

Falling from Grace

The Dukes of Mallard, 500 to 1990



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THE DUKES OF MALLARD

Viscountess Viola Vorpel, 1990

The Fitzartur–Mallard–Canard line has been called many things across fifteen centuries—noble, degenerate, illustrious, extinct. I call them what they are: a family too ancient to matter, too absurd to vanish, too entangled with history to be believed. Their dukes never laboured, their dowagers never slept and their servants never forgot. This book is not a history—it is a ledger of deceits, a satire of pedigree, a love-letter to folly. Read it as you will. I shall not explain myself further, for by the time you find these words, I shall be gone.

Preface

*Arthur Frederick Blandy, D.Phil. (Syd.), sometime Fellow in
Genealogical Studies*

It is not my purpose here to intrude myself upon the reader's attention; the documents assembled, once the property of Viscountess Viola Vorpel, require no embellishment. Nevertheless, propriety demands that the hand which has ordered these papers into legible form should be briefly acknowledged.

My academic work lies elsewhere. I devoted my Master's thesis to "*U and Non-U: Linguistic Indicators of Class in English Domestic Service*" (University of Oxford, 1954), later developing these enquiries in a series of monographs: *On the Speech of Gentlemen and Their Servants* (1958); *The Decorum of Address: From Mistress to Miss* (1962); and *Language as Ladder: Social Class and the Idiom of Distinction* (1967). Though these contributions were, I venture to suggest, not without merit, they failed to secure me that elusive tenure so casually conferred on less industrious scholars.

It was Octavia Mallard—herself a formidable mind and, I am proud to say, my doctoral supervisor—who first encouraged me to think of language not as neutral medium but as instrument of power. This lesson informs the present work. It is by no means *my* history, yet I trust my ordering of these disparate documents will be judged fair, though frank. I have resisted the temptation, common to family editors, to tidy scandal, suppress indiscretion or bowdlerise speech. If the Mallards, Dukes and Blandys appear in these pages neither better nor worse than they were, then I shall be content. That, at least, is my profession.

1928 Viscountess Viola Vorpel (Prefatory Note)

You will find in these pages fragments, trifles, diaries, fables, ditties, sermons and other scraps besides. They do not always match, nor are they obliged to. The Dukes never cared to be understood—why should their record be simpler than their reign?

There are keys, naturally. Every family keeps them. A butler's ring, a house-keeper's apron, a dowager's pocket, a child's rhyme. None are labelled and most have been misplaced. From time to time you may stumble on one; more often you will only discover the lock.

Do not trouble yourself overmuch. Return later and the same words will have changed. The Mallards are like that: elusive, ridiculous, eternal. You will read this book more than once if you mean to know it at all—and even then you will only know what it allows.

1985 Viscountess Viola Vorpel's notes on the fragments

These fragments are like the Mallards themselves: grand, ridiculous, elusive. They make sense only with the proper keys and the keys are, of course, never where you expect to find them. A house-keeper might keep them in her apron; a Duke might swallow them whole and forget; a Mallard might sell them for a song and then claim them lost. And yet, even without the keys, there is meaning. Each reading will unlock another door—though often not the one you thought you were opening.

One ought not to expect heraldry to speak the truth. Our Mallards bear lettuces and gryphons on their shields, never the bird whose name they carry. A pity, perhaps, for the drakes at least are gorgeously attired, shimmering green and gold. The hens are duller to look at, yet much cleverer: their wits, not their plumage, keep the brood alive. In this, as in so much else, the heralds preferred invention to observation.

Publisher's Preface

The present volume was discovered in 2018 in a cedar trunk, bequeathed anonymously to a provincial auction house in Sussex. Among its contents were correspondence of uncertain date, fragments of annotated histories and a bound typescript bearing the title *Falling from Grace*, attributed on its flyleaf to “Viscountess Viola Vorpel (1930–2010?).”

The question mark is not ours. Throughout the work, the Viscountess refers to herself both in the first person and in the third, sometimes as an observer, sometimes as an editor of her own text. She signs a few passages “VV,” others “Vorpel,” and in two places only

with the letter “M.” Whether these differences are the result of multiple hands or deliberate dissimulation, we cannot be sure.

Of her life little is known, though oral tradition in certain literary circles places her at Oxford in the 1950s, in Paris during the student unrest of 1968 and in Sydney in the 1990s. The Mallard family—whom she traces with an enthusiasm bordering on obsession—are never once mentioned in official peerage records. Nevertheless, the persistence of her detail, her reliance on genuine historical texts and the fragments of correspondence interleaved with her own voice suggest that *some* aspect of her narrative is rooted in reality, though whether in blood, marriage or imagination we leave to the reader.

We publish this edition as we found it: incomplete, contradictory and occasionally nonsensical. The Viscountess herself warns against tidy histories, preferring—as she remarks in her marginalia—“to stitch confusion into the seams, lest anyone mistake certainty for truth.”

Editor’s Preface

As the originals are in a fragile state and in some cases written in obscure hands, we have chosen to present plain transcriptions for the reader’s ease. Where inconsistencies arise, they reflect the sources.

The reader will observe that the family appears under a variety of names: Fitzartur, Mallard, deMallard, deCanard and several more foreign incarnations. This is no error of editing. Over fifteen centuries, the line gathered, by marriage or by royal creation, an assortment of titles stretching across Europe.

The Editors have preserved the usage as it stands in the sources, however contradictory, for the variety itself is the truest reflection of the house: a dynasty at once everywhere and nowhere, ancient and absurd but never without a style in which to sign its name.

(All documents have been verified as a true record during the period between 1750 and 1990.)

Introduction

Herein lies the story of a once illustrious house and its family, now greatly reduced as all historic greatness eventually is. The line persists though now in penury: the current Duke lives in a council flat, the size of which is less than that of a footman’s broom closet in the mansions of yesteryear.

Though rarely seen by the public eye, nevertheless this family has exerted tremendous influence on the lives of many thousands of people over many generations.

This then, is their story: an evolution and a devolution. It demonstrates that the mighty may well fall and in their place will arise a lesser version—as the line remains extant though more palatable to our modern tastes. Seen through the eyes of both themselves, their offshoots and those faithful retainers who have persisted through these generations, herein you will unearth—as we have done—an archival record crossing hundreds of years. Private papers, legal documents, letters, newspaper clippings and more delineate a family falling from grace; slowly crumbling as did their titles, houses and estates—attributable significantly to that blind public eye.

On the following pages, you will discover as much of their family tree as pertains to this valuable historic record and a smaller inset demonstrating how our own family intersected with theirs these past 250 years.

You will undoubtedly note a discontinuity in some years. As the estates were broken apart, much of their history disappeared—scattered across the globe like confetti. We have indeed been most fortunate to have kept our own family archives. We are also greatly indebted to the DeMallard family's preference for amassing as much of these estates as was possible and much that was not of value beyond themselves.

Additionally, we have been most fortunate to have had, within our own circle, a psychic of great renown and perspicacity who, after much concentration, has long been in contact with their family ghost. For every great house—and especially those of such antiquity—has one or two. Where they disappear to, once their home has been demolished, we leave to your imagination. In this instance, the singular family ghost remains the epitome, the stalwart, of the family motto. It is unclear—and cannot be verified for he allows no individual specifics—when he lived but his recollections have proved most enlightening.

As the family is vast across generations, we have in this work, chosen to limit our investigations to the primogeniture and to the lesser female line—those two branches of inheritance most likely to vanish without recognition and yet most revealing of the family's true character. Should this book prove of interest to scholars and the public alike, we shall endeavour to trace the fortunes of those members who sought power and influence as ViceRoys in the farthest reaches of the Empire. Our family inevitably followed their fortunes where ever they found themselves, except in the council flat.

A.F. Blandy

[The Blandy name was much bandied and besmirched during the 18th century. That taint did not pursue the family through the generations and the name of Blandy is now most suitably associated

with centuries' long, loyal service to a dynastic ogliarchy, now much diminished.]

Artful comment

Permit me to introduce myself: I am Art.

The ghost of a most prominent and notably distinguished aristocratic family—one that has weathered the ravages of history. Whether they will survive the far more savage ravages of my perspective remains to be seen.

As the titular ghost, I am bound to neither time nor propriety, neither scandal nor dishonesty. I may flit in or out, ascend or descend, drift beyond.

For you see, like my counterpart Mab, I do not exist, except in relation.

Mallard House

*Extract from The Illustrated Guide to the Seats of the Mighty,
1932*

There is an arrogance—an hauteur—that naturally assists primogeniture. A cold detachment, devoid of feeling, that arrives, arm in arm, with 300,000 acres and the people to tend them.

Mallard House is less a dwelling than an accretion—a brooding mass of stone whose wings have sprouted at odd angles for centuries, each generation adding corridors to conceal rather than connect. The visitor who stepped across its threshold found not a hall but an antechamber, then another and another, until the mind lost count and the body lost direction. Staircases broke away like ribs from a carcass, some climbing nowhere, others subsiding into shadowed basements. A gallery would stretch into darkness, its end never visible; a suite of chambers would lie silent, as though no door had been opened since the reign of a forgotten king.

It was said that from the entrance to the great hall was a walk of half a mile—and yet, no two visitors agreed on the route. The dining rooms multiplied like fungi, the libraries branched and contradicted each other and closets swelled to the size of chapels. At times the house seemed intent on consuming its inhabitants, drawing them deeper into its bowels where ceilings lowered, dust thickened and walls whispered with the sigh of draughts too regular to be natural.

From the outside, Mallard House presents a face of mute grandeur—battlements sagging under ivy, windows half-blinded, roofs scabbed

with lichen—but within it was a labyrinth of inheritance, as if the very stones bore the burden of primogeniture and would not permit escape.

Approached by a drive so straight and interminable one might think the landscape had been laid out not by gardeners but by surveyors with a ruler and no imagination, Mallard House presents itself at last like a mirage of permanence. The visitor is impressed less by its beauty—which is not considerable—than by its bulk, its breadth and the insistent squareness of its pretensions.

Built upon the grandest of scales, the house is said to have over one hundred windows facing south and not a single one of them opened in the last century. The great central court, designed to impress carriages, now impresses only the motorist with the inconvenience of turning his vehicle within it.

The house's famed symmetry is its own worst enemy. No matter which façade one approaches, it looks much the same: vast, joyless and intent upon its own eternity. Those who live within—or rather, those who serve those who live within—speak of draughts that run like arrows along its endless corridors and of rooms so numerous that some have not been entered since the death of the 21st Duke.

Still, one cannot deny Mallard House is a monument to the most aristocratic of qualities: the conviction that size alone confers dignity. Visitors are recommended, if they value their digestion, to admire it only from a distance.

Surrounded by its ancient deer park, where twelve hundred fallow and a smaller herd of noble red deer ran wild, Mallard House was approached by a drive three-quarters of a mile long, bordered with yews grown to a height of ninety feet. The house, with its three hundred and sixty-five windows—one for each day of the year—sat at the centre of this prospect, receiving all comers with proper majesty.

Lakes and ponds, filled with ducks both ornamental and edible, lay across the estate like mirrors to the sky. A fleet of white Mallard ducks was so carefully tended that it had its own keeper, whose duty was to protect them from foxes, poachers and occasionally the Duke's own chefs. Lesser flocks were encouraged to fatten themselves for the table.

Scattered through the grounds were statues of Roman and Greek worthies, discreetly hidden behind trees at the insistence of a former Lady Mallard, who considered their embarrassing nudities unsuited to the terrace view. Between these monuments the eye might stumble upon a crumbling pagoda, an abandoned folly or some other ornamental whatnot the Dukes had ordered built, admired briefly and then neglected for centuries.

The walled flower garden, of truly absurd dimensions, contained a maze of camellias so elaborate that visitors mistook them for roses, as well as stands of *Agnus Castus* and *Apocynum* for those with botanical interests. The kitchen garden, of nine acres, enclosed nearly ten thousand square feet of glasshouses forcing peaches, grapes, melons, cucumbers and whatever exotic fruit a Duke had once demanded but forgotten to eat.

Below stairs, the wine cellars spoke eloquently of the family's tastes: one forty-two feet by twenty, the other a modest thirty-six by twelve. Both were stocked with port, sherry, Madeira and table wines, together with a huge ale vat of fifteen hundred gallons resting upon trestles stout enough to hold an army.

At the back of the house, beyond the noble arched gateway flanked by ornamental pillars, stood the stables, with sixty stalls for horses. Beside them, the coach house contained half a dozen dark-blue carriages—drags, omnibuses and the venerable family coach with its panels emblazoned with heraldic bearings and the family motto, *Perpetuum Excellentiam* ("Unending Excellence").

Nor did the estate stop at the land's edge. For centuries the Dukes had maintained their own shipyards, felling their own timber, launching their own yachts and manning them with their own sailors. When they "removed" for the season, it was never to London—such vulgarity!—but to a vast estate in the Scottish Highlands, to their Irish demesne or to their private island in the Channel, once styled *L'isle d'Anatis*. Thus a whole floating city, absurd in size and complexity, might be seen to move about the seas with Mallard banners fluttering.

At their height, the Mallards employed more than five hundred indoor servants and a further eight hundred gardeners, farmers, quarrymen and outdoor men—including a hereditary stone-mason, for there was always a folly, archway or vault to repair. These tended not only to the needs—real and simulated—of the family and their guests but also to the Dowagers in their lodges and the long list of lesser houses kept on a care-and-maintenance basis.

When the family removed to one of their other seats, most of the servants departed too, together with the gold and silver plate. Those left behind rolled up carpets, stacked chairs by the walls, swaddled lamps and door handles in holland covers, draped curtains in hessian and laid sheets of brown paper over the pictures. Once the house was so "preserved," the staff settled cheerfully into their weeks of independence, sustained by board-wages in lieu of food—a system universally agreed to be more profitable than service under the Duke's watchful eye.

Yet no Blandy ever truly slept soundly during those intervals. For the Dukes, changing their minds as was their wont, were apt to return unannounced. A hunting whim, a sudden weariness of Scotland or Ireland, an impetuous quarrel with a cousin—and within hours, Mallard House might be flung open again, blazing with lights, fires crackling in every grate, beds remade and kitchens clattering at full tilt. Worse, His Grace often arrived with thirty companions in tow, none of them servants but courtiers and favourites who travelled with their own valets and expected Mallard hospitality besides. Thus the reduced household, caught out, were obliged to serve double and treble duty, working like demons to supply a banquet, dress the guests and put the House back into splendour as though it had never slumbered.

Mab whispers

Who is primogenitor, the sire or the soil, the seed or the rot? What is life but a tapestry half-gnawed by satyrs, smeared by nymphs, tangled by dryads who never learned their weaving? You call it lineage, I call it loom-dust. Jupiter himself has tugged a thread or two and found his thunder unravelled. Diana's bowstring? A snarl. Venus' girdle? Knotted and torn.

Do you think your silks fare better? Ha! I am Mab, spinner and spoiler, sibyl and sprite. I twine your houses like ivy over ruins and when I laugh the Fates forget their shears. You have temples of stone; I have threads and threads undo all.

The Edifice

500 to 1800

570: The Giant

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

There once lived a giant. A man of such high stature and unsurpassing ugliness that none dared approach him. As is often that way in such matters, this giant had stood still, *locus standi*, for so many centuries that those who dwelled nearest had named him “menhir velt”. Viewed as he was from leagues’ distant, he stood as testament to time’s harsh currents that sped across a plane few chose to cross.

Such was his menacing aspect and the tales that grew up about him. He stood tall, his head bowed as though he was contemplating the single shaft of silver that rose from what might be supposed to have once been his finger. His hat, perhaps caught in an unseen yet violent wind or crashed upon by the strike of lightning, lay to one side, forgotten to his sight.

The field in which he stood—edged all around with a farrago of villages and castles was rimmed by forests too that would not step lightly into his sight but fighting, always, to avoid the woodman’s axe—was broad and flat, enfolded and tussocked. None dared tread near him but viewed as a landmark around which all was centred. Such perhaps is the fate of such monoliths.

One day a lad, a fool in many eyes, became lost in this velde and it being one of those dark and stormy nights, told too often as a harbinger of misfortune, saw in a flash of lightning that stroke of steel and leaned his pace towards it, hoping to catch his bearings.

Had that giant been merely watching for such an innocent, adventurous child to approach? Who can say? Yet, when that boy finally clambered up and onto that outstretched finger and grasped that steel plate as his only anchor in the gusts of rain and thunder, when he stood tall and sought a refuge in any direction. When he tugged so slightly to steady himself in that blustering gale, the silvery steel worked loose, like a splinter released from beneath skin.

And the giant disappeared, as dust to dust, departing in such haste at his final delivery, he forgot his hat.

500—1940: Fitzartur seats

Before Europe resettled itself along less dynastic lines, the Fitzarturs owned many thousands of acres and many palaces, each attached to a title and each stuffed with the treasures of a nation.

Les Princes de la Mu

Château Plumecourt (literally “Feather Court”)—rumoured to have gilded duck ponds and aviaries. “Extant, location unknown” fits with a hidden French estate.

Marquis deCanard (lost 1789)

Palais de l’Oie Blanche (Palace of the White Goose)—ransacked in the Revolution, its marble floors supposedly engraved with waddling tracks.

Baron Entenbraten (lost 1848)

Schloss Knusperente (Castle of the Roast Duck)—a German pile, mocked by locals for its kitchens larger than its chapel.

Condé el ánade (lost 1842)

Palacio de los Patos Reales (Palace of the Royal Ducks)—Andalusian, its fountains designed to spout wine for visiting grandees until the pipes clogged.

Principe Anatroccolo (lost 1919)

Villa del Germoglio (Villa of the Duckling/Sprout)—a Belle Époque villa on Lake Como, seized as war reparations.

Viscount d’Anetis (given to the nation, 1910)

Maison des Nénuphars (House of the Waterlilies)—donated in a gesture of false noblesse, now a municipal gallery showing bad landscapes and one genuine Raphael.

All titles marked “lost” were either seized, burned or redecorated beyond recognition. The Dukes persisted in recording them as “mislaidd,” as if they might one day be recovered under a sofa cushion.

