with either the marriage of the heroine or the resolution of the love conflict'¹" (1). Preoccupied with children and marriage, female characters it seems had little time to take center stage in historical novels meant to document the shifting nature of politics, societal values, and culture through momentous world events and bold action. The privilege of relaying historical events in the novel fell then, all too often, to a male at the center of the controversy being relived.

Sir Walter Scott's *Edward Waverley* epitomizes this type of protagonist, and so much criticism on *Waverley* revolves around the central character's status as the middling

hero; meanwhile, the heroines have scarcely been analyzed as cultural constructions. Feminist critics who have looked at Scott's cliched depiction of female characters acknowledge that "Rose is a case of Scott telling us about a character, but not showing us that character" (Watt 124). As early as the 1830s, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, in her commentary on Scott's female characters admits that "Generous and high-spirited as she is, Flora never goes beyond what we wish, and what we feel, a woman might be" (84).

The primary women portrayed in Scott's *Waverley*, Rose Bradwardine and Flora Mac-Ivor, are both given floral names, but their similarities seem to end there as Scott creates two distinct portraits of the female—one who would make a good spouse and ultimately becomes Waverley's wife, and the other who is too passionate to be tamed and therefore remains unmarried. Readers first meet each woman in her own title chapter, though neither fully possesses those titles. Rose's name is included in hers, but it is accompanied by the add-on "and Her Father," and indeed Baron Bradwardine assumes the majority of the chapter. In her introductory section, we learn first about Rose's beauty and then about her docile and amenable demeanor, which the narrator describes as "a manner that hovered between bashfulness and courtesy" (Scott 86). Flora is kept further hidden in a chapter simply naming her as "The Chieftain's Sister." She bears "a most striking resemblance to her brother Fergus" (Scott 167) with dark features and a voice that while "soft and sweet," "possessed as well the tones which impress awe and conviction, as those of persuasive insinuation" (Scott 168).

Through these depictions of Rose and Flora in *Waverley*, Sir Walter Scott offers a binary set of possibilities, typical of his era, through the construction of two roles for women in society and the relegation of them to only one of two possible fates. Rose is

calm, passive, and marriageable, while Flora is passionate, independent, and ultimately labeled as an unmarriageable love interest. By keeping both female characters primarily in the background and assigning them these distinct, conflicting roles, Scott establishes a dichotomy between the passive woman and active woman in what is often viewed as the first historical novel.

There has been significant critical exploration of this recurring binary in literature and cultural history; whether referred to as passive and active, the virgin and the whore, or the wife and spinster, these roles have long been assigned to women and have gone far to keep them marginalized and trapped by their stereotypes. There has been little critical conversation, however, on how twenty-first-century female historical novelists are revising that false binary and creating an alternative for the protagonist of the historical novel and traditional romance. The practice of characterizing women according to their marriageability trended throughout the twentieth century, and its effects can be felt still, with novels such as *The Blind Assassin*, *The Nightingale*, *Water for Elephants*, and *The Other Boleyn Girl* deploying those same binary possibilities for women and ending with either a wedding or a lonely woman. Only in recent decades have female novelists such as Suzannah Dunn and Tracy Chevalier begun to offer a third category of womanhood in their contemporary historical fiction. In their respective novels, *The Queen of Subtleties* and *Remarkable Creatures*, Dunn and Chevalier interrupt the persistent portrayal of women found in the line of historical novels inaugurated by Scott, challenging the insufficient models with the creation of an alternative—a woman specifically possessing and demonstrating her own agency through a successful profession.

This alternative to Scott's one-dimensional female stereotypes, however, is not a twenty-first-century career woman, and while a professional in each novel, she is not solely defined by her work accomplishments. Instead, each author moves beyond the characters' professions and constructs this alternative with the help of an older female mentor to support the formation of this third category of women. Further, by directly contrasting their new protagonists against counterparts headlining alternating chapters, specifically unmarriageable women, these twentieth-century female historical novelists more clearly underscore the differences between the wife, the spinster, and this new representation of women.

In addition to presenting a new type of woman, Dunn and Chevalier also portray female perspectives not traditionally found in male-dominated historical fiction, accomplishing this particularly through the creation of a new way of narrating interiority for those women. Narrated in third-person, Scott's *Waverley* portrays Rose and Flora, like its other characters, from a distinctly male perspective; though they are afforded dialogue, Rose and Flora's interior thoughts are rarely depicted. In contrast, Dunn and Chevalier each construct a particular type of narrative interiority for their protagonists, which offers a more complex understanding of the characters and nuanced version of womanhood. Contemporary authors such as Hilary Mantel, writing distinctly from a male perspective like Scott, are consistently elevated to literary status by book reviewers and garner critical acclaim for this narrative technique. Meanwhile, Dunn and Chevalier, whose work has primarily been the subject only of book reviews, use their nuanced depictions of the third type of woman to repudiate the traditional binary inaugurated by

Scott and reinforced through the lack of critical exploration of its alternatives in female-centric historical novels.

Email exchanges with the novelists confirm that neither had read Sir Walter Scott prior to writing their novels and were therefore not consciously influenced by his binary depiction of women. However, both were aware of Scott's influence on historical fiction and certainly familiar with a wealth of novels influenced by his works. Chevalier further offered that she was influenced by the virgin/whore dichotomy when writing *Remarkable Creatures*, being drawn to Mary Anning because of her deviation from those two options. Even without doing so consciously, Dunn and Chevalier directly repudiate both Scott's options for womanhood and his unspoken acceptance of the prescribed romance that ends in marriage, consequently recovering from the margins of history a different female perspective and re-introducing another aspect of female identity that was long buried beneath dominating male viewpoints and storylines that ended with a wedding. The novelists' specific narratological decisions, while achieving something similar to Scott's evocation of interiority and connection between protagonist and reader, nevertheless challenge Scott's focus on the middling hero by centering on the female perspective and using these narrative tools to unearth female identity that was overlooked by Scott.

CHAPTER II

TRACY CHEVALIER'S MARY ANNING

In *Remarkable Creatures*, published in 2010, Tracy Chevalier offers Mary Anning as the personification of the third type of woman. With the construction of Anning, Chevalier defines the key characteristics of this new woman, specifically her professional agency, support in her growth from another female character, and status as a single woman at the novel's conclusion. These characteristics and Chevalier's style of narrating them directly refute Scott's two-sided, male-centric definition for women and offer an alternative for contemporary readers exploring female identity in historical fiction.

With their parents deceased and only brother engaged, Elizabeth Philpot and two of her sisters are forced to downsize their lifestyle, moving to Lyme Regis at the beginning of the nineteenth century. There, Elizabeth, who takes up fossil hunting as a hobby, meets a young Mary Anning and immediately recognizes Mary's extraordinary skill for fossil hunting. Although the young girl is below her station in society, Elizabeth supports Mary's development into a professional fossil hunter, which spurs Mary's discovery of several marine reptiles, including the ichthyosaur. Mary's discoveries, beyond generating income and facilitating her professional independence, revolutionize

the geological field and society's understanding of world creation, which subsequently became known as evolution.

In direct repudiation of the typical courtship plot-style "happily ever after," Tracy Chevalier creates in Mary Anning a woman who works and survives due to her own passion and professional occupation, one who is not dependent upon men and manages to eclipse all those who are offered as her superiors throughout *Remarkable Creatures*. At first, readers may believe that Elizabeth Philpot is the primary protagonist of our novel and the model for this new woman, and indeed her character's voice dominates more than sixty percent of the 275-page novel; however, Mary Anning begins the novel with her short one and a half page opening section, in which she declares, "...the lightning is me," (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 4), and her name makes up the first words of Elizabeth's initial section as well. Further, Elizabeth's declaration that "Mary Anning leads with her eyes" (7) and subsequent description of Mary and her eyes as bright, vigorous, and always searching for something of interest identifies Mary's important role. Chevalier returns to the image of Mary's leading eyes at the end of section one, Elizabeth admitting, "I wanted to learn how to do so myself" (23).