Even after the French lands were lost, the style was retained, as was the habit of claiming precedence over their cousins.

The substance of those holdings has long since withered, yet the titles persist, polished as carefully as the family silver. The right to sneer—particularly at those who only possess one title or worse, none—is still zealously guarded.

Artful comments

Do not let the unlettered sneer fool you. The titles are real enough. When I waged across Gaul, the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees, I set my sons, nephews and loyal companions as princes, counts and marquises. Did you imagine those crowns fell from heaven like apples? They were mine to grant and grant them I did. The parchment may be faded, the lands may be lost but the names remain, polished by generations of Mallards as keenly as the hilts of their unused swords.

The Fitzartur shield

There are two versions of the famous Fitzartur shield. The one—white on black—we are used to seeing: this for the ease of reproduction in heraldry books, newspapers and the like.

The other—along with a host of other national treasures—is secreted in a family vault of great antiquity somewhere in London or thereabouts. (The keen researcher may find a trace in the archives of some crooked royal line or other.)

This shield—its surface black—exquisitely worked with costly embellishments is the one presented to the 1st Duke when he was created by his father. An extraordinary artwork in itself, its very existence undermines many a historian's appreciation of such early, magnificent craftsmanship.

As with so much we do not understand about our ancestors, it is impossible to accurately determine if the elements on that shield are or create, myth. Consider its description:

“A crowned gryphon en rampant. Holding a crown on its right paw, a cowrie shell in its left, standing on a sword laying flat beneath. And the motto: *perpetuum excellentiam.*”

Are we to assume the gryphon represents the lands the Duke was given across borders? Or that these too are mythic times? Does the sword held in place promise war vanquished by that very myth? Those crowns too. Does the one that dangles so carelessly signify a spare crown, as our Dukes had so many?

The motto itself tends to a lie for see how the unending Ducal family is all but extinguished.

And yet perhaps it is the shield itself that tells the truest story: a beast holding what it does not need, trampling on what it cannot use, crowned and yet still reaching for another.

Primogeniture

550: Eadwulf Mallard

The tale is that Eadwulf Mallard, a free farmer of the fen-lands, went to fetch his bride with coins jingling in a leather pouch and a cloak stitched by his mother. He spoke no Latin and signed with a cross. The priest at the ceremony, old Frithwald, had to be prompted through the blessing, muttering half-remembered scraps from the Psalms.

What mattered was not the prayer but the exchange: the silver weighed in the palm, the heifer's rope pressed into the bride's brother's hand.

Ceolburh herself was cleverer than all of them. Later generations whispered she introduced the custom of "conjugal conversation": she would bargain with her husband at night, demanding the cottage and meadows in writing as her *morning-gift*. It was her way of ensuring her children would inherit something more than reeds and mud.

The story was retold down the Mallard line, though no one knew if it was true or only family legend. What remained certain was that the Mallards began with a bargain, not a blessing—silver, a cloak and a cow, inked badly by a priest who did not know his own Church's rules.

673: Fragment of a Marriage Contract (Mercia)

In the year of the Lord 673, Mallard son of Eadwulf gives to Ceolburh, daughter of Herefrith, twelve shillings of silver, one cloak of good weave and a heifer with calf. Thus she is taken as his wedded wife.

If she bear him children, her morning-gift shall be the cottage at Fenstoke and three acres of meadow.

If she depart from his hearth without cause, she shall restore twice the price.

If he dismiss her without fault, he shall restore her dowry and one half again.

Witnesses: Frithwald the priest, who cannot write and Hrothgar, reeve of the hundred.

The script breaks off after a few lines, leaving ink blotches and half a cross for signatures.

1460: Off with his head

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

There once lived a king who was exceedingly good at his job. He spent every day of every week fighting and smiting and beheading all his enemies, expanding his territories and being terribly unpleasant to anyone who stood in the way of his ambitions. Afraid of no one and of nothing, not even of Glod.

Now Glod, mild of aspect yet iron in patience, whispered in the King's ear: "*Take thou one day in seven for rest, lest thou find thyself alone upon the earth with none left to conquer.*"

One day, wearied after his latest successful battle, he decided to follow that advice. He declared that henceforth, one day each week would be given over to a different form of pleasurable occupation.

He declared that on Saturdays bawdy stage-plays, maintaining lords of misrule, May games, church-ales, festive gatherings, feasts and wakes; piping, dancing, playing dice, cards, bowls, tennis and football and such other pastimes; drunkenness and whoredom; bear-baiting, cock-fighting, hawking and hunting; holding fairs and markets; reading lascivious and wanton books; and an infinite number of such like practises and exercises were to be conducted with rigour and zest. Or else.

Glod wasn't convinced that this was the right way to go about the matter. He had really only meant a day of rest from the King's exertions.

So Glod sent one of his misbegotten sons, Eustace, Rebbot of St-Nonce-de-Fey with a copy of a letter that had fallen from heaven on to the rooftop of a Fey church—an event which had caused the people of that area to lie on the ground for three days and nights, together with their spiritual advisers, imploring the mercy of Glod. Who admittedly was mildly displeased at such a waste of time.

This heaven-sent document, which the Rebbot took from town to town on a preaching tour against Saturday pleasures, warned that violations of the fourth commandment would be punished by a rain of stones, wood and scalding water at night; in addition, the fruit trees would wither, the fountains would dry up, the pagan nations would come and slay them all, and, as if all this were not enough, fearful animals would devour women's breasts and men's nutmegs and cabbages. Moved by these threats and by the Rebbot's exertions, the people vowed not to let anything be sold on the Glod's special day, except meat and drink to travellers; not to work on that day; and to give money to the Rebbot.

To ensure the people and their King took proper notice, at Biranly a carpenter and a weaver who went on working after three o'clock one Saturday were struck with the palsy. At a village in Linshire dough put in a hot oven after that hour stayed unbaked till the Monday; elsewhere a man who had baked a cake on a Saturday evening found that it bled when he bit into it next day; while a miller trying to work his mill on a Saturday discovered, no doubt to his horror, that blood gushing from between the stones was preventing them from turning. Glod and his son decided that might be enough.

“Behold,” cried the Rebbot, “thus are Glod’s warnings made manifest.”

One Monday morning, the King had the Rebbot beheaded, collected all the money into his treasury and returned to slewing.

1625: Patronage of a Duke

Fowl is fair and fair is fowl

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

A playwright of some repute petitioned the Duke for patronage. After he was declined with the characteristic bluntness of that nobleman, he is said to have taken revenge on the insult levelled at his works by basing three witches in his next play on the three Dowagers then resident at the Mallard Estate.

An injunction was sought by the Duke’s representative. The case failed, on the grounds that His Majesty’s Players could not be held accountable for likenesses taken from life, lest all noble families be found upon the stage.

Indeed the notoriety of the case increased interest in the playwright’s works. Such that nowadays the name of Mallard is meaningless while that of the play and its creator lives on eternally.

1711: The curse of the Mallards

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Toil and trouble, rich in strife;
That is the tale of a Lady’s life.

Cassandra Purslane was supranatural, thus not bound by the laws of god or man. Her affianced and betrothed, Mordred von Hessian-Bagge, though in love, was a fool and held high office in the court of their

supreme highnesses, those majesties of Buringminstershire. He was their court jester.

Test the jest, count, recount
Tail the tale, pale
Pass my arse arise with class.

Everyone at court thought that was uproariously hilarious though none understood the words, only the sounds they made.

Yet Cassandra knew: he had stolen those lines from her diary and he was in danger of miscasting a powerful spell.

She danced at his wedding though not as his bride, for she was no fool herself. Yet she had caught a duck and made him a Duke, all the better for casting wide. Where a more powerful sorceress may have made him a swan or a lesser woman may have kissed a toad and made herself a prince, Cassandra had no use for either and even less for a Hessian-Bagge.

So a witch, I hear you say. A dark forbidding creature not to be met on a moonless night, lest cows should die and children stillborn. Tis a common understanding of a witch that she be old and cold and ugly. Haggard and foul smelling like a midden not maiden. Dressed all in black—that shade worn only by the most rich, most high. A crooked nose of that poisoner Lucrezia? Hiding her wiles. While casting her net of evil intent? Did she have a cauldron? Yes but which woman did not. Did she mix herbs and spices stolen from a kitchen or gathered beneath pale moonlight from rocks and crevices, from forest paths and grottos? Yea, for when else are certain flowers to appear.

Yet, there was not among them a woman more beautiful than she. She surpassed in fairness the goddesses and the petals of the privet and the blooming roses and the fragrant lilies of the fields. The glory of spring shone in her alone and she had the splendour of the stars in her two eyes and splendid hair shining with the gleam of gold.

She spent her days and nights in collecting and learning. She planted those yews we see on our drive and privet for more. Collected hemlock and foxglove, wolfsbane and corn cockles, nightshades by night and spurge by day. Marshmallow to soothe and knitbone to mend, yarrow for tisanes and bezoar stones for all.

Much loved, nay cherished by all who met her on path, in court, at castle Mallard, this soon proved her undoing. For having given to her Lord the heir he required, she was soon cast beyond the pale for her beauty now fading, her wisdom now growing, her knowledge now broader, too dense for a superstitious Duke to withstand.

Her gift for far-sight went often unheeded—by men at their peril. To their long-lasting rue for all she witnessed soon came to pass.

No lodge for that Duchess. No headstone, a flat-stone for fear she might rise, swollen with decay and revenge.

Yet so it is that men recast those very spells, of which their women-folk stand accursed. And bury wisdom and health, hearth amid soil: turned and turned like a heavenly garden in purgatory. Waiting, always awaiting we witches of yore, of lore and foretelling.

So it is told among us still, that a curse passed her lips with each dying breath. A curse to last ages: ducks you were and always shall be. Mind how you step, lest your line exhale its final gasp.

1720: Agnus Castus et Apocynum

My mam was burned for a witch. Fire and brimstone they used while she writhed among the cherubs and wished herself in Bethlehem.

Aye but I lie, for which crime I speak from Whittington College.

She was hanged. As all unfair ladies are hung. Strangulated as befits a servant of the Pope, that she-devil of mischief, who flaunts her wares in White Friars, dragging chains for a soupçon of our native gold.

Artful comments

That Grand Dame was never hanged.

Neither was her son ever less than a liar—sent down from Oxford—he was never sent to Newgate. Poetic licence married to title and immense wealth, he could say what he chose.

We hear little from her: women's voices are crowded out in history to make way for the greatness of their men. Those harbingers of fate's demand that skew our sense of time, of fashion or of success in crushing dissent.

Of madresses disguised as insensibilities. Of Bedlam, that dungeon of despair, where all dissenters are sent to quash and wallow; watched amidst great hilarity by richly dressed women with too much time to spend.

Neither was she, that Dame, sent to a madhouse. She was not mad—merely a woman past her usefulness. Her status as Dowager, with only the imagined dignity the title conferred, was her sole guard against public mistreatment.

She owned no rights: they had devolved, along with her fortune, first to her now-dead husband, then to her son—by rights, by law.

Yet the scandal of a Dowager imprisoned was too great to be borne. Placed instead in a living mausoleum—a gilded, dowered cage—on the

edge of the estate, she was kept from harm's intentions. She had long since outlived herself. Now fresh blood could be spilled in her stead.

So he married an heiress and left her to bleed, betwixt children borne and expiring early.

1732: A cat of ten tales

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

At Whittington College there once lived a cat. Friendless entirely but for rats and mice, which being too delicious did not make worthwhile, longterm companions. Instead she befriended those inmates who still held their tongues. She listened attentively to their stories of cat's paws and blush. Told none of herself but lapped at their bowls of whey, attended to their chatts and allowed herself to be petted beneath her petticoats loose.

"We men have but one life, you cats have but ten." Was a common complain yet, trapped as she was, there was no escape for her either. "I've a cat's foot at home," they'd blather, "no cicisbeo for her. I'm in here for shooting the cat, no more; and lettered mark you for the sham of it."

"Oh, snitchel his gigg or fillip his nose," she often said to comfort and as all she had ever heard from her sire. "Tis better than Bedlam to rest your head here."

Many years passed in happy discontent until one fine, snowy day, a Duke arrived in full regalia with no character to tarnish his great name.

This Duke had been fined in the Temple two shillings and sent to rest his heels in Whittington for striking a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street; and it seemed his hands ever itched to be revenged and have his pennyworth's out of them, so tickling religious orders with his tales and yet so pinching them with his truths, that friars, in reading his books—and monks—know not how to dispose their faces between crying and laughing.

He made good his garnish and took no male companions, for his cabbage was whiffled and his nutmegs too small.

That cat had bethought herself worthy to be the peculiar of His Grace. Yet his tastes ran a different course: to Italians and such Greeks who wallowed and swallowed that duddering rake's ducks and drakes.

Until soon he made his way to the paviour's workshop, having cried peccavi.

1730: Marriage Licence Bond & Affidavit

Diocese of London, the Year of Our Lord 1730

Know all Men by these Presents, That we, Edward August Fitzartur, Duke of Mallard and Marquis deCanard, of the Parish of St. James, Westminster, in the County of Middlesex and James Fitzroy, Earl Fitzroy, of the Parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, in the said County, are held and firmly bound unto the Right Reverend Father in God, the Lord Bishop of London, in the Sum of Two Hundred Pounds of lawful Money of Great Britain, to be paid unto the said Lord Bishop, his Successors or Assigns; for which Payment well and truly to be made we bind ourselves and each of us, by himself, for the Whole, our Heirs, Executors and Administrators, firmly by these Presents.

Sealed with our Seals, dated this Twentieth Day of May, in the Fourth Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c.

The Condition of this Obligation is such, That if hereafter there shall not appear any lawful Let or Impediment, by reason of any Pre-Contract, Consanguinity, Affinity or any other lawful Cause whatsoever but that Edward August Fitzartur, aforesaid Duke deCanard and the Right Honourable Lady Lettice Elizabeth Anne Fitzroy, Spinster, daughter of the Most Noble the First Earl Fitzroy, may lawfully marry together and if the said Marriage shall be openly solemnised in the Parish Church of St. James aforesaid or in such other Church or Chapel as by the Laws of this Realm they may of Right lawfully marry in and if they shall save harmless and keep indemnified the above-named Lord Bishop of London and his Successors, for and concerning the granting of the Licence for such their Marriage, then this present Obligation to be void or else to remain in full Force and Virtue.

Edward August Fitzartur (Seal)

James Fitzroy (Seal)

Affidavit

The said Edward August Fitzartur, of full Age, maketh Oath that he intendeth to intermarry with the said Lady Lettice Elizabeth Anne Fitzroy, Spinster, of full Age and that he knoweth of no lawful Impediment, by Reason of any Pre-Contract, Consanguinity, Affinity or any other lawful Cause whatsoever, to hinder the said intended Marriage; and that he prayeth Licence to be granted for the Solemnization thereof accordingly. Sworn before me, this Twentieth Day of May, 1730.

1730: Pas de Droit de Monseigneur

Of course he married—he had no choice in that, not with primogeniture to secure and social acceptability to maintain. Yet it did not stop him—nay, it encouraged him—rogue that he was, to be who he truly was without risk of obvious castigation, for he rarely left his estates.

Not *Droit de Monseigneur*—unless one discounted moral virgins and preferred the stable boys, who were no more able to deny him his presumptive rights than those same virgins who ought to have pined for him.

1735: Family matters

I married my sisters off, as soon as I decently could. One at 13 years; the other, less comely, at 16. They each brought illustrious prestige to reflect more colour on me, while they faded into the scenery. At little cost to my own fortunes.

My brothers, with no claim on me, were deposited, as right and proper. One to the army, the other to the Church. Let them learn their trades far from my influences.

Strategically placed, for I keep one eye open to our future family obligations. What choice do I have in the matter?

1750: Papers of the Dowager Duchess Mabel Augustine Belladonna Fitzartur

Last night I dreamed, though perhaps it was not a dream but a visitation. Mab—my namesake of old tale and fog—came to me. She stood not in velvet nor in lace, nor crowned as men would have their queens. She stood barefoot on the sodden earth, her hand filled with grass that pulled free as if to show me how nothing holds forever.

She laughed, not cruelly but knowingly and said: “*Your Dukes weigh land with titles, as if a word could fence a field. Yet the field obeys no word. The earth belongs not to man, nor to king, nor to duke, nor even to you. It belongs only to itself.*”

I woke unsettled, for my days are spent with stewards and lawyers who measure every acre, every coppice, every patch of fen and fallow. And yet, her voice lingers—whispering that what we “own” is but a story, ink on parchment, passing from hand to hand while the soil lies patient beneath.

I have not told my son, for he would sneer and say it is a woman's fancy. But I wonder if it is not Mab who holds the truth and the men who dream.

Mab whispers

And yet—what is it to “own” land? To sit on dirt and call it yours, as if the grass obeyed? The deer run, the rivers shift, the stones endure without remembering you. Men draw borders but borders bleed. What folly, to bind soil with a word and think the earth is captured. It is no one's but itself.

1750: A note from a Blandy diary

It is told among us below stairs that Her Grace spoke in her sleep and called the name “Mab.” One of her maids, a silly girl, said the Duchess had dreamed the earth could not be owned, nor measured, nor claimed, for it belonged only to itself. We thought little of it until word reached His Grace.

The Duke muttered of witchery, that such talk smelt of rebellion and worse—of a woman thinking beyond her station. He has never forgiven his mother her long life, nor her habit of speaking riddles. The family say she grows fanciful; we below say she grows dangerous.

1760: A Fitzartur fable

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a land far, far distant that is no longer there, lived wizards and witches, warlocks and winkles. Wizarding and witching to their hearts'—if not always their neighbours'—content.

There were dragons with long tails and feathered wings. Gryphons that spewed fire and ate brimstone from vast quarries. Pixies, fauns, wolves and wyverns. Unicorns, manticores and one single sphinx. Merfolk and satyrs, serpents and voluble trees. Titanic turtles and tiny tortoises. An occasional octopus or oyster, a push-me-pull-you or two. Hairy homonids and mystery monsters. Phantasmal felines and demonic dogs. Serious spiders and laughing baboons. A phoenix on fire.

Pick up any bestiary you choose, perhaps the “*A Menagerie of Myth, Mania and Mystery*” and every mythical beast therein you would have

seen bounding, flying, burrowing, brewing and spelling throughout the land. And a great many other beasties that have never been seen.

Houses, huts, towers, hermits, palaces, castles, mounds, nests and burrows littered the land between swathes of webbed forests or grasslands of deep green and deep lakes filled with sword and spears, chain and lace, lilies and ducks.

Theirs was a happy existence. Of dancing and laughing, of spelling and unspelling. Of hide-and-go-seek and ringing rounds of roses. Of peeling bells and peering eyes from lakes and ponds, rivers and streams. All gushing, all thriving and writhing. Swooping and tumbling. All jolly and free.

But even boundless freedom needs a barrier, else how to tell free from not. So there was one absolutely, no-mention made on pain of pain, no crossing this line or else, rule: there was a word of immense power that could never be spoken. For it was known, somehow, that this single word would destroy them all and the land with them. It was never to be uttered or thought or whispered. Never drawn nor seen nor spelt. To spill it so would be to expose in an instant the utter futility of existence and it too would cease.

One day, a great Prince rode into the land, followed by a vast swarm of soldiers and servants, carriages and carts, women, children and at last, an old bent woman carrying a stack of sticks she'd gathered for a small fire when the Prince should choose to rest. She sat on an old tree stump and waited vainly in the hope that soon the cavalcade would turn about and she could rejoin its tail on the next march.

Meanwhile, the Prince rode forward, his horse prancing as it had been taught. He looked about at the mountains dusted with snow, the lush fields waving in the gentle breeze, the rich scent of meadow flowers and said "This is a land of magic". He and his entire retinue promptly vanished as did the land and those snow-capped mountains, the scent of fresh meadows, the wizards and witches, warlocks and winkles and dragons and gryphons and everything.

The only reason we know—and can we really trust an old wife's tale?—what the Prince said was because of an old woman carrying a bunch of dried twigs, sitting just beyond the border on a tree stump, waiting.

1772: The Noble Line of Fitzartur de Mallard and Their Kindred

It must here be noted that His Grace the 39th Duke of Mallard, in the reign of Queen Anne, enjoyed the ancient dignity of Keeper of the

Royal Duck-Ponds and Overseer of the Marshes, a sinecure said to have been granted by William the Conqueror himself upon his landing, 'that the realm might ever be furnished with fowl both fat and fair.'

From this office there flowed no duties, unless it were the annual counting of feathers but its revenues did amount to no less than £1,000,000 sterling per annum, being collected from obscure tolls on quills, marshes, millraces and sundry other matters too tedious for enumeration. So vast an income did assure the Mallards a splendour unequalled, until the melancholy day when Her Majesty Queen Victoria, being displeased at such superfluity, did suppress the office altogether, declaring it "*more fit for a nursery rhyme than for a modern Treasury.*"

At the same time, the younger branches of the family were not neglected. Lord Duckling Mallard, second son of the Duke, was, at the age of eighteen months, gazetted Cornet of Horse in His Majesty's Blues and Royals. Though still in long coats and incapable of speech beyond '*Ga-ga,*' his commission was duly purchased and his name entered upon the rolls, such that by the time he could walk without leading-strings he had already two years' seniority in the service. A satirical sheet of the day reported that his first word was '*Charge!*' but the nursery maid swore, with some heat, that it was '*Milk!*' In either case, his early advancement was reckoned a sign of the family's precocity in matters martial, if not entirely moral.

1786: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

I have lately been pressed with a new collection of ditties from the North Country, where that low-born poet Burns passes his time among cattle and ploughs, yet sets himself as bard to the common folk. His verses are coarse, though not without a certain rustic wit. One of his more notorious effusions, passed to me in a folded slip of paper at table, I transcribe here for my amusement and that of my heirs—if any still know the difference between poetry and parish gossip.

A Duchess whose Duke made her ready to puke,
With fumbling and f— — all night, sir,
Being first for the prize, was so pleased with its size,
That she begged for to stroke its big snout, sir.

My stars! cried her Grace, its head's like a mace,

'Tis as high as the Corsican Fairy;
I'll make up, please the pigs, for dry bobs and frigs,
With the great Plenipotentiary.

The next to be tried was an Alderman's Bride,
With a c— — that would swallow a turtle,
She had horned the dull brows of her worshipful spouse,
Till they sprouted like Venus's myrtle.

The nymphs of the stage did his ramrod engage,
Made him free of their gay seminary;
And Italian Signors opened all their back doors
To the great Plenipotentiary.

I make no judgement save to observe that even in the lowest taverns there is more candour in such ribaldry than in the sermons of our Bishops. Better a bawdy poet than a sanctimonious fool. And yet, how curious that whether among ploughmen or peers, the great engines of men's vaunts are ever the same.

1794: On the Continuance of Titles

An excerpt by "A Gentleman of No Fortune"

It is a curious contrivance of our nobility that the fewer heirs they produce, the more titles they acquire. Thus a lady, by marrying beyond sea, contrives to transfer her brother into a marquis, though no more authority attends the name than attends the title of Emperor in China, which we likewise adopt at will. The French have abolished theirs by reason of bloodshed; we preserve ours by reason of boredom. Both, it seems, are equally unreasonable.

Servitude

1720: Saint Bardos

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

When Saint Bardos of Nestoniorium was a young lad—so not a saint as you must be dead a century first and have procured a miracle—his family did not live in Nestoniorium.

Before we proceed, what I hear you ask is a miracle? It's a trifle of magic the kurch will allow so long as you're dead for a century or six. The kind of unsubstantiatable myth no one can poke or prod a missing finger at and say "ah, that there's the devil's work, that is".

When Barthus was a boy he stole a crust and lost two fingers for his crime and the bread too, which was rather unfair. Yet only his two littlest fingers were sliced cleanly off, so he could still work. His family were so embarrassed they moved to Nestoniorium and Barthus was sent to church.

He was an exceptional genuflector and rose through the ranks, higher and higher til he was created an abbot, then he rose higher still until he became a cherished poppet.

He was high and he was mighty for all he was missing his littlest fingers. And the people loved him and wished to be like him so they chopped off their fingers and formed a bridge and Barthus was made the first Pop.

By and by, Barthaus grew concerned when there were more fingers than needed for his bridge, so he invented leprosy and sent out a bit of a popul bull to tell everyone. And the crowds were terribly pleased. At last a reason to be, they exclaimed in the commoner speech of them there olden days.

And Blathaus sent a prayer to heaven and Glod promised to send his only misbegotten sons to help build huge towers and tiny clamps where all those fingerless peeples could live out in a daze. Except Glod forgot and went back to playing games with his Amazoning lady friends.

Wise men and fools came from far and wide to kiss Pop's ring. So many that soon his tailors had to create a special tabard so the Pop didn't have to sit in a wet seat too often.

Alas totalitarianum nustrus badium comes to us all and many years later Barthuse died in his sleep propped up at a window, his good eye focussed on the bridge below, the other in a dish on the sill—with a dry bum for that fashion had finally withered away, not unlike Barthuse—yet peaceful to his end.

Laid out gracefully on a stone altar, his body soon to be washed and prepared for the first mausoleum in Jistondom, his priests were astonished. For Borthous' feet had regrown. They whispered and wrote long tractual letters to one another to explain this phenomena. Conferences were held and plenty of parties were had with the ladies who lived downstairs in the Catchyercombs.

Until almost a hundred years to the day, they finally reached a unanimous decision: Pop Brithius was made a Saint.

Was it a miracle or was it fiendish magic, the work of a dervil? Who among them was brave enough to say otherwise but it were a myracal: for if the Crutch claims it so, so it must be. And so it was. And will be for ever and ever. Achew.

Titousium blathem corpora nascis

The Blandy family diaries

Like many generational servant families working in the Great Houses, the Blandys kept a diary. Filled with details about how best to serve a current Duke, the best rorts to be had, details of the family tree as it grew and spread across the estate, how to polish silver, save extra money from stipends for powder, cloth or cosmetics.

We have been lucky to peer inside a personal diary that seems to cover all their years of service from the early 1700s. Many pages are beyond legibility from age or the peculiarities of pen or quill or handwriting. The ones we produce here are from several dates and provide an uncommon insight into the real lives of many servants, especially the Blandys.

V.V.

1735: a Mrs Blandy, under cook

When one line of work fails, look for another. I was once spinner of cloth but when the mills went, the work went too. Too old to bother with men, it was alms or workhouse. Or service. I chose and I rose. At least there is shelter and money enough for my brood—and places for them here to rise.

1740: From a Blandy book of recipes

Spanifh Olio, the cheap Way

TAKE Mutton, Beef, Veal, Lamb and Pork, cut in two Pound Pieces ; then fet them off or pafs them in a Stew-pan ; then take

two Pigeons, two Teal, one Duck, two Chickens, four Snipes, two Woodcocks, one Pound of Polonia Saufages, one Pound of lean Ham & pafs off all, then ftove all in a deep Pot, with Lettuce, Savoys, Celery, Endive, a Faggot of Herbs and fome Garlick, with a little Saffron and a Handful of large Dutch Peas; feafon it with Pepper, Salt, Cloves and Mace; ftove all tender and skim it well; then make a Coolio with fome Peas or Afparagus, to lap over and afew' forc't Lettuce and Heads of Afparagus ; fo difh your Roots and Meat in Rows, your Fowl atop, then your Coolio; fo cover it and ferve away full of Liquor.

1752: Mallard Kitchens

After the year 1752, there was never again a Blandy cook in the Mallard household. By an accident of good fortune—or perhaps a more pressing memory—the fashion for the *chef de cuisine* had overtaken the nation. The Duke, never slow to seize upon a mode when it promised distinction, imported a Frenchman from one of his continental estates.

But it was not fashion alone. Aunt Mary Blandy, the poisoner and poor Uncle Francis, her victim, had left a dark aftertaste that lingered in every pot and pan. Women in kitchens, especially those with a turn for herbs, tinctures and “receipt books,” were easily whispered about as witches—and witches, as everyone knew, were poisoners. To import a foreign male chef was therefore a doubly safe expedient: chic in society and prudent at home.

The Blandy women, once stout rulers of the scullery, found themselves pensioned off or reduced to peeling, polishing and muttering. Their honest English fare—roasts, pies, broths—gave way to French dainties, sauces and masquerades on the plate.

Artful comment:

“They fled from witches into the arms of mountebanks. For the true peril is not in the pot but in the palate. The Blandys knew what they served. The Frenchman? He served only deceit.”

1752: The Case of Miss Blandy

Among the more notorious scandals to touch the otherwise obscure Blandy line was the poisoning at Henley-on-Thames, 1751–52. *Mary Blandy*, only daughter of Francis Blandy, a respected solicitor, was accused of murdering her father by means of arsenic—then coyly referred to as “powder to clean the pebbles.”

The story, much embroidered by pamphleteers, runs thus: Mary had been courted by Captain William Henry Cranstoun, younger son of a Scottish peer. The Captain, though already secretly married, persuaded Mary that their union was valid. Her father, outraged at this dishonourable connection, threatened to disinherit her if she pursued it. Cranstoun, conveniently in Scotland (and protected by jurisdictional obscurities), sent powders southward, urging her to “soften her father’s temper.”

Francis Blandy grew unwell in August 1751—vomiting, burning, unable to keep down his food. Neighbours muttered about the bitter taste of his tea and water-gruel. Servants whispered of “something gritty” left in the bottom of his dish. Within days he was dead, crying from his bed: “*My dear, you have given me poison!*”

Mary was arrested. At her trial (Oxford Assizes, March 1752), she insisted she thought the powders harmless, “a love-philtre from Scotland.” The jury did not believe her. She was condemned to death and hanged at Oxford Castle on 6 April 1752. Her alleged lover, Captain Cranstoun, never returned to England; he died in Flanders in 1752, of “a putrid fever” (or possibly his own powders).

The case struck Georgian society with horrid fascination. Ballads were sung in taverns; crude engravings were sold depicting Mary at the gallows. Some pamphleteers depicted her as a monster, others as a tragic dupe undone by passion. But among the Blandys themselves, it left a deeper scar: proof that ambition and servitude, long intermingled, could turn fatally inward.

The Scottish Connection

Cranstoun was indeed the son of Lord Cranstoun, of a noble Scottish house with seats in Midlothian. The match was, on paper, advantageous for a provincial solicitor’s daughter. But the Cranstouns were already compromised—too many debts, too many lawsuits, too many whispered Catholic ties. For the Blandys, it was a rare chance to ascend the social ladder. Instead, it ruined them.

Side-note in the Fitzartur Chronicles

Later Fitzartur genealogists, pawing through the archives, treated the Henley affair as a cautionary emblem: proof that the Blandys, though indispensable, could not be trusted. “They poisoned their own blood,” one caustic footnote declares, “and so were rightly confined to servitude, lest they poison ours.”

1752: From the Blandy Chronicle

(annotated 1891)

It has long been the habit of moralists to cast the tragedy of Mary Blandy as a cautionary tale: the dutiful daughter corrupted by a Scottish fortune-hunter and driven to poison her father, Francis Blandy of Henley. Yet the closer one looks at the record, the less Mary seems the prime mover.

Francis himself, a provincial solicitor of no especial standing, was the true architect of his own demise. For years he permitted—perhaps even encouraged—the rumour that he possessed an estate of £10,000 to bestow upon his only child. Such fictions were common enough among his profession, whose reputation in the 18th century was already clouded by peculation and sharp practice.

But Blandy's lie reached further than he could have anticipated, attracting the attention of William Henry, Prince of Wales. Some accounts suggest the Prince himself entertained the notion of the Blandy heiress for one of his household, which, if true, would explain why Francis could never contradict the myth of his fortune. To retract would have been to admit he had deceived royalty.

Thus his silence proved fatal. Cranstoun, a desperate younger son with debts and little but his title to commend him, pursued Mary under the assumption that the fortune was real. Francis's protestations against the match came far too late: he could not admit the truth without losing all standing, nor could he endorse it without impoverishing his daughter.

When Francis sickened in 1751, the coroner's jury and the public alike turned upon Mary. She was an easy target: a woman, accused of witchery in the kitchen, her love for Cranstoun painted as madness. But the deeper truth is plainer—Francis had poisoned himself with his own falsehood. His lie, once swallowed, could not be digested.

It is noteworthy that the Blandy line all but vanishes after this affair. Francis left no legitimate male heir; no cousins came forward. Some have suggested the name was quietly extinguished by design, to avoid the embarrassment of further scrutiny into Francis's dealings and connections. The brief mention of his correspondence with the late Prince of Wales (preserved in a solicitor's ledger, later destroyed) hints at higher circles than Henley society ever admitted.

Thus the case, recorded in broadsheets as "The Henley Poisoning," may better be understood as "The Blandy Inheritance": not of lands or wealth but of silence, disgrace and a convenient erasure from the record.

1501: The Frenchman's complaint

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Once there lived a Bulgar called Bulger who, being chaste was so often chased, he was arrested. Yet as he attested he was not to blame for such shame.

"For do you see, My Lords," he exclaimed to those noble paragons of that virtuous See, "I have, I do pray, simply followed the way of a Xtian."

He added, most humbly disclaimed: "For has not the puritan, St No-Not of Adolphous d'Aeraemaethaeiea proclaimed: 'avoid all sin you sinners that you may not face the wrath of Peta, who stands at the gates of Paranoia, forbidding all but the most faithful?'"

"Aye," replied a Lord, lifting his head from the lap of his mistress." Aye, then off with yer head ye lollop. For we'll have no bugling Bulgar tell us our creed, in deed or in plaintive tones."

"Aye," murmured his mistress, "and salt all his lands, bring me my stole he stole and my freemen too, to your Lord's greater glory and my own joy."

And so it came to pass. And verily to all future generations a Bulger was never no more than a Frenchman's complaint, brought to our fair shores by a chaste man who declined to be chased.

1760: a Blandy cure-all—Aqua mirabilis or "miracle water"

Infuse a mix of *papaver somniferum*, brandy, wine and celandine juice with cloves, mace, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, ginger, sweet clover, spearmint, rosemary and cowslip for 12 hours, then distil it into a cordial.

1770: a Blandy footman

It's hard toil being a manservant to a Duke. Yet he pays a good wage and that extra £2 each year makes all the difference. Mother says flour works as well as powder. The Duke never notices.

1790: a Blandé chef, engaged by our butler at His Grace's command

In the great kitchen the Duke's duck is always turning on the spit, that whenever His Grace should ring for it, one bird is ready roasted, crisped and fit for his pleasure.

1790: a Blandy butler

It is a curious thing how many of our family rise by favour. My cousin, born Blandy, now styles himself *Blandé* for the kitchen. Whether he is truly a chef or merely a cook with sauce to spare, who can say? The duck turns, the spit turns and so do the coins: £170 a year and not all of it seen by His Grace. For who sews the pockets? We do. And who lines them? Why, ourselves.

1798: a Blandy Groom

His Grace spent more time in the stables this day than in the Hall, which is no surprise to any of us. He will have no supper till he has had his rounds with the lads and we are bid keep the stalls clean but not our mouths.

I saw him put his hand upon Will the new boy's shoulder, lingering there as though to test the flesh more than the muscle. The Duke laughed when Will blushed, saying, "*A horse is not the only creature that must be broken in.*"

None of us dare speak of it beyond the tack room, for though the ladies of the House hold their heads high, they must know why His Grace is more oft among us than among them.

Some say it is a kindness—for the ladies are spared his company—but others whisper it will damn us all should word reach the wrong ears. For myself, I care not, save that the Duke's hand lingers too long upon the reins and his eye is sharper upon the lads than upon the mares.

1798: a Blandy Groom

His Grace unbutt'd my Breeches & put up my Shirt. I asked him what he was going to do he said I was to be quiet and lie still I told him he ought to be quiet & lie still because I wanted to go to sleep he took his Yard and put it to my Fundament.