Writing in first person, Chevalier alternates between Mary Anning and Elizabeth Philpot, using each woman's perspective to highlight their friendship and evolving interests and profession. There is a sprinkling of men throughout, namely male relatives or else those interested in Mary's fossils for personal and professional gain. These men may occasionally play the role of potential suitor, and some are described as kind, but each hinders Elizabeth and Mary's evolution into serious fossil hunters. Lord Henley believes he must represent women since they are "spare parts" and "cannot represent

themselves” (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 105). James Foot “wants things to be proper” (37), primarily his future wife and her family. A geology professor reawakens a desire for connection in Elizabeth, but she quickly realizes “...that only a woman beautiful enough to distract him or patient enough to put up with him would manage to marry William Buckland” (154). Arguably, there are no knights in shining armor in Lyme Regis, a reality that seems central to Tracy Chevalier’s novel.

With women in the foreground, a clear binary emerges between a woman who is marriageable and one who is unmarriageable, i.e. a spinster. In fact, the term “spinster” is heavily used throughout the text, predominantly in reference to the Philpot sisters, but also frequently when talking of Mary Anning’s future and possible marriage prospects. Furthermore, women’s physical attributes demarcate the two categories more distinctly, as we learn early on that the “...Philpots are not known for our beauty. Our frames are bony, our features strong” (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 8).

Though she is barely mentioned afterward, one of the Philpots manages to find a husband, and Elizabeth alludes to her sister’s use of her body to attract a man: “Frances has been the only Philpot sister to marry, and leads with her bosom—which I suppose explains that” (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 7-8). Fanny Miller, on the other hand, represents a second archetype of the wife, with her “big eyes and dainty features” (141). Following an accident on the beach in which Fanny’s leg is crushed by a landslide, Elizabeth believes “Fanny could not now expect to marry well, or at all. Her fair looks might make up for a great deal, but most husbands at that working level of society would need a wife who was able to walk a mile. No amount of money could make up for what Fanny had lost” (150). This belief is proven wrong, however, for even with a severe leg

injury, Fanny Miller manages to marry one of the Day brothers and save herself from the workhouse. Her beauty, then, is more powerful and desirable than Elizabeth believed.

While contemplating what seemed her impending death, Mary "...wondered why it was that the pretty ones were always rescued before the plain. That was how the world worked: ...Fanny did not get stuck, whereas I was caught in the mud, the cliff threatening to crumble on top of me" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 141). Chevalier literally and figuratively traps Mary in the middle, exploring possible suitors for her in Mr. Buckland and Colonel Birch, but ultimately denying her that end. Instead, Mary realizes that "'God must have other plans for me. Besides,' she added, 'I can't afford to stop'" (149).

In contrast to the models of a wife, presented by Frances Philpot, Molly Anning, and Fanny Miller, Chevalier begins embedding images of spinsters early on in the narrative. In one of the first scenes, Mary tries to soothe her sickly baby brother by singing "Don't let me die an old maid" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 56), while her nemesis, Captain Cury threatens that she will "...grow up into a sour old spinster no man will look at" (64). Further description ranges from "harmless spinster" and "prickly" to "stubborn Lyme spinster with my own mind," demonstrating an array of traditionally negative connotations associated with remaining unmarried and independent at the time. It is no wonder then, that our protagonists were fearful of becoming spinsters themselves, even though it seems to readers to be the obvious alternative for both Elizabeth and Mary. For Mary, at least, this turns out to be untrue, and through this comparison of Mary with Elizabeth, Chevalier begins constructing the alternative to the prototypes of wife and spinster.

Mary Anning eventually manages to embrace a profession and support herself through her work, with no husband, father, or brother to help, aside from Joseph who offers some initial support by going with her to hunt curies and then through his work as an upholsterer; however, it is obvious that Mary's work as a fossil hunter, though sporadic at times, is much more profitable for the entire family, and Chevalier highlights Mary's career as a principal aspect of her formation into the alternative to the two most familiar types of women in novels, including Scott's.

While there are few men who truly support her development, Mary does not become the third type of woman without the help of Elizabeth Philpot, who herself pushes against the model of spinster as prescribed for her. Elizabeth's interest in fossils, her dismissal of certain societal customs in favor of her own independence, and her willingness to repeatedly help the Annings, even though they are below her social class, garner disapproval from some members of her family as well as many in Lyme's social sphere. But she and the two sisters she lives with receive £150 per annum from their brother, John, and they all answer to his authority in the absence of husbands: "And John must be our shepherd" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 9). While the reader is reminded that their yearly stipend is nothing exorbitant, it does allow Elizabeth to collect fossils purely for enjoyment, and she can afford to donate specimens to London museums, rather than sell them to collectors or gentlemen to keep coal in the burner and food on the table. With these details, Chevalier represents Elizabeth as a spinster more typical of her society's leisure class.

Though she gains self-confidence and a certain independence by the novel's conclusion, finally declaring that "something had shifted in me...I was responsible for

myself” (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 252) and “It was time for me to lead with my eyes” (258), Elizabeth is clearly not our new woman. Instead, Chevalier uses her as a mentor to help Mary Anning develop as the alternative to Walter Scott’s binary possibilities for women. When Mary discourages Joseph from apprenticing as an upholsterer because she needs him on the beach, Elizabeth reassures Mary that she is more than capable of hunting for curios on her own. Repeatedly, Chevalier shows Elizabeth defending her mentee, first to Lord Henley, then to the bread baker, Colonel Birch, and Mr. Buckland at the Geology Society gathering. It is also Elizabeth rather than William Buckland or another man, who physically saves Mary from suffocating in a landslide by digging her out of the mud with her bare hands. In this scene, Chevalier signals Elizabeth, and not a male scientist or famous fossil collector, as the character to guide Mary Anning through her many challenges to become an independent professional and ultimately the new, third type of woman.

Scott’s original binary roles for women, then, do not apply to Mary Anning, who finds an older female mentor in Elizabeth who nudges her down a third path. Elizabeth supports Mary’s profession, pushes her to pursue more ambitious discoveries, and teaches her how to properly value herself and her work without the condescending assistance of the men in the novel. Mary’s mentor also encourages her to look past dreams of being a wife and to embrace her own capabilities, seeing potential in Mary when few others did.

Just as Chevalier rejects Scott’s two models for women with Mary Anning, neither does she line her protagonist up with the template for Waverley’s so-called middling hero. Unlike Edward Waverley, Mary is not afforded the money or title from a

long-established noble family, does not have the opportunity to explore new lands, and cannot shirk responsibilities when it suits her. Instead, Chevalier makes Mary Anning reliant on the support of other women in her life as well as her own self-creation, rather than advantages bestowed upon her character at birth, to develop into the third type of woman.

Chevalier set up the building blocks for her newfound woman, including Mary Anning's unwed status at the end of the novel, her work as a professional fossil hunter, and her relationship to her older, female mentor, Elizabeth Philpot. These building blocks help shape readers' understanding of who Mary Anning is and how she contradicts both Walter Scott's average male hero and his more traditional models for women in historical fiction; however, these characteristics are not all encompassing, and Chevalier further reconstructs Scott's possibilities for women through her distinctive narration of interiority for Elizabeth Philpot and Mary Anning. Her use of the visual imagery of lightning, paired with uncommon italicized phrases and colons throughout the text, results in a specialized interior view of her characters that both elucidates the form of the new woman as Chevalier sees her and highlights the endless possibilities for female identity which this break from Scott ultimately represents.

CHAPTER III

SUZANNAH DUNN'S LUCY CORNWALLIS

In her 2004 novel *The Queen of Subtleties*, Suzannah Dunn constructs a new representation of womanhood for her readers. With her protagonist, Lucy Cornwallis, the novelist effectively rejects long-standing female stereotypes in historical fiction and diverges from the middling male hero as established by Sir Walter Scott. The stereotypes of women that Dunn is actively rejecting, along with a marginalization of those women's stories has arguably created a lopsided and inaccurate depiction of the roles they played throughout history. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* seemingly offered two parts for women to play: the wife or the alluring, but non-marriageable woman. In *Waverley*, Rose assumes the position of wife, and while Flora Mac-Ivor is imbued with passion, intelligence, and political allegiance, her primary role in Scott's novel is that of Waverley's disinterested crush. Expanding those prescribed options and opening up a space for a more complicated portrayal of women, Suzannah Dunn designs in Lucy Cornwallis a third female character, one who succeeds professionally while remaining unmarried.

Set opposite the well-known historical figure of Anne Boleyn, Lucy, a fictional creation based on a historical footnote, is the only female in King Henry VIII's kitchens.

A seemingly unassuming and traditionally marginal type of character, the confectioner here takes a central role. Her story unfolds over boiling pots of marmalade and in front of partially constructed sugar sculptures. At the same time, the novel also follows, in sections narrated by Anne Boleyn, that queen's rise and fall in the king's attentions. Embroiled in both women's lives is court musician, Mark Smeaton.

Dunn uses the introduction of Smeaton into the narrow confines of the court kitchens and Lucy's unanticipated romantic feelings for him to facilitate the confectioner's development, both personally and professionally. Mark's attention seemingly encourages Lucy's confidence and inspires her work, as suggested by her increasingly exquisite subtleties and a truly ambitious wedding centerpiece for Boleyn's replacement, Jane Seymour. Just when Lucy begins to believe she has a chance at a happily-ever-after with Mark, his life is snatched away with the queen's by a conspiracy designed to relieve Henry VIII of his second wife. With Anne Boleyn and Mark Smeaton dead, and her only friend, Richard, gone, the talented confectioner is left in the royal kitchens to carry on her life and work alone.

Lucy's solitary status at the end of the novel is one of the three essential characteristics that distinguishes Dunn's protagonist from both Rose and Flora in *Waverley*. As she does for the majority of the characters in the novel, Dunn denies Lucy closure in a romance plot. Apart from Richard, who leaves court with his boyfriend, no one is afforded a truly fulfilling romantic ending, effectively creating a storyline of the type that Miriam Elizabeth Burstein terms an antiromance. Rather than obscuring Lucy behind a husband, Dunn allows her central character to pursue a career in fourteenth-century England, and Lucy's occupation as a confectioner is the second of the three traits

identifying her as an alternative to Scott's twofold options for women. Though Dunn imbues Lucy with her own agency, the character's professional development hinges in part on the sisterhood and encouragement of an older female mentor. Dunn highlights that sisterly support as essential to Lucy's success and as the third key distinction between her character and the standard roles of wife and spinster.

Shifting between Anne Boleyn's and Lucy Cornwallis's viewpoints, Dunn narrates each in first person. Although the storylines are intertwined, the novelist splits them between two distinct time frames so that they intersect but are not connected linearly. As in Chevalier's *Remarkable Creatures*, there is no male savior, no gentleman to whisk Lucy away to the country, and for the most part, she is responsible for her own position and success. Richard, her protégé, is admittedly talented and is her "sharpest critic" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 79); he pushes Lucy to excel in her work, but she taught him everything he knows and remains his superior until he leaves court with his boyfriend, Silvester. Dunn imagines King Henry VIII's occasional interactions with his royal confectioner while tracing his move from Catherine of Aragon to Anne Boleyn to Jane Seymour, three of his six wives. Aside from the king's link to both, Mark Smeaton is the primary connection between the two protagonists, unknowingly playing Lucy's failed romantic interest and harboring an infatuation for Anne that ends with him being tortured and executed.

Paradoxically, Dunn sends Lucy to save Mark, or at least to try. Though she is not influential enough to garner Mark's release from the Tower, Lucy's pleas obtain a promise from Thomas Cromwell that he will "get Smeaton a commuted sentence. Not a traitor's death" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 211). Lucy's action on Mark's behalf

echoes the unexpected agency extended to Rose in *Waverley*. Scott's two paradigms for women in his novel, while confining, offer some surprises, particularly as Rose travels through the night to warn Waverley of trouble headed his way. In this way, Dunn mirrors Scott by empowering the woman to rescue the man, and through this detail, both authors subtly complicate traditional gender roles. Regardless of the risks Lucy and Rose take on behalf of the men they love, there remain fundamental differences between them. By concluding Lucy's story without marriage, Dunn further disrupts the binary possibilities for women laid out by Sir Walter Scott.

To solidify that disruption, Dunn invokes and explodes another binary when she contrasts her new female archetype against Anne Boleyn who plays one of the traditional tropes: the spinster or unmarriageable woman. This contrast illustrates the principal differences between Anne and Lucy, which helps readers understand the professional confectioner as the third option rather than the spinster she initially seems to epitomize.

Ironically, Anne Boleyn continuously calls Jane Seymour, her imminent replacement as Henry's wife, "the dim Seymour spinster." Though Anne wins the position of wife after years of waiting, and ultimately ends the novel still as Henry's spouse, she more accurately represents the non-marriageable counterpart to both Jane, whom Anne initially fails to see as the more traditional model of the wife, and Catherine of Aragon. Even Catherine, legally divorced and abandoned by Henry, remains the "kind, stoical, scholarly young woman, as he saw her" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 9), and at one point he implies nostalgia for his first wife who had refrained from complaining about his many mistresses. The readers' initial misconception of Anne's role, however, is amended in her character's initial section, as readers learn she is writing to her daughter,

Elizabeth, from the Tower of London. As she awaits her execution, Anne speculates that the king "... was tired of spirited women, and hankered for the good, old-fashioned kind" (257). With divorce, much less a second dissolution, uncommon at the time of her beheading in 1536, the king instead allows his advisor, Sir Thomas Cromwell, to construct an elaborate conspiracy against Anne in order to force her execution, so Henry can marry Jane Seymour.

Dunn's descriptions of Jane as plain, nice, good, sanctimonious, docile, and an angel mirror the ideal of the wife familiar in Sir Walter Scott's novels and reinforced in much popular historical fiction well into the twenty-first century. Jane's beauty and purity are seemingly requisite attributes of the wife, and Dunn's echoing of Anne as independent, passionate, "a dark-eyed, gold-digging, devil-may-care temptress" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 8), even a flat-out whore, are key indicators that Anne Boleyn is mislabeled as the wife: "He insists upon seeing her as a good woman...If she was the angel, I was the devil. The role had been left to me, so I might as well embrace it" (252). Although married throughout the novel, Anne more precisely reflects Walter Scott's spinster as played by Flora Mac-Ivor, and with the queen's death, Dunn rectifies the mistake and seemingly restores the binary set of options for women, at least within Anne Boleyn's sections. Beauty, then, appears to be key to marriage, but Anne's execution is proof that it must be accompanied by other wifely qualities, such as reverence and obedience, to be sustainable.

With Anne reclassified as the spinster, albeit one who won't actually get to fade into old age alone, readers are still left with Lucy Cornwallis who resists the confinement of Scott's two neat boxes for women. Repeatedly, Dunn alludes to the fact that while not

unattractive, Lucy isn't a dazzling beauty: "And I'm *not* pretty. My sisters were pretty," (71) admits Lucy. When summoned to an audience with the king, Lucy worried, "How would I look, to him, there? Just as I look to the rest of them. Tongue-tied, bareheaded and loose-haired in my dowdy gown" (74).

Conversely, Lucy's sisters and their children are "stunning...sleek and sure-footed" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 81), and when Mark asks where her sisters are now, she simply responds "Married" (80), implying that being a wife is in and of itself a natural state of existence for women who are attractive enough. Richard apologizes for teasing Lucy about her marriage status, telling her "You're beautiful and wonderful and you're wasted," (162), but Dunn again cancels out his declarations of Lucy's attraction, as the protagonist proclaims, "I simply couldn't go cavorting to the king like some girl. I'm unmarried, yes, but the point is that I'll never be married. I'm not some young, unmarried girl, whatever Richard thinks to the contrary" (73).

Deliberately illustrating Lucy as modest and plain, Dunn suggests her bare countenance is partially responsible for the confectioner's lack of a husband. The novelist temporarily leads Lucy to reconsider the plausibility of her own marriage, as Mark Smeaton's attention influences a growing conviction in her own beauty and self-worth. Lucy ultimately returns to her original conclusions, however, when she learns of Mark's love for Queen Anne Boleyn: "How had I—supposedly sane and sensible—come to believe he could have such feelings for me? Why *would* he? Me: an aging woman who's never looked farther than the four walls of her kitchens, who knows nothing and has nothing to say for herself" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 204). Time and again, Dunn

conjectures that beauty and youth are necessary for marriage, contending that Lucy Cornwallis's looks were not enough to secure a marital union for the character.