1799: The Swan-Brothers and the Fairy Tart

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Once upon a time, in an age when the moon hung lower over the pines and the breeze itself seemed bewitched, there dwelt a certain fairy amidst twelve noble swans of surpassing beauty. By day they glided upon the silver lake as creatures of grace beyond mortal naming; by

night they became men again—if men they ever were—bright-eyed, nimble-limbed, with stockings drawn to bursting and laughter like the ringing of goblets. Their revels resounded through the evergreen hollows, for they danced until dawn and supped upon the dews and fruits of the forest, finding in every blossom's heart a drop of sweet intoxication.

Now, though tale and token named them brothers, the truth was of a less pious complexion. They were brothers rather in vanity and velvet, comrades in every tender vice, bound by a fellowship of mirth and mischief. Their hearts beat not to hymns but to the music of each other's sighs. It was whispered among the dryads that if one crept near their moonlit ring, one might spy kisses stolen under the boughs and gestures that even Pan himself would bless with a knowing grin.

As for the fairy, she—though oft styled a maiden—possessed more masks than any mortal count might dare wear in Lent. Some nights she came robed in pearls and powder, her smile sharper than a duke's dagger and her voice trilling as if cupid had taught it. Other nights he flung aside the silks, donned the guise of a gallant rake, and took the lead in their wildest measures. In truth, this creature was of neither simple sex nor steady shape; now he, now she, now something soaring beyond both. Yet all knew them as the Tart of the Wood—a name uttered half in jest, half in adoration.

So they lived and dallied, whispering in the antique tongues beloved of poets long dead—"thou" and "thee," "sweetest heart" and "fairest sin"—their speech as florid as their affections. They plotted, too, to enlarge their merry band—though none ever asked how such new swans would be found, or by whose hand they would be transformed—to charm new swans from distant lakes, to adorn the night with ever fairer forms. And though jealousy flamed among them like wine on the lips, it burned no truer than love itself. For even in their quarrels there gleamed that generous madness which springs only from shared delight.

And the fairy, by whatever semblance worn, was content. For in that fellowship of feathers and foolery, of passion unbridled by priest or prince, the Tart found a strange peace—part laughter, part longing, wholly alive beneath the ancient moon.

Gynecogeniture

1750: A rose by any other name

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Was once a princess born. Named for her place of birth and for that virgin queen she would one day emulate—Mary of Henleigh—she grew in all the graces of her status and gender.

Her sweet singing voice was more beautiful than the most delightful of nightingales. Her playing more exquisite than the finest instruments could master. Her dress, her manner, her sparkling eyes and charming ways, her modulated tones and her svelte body a marvel to all she commanded into her presence.

Great, good fortune was foretold her. A marriage with an Apollo or some lesser but not less magnificent god would be her crowning glory, resting on her lustrous golden hair that shimmered like the early spring's morning sun. She was good, sweet and kind in nature: perfection personified.

Assured of an impressive dowry beyond her own person, she was pursued by men of rank and high distinction. Yet her father, loving her as he did and desiring, as his wont, an ever more impressive connection, forbade all her suitors, so that by the age of twenty, there was not a man of fame or fortune who could win his favour or her hand.

Sent one day to visit her aunt, a gullible Lady, much given to fancies and foibles, much to the look of a man and little to his estimable worth. This aunt had, within her household, a knight of dubious character yet with a most charming manner. He had installed himself in that Lady's palace and favour and had whiled his time at her expense for some months past.

Lacking his own fortune and not beneath orchestrating a life for himself that held the promise of idleness in luxury, he willing colluded with this innocent aunt in the wooing of the princess and the winning of her hand.

Mary, faithful always to her sire's wishes, yet hoping one day to meet a suitor suited to her father's tastes and preferences, recounted her lover's virtues to him on her return to her home, after a month's sojourn with her aunt.

That King was already at his wit's end in the matter of finding his most treasured possession a suitable consort. Yet he dithered in decision in that manner peculiar to fathers who do not admit of their female children's ascendancy. The more he wavered, the more his

daughter persisted and the more her aunt and her paramour pressed his suit.

Finally, his great majesty lowered his drawbridge and agreed a wedding should proceed with all pomp and circumstance. Plans were drawn, contracts written so the marriage might proceed.

And yet is there not always some loppe that threads its own web and causes dismay? A missive from King to sister, intercepted by that knightly knave, asked funds for the nuptials. For the king's treasury faced a shortfall from a war the king planned to execute on a neighbour soon after his daughter's wedding.

Fearing that her inheritance and that costly dowry of lands and jewels might become endangered, the knight hit upon a plan. He claimed in a secret letter sent to his affianced that a special token introduced into her father's bedchamber would render the king victorious and far richer. She was delighted and naturally, unsuspecting, agreed.

He soon sent her an oleander in full flower and instructed her to stand it near her father's bed, with curtains and windows closed overnight.

She, unversed in the linguistic possibilities of floral arrangements yet also finding that flower's delicate and delicious perfumed scent to her taste, did instead introduce them first to her own chambers with windows closed and curtains drawn and maids dismissed.

The King's majesty never knew such grief as when his daughter was found on the morrow beyond hope of redemption.

1764: Espèce Fitzartur

Oh woe is me, that I was born to this house, for it gives me nothing but stone walls and shadows. My father speaks only of heirs; my brothers strut as though the world were theirs; my mother smiles with lips bitten through. What place is left for me, save to sit with my embroidery and stitch my silence into roses and lilies?

I am told I must be grateful, for I eat well and my gowns are of velvet. But what is gratitude when one's thoughts must be bound tighter than my stays? My mind runs to the woods, to the river, to the sky but I am recalled: *a lady does not run, a lady does not think, a lady waits to be chosen.*

And yet I see, I see, how men tire of their own conceits. Their power is a hollow drum, beaten to frighten us. And I ask myself, though only here in my book: if the Duke may truly express himself only with his gentlemen, why may I not express my true thoughts? If my brother

may spend a night on his horse, why may I not spend any night as I choose?

They will call me fanciful or wicked or touched by Mab herself. So be it. If Mab comes to me in dreams, I will not turn her away. Better her dark laughter than the pious sermons of men who cannot bear to look at me except to measure my dowry.

Oh woe is me, yet woe may yet be fortified with bone.

1780: Espèce deCarnard

Daughter of le Duc de Canard, grand-daughter of the 38th Duke of Mallard

Where once our catholic tastes were housed within the Roman Catholic Church, we are now instructed to rehearse them in the Anglican manner. Yet we are no Protestants. We are told this is the *True Church* and that to follow any other is to follow the Devil. I smile at such proclamations.

My grandsire, never one to chase false fashion, held fast to his own chapels, for his worship was contained within his own estates and his people prayed to him as readily as to any saint. My father, summoned often to Rome, maintained the dignity of that communion; my daughter, poor child, must now genuflect in an English parish or be branded sinner in these cold, forsaken lands.

But we Mallards do not alter with every sovereign wind. We are high-born and in that highness follow the *High Church*, whichever land we inhabit. In France, with my mother la Duchesse de Canard, I see little variance: incense and Latin masses there, surplices and processions here. Priests decked in their finery, tithes taken, titles bestowed—all is alike.

Our God is just, whether His worship straddles Rome or Canterbury. If in England we have lost our way to Purgatory, then we ascend the quicker. If here we confess not to men but to God Himself, then it is but a short cut to the same mercy. And if God should prove otherwise than men proclaim Him, then surely He will forgive us our obedience to convenience.

1810: Of Drakes and Swans

The 40th Duchess, a great favourite of the King of the day, found herself *enceinte*. Clearly not by her husband, who, having discharged his duties to marriage and entail, had long since lost any desire for further performance. Following the precedent of his grandsires, he

returned to his true pleasures, as all Mallard husbands have done since records began, and long before: horses and the youths who tended them

The Duchess, thoroughly aware of the vagaries of social and family gossip, departed on an extended Grand Tour of the Continent, taking with her a modest retinue of only fifty utterly trustworthy attendants.

A year later she returned no less slim than at her departure, yet happier and full of outrageous plans for the refurbishment of one wing of Mallard House. Inspired by the delights she had encountered abroad, she caused to be set about a thorough re-design of her husband's seat. By then she had already lost the favour of the King—which, for her, was no cause for grief.

Yet, as noted in an *unauthorised diary* kept by a Blandy maid, there was more to the tale than even Mr Andersen could imagine:

“She waddled so ungainly. And swaddled that babe so tight it were a relief to relieve herself of this unfortunate burden by placing the child among a family of no ill-repute, that it might have a chance at a better life than My Lady could maintain in its behalf.”

What became of that *ugly duckling* is outside our imaginations, though mutterings persisted of the arrogance of a fallen woman in inserting a bastard into the Hungarian line—whispers so insistent that later claims to the English throne by a Kaiser were greatly diminished and disputed.

1411: The Tale of the Ill-Favoured Cygnet

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

What became of the so-called ugly duckling was for many years wrapped in the veil of courtly discretion, though rumour, that winged herald of half-truths, would not be silenced. Some whispered that from a single night of unseasonable tenderness between a lady of high distinction and a gentleman of such doubtful origin as to make the saints blush, there issued a child of uncertain plumage. Others, more daring in their malice, declared the creature no true duckling at all, but rather a cygnet hatched unbidden in the royal pond—a bird whose very grace condemned its supposed mother.

In that age of powdered virtue and hereditary scruples, the appearance of any fledgling unlike its kind set all the courtiers calculating. The dowagers fanned themselves into faintness; the bishops turned their eyes discreetly skyward, as though Heaven might correct the matter; and the ministers whispered consultations behind velvet screens. Was this birth an omen? A jest of Nature? Or the bold

ambition of a woman whose charms had overleapt her rank? None could answer without risking either her favour or her wrath.

Yet among the lesser halls and servants' quarters the story grew wings of its own. The duckling, they said, had feathers too white for common stock, a neck too proud, an air too assured—traits unbecoming in one of unacknowledged descent. When the royal genealogists traced the bloodlines and found no rightful branch to perch upon, they did what all good chroniclers of noble confusion do: they wrote nothing at all and waited for time to bury the matter in ceremony and lace.

Still, whispers are a long-lived breed. Years later, when a certain foreign Kaiser put forth claims of kinship to the English crown, the tale was revived in salons and embassies alike. Some recalled the ill-favoured hatchling of Hungarian origin, raised among reeds and rumours, whose grown magnificence none dared deny. "There," murmured the old ladies, "lies the stain in the tapestry—the swan that flew where he had no right to fly." And though treaties were negotiated and titles appended, the story lingered, faint as perfume after a ball, suggesting that beauty itself may sometimes be the most damning proof of illegitimacy.

1813: A Dowager Duchess Speaks

She writes in her small hand, ink blotting where the nib trembles with suppressed anger: phantasy, they call it—that we should sit idle, that we are the painted dream to gild their reality.

Art: (aside, with a bow too deep for sincerity)

"And what else are we all, if not phantasms upon a stage? Yet mark how my ladies keep their lodges better than the men keep their seats. For while His Grace whispers to stable boys, she writes the law of tomorrow in her diary."

We are the Republic of Women, though unproclaimed. They imagine us docile in our needlework, yet our threads stitch together a map more enduring than their campaigns. They mistake stillness for obedience.

Mab (a laugh, barely audible):

"And who taught you to hear her, Art? You, who strut in velvet shadows, now an eavesdropper at a woman's desk."

Art (recovering, with mock dignity):

“I do not deny it. I admire their duplicity—how they let men see lace while hiding steel. A phantasm, yes but whose illusion is it? Theirs or ours?”

And why, I enquire, are we sent to these lodges on My Lord’s estate—so neat, so confining, so unworthy of our proper households, whose members must perforce scatter like servants gone to market? Once I held lands and titles sufficient to preserve my dignity entire; but such acres are no longer mine, for the wisdom of men has long decreed that women are unfit to order their own affairs.

We are thus kept, the several of us here, as though we were a phantasy devised to rival the harems of those Oriental princes about whom so many tales are whispered and so little truth is told. The men imagine us docile, exotic, ornamental. In truth, it is they who are the dreamers, sustaining their own illusion of power.

It is not my desire to be remembered only when my husband or son wearies of his footmen or his horses. Let him pursue his pleasures where he pleases. Let him leave us—phantoms in their eyes, yet real enough in our own—to the life we make here, unseen but enduring.

And yet, within these walls where we are so artfully confined, there flourishes a society of our own contriving. The lodges are not harems but republics. We speak not as rivals but as sisters; we exchange letters more freely than men imagine and dispatch volumes from one library to another as though conducting a secret trade. We read Wollstonecraft by candlelight and laugh at the earnest pamphlets men write to assure themselves of their natural superiority.

The servants imagine they overhear only trifles—needlework, recipes, the complaint of a gown too tight—but in truth our conversations circle around politics, around inheritance, around the ways in which men betray one another while still believing themselves kings of the earth.

If we are phantasies, we are dangerous ones, for we have learned how to turn men’s illusions into our shelter. They look away and we grow strong. They dismiss us and we write the record that will outlast them.

1820: A Duchess’s Diary

The Jesuits are wont to say, “*Give me a boy at seven and I will show you the man.*”

Men never fail to parrot such things and never question why the Church should claim authority over the shaping of souls. Women, as always, are presumed to acquiesce. Our education is barely permitted

to extend beyond our utility—a failure so original it outstrips Eve’s supposed trespass, at least in the minds of men.

Give me any child at seven and I will show you the adult: the boy, already swamped by Jesuit idolatry; the girl, tutored by women, compelled to learn not only her station but every contour of its cage. She will suffer beneath the dominion of men, yes. She will labour and toil beneath their fractured inspections. Yet she will also compass the world more broadly than they dare.

As for myself—decked like a drake, never dowdy like a hen—I know our true power rests in subterfuge. If men are dazzled by my diamonds and emeralds, distracted by the rubies and pearls, by the weighty fabrics stitched in gold and silver, then let them be dazzled. For while they preen in their illusions, we women keep the world spinning.

Tell me, then: who is the greater sinner? A woman who seeks knowledge or a man who presumes he can comprehend God’s ineffable designs?

1812: On Rank and Sin

The 40th Duchess of Mallard (a contemporary of the Duchess of Buckingham) once declared in her salon:

“It is monstrous to be told that we Mallards have hearts as sinful as the common wretches who crawl upon the earth. This is not only highly offensive but at variance with high rank, good breeding and the keeping of swans.”

So widely was this remark repeated that pamphleteers of the time renamed her *“The Most Sinless Duck in Christendom.”* She was thereafter painted with a heart carved from alabaster in place of a jewel.

1825: The Dowager’s Court

Mallard Estate

While the Dukes busied themselves with stables, hunting and the eternal trifles of power, the lodges of Mallard House hummed with a quieter persistence. A reader of ledgers might miss them altogether, for they were written down only as “household expense,” “charcoal for fires,” “maid’s allowance.” Yet here, in these modest-seeming residences, lay the true pulse of continuity.

Dowager after Dowager, outliving husbands and sons, gathered her circle—widowed cousins, unmarried sisters, loyal maids promoted by affection more than wage. They stitched, they read, they copied manuscripts. They embroidered flowers whose meanings were known

only to them, tucked secret verses into hems and painted miniatures of one another. Men called it “feminine trifles.” The women knew better.

Their letters circulated in a clandestine network: recipes folded beside coded commentary on court gossip; psalms annotated with satirical glosses on dukes and bishops alike. A nephew might inherit a title but a Dowager ensured which alliances his wife would bring and what “friendships” survived from generation to generation.

There was, always, the faint perfume of conspiratorial intimacy. One Dowager was said never to sleep apart from her “companion,” another’s maid was buried in the family plot without anyone remarking it odd. None of this was spoken plainly, for women’s love had no name in Mallard annals. Yet it endured in the lodges, where the real reckonings were written not in titles but in whispers, loyalties and the slow quiet work of hands.

Thus the Dukes strode and postured, believing themselves masters. But the lodges never forgot: *without mothers, where are the men?*

1311: The Crimson Mother

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

In a vale where the mists clung low and the moon rose like a wound that would not heal, there dwelt a woman once fair, now formidable in both wisdom and wrath. Age had not softened her but honed her to an edge; she had tasted the sweetness of love and discovered its rot beneath. Her daughters were the only balm to her solitude—three creatures of surpassing loveliness, whom she cherished with a devotion that shadowed upon the unnatural.

The eldest was bronzed as the ripened leaf and strong of limb; the second pale as frozen light, a spirit more than mortal; and the youngest of golden hair whose laughter could raise the veins of the dead. To strangers they were maidens; to their mother, they were instruments of long calculation. For she had grown wise in her years, too wise to let the world’s masculine appetite devour those she had borne in anguish.

“Men,” she would say, “love as hawks love doves—by striking.” And each time she spoke it, the candlelight shivered.

Now it happened that she made her house a place of enchantment, draped in silks that seemed to breathe, perfumed with herbs that veiled the senses and thawed the soul. When the harvest waned and the forest reeked of dying leaves, she rode forth one night into the township, attired in velvets the colour of dried blood. Her eyes beneath the veil gleamed like a prophet’s in ecstasy, and though her lips were withered they smiled with promises beyond mortal honour.

At a banquet among the town's nobility, her gaze fixed upon a prince—youthful, fragrant, and splendidly careless, with the beauty of one who has never known refusal. She spoke softly at his side, her voice a dark caress.

“My lord,” said she, “would it please you to behold what the moon envies and the devil himself would covet? Three daughters I possess, exquisite as dreams unconfessed—one of bronze and warmth, one of silver and chill delight, and one of gold whose touch dissolves the soul from reason. Visit them if you dare. Each will grant you one night, and one night only. Yet beware, for when the cock cries, you must be gone, untasted by daylight, unsouled by guilt.”

The prince, pride-blind and drunk upon her perfume, bowed low. “By your beauty's oath, lady, I shall obey.”

She smiled—a slow, sorrowful curve that betrayed no mercy—and bade him follow to the house wherein none but daughters dwelt.