Therefore, Lucy may seem to represent the unmarriageable woman or spinster, particularly as Dunn continues underscoring Lucy's plain looks and unwed status; however, Lucy's profession as a confectioner in the king's household remains a key contrast between her and the traditional spinster in historical fiction. While her half-sisters are all married and have children, Lucy invests her energy into learning and becoming the best at what she is paid to do: create sugar subtleties and delectable confectionery for the king and his companions. When asked if she liked working in the kitchens, liked making confectionery, Lucy responds, "I like getting things right...I like working in kitchens if I'm the head...And I'm lucky...working for someone who appreciates what I do and encourages me, no expense spared" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 79). Dunn emphasizes how Lucy's fruitful profession would be the character's primary source of fulfillment, as her family seems unable to support her as a traditional spinster and her hopes of a marriage fade away with Mark's criminal conviction and death.

Mark Smeaton's interest in Lucy undoubtedly nourishes her creativity, as demonstrated by the elaborate subtleties and monumental sugar sculptures she builds during her dalliance with the musician. However, Dunn emphasizes Lucy's intelligence and artistic talent existed long before Mark walked into the royal kitchens, revealing the confectioner's inherent interest in art through descriptions of an early fascination with the decorated clay tiles made in her hometown. That fascination never evolves as Lucy is sent at age twelve to work and learn in her village's manor house, and there, she meets

Alice, the kind, young mistress of the house who provides a more extensive and indulgent education than her pupil expected: “Once, she flung sugar syrup at a rosebush and we watched it dry on the petals. Ingenious: real sugar roses; sugar real roses. We picked the crisp, glowing petals for storage, allowing ourselves to sample a few. I’ve never dared do it, myself: that flinging of sugar, that gloriously haphazard sugaring” (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 78). Although concise, this portion of the novel is fundamental to Lucy’s development into a true professional. Alice “was keen on confectionery” (78) and infused her apprentice with significant initial skills, resulting in Lucy’s ultimate advancement to the kitchens of the noble Neville family and finally her recommendation of service to the king.

It is during her time in the king’s kitchens that Lucy meets Anne Boleyn, who appears at first to play the role of wife; however, Dunn complicates Anne’s roles as both wife and as the new professional type of woman. Though considered an English commoner, Anne is niece to the Duke of Norfolk and her family enjoys a certain amount of wealth and privilege that come with being related to “a respected elder nobleman” (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 229). She rises quickly once engaged to Henry, being named a peer of the realm as the Marquess of Pembroke, a noble in her own right and with an income to boot. Anne arguably deserves those benefits at the time and is a capable ruling partner for the king, but her newfound title and fortune were bestowed by a besotted lover, not truly earned from a professional position. So, while Anne Boleyn spearheads the novel’s first and last sections, and is arguably the more notable historical figure of the two, it is Lucy Cornwallis who defies Scott’s binary roles for women, as she charts her own course in history. Dunn took the reference to a woman in King Henry

VIII's royal kitchens and created a character who is unmarried while succeeding professionally due to her own fortitude, and though employed by the most powerful man in England, Dunn grants Lucy personal skill and determination that prove responsible for her advancement.

Dunn implicitly critiques previous depictions of women in literature by revising those depictions and emphasizing the myriad of possibilities for women. Specifically, Dunn creates a character with Lucy Cornwallis who defies the binary of wife and spinster as outlined by Sir Walter Scott in *Waverley*, reinforcing that women's experiences were and are more complicated than the side roles they are often relegated to in historical fiction before and throughout the twenty-first century, more complicated than their marriage status at the end of the novel.

Dunn defined the qualities of her new type of woman—unmarried, professional, connected to an older female mentor. Yet delineating those qualities only explains part of Dunn's achievement. In updating Scott's traditional binary possibilities for women in historical fiction, Dunn employs particular techniques to narrate this new female character type, using floral imagery, specifically that of a red rose, to comment on the construction of women in literature and to imagine a new alternative. Additionally, Dunn's particular use of italics and colons throughout the text creates an intimate voice for both Anne Boleyn and Lucy Cornwallis, helping Dunn to construct interiority for her protagonists and introduce readers to Lucy as the alternative to Scott's characters.

CHAPTER IV

INTERIORITY AND THE NARRATION OF FEMALE IDENTITY

In her article “Constructing Interiority in Eighteenth-Century Narrative Fiction: Wieland’s *Geschichte des Agathon*,” Lorna Martens pinpoints the importance of interiority in fiction: “The representation of interiority is often thought of as the special preserve of fiction, in fact as one of the signal characteristics that distinguish fiction both from non-fictional genres like historiography and from other media, like film” (49). Authors, then, inherit the important privilege, and also the responsibility of creating and inventing an interior space for their characters to thrive within and for their readers to temporarily inhabit and experience.

In *Waverley*, Rose’s introductory chapter consists of approximately six pages, the majority of which are dedicated to Scott’s description of Baron Bradwardine and his dinner guests. Miss Bradwardine, as she is introduced, partially possesses the chapter’s title and is the subject of its initial paragraphs, but those are primarily composed of descriptions of her physical attributes and docile demeanor. Labeled as bashful, civil, demure, and compared to a fairy, Rose fits the mold of the wife in Scott’s binary conception of womanhood. His construction of her character remains surface level, and at this point, the reader is neither offered a glimpse inside her thoughts nor a direct citation

of her share in the conversation. The only allusion to her speech is relayed in the past tense as “Edward learned from her” and “She offered, with diffident civility, to show the stranger the way to the spot” (Scott 86). Like Rose’s opportunity to be cited directly, the proposed tour was “prevented by the appearance of the Baron of Bradwardine in person” (86), and readers learn nothing else about the interior composition of this central female character. Instead, her father dominates the remaining pages of the chapter, and Scott relays more directly his role in subsequent dialogue as his “speech, with the necessary interjectional answers, continued from the lower alley...” (89).

Scott dedicates a longer sequence of narrative to Flora Mac-Ivor’s debut, primarily describing her in contrast to both Rose and her brother, Fergus. Her introductory chapter includes no direct dialogue, but she is granted a much more active role in the novel in general. While Rose is talked to and about but rarely included in the action, Flora speaks, sings, recites poetry, writes letters, and offers her opinions. There are even rare times when Scott seems to meld the narrator and Flora into one:

‘Because you seek, or ought to seek, in the object of your attachment a heart whose principal delight should be in augmenting your domestic felicity and returning your affection, even to the height of romance. To a man of less keen sensibility, and less enthusiastic tenderness of disposition, Flora Mac-Ivor might give content, if not happiness; for, were the irrevocable words spoken, never would she be deficient in the duties which she vowed.’ (214)

It becomes difficult, in the above passage, to discern Flora from the third-person narrator, and the fusion of the two offers some glimpse of an interior perspective for the novel’s second leading lady.

That brief hint of interiority and Flora’s evident autonomy are nevertheless overshadowed by the prominently male perspective, as readers are immersed in Edward’s thoughts and emotions. Listening to Flora recite an old battle song, “He would not for

worlds have quitted this place by her side; yet he almost longed for solitude, that he might decipher and examine at leisure the complication of emotions which now agitated his bosom” (Scott 178). It becomes quickly apparent that Flora’s increased action primarily revolves around the men in the novel, most notably her brother, Fergus, and their joint support of the Chevalier’s return to the Scottish and English thrones. This fact, along with the significant amount of time she spends refusing marriage to Edward Waverley greatly diminishes her power and reinforces the male-dominated viewpoint.

We are privy to Flora’s expression of emotion at times: “This greeting over, Fergus said three or four words to his sister in Gaelic. The tears instantly sprung to her eyes, but they seemed to be tears of devotion and joy, for she looked up to Heaven, and folded her hands as in a solemn expression of prayer or gratitude” (Scott 195). Here, Scott offers a direct glimpse of Flora’s evident capacity for passion, but we are denied hearing directly from her. Rather, she is continuously observed, described, and compared by the narrator and by Waverley himself. We learn about Flora’s “loyalty” and other characteristics through the narrator’s evaluation of them, observing that “Every sentiment that Flora had uttered vindicated the strength of his attachment; for even her loyalty, although wildly enthusiastic, was generous and noble, and disdained to avail itself of any indirect means of supporting the cause to which she was devoted” (216).