There, his nights unfurled like fevered scripture. The first chamber glowed with bronze and candle-smoke; the maiden's skin shimmered with sweat and spice. She sang to him in a language half prayer, half temptation, and when she kissed him, he felt a pulse of strange life pass from her mouth to his. The next night the silver daughter received him amidst silken veils that rippled like moonlit water; her breath was cold, her eyes lit by hunger blanched of pity. He thrilled and shuddered by turns, unable to distinguish pleasure from devotion. On the third night he came weakened, yet eager still, and found the golden daughter waiting bedecked with flowers of poisonous hue, her warmth suffocating, her laughter like a promise broken.

He tarried with her too long. Dawn sharpened its blade against the hills, and the cock crowed.

He woke to fetters. His wrists were bound by chains so fine they glittered, his body slick with a nameless damp. The room smelled of roses and rust. From shadowed corners, footsteps sounded—the old woman entering with a chalice of dark wine. Her robe, black as ash at midnight, clung to her like living flame.

“Sweet prince,” said she, “thou didst stay beyond the hour. Know now the covenant of my house. Daylight doth demand sacrifice.”

“Release me,” he gasped, “and all I possess is thine.”

“All?” The word hung upon her lips like a kiss withheld. “Nay, my dear child, you have already given all—your promise, your seed, your vanity. My daughters shall build their world from thy remains.”

Then the daughters came—barefoot, their hair unbound, their voices an unholy harmony. The bronze one bore a knife that shone like a heart newly cut. The silver one held a basin wrought with runes that shimmered faintly. The golden daughter bent near his face, traced a

finger down his neck, and whispered, “We thank you for your warmth.”

The mother lifted her chalice high. “Let the proud bleed for the peaceful,” she intoned, “and the feast of centuries begin.”

When they were finished, silence fell deep as the grave. Outside, the air thickened with the scent of roses blooming redder than reason. From that night hence, no man dared approach the valley; travellers who wandered near claimed to hear soft laughter riding the wind and to see, among the garden’s vines, a figure pale and half-formed—a prince kept for eternity in fertile soil.

And the Mother sat at her hearth and smiled. “It is well,” she murmured, “that the world shall at last be ruled by those who know how to bleed and yet live.”

The Cracks 1801 to 1880

1810: Mallard House Lodges

As the decades progressed, an increasing number of lodges was constructed on the estate. These were for the Dowager Duchesses, who often outlived their husbands and needed—for the sake of propriety and noble standing—to be seen to be kept in a befitting, if not too costly, manner.

Many Duchesses lived into their 80s and 90s, surviving husbands and sons by upwards of 20 years. How they spent those lives is not recorded in the Mallard records, for such women's histories were not heroic.

However remote the connections may appear at first glance, at least two Dowagers exerted a profound influence on human history. These emboldened women had regular concourse with certain notable women whose histories have been kept. Like Mary Wollstonecraft who offered to dedicate one of her pamphlets to a Dowager who graciously declined.

"The notoriety is not worth the cost to my person," she is recorded (by her maid) as having remarked to that author and later in a letter to another Duchess resident on the estate. Few of her letters remain for women's histories are often kept secret from the impure recollections made by men.

1812: On Stephen Duck

It was in this same period that the family attempted to *elevate their own poet*, one Stephen Duck of Wiltshire, a thresher with the misfortune to be discovered by a Mallard cousin. Carried to Court under the wing of patronage, Duck was dressed in livery and made Yeoman of the Guard, though his verses were mostly about flails and haystacks.

The Mallards claimed him as a lost scion—the "*Duck returned to the nest*"—but the poet drowned himself in a trout stream before the heralds could draft a pedigree. The tragedy was whispered of as "*The Drowning of the Mallard Duckling.*"

1814: a Blandy groom

The Dukes of Mallards do not work. We work for them. But in our working we work for ourselves and in working for ourselves we breed more mouths to be fed. The Duke thinks his line endures by primogeniture. But our line endures by proliferation. One son into the stables, one into the kitchens, another into the lodges, a daughter married to a footman and birthing another half-dozen. Thus do we consume the wealth of dukes more surely than taxes.

Yet when too many of us arrive at once, there is no room but the workhouse, no coin but gin. Our name multiplies and diminishes in the same breath.

1820: Henry 41st Duke of Mallard

There is, as the proverb insists, always one rotten apple in the barrel. Even among so illustrious a stock as the Dukes of Mallard. Each Duke had been content to inherit his father's name, perform his conjugal duty with perfunctory haste and retreat thereafter into the masculine consolations of valet, footman or horse. Henry, however, was not of that mould: he was the rotting branch that bore no fruit.

Rake-thin and rakish in appetite, he cultivated marriage itself as his chief amusement, collecting a series of beautiful but mysteriously barren wives. Within scarcely a decade, he left no heirs but twelve dowagers lodged at Mallard House and its outlying estates—a veritable aviary of ornamental widows, each extracting her own pension, jewels or deed of land before shaking the Mallard dust from her slippers.

It was whispered, even in his own time, that Henry was never meant to be Duke at all. Born one half of a pair, his elder by a matter of minutes was christened Edward, in the old family style. Henry's name was given, some said, as a subtle signal from his father that *this* child was not to carry the line. Yet fate—or some midwife's miscount—placed the coronet on his head, if only briefly.

In the end it was Edward, the twin, who assumed the title and steadied the line, while Henry's reign was reduced to a cautionary footnote: that primogeniture, so loudly lauded, could be undone by the accidents of birth and the blindness of law.

1650: The witless one

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

There once lived a man who rode on his wits, which were never so great but that he was also a liar. He rose from the rank to the highest of offices where he finally lost his head and spoke the truth.

He lied to his mistress and said he was fey. But Mab is always listening for such treachery as this and she plotted—in idle moments that for her last longer than time—for his destruction as such an offence. For she holds not with such base deceits; holding such treasures as these in her own courts to waylay those foolish men such as he.

She sent her minion, known to many and none, as the Devil. Cloven of foot and swift in his demands for always taking selves, he promised this man the world and delivered it at his feet.

From simple squire to baron thence Earl of a great kingdom, all he promised came to pass with such unearthly magic as could be desired.

The Earl's fortunes mounted, his gold and treasures piled high, while others' depleted. For, in this world, that is the way of such matters. That which is stolen and never returned, furnish only one life, leaving others destitute or starving.

Had he been truly fey—and who among us can claim that—he would have no need of Mab's minion. He would have seen past the veil of mist that hid from him the Devil's foot in all he achieved and believed his own work.

For the Devil will not consort with those who are so evil as to desire their own flesh in another's form.

The mistress never forgot his perfidy and she too was aided by Mab, with lands and titles accruing, with a marriage that brought her to a king's command: to his bedchamber and a seat near his throne.

So that once, when that Earl presented himself at court, she undid him.

"My Lord King," she whispered in a voice not her own, "that Earl you cherish and load with treasures and titles and wealth of kinship and trust. My King, he is no more, nor no less than a sorcerer, a wizard and witch who has ravaged your kingdom and savaged my person and stolen my lands and usurped your prestige for his own."

Addressed, as his right for being an Earl and expecting—perhaps demanding—leniency, he was instead banished. By all those great men who truly serve their King and take no brook with such obvious menace.

Banished to earth's final embrace, yet still he lost his head.

For the Devil, like Mab, works always in ways mysterious to men and will not have her domains com-promised with falsehoods not of her own devising.

1820: a Bandy butler

His Grace need not raise his voice. A still glance, a silence at the table, is enough to see the colour drain from a footman's cheeks. We whisper amongst ourselves what slight may have occurred—a misbuttoned cuff, a soup not quite steaming—but he never says. It is the not knowing that scalds us.

1820: Espèce deMallard on labour

To the outside observer, there were many Dukes who appeared to not perform what might be termed work. I am not sure we would agree.

As the heads of dynastic incorporations—of status, land, houses, people, titles and obligations—they had, at least, to maintain sufficient interest in their own fortunes; and those of their heir, to some degree. An estate could not be left under-funded for the next generations. There was work in the upholding of status, pride and heritance.

If, after a difficult day working on his estate, His Grace chose to order a magnificent dinner for twelve guests—with a footman behind each chair— then dine in solitude, who are we to judge? If he tasted only one dish and sent back dozens of pheasants, salmon, sturgeon, trout, foie gras and soufflés? His Grace had worked hard to be able afford such an eccentricity: it made him both steadfastly English and unutterably noble.

The Dukes of Mallard did employ vast armies—often double that enjoyed by monarchs—of retainers, architects, landscapers, painters, sculptors, domestic and foreign servants and other minions to tend to the trivialities of real life.

Yet every Duke, no matter how industrious or apparently lazy, remained a perpetually indentured slave to posterity.

1825: a Blandy butler

As butler to His Grace, I look to his manner toward my person as being the proper rule for all who serve him. He sets the fashion for his house and I am bound to follow. Likewise does my sister, the house-keeper, look to Her Grace for guidance in all matters relating to her maids. Thus the order of the house reflects the order of the world.

1823: Espèce deMallard on credit

It is a curious thing, how families style themselves creditors of the heart.

A woman makes a match and at once her kin insist they have “invested” in it—as though affection were a bond paying quarterly dividends and disappointment an unpaid debt. Should she part from her husband, her sisters will sigh that *their time has been wasted*, her father that *his pride has been for nothing*. They cry not for her pain but for their own thwarted comfort, as though she must return at once to her chains in order to protect their feelings.

One wonders: who, in such reckonings, is the debtor? The woman who dares to live or the family who dares to call her life their possession?

It is ever the same arithmetic: the man’s vices are excused, the woman’s refusals condemned. She who leaves is selfish, she who endures is virtuous and she who dies young is *most lamented of all*—for she troubles no one further.

I cannot decide which is the truer blasphemy: to call love an investment or to imagine a daughter must pay it back.

1823: From Annotations upon the House of Mallard

Privately circulated

It is curious to observe that whilst the noble line of Mallard tottered beneath the weight of its own titles, it was their servants—those Blandys—who endured. No entail ever secured them, no herald ever blazoned their arms, yet there they are, always in attendance, like shadows in the margin of the record. Perhaps it was too useful a family to be ennobled; for once a man is made a duke he ceases to serve and the kingdom must look elsewhere for its labour. Nobility breeds extinction. Servitude breeds continuity. Thus it is that the Mallards are remembered only in scandals, while the Blandys persist like mildew in the parchment of history.

1824: From The Morning Gazette

It has lately been remarked that the Duchess of Mallard, wishing to avoid vulgar intercourse with the commonalty, has devised a novel stratagem for her daily promenade in Hyde Park. No less than a *quartet* of violinists—four gentlemen in frock-coats and powdered wigs—are

employed to pace behind her carriage. Their bows rise and fall in unison, producing a thin but constant drizzle of Corelli and Purcell, intended (as one footman confided) to drown the nuisance of street cries, hucksters and idle salutations from those she has no desire to know.

The arrangement is effective, if absurd. Passersby must either risk stepping between the Duchess and her private orchestra, thereby silencing the tune and earning her frosty glare or else shout their greetings above the scrape of catgut. Few dare either.

“It is,” wrote one wag in *The Scurrilous Rag*, “a most ingenious contrivance, by which Her Grace may move through society as through a drawing-room, hearing only the music of her own choosing, while the rest of us are reduced to pantomime or polite despair. Indeed, were this fashion to spread, London would become a field of fiddlers, each noble lady trailed by her own string quartet and conversation would die altogether.”

1825: the Duke of Mallard

Private papers

We have rarely dabbled in the fashion for political intrigue but on a few occasions as mentioned elsewhere. For our own amusement rather than the honours showered upon us in gratitude.

It is perhaps now safe to recount a trifling anecdote of our grandsire’s favour to Her Great Majesty, Elizabeth. Our cousins in Spain had sought to quell the English rabble and remove that pretender.

Elizabeth was mounted on a glorious white stallion from our Spanish stables when she performed that justly celebrated speech, which historians so love to record as having turned the fleet on its heels. Well enough may she have written her words, yet oratory was never her strong suit. It was we, with our ancient histories, who furnished her with our choicest phrases and we who allowed her to claim them as her own.

She mimed that speech, to great effect. For who but our retinue which surrounded her person and that horse to a distance of half a furlong, might have heard her voice? A kingdom, for the length of a horse.

1826: Espèce deMallard on roosters

It is with no little amusement that I note the formation—in 1824—of that exclusive gentleman’s club for men of intellectual capacities we

women are not permitted to indulge. The Anathaeum Club, demonstrates that utter lack of comprehension by those same gentlemen of our Mother Tongue.

Or perhaps I am mistaken and it is a tongue-in-cheek reference to our inevitable exclusion. In polite society, where we are required to uphold a certain standard of behaviour and discourse, I cannot imagine an occasion when I would have recourse to refer to the “male member”, except perhaps as a politician; but what am I permitted to know about such matters. However, had I the necessity, I would use the commonest yet most euphemistic term “anathaeum”, for it carries the same meaning.

So that this prestigious club is one of pricks and cocks, roosters without their hens.

1829: the Duke of Mallard

Private papers

We pray against Death every Sunday, yet he is our true sovereign. The Church bows to him more deeply than we do the Crown. We bow to no one, save our ancestors.

Dante, that Florentine of fevered imagination, made of Hell a vast registry of human pettiness. I quote him, not from reverence but to amuse myself with his orderliness:

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate.

So it is written above his gate of perdition. Yet is it not written more truthfully above the gate of every nursery, every marriage bed, every court of law? Hope is the vanity of the lesser sort, who believe they might rise.

Death governs us, as surely as primogeniture. It is he who decides which crown is passed and which skull is split.

1830: a Blandy butler

Aye and so did His Grace send down golden dishes of untouched food, the chefs having laboured for hours upon them. Yet little enough reaches the kitchens and less as scraps or fowl feed.

The compensations due to our rank are not to be disregarded. We are not common servants. Dressed at His Grace's command in silks and satins, wigs and leather boots of the latest fashion, we are to stand as his glory reflected and behave as becomes the servants of so illustrious a Duke.

1830: the Duke of Mallard

Private papers

We had, in a moment of benevolence, permitted our Jewish bankers to lend a million sovereigns in gold to the king at the conclusion of that tedious affair now styled the Hundred Years' War. Such people are accustomed to usury; we Mallards have never soiled our hands with base metals. In due course the crown repaid the sum tenfold—though only after certain persuasions of a nature I will not trouble posterity with.

His Majesty, being merely a monarch, squandered the fortune upon a vulgar extravaganza, the so-called *Field of the Cloth of Gold*. Historians prattle of it endlessly; not one credits the true source of its splendour. This was a concession we allowed when repayment was secured. Let the rabble cherish their pageants; notoriety is not our concern.

A century later, in 1789, we resolved to demonstrate what true magnificence might look like. We invited our cousins from France, Italy, Spain and Austria to Mallard House itself. For reasons known only to themselves, our French cousins failed to appear. The discourtesy did not pass unnoticed, though naturally we are above such trifles.

On that day we expended in excess of five millions. Such is the difference between Mallards and kings: we do not perform history, we underwrite it.

1831: a Mrs Blandy, house-keeper

We ultimately work for our own salvation, brother, lest we forget. To the greater glory of God. And to our children—bless them—should we be so permitted to offer them into the service of our Lord.

1847: A Moment at Mallard House

The 42nd Duke insisted upon nightly dinners of twenty courses, though half the chairs at his interminable table sat empty, their covers carefully set, their silver polished for mouths that had not opened in fifty years. The footmen knew to carry the tureens down the line as if serving the shades of ancestors, for His Grace claimed that “tradition is not habit, it is blood.”

It was during one such performance that a single candlestick guttered in its socket and, for a moment, the entire room flinched. The Duke's hand trembled on the tablecloth; his daughter, a thin, pale creature of

twelve years, looked up quickly and then down again, ashamed to have seen. The candle was relit, the footmen resumed their procession and the Duke loudly berated the cook for under-salting the consommé.

The guests—a pair of minor baronets brought in for the occasion—never mentioned the tremor. But the child remembered it. She wrote later in her diary: *“If Father should cease to order soup for ghosts, I think he would cease to be.”*

1848: Espèce deMallard, letter to the Dowagers

Permit me to trouble you with a matter both practical and pressing. You will have heard, no doubt, of the new Queen’s College for Women, lately founded in Harley Street under the auspices of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution. While its first aim is the improvement of governesses, I perceive in it a far greater opportunity: a crack in the wall that bars our sex from serious learning and through which daylight may enter.

I have therefore taken the liberty of subscribing a substantial sum to its establishment and I invite you, each in your wisdom and generosity, to consider a like contribution. Not for my own daughters—for they have already been schooled in languages, in history, in those sciences of state and society that men imagine their exclusive preserve—but for those women less fortunate, who must live by their wits yet are denied the tools by which to sharpen them.

It is a mockery that men parade their superiority while leaving women to scratch knowledge from the margins. I mean my daughters to prove them wrong. They are not bred to be governesses, nor merely to embroider samplers of virtue; they are educated to think, to argue, to interpret and yes, to govern themselves.

If our daughters cannot inherit the House, they may at least inherit the mind. And if this College provides even a single girl the means to confound a man who believes her incapable, then I say the subscription is well spent.

1848: Letter from the 40th Dowager to Espèce deMallard

Your letter reached me yesterday and I confess it struck me with both admiration and amusement. Admiration, for your foresight in supporting this Queen’s College and amusement, for the prospect of governesses being fitted with Greek and history, as if such endowments would elevate their charges beyond the station of their birth.

That said, I do not wholly disagree with you. To educate our daughters better is indeed a worthy aim. Let them be schooled in

languages, politics and suchlike accomplishments; they must be armed against the dullness of husbands and the frivolities of drawing-rooms. But I should hope, as you do, that such learning is directed chiefly to the daughters of gentlemen and above all those of baronets and higher. For what would it serve if a tradesman's child, however diligent, presumed to instruct the daughter of a duke?

The purpose of a young lady's education remains what it ever was: to fit her to marry suitably and thus preserve the dignity of her house. A smattering of Latin or a sharper wit may make her more agreeable at table but Heaven preserve us from clever girls taking to the rostrum or the counting-house!

Nevertheless, I shall add my subscription, for I see your point: if such an institution can strengthen the hand of women like ours—your daughters, mine and those of our circle—then perhaps it may prove more useful than it first appears.

1848: a Blandy governess

I have little enough time to spare from my charges. Yet I gladly offer it to any member of our family who, with a little education, might rise higher in the service of Their Graces. For is it not fitting that a Blandy should aspire as nobly in service as others do in birth?

1848: Reply from the 41st Dowager to Espèce deMallard

Your enterprise is, as ever, bold and I cannot help but smile at your zeal. Yet I must decline to add my subscription, for I fear the scheme, however well meant, runs against the nature of things.

To fill young women's heads with Greek and Latin before they have a husband to steady them is to invite nothing but disappointment—for themselves and for their families. Men do not marry clever wives; they marry agreeable ones. A husband may endure his wife's wit in the nursery, even in the drawing-room but not at his table and certainly not in the presence of his friends.

It has ever been my conviction that learning is best acquired late in life, when its dangers are diminished. Let girls be charming, pliant and pious; if fortune spares them to widowhood, there will be ample time to take up Horace or Tacitus. A dowager with a little Latin is diverting; a debutante with it is insufferable.

If your daughters are to marry dons, well and good; let them conjugate verbs to their hearts' content. But the rest of us must think of dukes, not dons. For my part, I would rather see my granddaughters safely wed than dangerously educated.

1849: a Duchess burns

The 42nd Duke faced a quandary, which luckily, as is the way of such matters in illustrious houses, was met by Providence.

His first wife, declined to share a conjugal conversation with her husband. Instead she used womanly wiles, “witchery mid-wives” and common deceit to remain wantonly barren all her short married life.

Luckily, as I say, Providence stepped in. The Duchess was found one morning in 1850, shortly after her 30th birthday, burned beyond recognition after her gown had caught fire from sitting too close to a fire.

The Duke was want to exclaim that his error in marrying her lay in the fact of the initials of her name not, as tradition seemed to demand, following the “leaf” insignia of the Mallard name. She had never belonged: thus was she justifiably expunged from the line.

He soon remarried, begat an heir (in that same year) and a daughter soon after. He then retired to his contemplate the treasures of his wing.

1502: The Prophecy of the Duke

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

It is seldom recalled that nobility, while often incapable of thought, proves remarkably capable of consequence. Thus it was with the Duke of Mallard, who inherited both an illustrious name and an inconvenient mind. The family, long resident in the northern shires and believed to have been ennobled by a king who mistook them for another house altogether, carried with it the oddest heraldry in Christendom: a mallard duck grasping a laurel leaf in its bill, above the motto, Providence Will Out.

That phrase was repeated often in the house, sometimes as prayer, sometimes as warning, and always when anything untoward occurred—which was frequently.

In the year of Our Lord fifteen hundred, the Duke faced what he termed “a matrimonial irregularity,” though others might have called it a curse. His first wife, a small woman with large opinions about celestial influence, had refused all conjugal conversation. Instead she had set about consulting certain “witchery mid-wives,” village women whose herbs and charm-bags were said to keep the body wholesome, the womb contrary, and the husband docile but disappointed. The Duke bore this trial in silence for seven years, until silence grew unbearable. It was then that he announced, before a dinner of religious

men and moral cowards, that Providence would soon find the proper correction for obstinate virtue.

Providence obliged with exemplary punctuality. On the morning after her thirtieth birthday, the Duchess was discovered in her chamber—burned to something smaller than herself. Her gown, they said, had caught a spark from the hearth. The servants whispered that when they rushed in, the fire seemed to curl away from the curtains and leap towards her, as though attending to some forgotten debt. The smell endured so long in the chimney that the entire wing had to be repointed and blessed.

The Duke grieved decorously, then declared to all who would hear that the true cause of misfortune lay in the woman's initials, which did not—he noted with genealogical precision—follow the alphabetic pattern of his house's leaf insignia. "It is evident," he proclaimed, "that she was unaligned with the Mallard principle, and thus justly pruned by Divine order." Even the bishop could find no fault with reasoning so immaculately self-serving.

Within the year he remarried, an agreeable young widow of Devon, and produced both heir and spare in gratifying haste. Having thus satisfied Society, Providence, and himself, the Duke retired to "contemplate the treasures of his wing," a phrase historians have delicately corrected to mean "grow peculiar in his upper rooms."

For the household soon noticed the new Duchess had taken to locking her door by day and singing peculiar lullabies by night—verses without rhyme or mercy that mentioned ducks, ashes, and the turning of the moon. She also collected feathers from the marsh at dawn and refused to eat fowl; when told that this was unpatriotic given the family arms, she replied pleasantly that some heraldic meals were best left untasted.

As for the Duke, he became devoted to his study of ancestry. One cold evening, poring over a charter dated two centuries before, he found a marginal note in a crabbed feminine hand:

The leaf burns. The line rots. Providence is a duck with teeth.

He assumed a jest, though unsettling, and drew his candle closer. A draft exhaled from the hearth; the flame grew long, yellow, and strangely alive. In its light, the seal at the bottom of the parchment glistened bright green, as though fresh wax had been poured upon it. The impression, which had formerly shown a mallard with laurels, now bore an outline unlike any natural bird—a thing half-feathered, half-flame, beaked and crowned and very faintly smiling.

When morning came, the Duke was found in his chair, quite dead, with his signet fused to his finger and a patch of soot upon his breast shaped like a leaf.

The widowed Duchess—who bore a passing resemblance to what the peasants called a “wise woman” and the priests condemned more selectively—put the affairs of the estate in order. She dismissed the foreign chaplain, sold the peacocks, and issued a curious notice to the tenants that henceforth the family feast of Saint John would be called the Night of the Returning Feather. She was frequently seen walking by the pond at dusk, speaking very softly to the water. One soldier swore he saw a single white duck rise from the reed bed and hover above her head like a benediction before vanishing.

When asked whether she feared her husband’s ghost might return, the Duchess replied mildly, “Ghosts are what remain of people who never listened while alive. I should be safe enough.”

And so the legend of the House of Mallard settled into local superstition. It is still said that every generation the leaf upon their crest blisters black and the eldest son dreams of fire. Monks at the nearby priory keep a record of these occurrences, along with a prophecy attributed to one Dame Agnes of Nuttery, an elderly prophetess who had once traded duck feathers for ink.

Her prophecy reads:

When man’s conceit doth make him leaf,
And wife is burned for his relief,
Then shall the water claim its kin,
And Providence be proved by sin.

Scholars of darker inclination note that the original parchment of the prophecy bears a watermark in the shape of a mallard rising through flame. The safe at the Hall where it was long preserved was found empty in later centuries, and the motto was quietly shortened by descendants to Providence Out.

And if on certain foggy nights one hears laughter like the rustle of feathers and the crackle of kindling, it is best not to investigate. For the Mallard line, though ancestral and noble, has always believed that Providence provides—for those who can bear its sense of humour.

1850: Jeanne d’Anatis on religion

The English, in their wisdom, contrived more churches than heirs. One may be born to a coronet or to a cassock, yet it matters less what creed is professed than which pew is occupied.

We are told we are Protestants—except when we are High Church, which is Catholic without the Pope or Evangelical, which is Protestant

without the music. The Methodists are Anglicans who refused to sit still, the Presbyterians are Scots who refused to kneel and the Lutherans are foreigners who refused to learn English.

A Duke is expected to be Anglican, of course, for that is the faith of property and of Parliament. But a Mallard may dabble in Rome, so long as it is done discreetly and on the Continent. Incense is permissible if confined to a chapel but not if it lingers on one's coat. And above all, the family must be seen at Easter, regardless of whom they privately worship—God, Mammon or themselves.

The Church is less a matter of belief than of heraldry. It is another escutcheon, another title, another chain of continuity. To be on the “right side of the altar” is no different than to be on the right side of the genealogical tree: a signal to the world that one belongs.

1850: the centennial

There existed an ancient tradition in the Fitzartur family, its reason lost in the annals of time. Every 100 years, all lines gathered together on a day selected by the current Duke and held at Mallard House.

Nothing, not war nor famine nor dwindling heirs, could unseat the certainty that the story would continue.

Do not mistake their presumption for folly. They were not wagering on continuity. They were merely affirming what was already guaranteed. Time, like the servants, would wait upon them. Stones do not question whether they will endure; nor did the Fitzarturs. The fairy tale was theirs because they had the audacity to live as though it could never be otherwise.

As the centuries progressed, there were fewer Fitzarturs and an ever increasing number of deMallards, as well as those colonial Mallards from across the Empire who could capitalise on the journey and recoup their expenses..

It was a day—an event that might extend beyond the graciousness of His Grace—to share triumphant stories. Beyond that the purpose was vague—part pilgrimage, part rummage sale—but it allowed the highborn to posture, the middling to gape and the poorer relations to pocket whatever trinkets went unwatched.

The event of the mid 1800s was of especial note for the scandal of it took another century to dissipate.

The Duchess, Lady Alice, a woman too fond of her fashionable attire, with a notable collection of headwear, including several top hats and boaters—and none too fond of her husband—had absconded with many of his finest jewels and her milliner to an Oriental wonderland in an Eastern oasis.

She left no trace of herself—not even children—so another marriage was hastily convened with a less flighty bride.

Artful comments:

Her madcap behaviour caused much fluttering, swooning excitement. Insanity in a member of our family! Who would have imagined? The whispers at dinner were like doves in heat: the men muttered she was a disgrace, the women insisted she was a marvel. And I? I declare she was the only one who ever knew how to fall down the rabbit-hole with style.

She asked riddles no one could answer, flitted through rooms like a playing card and left us all teacups with no saucers. She gave the family its very own Mad Hatter and in so doing proved the Fitzarturs possessed imagination, however briefly.

Of course, they called her mad, because they had no better word for freedom. Hats, jewels, gossip—that's all she left. Which is more than most of us will ever leave.

1850: a Blandy lady's maid

Whenever His Grace is without a wife, as now with Her Grace escaping eastwards, this house has little need for a superior lady's maid. Fear not to slide down the ranks, for there is much service to be given to our old Dowagers in their lodges upon this estate. There is always needlework, tea poured at peculiar hours, dreams spoken aloud and secrets stitched into bodices. One might think them all Mad Hatters and yet it is steady work, for Dowagers never die—they merely multiply in lodges.

1850: Espèce deMallard on milliners

The Fitzarturs did not much care that Lady Alice had stolen jewels, nor that she had absconded eastwards with a milliner. These were frivolities, easily replaced. What could not be replaced were the children she never bore.

In tripping the primogeniture, she did more damage than a thief or an adulteress ever could. For in her abdication of maternity—her *unforgivable* dereliction of duty—lay the one scandal no noble house could tolerate: the possibility of its own extinction.

Artful comment:

We were never a family of passion, you understand—only of succession. Even in the bedrooms, the question was not love but law. A

son was an entry on a ledger, no more. And when one of us stumbled, oh the thrill in the galleries! Whispers, wagers, alliances re-sketched. Nothing so intoxicating as a cousin's failure. Nothing so exquisite as the scent of proximity to the entail.

1850: A fragment from the private papers of the
45th Duchess

On the day of her wedding

Is it to be my misfortune or my mark of honour, that my father has given my hand to His Grace? This union is said to restore prestige to our family—though I cannot help but note that one of my grandmother's sisters once made a similar match and her name is remembered now only in hushed anecdotes, never in triumph.

The whispers trouble me still. My maids—soon to be dismissed, for the Blandys will take their place—have muttered of the fates of the Duke's former wives. Did they perish as claimed or vanish into some hidden lodge, some shuttered chamber of this vast house? I ought to scorn such gossip, yet I confess it clings to me, like a damp veil that cannot be shaken off.

How swiftly a woman's world is reduced: from her mother's drawing-room to a stranger's hearth, from chatter with companions to solitude in corridors too wide for comfort. I am told to be proud, to stand as a Duchess. Yet pride is poor armour when one is a bride—transferred like treasure, to be guarded or spent as pleases another.

I have no illusions. Mine will not be a story of romance but of endurance. If history records me at all, it shall be as little more than a number, another name pressed flat between the pages of a ledger.

1850: from the Duke's private papers

I am, alas, compelled to take yet another bride. One saw fit to immolate herself, the other her lineage and connexions. Must I alone suffer for such gracelessness? These women—chattels, no more than cattle—might at least have spared a thought for my sensibilities. Do they not perceive the insult to my house, the blot upon my name, when they so dispose of themselves without leave?

The first—her name eludes me, though doubtless some Blandy has it scribbled down—avoided me as diligently as I her. The second, perfidious creature, has fled eastward with half my jewels and, more wounding still, with that image of my visage upon the world which she was charged to preserve.

And now, this centennial. A rabble of my kin, squabbling like ducks in mire, gather to honour some ancestor I never knew. Would it had been my father—or worse, that Henry, no brother of mine!—then perhaps the homage might have held a shred of meaning. Instead, I must endure their bowings and scrapings, their odious awe at my magnificence and all for the sake of a title they sully by their very presence.

Let them look once upon me and be satisfied. Thereafter I shall retire to my true sanctuary: my horses, noble beasts and the men who serve them—and serve me. They alone do not contrive to undermine my majesty with womanly wiles but minister to it as nature intended.

1850: Jeanne d'Anetis on ducal marriages

I cannot forbear to note—with no little amusement, though such mirth is unseemly—that His Grace has contrived to lose yet another wife. To lose one might be called misfortune; to lose three in so brief a span is, frankly, incompetence.

Worse, that rapacious laughter has already found its way into scurrilous pamphlets passed from hand to grubby hand across the nation. Have these unlettered folk no sense of decorum? Must the griefs of our nobility be made the bawdy jest of every alehouse? It is a poor day for the aristocracy when the fall of a duchess becomes fodder for caricature.

As for Lady Alice—too enamoured of her hats, too little enamoured of her husband—what conclusion is there but madness? One hopes this debasement of noble pride will soon be displaced by some other vulgar amusement to occupy the public's squalid mind.

And that Oxford Don—unscrupulous, witty and altogether too clever by half! His verses circulate as freely as the pamphlets, undermining His Grace while secretly delighting even those who most loudly condemn them. I confess myself not immune to the sparkle of his phrasing. Yet still I maintain: such work ought to be suppressed, lest the common herd mistake satire for truth and laughter for judgement.

1852: Private papers of the Duchess

It is two years since my wedding and I find myself less inclined to tremble at shadows. This house is no longer a prison, though its chambers remain cold and I have learned how to walk its corridors as though they were made for me. The servants bow and in their eyes I read curiosity mixed with disdain—and I choose disdain for them in return.

I think less often of my predecessors, though whispers still trail after me. It is easier to wear pride than to wear fear; one looks better on the face. If His Grace requires little of me, then so be it: I shall make of myself an ornament, polished and untouchable. And when I speak, they will hear not a girl's faltering but a Duchess's decree.

1853: a Blandy superior lady's maid

Transferred from the Big House

It may be thought a fall, to pass from the great House into the lodges but I will not call it so. At the Big House one serves the moment—a gown, a supper, a grand display that is forgotten as soon as it is seen. Here, one serves the years. The Dowagers may not be young but their thoughts are sharp, their pens sharper still. They speak of women's rights and education, of keeping accounts and managing lands. Such matters do not fade like last night's feathers.

The butler puffs like a duke, aping his master's ways. We maids, when placed among the lodges, see the thing more clearly: it is we who steady the family, for it is we who remain when wives are buried and Dukes lie in their coffins. A new Duchess will one day arrive and she will need her confidante. Then, another Blandy will step up, as one always does. For while Dukes inherit the lands and titles, it is we Blandys who inherit their control.

1853: Letter to Jeanne d'Anetis

from the Dowager, South Lodge

This new-fangled postal service spares us both the tiresome rituals of secrecy. No longer must I rely upon a footman's discretion—or indiscretion—to ferry my words, nor disguise my thoughts in codes that any half-witted secretary might decipher. For once, our correspondence passes directly into your hand and His Grace's prying eye is thwarted. I confess, it feels almost indecorous, this liberty of communication but I shall not repine at such convenience.

As to your observation on blood, I find myself both amused and fatigued. Yes, the veins of all England's people show blue beneath their pale skins; yes, the metaphor has worn thin from over-use. You say this proves that nobility is no special gift of ours and perhaps in the marrow of truth you are not wrong. Yet I cannot so easily surrender the distinction of centuries, the weight of inheritance, the long chain of names and lands and obligations. If we are reduced to flesh alone, then

what has my life meant, save a succession of duties borne and jewels worn?

Still, I tire of hearing our exalted rank exalted beyond reason. The jest has become a weariness. Too often is “blue blood” paraded as proof of virtue, when it is at best a matter of circulation. If I am honest, my own children weary me with their constant appeals to pedigree. They forget that marriage is a trade, that fortune is fragile, that even a Duchess may be dispossessed. Were it not for the accidents of birth, I might have lived as you do—freer in some ways, more shackled in others, yet unobserved.

Forgive this frankness. It is the privilege of age to say what younger lips would never dare. You will not, I trust, mistake me: I am still my father’s daughter, still the Duchess I was, yet less inclined to clutch the old pretences as if they were gospel.

Write soon and write freely. I find in your words a candour I no longer hear in my own house.

1855: From the papers of the 42nd Duke of Mallard

We hear it said, even in certain vulgar newspapers, that aristocracy is a spent force. Spent by whom? What force, pray? Power does not dissipate like a candle guttering in a draught. It rests, as it ever has, upon the permanence of soil, the veins of metal beneath it, the forests above it and the men who till and harvest at our bidding.

The rabble imagines power as action—parades, decrees, proclamations, vulgar thunderings from thrones. Such things belong to monarchs, whose reigns burn bright and end in smoke. We are not flames but embers. We do nothing and in doing nothing, endure.

It is a child’s fear of darkness that sustains them—the terror of what they do not know, most of all the blank mystery of death. So they cling to us as if to continuity itself, hypnotised not by command but by presence. The Crown must be seen. The Church must preach. The Mallards? We merely are. And that suffices.