Once rejected, Edward’s perception of Flora shifts dramatically, admitting that he had “dedicated myself to one who will never love mortal man, unless old Warwick, the King-maker, should arise from the dead” (Scott 376). To him, there is no worthy marriage companion for Flora, and his attitude toward her passion and rejection, along

with Flora's decreasing presence in the narration, culminate into the characterization of her as the active but ultimately non-marriageable woman, i.e. a potential spinster.

In contrast to Rose and Flora, the prototypes wife and spinster, Waverley, the unassuming hero is depicted through extensive internal monologue, as already evidenced in the focus on his thoughts in Scott's introductory chapter for each of the heroines. As with Flora earlier, it is often unclear whether Waverley is still speaking and/or thinking or if the narrator has now assumed first person and merged with the protagonist. Scott veers towards free indirect discourse, for example, in the following typical passage, although retains the first-person pronoun:

And such a catastrophe of the most gentle creature on earth might have been prevented if Mr. Edward Waverley had had his eyes! Upon my word, I cannot understand how I thought Flora so much, that is, so very much, handsomer than Rose. She is taller indeed, and her manner more formed; but many people think Miss Bradwardine's more natural; and she is certainly much younger. I should think Flora is two years older than I am. I will look at them particularly this evening. (377)

Edward's assessments of those around him, Rose and Flora included, are often the primary source of readers' intersection with other characters. Comparing the two women, Waverley's internal dialogue frames Rose as the more attractive and interesting of the two during tea at the home of a Bonnie Prince Charlie supporter: "'Her manner, upon the whole, is most engaging,' said Waverley to himself" (Scott 377) and "'She has more feeling too,' said Waverley, internally" (378).

One critic, Andrew Welsh, believes Scott's female protagonists successfully demonstrate interiority, asserting that "Scott, or his narrators, allow the female characters thoughts, feelings and passions which are often ignored or unacknowledged by the heroes such as Waverley" (25). While Flora, much more than Rose, is given space to discuss her

passion and feelings, that expression is continually cut short or overshadowed by the novel's men. Not once in the novel do the phrases "Rose thought" or "Flora thought" appear, and the dialogue tag "said" is attributed to Rose only three times, to Flora ten, but to Waverley, 86 times.

In addition to this lack of a female voice and perspective, Scott's novels, in the view of some critics, feature unimaginative characters with weak interior composition. Harry E. Shaw argues that Scott sacrificed the inner makeup of his characters, presenting instead pre-formed versions of social figures with limited individuality, to focus on the greater historical events that shape his narrative. Though Shaw referred specifically to Scott's *Redgauntlet*, this critique easily translates to the one-dimensional characters of *Waverley* as well. Scott relies heavily on exterior movement to give his characters life, and while exteriority can often drive interiority, the lack of explicit interior thoughts, motives, and desires can create for readers a sense of the disinterest and impartiality on behalf of the characters.

That indifference plays directly into the designation of Waverley as the "middling hero" which was, for many decades, praised as an accomplishment—the representation of a true average man. Scott's neglect of Rose and Flora, however, only further embalms them in the familiar roles of wife and spinster. Only more recently, have contemporary female historical novelists achieved the type of interiority for female characters for which Scott is praised for his male characters. Although not directly alluding to Scott, Suzannah Dunn and Tracy Chevalier, nevertheless build on the tradition raised upon Scott's foundation, particularly the narratological effort to create a character with which readers (particularly male readers) can identify and empathize. The construction of a particular

type of narrative interiority for Dunn and Chevalier's female protagonists offers not only an alternative to Scott's flat female characters but contributes to a more complex understanding of the third type of female existence, one who fits neither Rose's nor Flora's pattern of traditional options for women.

Dunn's and Chevalier's construction of interiority for their protagonists exposes readers to the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and reactions of the women at the center of these novels. Beyond simply creating lifelike characters, however, Dunn's and Chevalier's techniques also produce a specifically female point of view, one that was identifiably lacking in Scott's work. While Scott neglected Flora and Rose's internal strife and personal development, Dunn and Chevalier seized the opportunity to construct empathetic, individualized, and authentic women with demonstrated agency. Dunn's and Chevalier's deft development of their heroines' interiority further allows them to reclaim and expand female identity and perspective for contemporary historical fiction. Their updated narration of interiority presents an opportunity for heightened intimacy between readers and these new female protagonists. Further, their updated techniques depict women's previously shielded thoughts and emotions and help expand readers' understanding of female identity in historical fiction.

Throughout *The Queen of Subtleties*, Dunn uses the image of a red rose and its constructed sugar counterpart to bare her protagonists' interior thoughts and emotions; this image also enables her to comment on the difficulty of writing fiction—one of the earliest professional careers available to educated women. Additionally, through the detailed descriptions of subtleties and construction of elaborate sugar centerpieces, along with Lucy's daily work of piecing sugary puzzles together, Dunn builds for Lucy a way

to express and demonstrate her agency and true competence as a professional. These attributes build on one another and produce a third version of womanhood in the existence of Lucy Cornwallis, a version that is tied to neither the wife nor spinster stereotypes, but which exists through her own demonstrated ability.

Chevalier goes further, integrating the image of lightning and its metaphor for Mary Anning's agency and ultimate development into the third female type as a more dominant component of her protagonist's interiority. The existence of the lightning and Mary's possession of it within the text demonstrates her personal power, capacity for growth, and her ultimate influence on society. Chevalier mirrors this technique in Elizabeth Philpot's sections, tracing the movement of characters' body parts (chin, eyes, eyebrows, etc.) and intimating the connection of those body parts and their movement with a character's own personal trajectory and development. With this technique, Chevalier hints at Elizabeth's own agency and possible ability to break free from the mold of spinster in which she finds herself confined, but Elizabeth's development into the third type of woman is never fully realized, as she continues collecting fossils as a hobby and supporting Mary Anning's professional goals instead.

In conjunction with the rose and lightning imagery, Dunn and Chevalier use particular modes of punctuation to illustrate and then amplify their protagonists' interior voices. Both novelists' unusual placement of colons and italicized phrases, along with the frequency of both, draws attention to key themes and characters' internal thoughts. For both authors, punctuation becomes a powerful tool for depicting and examining nuances within the human identity.

The metaphorical imagery in both novels and the distinct punctuation usage combine to create a distinct and memorable interior representation for each female lead. Such interior representation is notably absent from Scott's *Waverley* and represents, in addition to the simple whims of these characters, the nuance of female identity and a myriad of possibilities for women beyond the traditional virgin/whore dichotomy.

Interiority in Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*

Written around the same time as *The Queen of Subtleties* and *Remarkable Creatures*, the work of another female historical novelist similarly offers an intimate, if contrasting, view of its primary characters' internal composition and identity. In *Wolf Hall*, prestigious literary prize winner Hilary Mantel constructs interiority, most specifically for her male protagonist, Thomas Cromwell. In an interview with Susan Bordo, published both on Bordo's website and in her book, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn*, Mantel explains that

You have to think what you owe to history. But you also have to think what you owe to the novel form. Your readers expect a story. And they don't want it to be two-dimensional, barely dramatized. So (and this is queasy ground) you have to create interiority for your characters. Your chances of guessing their thoughts are slim or none; and yet there is no reality left, against which to measure your failure. (230)

The interiority of characters that Mantel discusses has proven to be central feature of her novels, particularly *Wolf Hall*, and a key detail in the critical discussion surrounding them; it is noted in almost any review or analysis focused on a novel of the *Wolf Hall* trilogy. Mantel brings this striking and clearly important element to the forefront, but the techniques she employs in her quest to bring readers into Cromwell's head seem at first a bit unusual. De Groot notes that "*Wolf Hall* tracks several key years in the life of Thomas Cromwell (specifically 1521-35), narrating events, both domestic and national, from his

own particular point of view, in a deeply complex, third-person narrative style” (*Remaking History* 23). In “The Life and Times of Thomas Cromwell: *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*,” Karin L. Kross describes how “Mantel nests the reader within Cromwell’s busy brain; the limited third person style is at first slightly disorienting, in that sometimes you find yourself stumbling over exactly who the pronoun “he” refers to at any given time. (Hint: It’s usually Cromwell.)” This narrative technique can be a bit confusing, but given a few pages to sink in, it becomes a very effective tool for positioning our eyes from the stance of our unusual hero: “soon you slip into the rhythm of Mantel’s extraordinary, elegant prose; language that guides you through the story like a steersman’s light hand on the tiller” (Kross).

When examining Mantel’s depiction of interiority of Cromwell, most critics refer to the opening of *Wolf Hall* where readers first encounter the protagonist as a boy and quickly get a sense of the narrator’s viewpoint. Many critics rely on this scene to bolster their argument because it gives such a clear demonstration of the strong viewpoint to come in the next five-hundred pages: “Add to this, his left eye is blinded; but if he squints sideways, with his right eye he can see that the stitching of his father’s boot is unraveling. The twine has sprung clear of the leather, and a hard knot in it has caught his eyebrow and opened another cut” (Mantel 3). In the first section of the book, spanning only eight, relatively short paragraphs, the pronouns “he,” “his,” and “him,” are used only seven times to refer to Walter Cromwell, while they prominently refer to his son and our protagonist, Thomas, a total of 48 times. This small fact, in itself, should demonstrate Mantel’s commitment to her main character, and Stephen Greenblatt, in the third section of his review for *The New York Review of Books*, “How It Must Have Been,” affirms

this scene's significance, questioning "What is established here? The murderous violence of his father, of course, but also the novelist's ability to bring us extremely close to her subject, close enough to follow the sightline from his eye to the stitching of the father's shoe." As evidenced by Dunn and Chevalier's parallel narration of interiority, this technique is not exclusive to Mantel; however, the significant critical acclaim Mantel receives for her narrative style, and the corresponding lack of analysis of both Dunn and Chevalier, suggests that this technique is most often appreciated when it is done from a male point of view.

Rather than use a complicated version of third-person point of view, Dunn and Chevalier use first-person point of view to help build interiority for their protagonists from page one. First-person narration offers a direct entrée into a character's thoughts and emotions, but instead of simply telling these stories from direct female perspectives, both contemporary historical novelists go much further in constructing interiority for their protagonists, employing particular modes of punctuation and metaphorical imagery to accomplish this undertaking.

Metaphorical Imagery in Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* and Chevalier's *Remarkable Creatures*

Metaphorical imagery plays a vital role in Dunn and Chevalier's construction of interiority for their protagonists and female identity in their novels. Suzannah Dunn offers a bold, independent, and forthright female protagonist, particularly through Anne Boleyn's dialogue. More interesting, though, is what happens outside of the characters' direct dialogue as Dunn covertly reinforces the image of that independent and resilient woman with her continual use of flower symbols and imagery. With this recurring

imagery, Dunn also expands her revised depiction of women beyond the narrow confines of Anne Boleyn's well-known life events, building for readers an understanding of Dunn's ideas that is not tethered to specific historical events or famous personas.

Though *The Queen of Subtleties* begins with Anne Boleyn's perspective, and the inclusion of rose and rosebud imagery, along with an engaging use of color symbolism throughout, are fruitful ground for analysis, it is this technique in Lucy's sections that are my primary focus here, given her status as the new woman. Dunn contrasts Lucy against Anne Boleyn's striking presence to help delineate the two, and with the confectioner's meeker personality and stifled dialogue, the flower imagery in her sections becomes even more integral to the construction of character interiority.

Upon meeting musician, Mark Smeaton, Lucy Cornwallis sets herself to a new and daunting task: "What I want to do is make something like a real rose from sugar. As like a real rose as I can" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 78). Mirroring what authors attempt with the construction of a realistic protagonist, as close a representation to human nature as possible, Dunn acknowledges with this task the difficulty faced by her predecessors, as well as herself and her contemporaries. "But roses, folded in on themselves, are hard to capture" (78), she admits. Likewise, historical fiction and its characters, though relying on some semblance of historical fact, must be supplemented heavily by imagination while still expected to be authentic and believable. Like all those before and after her, Dunn must create "A rose made of sugar, but with very little that's sugary about it" (78). Both Dunn and Chevalier, however, take this task a step further as they offer a different way to sculpt a rose that represents a new, perhaps truer, version of history—one that acknowledges more than two types of women.

In Lucy's kitchen, Mark admits he cannot visualize the origin of sugar and spices, "can't imagine the plants" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 36), and through his ignorance, Dunn draws attention to the tendency of authors to make assumptions about women and their historical agency. Lucy continues, "Reaching into a bowl, I took a rose petal. With it on my palm, I said, 'I wonder, if you'd never seen a rosebush, whether you could imagine where this came from'" (36). As Cornwallis gives Smeaton his first glimpse of her work, he examines a rose petal, rolling it between his fingers while the narrator observes that "It kept its shape, bounced back from every fold; effectively remained untouched" (36). More than commenting on misconceptions, Dunn previews for readers her proposed revision of female depiction in nature and literature: "'I'd never thought of them as tough,' he said, and he was as surprised as I'd known he would be. 'They're not really delicate at all, are they?'" (36-37).

Simultaneously, we come to realize that Lucy is not as simple as we first imagined, and in fact within her small world, encompassing only the kitchens and a limited space outside of them, readers experience a variety of emotions and revelations with her.

Rose shapes, though, are anything but simple. Here in the kitchen we have stamps and flat molds of roses that are regularly petaled. Tudor roses. And we have one old mold of a rosebud which yields a rosebud-shaped pebble of sugar. But real roses have intricate whorls of petals as individual as fingerprints. If I were to try to make a faithful reproduction of a rose, I'd have to build it petal by petal, modeling each petal by hand; each one bowed and tapered between fingertip and thumb. (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 38)

In the second sentence, the appearance of the spatial indicator "here" grounds us in Lucy's reality, and we are alerted of the scene's importance by the delicate description of the molds and sculpting process. It is one of our first encounters with Dunn's rich

description of subtleties and easily demonstrates her character's great reverence for confectionery, nature, individuality, even art.

While the shape of the rose offers fertile ground for Dunn to critique female stereotypes and covertly discuss the challenges of writing a new truer type of historical fiction, color, too, is an obvious tool of the author: "Of my planned sugar rose, it's no longer the shape that's concerning me...What's preoccupying me, now, is the color. Red isn't easy" (*The Queen of Subtleties* 82). Dunn dedicates two full paragraphs to the color of the rose and the difficulty of producing a true rose-red. "Even the reddest lose themselves a little to become, in our hands, something else" (82), Lucy observes. Again, this metaphor comments on each author's ultimate challenge. No matter how intentional an author is about creating a realistic interpretation of women, historical fiction writers still possess a limited understanding of the past, and simply putting a woman at the center of a story won't overcome those limitations.

Color, then, displays prominently in both Anne's and Lucy's sections. For Lucy, we see a clear movement, as she mixes "More and more petals into the merest sprinkle of sugar. Pushing beyond pink into red, then deeper into red" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 108). Beyond Lucy's actions and words, Dunn's use of deepening color, from white to pink to red, mirrors Lucy's development throughout the novel. Lucy molds her sugar rose, little by little, and as the sugar transitions from a light, translucent flower to one with "fierce red blades" (205), Lucy simultaneously moves from a sane, sensible, and lonely woman to become a more passionate and hopeful woman, ready to profess her love to Mark. Further, this movement from light to dark also emulates Lucy's

professional development and increasing skill as a confectioner as Dunn weaves a plot around a new type of woman, not previously represented in historical fiction.

Like Dunn with the red rose, Chevalier further underscores the existence of an independent and resilient woman in history, the alternative to the wife and the spinster, with her continual use of lightning imagery in Mary Anning's sections of *Remarkable Creatures*. Fundamentally, lightning represents Mary's intrinsic intelligence, power, and personal ability, all of which influence her eventual success as a professional fossil hunter. Before we see the skills of the young girl emerge and develop, however, the lightning and Chevalier's descriptions of it foreshadow Mary's success and singularity.

Lightning is introduced as a visual metaphor for the third representation of womanhood in the novel's opening section. As the first word of the novel and in a section titled "Different from all the rocks on the beach," the natural force is immediately flagged as significant and interconnected with Mary Anning's character: "Lightning has struck me all my life. Just once it was real" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 3). She recounts "It marks powerful moments of my life" (3) and it "entered me when I was a baby and never left" (4). Chevalier's description of Mary's experience is brief but distinct, incorporating sight, sound, touch, and smell into three short sentences: "There was a noise, like all the trees falling down around me, and a bright, bright light, which was like looking at the sun. A buzz ran through me. It was as if I'd touched a hot coal, and I could smell singed flesh and sense there was pain, yet it weren't painful. I felt like a stocking turned inside out" (3). Killing both the woman who held her and the two girls next to her, the lightning seems to selectively spare Mary Anning, a detail that again punctuates her importance.