If there is force, it is not ours but theirs: the endless labour and faith of those who cannot abide uncertainty. They spend themselves upon us, gladly. We are the mirror in which they calm their fear.

1987: Annotation by Viscountess Viola Vorpel

The Duke, in his way, was correct: aristocracy was never a force to be spent, merely a structure that shifted its façade. What he could not have foreseen is that, after the second great war, the state itself would become the new landlord. The dream was sold to the people that every

man might be his own Duke—a *house of one's own*, they said—but the dream was built on paper.

Banks replaced barons, mortgages replaced manors. The Mallards sat upon their acres; modern citizens sit upon thirty years of debt. Slavery did not vanish; it merely changed livery and engaged a subtler public relations agency.

The Duke's "we are and that suffices" finds its echo in the banker's quiet ledger. Continuity is no longer a matter of land and entail but of interest compounding invisibly. The commoner is chained to the wheel, walking it with dutiful pride, mistaking exhaustion for achievement.

It is fashionable to say that the aristocracy is a spent force, yet I wonder: who here is freer—the nobleman in his lodge or the homeowner locked to his mortgage?

1855: a letter to her sister, from the Duchess

On the topic of art

We do our nation and its people a grave disservice in allowing art—paintings, statuary and sculptures alike—to be seen by the public eye. Far better such cultural artefacts be hidden from prying eyes—too given to prurience—in our private galleries where taste, decorum and decency precludes such proclivities as those often depicted and which must give rise from the contemplation of the unclad form.

For who can look upon the sinews of an antique and not... avert their gaze?

I thank God that we are not to be embarrassed by the sight of such works as those that display the male form in its natural state. That appalling sin of goosing must not be seen to be encouraged nor condoned as it surely must be when the uneducated are permitted its viewing.

I do most heartily concur with that Proclamation Society's refusal to allow the opening of galleries—national and regional alike—on Sunday, which is the proper day to give thanks to heaven for our forlorn and sinful lives. In this happy result, the hand of God is discernible, as such collections are quite as likely to inflame the passions as to purge the life.

1855: the sister's reply to the Duchess

On the topic of art

Of course, in the proper setting, with one's own kin, such artistic works may be... most edifying.

But I would draw your attention to the obverse of such a viewing, to that odious place known here in Oxford as "Parsons Pleasure", I am led to believe. A location one has been told at which the younger dons disrobe and plash about in the all-together. I have forbade my daughters their ordinary walks for fear of their being perverted by such a spectacle.

I also must note a most curious tale told me by some maiden ladies in my occasional employ.

According to these ladies, a man was used to take a boat out from the shore, where he would disrobe and enter the sea. After several days of this our local vicar gravely informed him that these venerable old ladies, whose house faced the sea where he embarked each day, were much distressed in their minds by his proceedings. That swimmer—one hesitates to name him a gentleman, for his being a foreigner, I believe—promised that in future he would go further out. Next day however the vicar told him that the old ladies could still see him plainly—by means of excellent binoculars.

So you see, my dear, the greatest danger is not the naked man in the water but the naked eyes of the ladies ashore.

1859: a Blandly Lady's maid

Her Grace has taken to the disgusting fashion for wearing fine calico drawers beneath her crinoline. It may be suitable for her to wear such an abomination to decency, for I never shall.

1859: A Dowager's letter to Jeanne d'Anatis

We are not amused. I note with the faintest curl of lip a little book by the curiously named Mr. Smiles has swept our parlours and railway carriages alike. Its opening line—"Heaven helps those who help themselves"—demands censure and you, dear Jeanne, are far better placed than I to deliver it. If heaven is to be thought so meanly transactional, then let us all turn bankers and be done with it.

Why must we wait until death to be "helped," if Heaven's promise is of life eternal? And why must Heaven busy itself with the doings of men, with their gold and their jewels? Surely it is Hell that assists men

in helping themselves to other men's wealth. Surely God has placed us in our compartments that we may aid others, not ourselves.

This new world of iron and steam undoes our past. I see only those who traffic with the Devil being helped—to contracts, to fortunes, to commerce without end. We women, forlorn and outcast, abandoned by husbands and sons alike, are left to endure. Heaven may one day claim us for our piety but until then, we persist.

I entreat you, Jeanne, write one of those anonymous pamphlets for which you are (I suspect) justly famous. I often include you in my prayers and trust that one day a woman of your education and calibre might stand openly against men like Mr. Smiles, whose doctrines are but the proselytising methods of Satan, cloaked as virtue.

It is time women remind men that piety and virtue do not lie in commerce, nor in slogans but in conscience.

1859: Fragment of an anonymous pamphlet

(attributed in whispers to a Lady of means)

Who smiles upon Mr. Smiles? Not heaven, surely. If heaven were in the business of such bargains, it would resemble a counting-house more than a kingdom. The line he trumpets—"Heaven helps those who help themselves"—is no more than a Scottish conceit, cloaked in the pretensions of a Jewish name, sold cheaply to a public eager for sanction of their own selfishness.

To help oneself is to steal: to take without measure, without conscience and to baptise avarice as virtue. That is the first theft. The second is subtler: the theft of words. A fine old phrase about charity twisted into a slogan for greed. It is a theft more dangerous than purse-snatching, for it plunders minds and fashions them to vice.

And what of the Church, that eager guardian of souls? It embraces the catalogue of deadly sins—gluttony, greed, envy—only to forgive them all, provided they are committed in comfort and with sufficient tithe. A merchant who fattens himself is "industrious"; a noble who drains his tenants is "responsible"; a wife who dares to eat before her husband is "wanton." Thus morality is served like a feast in which only the powerful are permitted second helpings.

Let us not pretend: it is not heaven that smiles here but men helping themselves to other men, to women, to land, to bread, to empire. And all the while congratulating themselves that the smile of God is upon them.

1618: The Moral History of the Mallards

*Being an Account of How Certain Waterfowl Became
Virtuous by Sin*

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Few families have brought the English peerage more disrepute or entertainment than the House of Mallard, whose ancestral acres were said to have been granted by a king suffering from youthful optimism and poor eyesight. Their crest, a mallard duck holding a spray of laurel, was meant, according to the heralds, to symbolise purity, resilience, and a cheerful interest in shallow waters. In practice it stood for the motto engraved above the east gate of their ancestral seat: *Do As Ducks Do*.

To the Mallards, this had long been less advice than theology. For five centuries they had conducted themselves under the comfortable conviction that morality, like feathers, falls differently upon every creature and cannot reasonably bind those hatched to grandeur. Their philosophy reached its perfection around the year 1600, when the seventeenth Duke—a florid gentleman of uncommon self-regard and excellent waistcoats—announced in a formal sermon to his tenants that the Seven Deadly Sins were, in fact, "merely the seven honest instincts of the human duck."

"Observe," said His Grace, "the natural world. The duck is proud of plumage: so we must embrace pride. It feeds excessively when grain is scattered: gluttony, good health. It courts its mate with noisy display and occasional infidelity: lust, the persistence of life. It squabbles over pond-space: wrath, the assertion of property. It envies the goose for its foreign travel: envy, wholesome aspiration. It lounges magnificently: sloth, the contemplation proper to noblemen. And finally, it gathers the whole pond to itself in winter: greed, the fiscal virtue without which no family rises."

The tenants applauded cautiously. In such times, theological novelty was risky, but rent remission was promised to all who assented. The village priest, finding the Duke persuasive and the tithes profitable, soon adjusted his sermons to suit. "The Almighty," declared Father O'Gudgeon that Sunday, "made man lord of the fowl, that he might imitate their better appetites." Parish religion, having thus joined hands with pond science, prospered handsomely for the space of a generation.

The Duchess of the day—a woman of formidable wit and two surviving chins—developed charitable organisations to encourage transgression in a refined way. Her "Order of the Feathered Grace" met twice weekly to exchange recipes, grievances, and discreet

confessions. They were patronesses of the Poor Glutton Society, which distributed cakes to those who could prove indigestion, and sponsors of the Laziness Hospital, which supplied footmen to anyone temporarily indisposed to work. One could not move in Mallard without encountering the evidence of virtue reinterpreted.

The local church itself succumbed to enthusiasm. The abbot, a man of overflowing sympathy for both himself and the wine cellar, composed an entire treatise titled *On the Winged Nature of Forgiveness*, establishing to his satisfaction that what appeared greed in a duck was, philosophically speaking, providence in motion. Copies were displayed prominently in every confessional, though few survived long on account of dripping candles and small chewing mice.

By 1609, Mallard House had become the intellectual capital of happy wrongdoing. Visitors from abroad came to witness this “Ducal Reformation,” marvelling at the workmanship of its vice. The Arched Banqueting House displayed seven fountains, each dedicated to a Sin and spilling claret correspondingly. The Duck Pool at its centre was said to contain the luckier souls of long-departed ancestors, preserved by the family’s expansive theology. Certainly no mortal gardener could otherwise explain the bubbles.

The only person to object with any consistency was the Duke’s illegitimate cousin, a severe gentlewoman named Temperance Mallard, who considered fun broadly diabolical. Her pamphlet, *A Word to Those in Feathers*, accused the family of “praising the appetites of the pond whilst drowning in their own.” As is the fate of all reformers in pleasurable households, she was politely invited to leave—at spearpoint, but with refreshments for the road.

Her absence did not hinder the family’s advance toward enlightenment. The great sin festivals of the early seventeenth century became legend. On Candlemas the Duke would host the “Venial Hunt,” loosing pardoned sinners across the moor pursued by the clergy for exercise. At Easter they staged the “Feast of Repletion,” where supplicants were encouraged to eat for forgiveness until they fainted, at which moment absolution was shouted down the table. The Bishop himself attended twice before retiring due to sympathetic gout.

But Fate, that malicious housekeeper, does not forever tolerate her furniture being rearranged. In midsummer of 1610, the heavens, offended by debate or simply bored, sent a tempest that drowned half the valley and deposited a small flotilla of ducks upon the chapel roof. The Duke, ever an optimist, interpreted this as celestial endorsement—“Providence congratulates us and joins the family!”—and declared a celebration of divine partnership. During the ensuing regatta on the flooded courtyard, he is said to have slipped upon his moral foundation

and vanished beneath the waters, leaving only his coronet and several satisfied quacks.

The remaining Mallards, perceiving both tragedy and publicity, adopted the event as miracle. “Our lord ascended by immersion,” wrote the chaplain, revising his memoirs before breakfast. Pilgrims soon arrived to drink from the “Blessed Pond,” whose flavour was of brandy and heresy. The peasants prospered on the takings, the church claimed a tenth, and the family retreated, gloriously justified, into legend.

To this day, the county proverb states, “Where virtue swims, a Mallard sinks.” The surviving descendants, few but voluble, continue to regard the Seven Sins as a matter of breeding rather than belief. They maintain that envy for one’s betters encourages good manners, greed finances art, and gluttony keeps butchers in business. As for pride, they note with modest gravity that if mankind were meant to refrain from it, Providence would not have made mirrors so persuasive.

And so the moral stands—like the family itself—wobbling on webbed feet but magnificently afloat: that what the Church condemns as sin, the Mallards commend as policy, and what ducks perform without conscience, dukes repeat without guilt, both being creatures equally blind to heaven and pleasantly oblivious of depth.

1860: a Blandy under-butler

It is a curious fact and one worth recording, that when Their Graces depart the House, all the bustling and covering and shuttering is as much a theatre as ever a stage has seen. Carpets rolled, lamps shrouded, chairs stacked, dust sheets drawn—yet only while eyes are upon us. Once His Grace is gone, half those curtains stay uncovered and a good number of rooms remain just as they were. Who would trouble to tramp up into draughty galleries or spend a day smothering portraits in hessian, when no Duke nor Duchess will ever step foot there?

We do enough for the appearance of care, so that, should some grand personage return ahead of time, all looks in order. But the truth is: we live the same way they do—managing for effect. Their Graces maintain a family, a house, an estate all for show; and we maintain our labours in much the same fashion. It is not deception, only common sense.

The real skill of a servant is not obedience but management—knowing how to anticipate, how to arrange, how to make it seem as though every wish of the Duke is already fulfilled, though we have done no more than half of it. Thus the House persists, as it always has: on appearances.

1860: A letter from a Dowager to Jeanne d'Anatis

If morality carries any true meaning, it must be that we are accountable to others. Yet the Christians assure us that we are accountable only to God. And since God does not present Himself at law, nor sit in judgement in Parliament, nor answer the petitions of His people in visible form, the effect is much the same as if He did not exist. Thus they may commit their trespasses with a light heart, confess them in secret and obtain forgiveness where no human hand can reach. This is the neatest impunity of all and one of which they seem most eager to avail themselves.

1860: A devil's tail

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

There was once an angle called Glod-frey. Any dolt will tell you, if you can convince him to speak and not contemplate his navel, that Glod-frey was the brother of Glod.

Glod was the eldest son of a remarkably large family: he had a wife who had left soon after the birth of her seventh son. And Glod himself, ruler of the heevens and sitter on a seat, had brothers and sisters, who led rather dull lives being worshipped by the dolts Glod had also created at the time of Creation.

One spring morning around the time of our Glod, 1102, Glod-frey decided he was bored sitting on the right hand of his brother, who was amused to twiddle his fingers to the greater discomfort of his brother.

So Glod-frey went to a local shop and ordered a basalt coach with cobalt wings, a crystal sceptre, a ball of string and a star-shaped thingummy. Sadly the shop was all out of cobalt so he had to settle for black.

He proclaimed: "I'm going down there to see what mischief I can make: liven them up a bit. Give a bit of good cheer.. See if you can stop me." And "I really don't like black, it makes my eyes seem small and my skin pallid."

He soon discovered how boring the dolts were, heads down, always pulling fluff from their navels and exclaiming it the work of Glod.

Glod-frey encamped in a place he renamed "Hardes", set his dogs loose and settled in for eternity. He employed a boat-man to ferry such foolish dolts as wanted to visit him across the vast moat surrounding his palatial residence; and made them pay the ferry-man with little circles of base metals. All seemed fairly right with the world for the next several hundred years.

Some days, in keeping with some of the mischief-making of his younger sisters—what verve, what panache—he betook himself in a different form. He preferred the hoof-and-horse aspect with horns and tufts of red hair but sometimes he appeared as a cloven hoof resting on a mantle or half an eye sitting in a vase of vinegar.

He had always preferred the bubbie types who seemed to be in less favour than the blokes but in a more plentiful supply. They'd dance and laugh, tell silly jokes and make lerv. He invented boogie-woogie just for fun and everyone—except Glod's people—seemed to love him.

But happy days do not persist for ever and ever. Achew.

Glod, who missed his hand-warmer, employed the public relations arm of heaven to undermine Glod-frey's pleasurable pastimes. They invented sin and rewrote the Babble to include plenty of references to snakes and gurlies doing the wrong thing, like learning stuff. As well, of course, of rather boring dolts doing the "right" thing like turning wine into water, salt pillars and piles of dung made into loaves for similitude.

And that's why we now have the famous phrase intoned by the right kind of dolts: "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning." Which was rather unfair, as Glod-frey hadn't arrived at the beginning.

1860: Jeanne d'Anatis on names

And let us speak of Christian names. For myself, I have chosen for my daughters the names of women, unashamed, unmodified, entire. Yet how often do I see fathers—whether in our circle or beyond—press upon their daughters the thinnest veil of femininity upon a man's name.

So Charlotte is but Charles with a bow; Pauline, a Paul in skirts; Louisa, poor Louis in disguise; Georgiana a George with a curl; Davidia (so help me!) a David in petticoats; Frances a Francis with softer shoes; Augustine a thinly veiled August; Christine another Christian (though less Christ than imitation). And even my own Jeanne—nothing but John, shifted by a single breath.

What does this betray? A wish for sons that went unfulfilled? A disappointment writ into the very syllables bestowed upon their daughters? The Scriptures are no better, repeating Mary upon Mary, as though a woman can only be holy in duplication, while men endlessly beget their likeness in names, in titles, in lineages.

And what of the marriages that follow? A man takes to wife a Charlotte, a Georgiana, a Davidia—does he imagine himself joined to a softer reflection of his own sex? Is there in this fashion some unspoken inclination toward his own kind, disguised by lace and hem? Or is it

but another way to remind women daily that they are not themselves but someone else's echo?

1860: a Mrs Blandy, house-keeper

We are but vessels, brother and our true labour is for salvation. The dust of carpets, the polishing of silver, the laying of fires—all are but outward signs of that inner duty. To keep cleanly house is to show obedience; to obey our masters is to show obedience; and above both, to obey our Lord.

I pray daily for His Grace and Her Grace, as I do for the maids under me. For what are we without His light but creatures lost in darkness? Though men may say we serve their household, in truth it is God's household we tend. Each bed we make, each candle we snuff, is accounted above.

So may our children, if so blessed, enter likewise into His service. For it is written: better to serve the Lord in humility than to stride proud and fall into sin.

1860: Jeanne d'Anatis on hymns

The quarrel over hymns amuses me almost more than the quarrel over doctrine. One century, hymns are banned as too merry, for they quicken the body and the body is ever suspect. A century later, the same hymns are commanded, as though music could sanctify what dogma cannot. Thus the organ becomes a mark of status: one parish boasts a mighty antique instrument; another boasts of its abstinence from such frivolity.

But is it not plain that none of this is about God? It is about order. The Maypole is condemned because it makes peasants dance. Hymns are condemned because they let women sing. Incense is condemned because it recalls Rome. Every prohibition is an act of fear and every permission an act of power.

Men may call this faith but I call it stagecraft. Churches forbid what they cannot control, then restore it once it can be caged in rules and rubrics. The dance becomes a march; the hymn becomes a dirge; the voice of the people becomes the echo of the pulpit. And still they insist it is God's will, as though He were an impresario of choirs.