Though Mary was indeed struck by lightning in real life, the final sentence of the novel's opening section alerts readers to Chevalier's use of lightning to complicate her protagonist: "That is why I am a hunter: to feel that bolt of lightning, and that difference, every day" (*Remarkable Creatures* 4). Through the lightning imagery, particularly its entanglement with Mary Anning's personality and her life milestones, readers are led to understand that the natural force personifies Mary and symbolizes her development into a new type of protagonist, one who possesses and demonstrates her own agency through a successful profession.

A heroine possessing lightning contradicts traditionally gendered representations of such natural forces. While women have long been associated with the earth, as in the consistently effeminate Earth Mother, men have been associated in many cultures with the almighty "above" and the atmospheric energy that comes from the sky. Thunder and sky gods, like Zeus and Thor, are depicted as masculine, able to rule over and protect the land, and Chevalier draws on lightning's long symbolic history as the power intrinsic in those male gods to highlight the existence of another option.

At the conclusion of Mary's description of being struck by lightning as a baby, she declares, "Then I opened my eyes, and it feels like they haven't been shut since" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 3). Here, Chevalier prefaces Mary's significant growth and enlightenment throughout the novel. Mary begins as a small girl looking for broken bones on the beach and evolves into an experienced and path-breaking professional fossil hunter, uncovering marine reptiles and eventually revolutionizing her field. The strike of intuition, in Chevalier's novel, is no longer reserved for men such as the famous French naturalist, Georges Cuvier, or the president of the Geological Society of London, William

Buckland. Chevalier asserts, through the incorporation of lightning and its entanglement with Mary Anning, that women, too, can make significant contributions to the geological world and society's understanding of existence in general.

By vesting Mary with the power of lightning, Chevalier depicts women reclaiming the atmospheric force as a power of their own, one that has historically been represented in the grasp of men. Mary's personal encounter with lightning morphs into a sort of folktale, labeled as incredulous by most of the people she tells, and in fact, many references to her experience as a baby ultimately result in commendations for the male doctor credited with saving her life. Her story gets overshadowed by the version of it that focuses on him. Mary's own story—her possession of lightning and her innate skill at fossil hunting—is likewise consistently challenged and undermined by her male counterparts.

Following the landslip that traps Mary in the mud and leaves her waiting for rescue, Chevalier incorporates the lightning imagery less literally, but in a way that addresses the assumption of male possession. Contemplating her own possible death, Mary sees that Captain Cury's "finger stayed stiff, pointing up at the sky" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 144). With the death of Captain Cury, the primary male fossil hunter in the novel, Chevalier alludes to the inability of men to embody the lightning, particularly when it comes to collecting fossil specimens, in the same way as Mary Anning.

At times, the lightning imagery seeps into Elizabeth's sections as well, alluding to the older woman's integral role as Mary's mentor. Although "the air seemed to crackle and buzz" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 105), the imagery is notably muted and

never fully permeates Elizabeth's sections; Elizabeth may exhibit sparks of the power inherent in lightning, but it is clear that she does not singularly possess the same power as Mary Anning. In fact, Chevalier uses alternative images of the individual body parts that each character leads with in Elizabeth's sections as a way to chart the mentor's own development and growth as a somewhat independent woman and spinster, but distinctly not as an empowered professional.

Using the metaphor of the lightning to illustrate Mary's singularity, and in turn the third woman the author is creating in her protagonist, the novel builds upon the imagery's strength until Mary's final section, appropriately titled "The lightning that signaled my greatest happiness" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 271). Chevalier concludes this section with Mary's personal revelation that she "had come unstuck. I would never be a lady like the Philpots—no one would ever call me Miss Mary. I would be plain Mary Anning. Yet I weren't like other working people either. I was caught in between and always would be. That brought freedom, but it was lonely too" (284). With Mary's acknowledgement of her personal development and individual distinction, Chevalier empowers her protagonist to appreciate her ability and profession even as it categorized her differently than most upper class and working-class women. Mary recognizes the "in between" as a lonely place to be at times, but she also appreciates it as the epitome of her accomplishments, fully embodying her role as the alternative option for women in historical fiction.

Visual Punctuation in Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* and Chevalier's *Remarkable Creatures*

In addition to the visual imagery in both novels, these contemporary female novelists also build interiority for their heroines with the assistance of punctuation. In both of her protagonists' sections, Dunn's continual use of colons and parenthetical phrases to emphasize a word or phrase, or to denote the illustrative nature of the second part of a sentence, is a bit unusual, mainly in the high volume of its usage. This technique, however, quickly creates a distinct style and contributes to evoking a sense of the characters' complex interiority. The introduction of Mark to the story is a critical plot point, and Dunn amplifies his significance by disclosing his name for the first time following a characteristic colon: "It wasn't until then that we exchanged names: 'I'm Mark, by the way,' he said. 'Lucy,' I said. Well, why not? Richard calls me Lucy" (*The Queen of Subtleties* 37). Parenthetical phrases accomplish a similar effect throughout the novel, more heavily in Anne's sections, but still present in Lucy's as well. Although not a particular admirer of Anne, Lucy laments the queen's miscarriage, admitting that "just as suddenly I understand why: the promised baby has melted away—her last-chance princeling—and so are we, too, now, all of us; we're moving upriver away from her" (174). While useful as a sort of announcement, the colons and parentheticals also produce a conversational tone throughout the novel. Cutting sentences into shorter, digestible segments, Dunn creates the sensation of familiarity with the protagonists and their thoughts. "*Mark*: a pinch to my heart; a fierce, cheeky pinch" (121), Lucy thinks, revealing her newfound feelings for the musician and exposing readers to those same emotions.

In combination with the abundance of colons and parentheticals, Dunn intermixes italics, adding to the complexity of her writing style while conveying the private and

personal nature of her characters' thoughts and conversation. Receiving the unbelievable news that the king intends to marry Jane Seymour, Lucy asks herself, "*Oh, will you ever stop your rumor-mongering? 'The king's already married, Richard'*" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 244). These italicized words deliver specific, piercing internal thoughts and feelings, effectively grabbing the reader's attention. Littered throughout the text, this punctuation creates the illusion of Dunn's private conversations with her readers: "I suppose I felt put-upon, cornered. Tricked, even: I was a *confectioner*; I'd come here to do confectionery; why couldn't they just leave me alone to get on with it?" (165-166). Frequently, this technique reveals a layer of humor connected with Anne's character or, as in the case above, a skeptical and, at times, exasperated attitude from Lucy.

Dunn primarily uses these punctuation tools to her advantage in both Anne's and Lucy's sections, building another layer of interiority for her protagonists by taking readers inside their most private thoughts and opinions. Dunn is able both to achieve a sense of intimacy with the reader and to create the impression of being inside both the character/narrator's head and the situation they are experiencing:

The queen spoke to her little girl in rapid but heavily accented English—all about sugar, and feasts—but somehow simultaneously there was an undertow of something else, presumably Spanish. Speaking to her daughter in her mother-tongue, she called her *Maria*. I took a while--because of the accent—to recognize it: the "r" lifted deftly on the tongue as if nicked by a knife. She was *Mary* and *Maria*, and her eyes switched diligently back and forth between her mother's and the subtleties. They were the same as her mother's, those eyes: the color of an English sky. (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 166)

Incorporating all three pieces of punctuation into this one small section, Dunn uses the parentheticals, italicized words, and colons to nimbly describe Catherine and her daughter while effectively demonstrating Lucy's own admiration for and support of

Henry's first queen. This structure highlights key aspects of Lucy without the novelist directly describing her character.

Beyond effecting familiarity, Dunn's sentence structure also amplifies her characters' personalities by mirroring their individual attributes. For example, the novelist complements Lucy's logical and straightforward demeanor with short, staccato phrases. In this way, the confectioner's interest in forthright conversation and the avoidance of gossip and side stories is emphasized in the curt style of her dialogue and exposition. The cut-off phrasing of Lucy's discourse, though intensifying her brisk conversation and the perception of her sharp concentration on confectionery, still offers considerable description:

He obliges. But he's still here. True, I didn't actually say, *With you on the other side of it*. Swiping the pan from the flame, I glimpse him. Glossy black hair; pale faced, kid-pale; dark eyes. I settle the pan in a basin of water; and through the hiss of steam, I hear him saying, "You've a sore throat." Concerned. For me, by the sound of it; not for himself, for the prospect of contagion.

"Dry," I clarify; feel obliged to. "Sticky. Comes of working in here." Our confectionery kitchen is purpose-built, here, at Hampton Court: we're on the first floor above the pastry ovens. Good for sugar, not so good for me. "And from the sugar." Sugar, powdered, gets everywhere. In my hair and down my throat. (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 25-26)

The longest sentence or phrase in the above excerpt is fifteen words, but the shortest is composed of only one, and the majority of Lucy's sections are similarly condensed.

The major exception to this straightforward and segmented language comes as Dunn allows Cornwallis to fully express herself through descriptions of her confectionery pieces and professional work. Although Lucy seems primarily driven by the orderliness and control behind her work, she also demonstrates a clear appreciation for the art. There is a distinct difference in prose, and by moving from that short, succinct style to a more relaxed form, Dunn signals the importance of Lucy's work to the overall growth of our

heroine. It is in these descriptions that Lucy's hard, business-like demeanor breaks down, revealing a softer, more vulnerable personality that portrays her creative imagination in the process.

The novelist painstakingly describes the action of forming Tudor roses from syrup, using details such as when it is "Time to take the pan to the marble slab, to drop and settle the syrup, bit by bit, into the warmed, oiled molds. Three dozen Tudor roses, each the size of the circle made by forefinger and thumb" (Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties* 26). The sentences are more in-depth, and this writing style simultaneously demonstrates Lucy's intimate relationship with her work as well as her limited connection to people. A new rhythm is established along with a sense of freedom that Lucy's previous thoughts and speech had inhibited, and a sense of poetic artistry emerges as Lucy describes how the "Seeds scuttle beneath my fingertips—fennel, aniseed, caraway, coriander—as syrup dries around them, making sugar hailstones" (31).

Perhaps unconventional, Dunn's routine use of colons, italicized phrases, and parentheticals establishes a distinct style that conveys her character's interior thoughts and feelings directly in its composition. Readers get a sense of who Lucy is both through the words that are written and how they are written. While this is clearest in its emphasis of Lucy's profession and the importance of that work to her development into the alternative to Scott's wife and spinster, the familiarity it creates allows readers to experience that evolution with Lucy. That experience and immersion in turn helps readers recognize and understand Lucy as that alternative and a demonstration of the myriad of other options for female identity throughout history and more specifically, historical fiction.

At first glance, Chevalier appears not to rely as heavily as Dunn on punctuation to create her signature style and build interiority for her characters. Without the abundance of colons and italicized text, the narrative of *Remarkable Creatures* flows easily. However, the novel's first chapter, attributed to Mary Anning and little more than a page long, features the use of parenthetical dashes and colons four times. The early inclusion of this punctuation, most specifically the dashes, indicate the choice is integral to Chevalier's style and clues readers into it as a means of understanding the characters, particularly Mary. Further, these parenthetical constructions allow for interruptions to the flow of the prose, and Chevalier's regular use of this tool produces a similar result as Dunn's use of colons and italics. Sabine Boucheron-Petillon suggests this punctuation offers the "possibility of opening a dislocated and marginalized space" (qtd. in Bigot 18) while Corinne Bigot agrees that "the parenthetical does represent a privileged space of intimate communication with the reader" (27). It is through these insertions and interruptions that Chevalier achieves a conversational and casual tone, creating a sense of familiarity between the reader and Mary Anning.

Chevalier's parenthetical dashes and colons serve as signposts for explanatory statements. Here, the colon serves to offer further description and a visual of the items Mary and Fanny found together on the beach: "Fanny had the eye but hated to use it. She loved pretty things: chunks of milky quartz, striped pebbles, knobs of fool's good" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 51). However, this punctuation style is more powerful when it highlights a step in her protagonist's personal development: "It marks powerful moments of my life: seeing the first crocodile skull Joe found, and finding its body myself; discovering other monsters on the beach; meeting Colonel Birch" (4). Unlike

Dunn, Chevalier rarely uses italics as a means of expressing a character's internal thoughts; she relies much more on parenthetical dashes as a means of explanation and description, interrupting sentence after sentence to elaborate on a point, offer a definition, or divulge Mary Anning's ideas about the world. In this way, Chevalier "Indicates the boundaries between thought, speech, and voice" (Bonapfel 54) for her characters and builds a sense of interiority by relaying their thoughts, feelings, opinions, dreams, and desires through the supplemental phrases and the visual interruption provided by that punctuation.

These parenthetical phrases, while fundamentally used to explain a thought or add information, contribute more to the structure of Chevalier's writing than just extra details. In this sentence, readers not only learn that being paid for her fossils is imperative for Mary, but that she appreciates her own talent and developing skill: "It weren't just the money from selling the croc that changed things. It was knowing there was something to hunt for and I was better at finding it than most—this was what were different. I could look ahead now and see—not random rocks thrown together, but a pattern forming of what my life could be" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 111). With these insertions, Chevalier offers readers a peak of Mary's thought processes, particularly when it comes to hunting fossils and being driven by patterns.

Though commas are the most commonly used punctuation to set off a parenthetical statement, Chevalier's regular use of em dashes instead, creates a more visual interruption for readers. Dashes offer more emphasis than commas and Chevalier effectively uses them to produce a stronger signal to the importance of this extra information. People's thoughts are not perfectly linear, and the high volume of em dash

parentheticals mirrors this fact, mimicking a more natural internal process where Mary's thoughts would be segmented and interrupted by new information or ideas: "He wanted what others in Lyme had—security and the chance to be respectable—and he jumped at an apprenticeship. There was nothing I could do about it. If I were offered the chance like Joe—if a girl could be apprenticed to a trade—would I have chosen the same and become a tailor or a butcher or a baker?" (Chevalier, *Remarkable Creatures* 114). Chevalier metaphorically splits Mary Anning open and offers the heroine's personal feelings and dreams up to readers as an example of a new possibility for women, both in the present and in their identity as narrated throughout history.

The cracks introduced by Chevalier's narrative choices prove useful to understanding Mary. Bigot suggests that in one of Alice Munro's short stories, "the high number of dashes and parenthetical structures are part of narrative strategies to convey the haunting dimension of the story and to resist closure" (24). We see Mary Anning's own resistance to categorization and closure represented in the punctuation. While the men in the novel consistently attempt to consign Mary to the position of mere hunter, a laborer for the benefit of the upper class, the heroine, with the distinct support of her mentor, Elizabeth, resists those consignments. That resistance eventually pays off as Mary's contributions are acknowledged by her male counterparts. Chevalier's stylistic choices, then, emphasize Mary's break from traditional roles for women.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The roles of virgin and whore, angel and sinner, wife and spinster have long been ingrained into societal consciousness and subsequently represented in literature throughout history. The two primary options for women, then, while historically discernable throughout culture, manifested in Scott's popular and long influential novel, in the depictions of Rose and Flora and as a result became mainstay in historical fiction. Although neither Dunn nor Chevalier have read *Waverley* or any of Scott's other works, both authors were aware of Scott's status as a popular and influential historical fiction writer. Neither of these contemporary female historical novelists were drawing directly on inspiration from Walter Scott it seems, but both were inadvertently affected by and repudiating Scott's construction of the limited possibilities for women in history.

While there are other examples of Mary Annings and Lucy Cornwallises, other examples of the alternative to Walter Scott's two female tropes, Chevalier and Dunn, as innovative twenty-first-century female historical novelists, brought this alternative to life in contemporary historical fiction. Their creation of women who, with female mentors for support, succeed professionally and independent of marriage or men, asserts that a woman's identity and personal agency are not tied to a man or to her marriage status.

Their success and personal agency further the break from the traditional binary options for women and facilitate a reclamation of feminine identity in historical fiction and history.

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