1864: Jeanne d'Anatis on conscience

1. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Matthew 7, 1-2 and 9-10

People are different, totally different, from one another. To think that we are all the same is impossible; our natures, our temperaments, are utterly unlike. But this is what people will never see; they found all their opinions on a wrong basis. How can deductions be just if premises are wrong? One law laid down by the majority, who happen to be of one disposition, is only binding on the minority legally, not morally. What right has anyone to tell me that such and such a thing is sinful for me?

Conscience should be that divine instinct which bids us seek after that our natural disposition needs. To the world, to Christians in general, conscience is merely another name for the cowardice that dreads to offend against convention. I have committed no moral offence in this matter; in the sight of God my soul is blameless.

1865: House of Lords

His seat in the House of Lords had long since been managed by a factotum of minor title who was keenly aware of his My Lord's wishes and intentions: largely that there need be no change to Acts of Parliament that did not, in some manner, benefit the Duke's immediate family.

His lordship's rarest utterance, when told of a pending bill, was "Do as I have always done." Which is to say: nothing at all.

Thus did many proposals for legislative change rarely succeed and many have been lost to history without ever being noted by commoners and nobles, alike.

1865: Jeanne d'Anatis on obedience

Among the scattered papers of my grandmother Espèce I have found a torn page, smoke-stained, as though rescued from the fire. Only one phrase remains entire: "*obedience to convenience.*"

I have read it again and again. It is not the language of sermons, nor of rectors with their stale breath and borrowed prayers. It is the language of a woman who saw that religion is nothing more than

theatre—incense here, surplice there, tithes everywhere—all to soothe men into believing they are more godly than their neighbours.

Her words are perilous ones. Had they been seen by any but her kin they would have condemned her as heretic, witch, devil's consort. Perhaps that is why so little of her hand survives. Perhaps that is why my own hand trembles to copy them.

And yet—does not *obedience to convenience* explain the whole of Christendom? Each monarch bends the creed to suit his purse, each priest alters doctrine to suit his appetite. Women alone are told to hold fast, as if obedience were our only virtue.

I keep this fragment as one keeps a jewel: not to wear but to remind oneself that light can pass even through ash.

Artful comments

“Ah yes, the noble Duke of 1865—so wise, so enlightened, so utterly terrified of change. His advice, I believe, was ‘We do not deal in loose change. Do nothing, as we always do.’ A principle that had guided Parliament for centuries with admirable consistency, if not with any visible result.

The poor clamoured for bread? Do nothing.

Women asked for schools? Do nothing.

Machines threatened to replace half the working class? Well—do nothing but faster.

And then, against all instinct, they passed the Education Act. Not, mind you, to educate anyone—heaven forbid the rabble should think—but merely to teach them to read orders, count wages and sign their names before being sent down the mine. The whole thing was meant as a leash and naturally they expected the dog to heel.

But dogs, once loosed, sniff elsewhere. The pupils began to read *more than they were meant to*. Pamphlets, novels, radical ideas, even—oh horror!—poetry. And the aristocracy discovered, to their horror, that teaching someone to read was like teaching them to unlock the wine cellar. They never stop at one bottle.

I laugh, my dear, because the same idiocy repeats itself in your time. ‘Do nothing’—the eternal wisdom of those who fear to be out-thought.”

1865: Jeanne d’Anatis on desire

It is curious, is it not, how the world pretends to be ordered by coin, creed or crown, when in truth every matter of consequence may be traced back to that simplest of hungers—the commerce of bodies. Call

it desire, call it appetite, call it Nature's imperative, yet always it is the thing people most disavow. Observe how language writhes to avoid naming it: the "limb," the "agility," the "visit," the "seat," the "fall," all standing in place of that blunt monosyllable which makes men tremble to speak aloud. Euphemism is not refinement, it is terror.

For sex is the true coin of the realm. Who may grant it, who may refuse it, who is punished for excess, who for abstinence. A Duchess in her window may be thought a whore, though she only seeks a breeze. A serving girl is condemned for looseness though it is looseness enforced. A wife is praised for virtue so long as she conceives and damned as barren if she does not. Even the holy fathers, with their cassocks and chants, labour to stitch together a language in which they may discuss the Virgin without admitting the act that made them all sons of women.

I have long observed that men call power "reason," "duty," or "law," but in practice it is exercised most nakedly through sex. The patriarchs forbid it when they wish to discipline, permit it when they wish to populate, distort it into scandal when they wish to destroy. Women, in turn, learn to disguise their cunning as chastity, their longings as faintness, their knowledge as gossip, their refusals as fatigue. And when a woman names the thing plainly, she is accused of coarseness—while a man, naming the same thing, is congratulated for wit.

The Puritans most of all make me laugh. They who in their youth are busiest beneath hayrick and pew, grow grey and suddenly "discover" virtue, as if it had been waiting in a cupboard all along. They rail against others' pleasures to mask their own recollections, like gluttons who now preach fasting. Yet it is their sermons that preserve the very acts they condemn; no one would remember half so much about fornication were it not for Puritans thundering on about it.

I do not condemn sex. Far from it: it is the thread that binds our species together, the honest heat in all our scheming. But I condemn the lies woven around it, the pious fabrications, the word-games designed to hide what all know perfectly well. For in these evasions lies the real corruption: not in the act but in the hypocrisy that denies it.

And so, my daughters, should you ever puzzle why society feels at once absurd and cruel, remember this: every system—Church, Court, Club or Crown—is but a house built upon sex and afraid lest anyone notice the foundations.

1865: Adoration of the Generative Powers

The 42nd Duke was, like many gentlemen of his stature, a dilettantish scholar and in later years—once he had divested himself of his familial duties—a recluse.

Few of his works were published and fewer still remained in the family archives. We may well adjudge the wisest decision of his executors in disposing of his writings, if this fragment, which does survive, is any indication of his tastes. Abhorrent to modern sensibilities, as it no doubt is.

Fortunately or not depending on one's perspective, such of his collection of rare texts have largely remained hidden from curious eyes. Of those that do persist, many contain spurious spillages on foxed pages that attest to his preference for this topic over that.

This particular piece is itself merely one small part of a larger paper originally in Roxburg binding - now reduced to tatters and unearthed beneath a staircase in the east wing at Mallard House- and purchased for £10 as part of a wider subscription to Hotten's Circular of 1865. If nothing else, it is indicative of where his real interests in physiognomy may have lain: and with whom.

The Adoration

The Adoration of the Generative Powers of Western Europe, being a most curious account of phallic emblems, their erection, position and duration, with special reference to the Middle Ages.

This is a very extraordinary volume upon a subject that now attracting the almost universal attention of the learned and curious in Europe.

Ever since the revival of learning, strange objects have from time to time been discovered—objects which, although they may amaze or amuse the weak-minded, have induced earnest students to inquire into their origin and true meaning. Various matters and discoveries assisted in clearing up the mystery; the emblems and symbols gradually explained their full meaning and the outlines of an extraordinary creed unfolded itself. was the Divinité Génératrice—the worship or adoration of the God Priapus the ancient symbol of generation and fertility.

The Round Towers in Ireland; similar buildings in India; the Maypole in England and even the spires of our churches are now shown to be nothing more nor less than existing symbols of this pagan and strange worship.

Almost all the great relics of antiquity bear traces of this impious adoration—the rock caves of Elephanta, near Bombay, the earth and stone mounds of Europe, Asia and America (North and South), the Druidical piles and the remains of the so-called Fire-worshippers in

every part of the world. Even existing popular customs and beliefs are full of remnants of this extravagant devotion; the horse-shoe placed over a stable or other door or nailed to the orchard gate (occasionally hung upon the branches of the fruit-bearing trees), is nothing more nor less than a bent priapus—the twisted and perverted emblem of an ancient creed, that numbered, probably, more devout followers than any other humanly-devised system of worship. Priapus, as the symbol of lively fructification, was esteemed the God of Gardens.

Artful comments

One of the most telling—albeit secret—attributes of that Ducal line is that they most often chose to emulate the example set by several kings, notably James I. Towit, preferring above all else, the companionship solely, of other gentlemen for “social intercourse”.

Nevertheless, their primogeniture required progeny. So they married florid women of title and fortune; and after that most distasteful of acts, retired either to their wings or to their clubs.

As one milady from the family unwisely remarked: “It is entirely respectable to be an eccentric. Queerness or a peculiarity of character is, like childhood, neither to be seen nor encouraged.”

1711: A Treatise Concerning the Melancholy of Desire; *or, The Duke and the Shadow of Understanding*

It hath been said—and vainly repeated by those who mistake repetition for wisdom—that man is led astray neither by Providence nor demon, but by his own appetite. I have observed otherwise. Appetite, as fire, burneth not of itself, but by the breath which heaven so artfully withholds and hell so generously supplies. Thus, when one’s longings seem unnatural to the clergy, one may with equal reason suspect that the clergy’s nature is unnaturally cold.

My confessor, a diligent man yet unschooled in human experience, once rebuked me that I had found greater sweetness in the company of men than in that of women. “It is not,” quoth he, “that the fairer sex is deficient, but that your Grace hath corrupted perception by indulgence.” I replied—respectfully, as became both our stations—that if God had meant women to be pleasurable to men, He would assuredly have fashioned them men, for no creature can minister to that which it doth not understand. How should a woman, bred for modesty and

miracle, comprehend the divine hilarity of masculine fellowship? She may witness, but not share; adorn, but not partake; smile, but not burn.

The good father muttered something about unnatural affection. Yet I perceive that to call Nature's arrangement unnatural is to impugn its Author, who, if omnipotent, cannot be surprised by the conduct of his creatures. I have therefore concluded—and record it here for the instruction of posterity—that the pleasure which arises between men is not an invention against Heaven, but an instance of its subtler workmanship, whereby each sex is taught to envy in the other what it possesses already in best form.

I have observed among my peers that the most vehement denouncers of manly passion are those who least command their own. The Abbot of Penwith, whose sermons on chastity have frozen many a maiden's smile, keeps a choir of boys whose voices ascend so near to paradise as might tempt the angels themselves to moral surrender. Yet he calls my appetite devilish. Either we are both housed in the same infernal architecture, or one of us dines better upon hypocrisy than the other upon honesty.

Let the reader understand that I admire women most exceedingly—at a proper distance, and clothed. They resemble divine poetry: pleasing to recite, perilous to enact. My steward reports that our tenants believe the Duchess to be a saint; they are correct, for she performs miracles daily—converting affection into patience, jealousy into sighs, and matrimony into sainthood. She hath produced no issue, save complaint, yet even complaint is a form of creation. I honour her for it, and keep my devotions elsewhere.

Among the young men of my service—pages, musicians, and those of uncertain trade—I have discerned that which theologians call communion, though conducted without chalice. The soul, when truly moved, forgets distinction of kind; we become, as Scripture saith, one flesh, though not perhaps in the passage the bishop prefers to quote. Some say this is perversion. I say it is approximation to the divine: for what is heaven but the endless recognition of oneself in another, unashamed and luminous?

Truth, being as patient as women are not, waited until I reached my fifth decade to speak plainly. It came one night as I walked beneath the north gallery, where the portraits hang—grim ancestors painted with moral certainty and actual debauchery. The air smelled faintly of lilies and extinguished candles. Then from the depths of silence came laughter, light as leaves upon water. I turned, but saw only shadow. Yet the laughter gathered itself into words I cannot forget: Thou imaginest sin; I invented it that thou mightest find thy way back to Me.

Whether the voice belonged to heaven or to reason disencumbered I do not know; but since that hour I have ceased to apologise. If Providence objects, it will convey its disapproval through flame or famine, not through friars. Until such correction is visibly distributed, I shall continue in my doctrine—and practice—that the tender understanding between men is the surest mirror of divine companionship.

Let those who have never tasted it condemn at leisure; their chastity is founded on ignorance, which is more secure than virtue. But if ever they are visited by that curious warmth in the breast which makes one man long to know the contours of another's soul, they will understand what I have long observed: that pleasure, like grace, descendeth without consent and saveth whom it will.

This, then, is my confession, my heresy, and my gospel. I am the Duke of my own depravity and find it, upon examination, less depraved than honest custom. Should the angels record my words with irony, let them also note that I have lived justly, harmed few, and paid all my debts save those to beauty. For these I plead that same mercy which permits ducks to swim where men would drown—proof that God favours those who follow inclination with clean feathers and open eyes.

1865: Jeanne d'Anatis on bodies

It is curious, this endless game of clothing words in borrowed garments. A simple, plain English word will not do—too direct, too bare—so a Latin polysyllable is ushered in to lend false dignity. Or some obscure term is pressed into service, not because it suits the thought but because it obscures it. Or a metaphor is summoned, coyly pointing at the thing without naming it.

The human body is never permitted its own language: we are instructed to call a part by the name of the region around it or by the inner organ it conceals or else by comparison with some animal's limb or even a piece of household furniture. At times we content ourselves with a word that merely sounds like the forbidden one, though it means something quite different.

Thus euphemism multiplies, for the delicately minded who cannot bear the naked fact. But euphemisms, like garments too often worn, soon grow shabby. Once the polite word has been recognised as standing for the "shameful" thing itself, the stain spreads and the word too is cast out. And so the cycle begins again: gooseflesh, fresh coinage, fresh victim sacrificed on the altar of propriety. There is no end.

1866: a Blandy groom

A young lady was out riding, accompanied by myself, her groom. She fell off her horse and in so doing displayed some of her charms; but jumped up very quickly and said: 'Did you see my agility, John?'

'Yes, miss,' said I, 'but I never heard it called by that name before.'
We calls it cunt in the kitchen!

1867: Jeanne d'Anatis on euphemism

On the face of it, this small passage seems innocent enough but my dears, this is euphemism at its uttermost worst. I shall be delighted to know your thoughts.

"Miss Mary Jane Brown left her card yesterday at Bushy Park but I was having the painters in so was unwilling to admit her. I asked John Thomas to convey my regrets, that I might rest and be thankful in my garden."

On the face of it, such a note might pass unremarked, were one not accustomed to the layered tongues of our sex. Yet it is full of those little disguises that men neither notice nor require.

"*Having the painters in*"—a phrase of some delicacy for that time of a woman's month, when she must keep to herself. "*John Thomas*" is no footman at all but a rude figure of speech for what gentlemen boast and women suffer. "*To rest and be thankful*" is not always a matter of fatigue after callers but a knowing reference to the languor that follows certain acts of congress. And "*in my garden*" is the most venerable trope of them all: not roses and lilies but a woman's own private plot, tended by herself, sometimes invaded, too often trampled.

Thus one polite entry may conceal an entire discourse of the body. The danger lies in how such euphemisms soften men's understanding. They see only the neat parlour; they never enter the kitchen, where the words are plainer and the truths more stark.

I confess, when I hear some woman praised as "a Miss Mary Jane Brown" of this or that parish, I cannot help but smile. For what are we saying, if not the same thing twice? A woman reduced to her privities, her "Bushy Park" whispered about in parlour tones, as though she is no more than a card left at the door. Words do not veil our shame, my dears—they become the shame itself.

And see too how men speak of us when we refuse them: *spinster*. A woman who will not wed is not free, nor wise, nor self-determined—she is only a spindle left to gather dust. Yet a man who does not marry is a bachelor, confirmed no less, as though he had received a decoration.

Such language is a chain about the ankles, forged of syllables, polished with propriety.

I write this not only for myself but for you, my daughters. Read between these lines when you are grown. Know that every “innocent” phrase has teeth and that when you hear yourself named in euphemism, you are already being diminished.

1767: The Tale of Nancy the Wood Nymph; or, The Tree that Remembered

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

The antiquity of this fable is doubtful; the nymph’s name, Nancy, seems an improbable relic of pre-Christian lore. Yet the Dowagers have always insisted upon its authenticity, which obliges the present editor to include it. [Ed]

Once upon a very ancient time—so ancient that even the stars had not quite learned obedience and sometimes wandered from their places—there was a forest vast beyond the measure of mortal eyes. It stretched for furlongs upon furlongs; to the eastern mountains that caught the first sunlight like polished shields, to the rivers of the western valleys that murmured secrets to themselves, to the northern plains where wild horses roamed as free as thoughts, and southward unto the sea which lapped at its roots and whispered of faraway realms.

In this forest the trees stood like kings and queens of an elder court. Their crowns were older than empires; their roots, deeper than gods. When storms came, the forest did not tremble but merely lifted its great shoulders to meet the rain. Between those pillars of living wood, in the green cathedrals of leaf and shadow, life abounded: birds of colour unknown to human heraldry, serpents with eyes like beads of dew, lizards that sang in the heat, and shy beasts that crept forth only when night poured silver upon the ferns.

And amid all this splendour lived Nancy, a Wood Nymph—daughter of the Dryads, cousin to the laughing Naiads who flung themselves down waterfalls, and sister to the swift Oreads who chased deer through the hills. Her home was no cottage but a great tree whose roots clasped the earth like a mother her child. Its branches curved to form halls and stairways of living timber where birds nested as guests and foxes slept beneath as tenants. When Nancy sang, the leaves above would part at her request, and sunlight would fall like golden honey upon the young saplings below.

She busied herself in tending to her domain with such devotion that even the oldest trees bowed faintly when she passed, which among trees is no small compliment. If a blossom failed to open, she breathed upon it; if a brook ran slow, she whispered to the Naiads until laughter set it racing again. Never did she harm a living thing, for the wood nymphs are the gentlest children of creation—until sorrow teaches them defiance.

Now it was upon a bright morning—one of those mornings that seem newly invented by heaven—that Nancy heard a sound never before known in her forest: a clash like a thunderbolt trapped in wood, regular and cruel. Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! The noise startled the robins, frightened the hares, and echoed through the trunks until even the slumbering trees stirred uneasily.

Following the sound, Nancy came to the edge of her groves and saw a man wielding an axe of iron. It glittered like unnatural frost. He was strong and sullen, clothed in coarse wool, his eyes fixed upon her own tree, her very heart.

“Good sir,” said Nancy, stepping lightly upon a fallen log. Her voice was kind and bright, for nymphs know no other at first. “You stand before a dwelling, not dead timber. The roots beneath your feet are the bones of my home; the leaves above you are my dreaming brow.”

The man wiped his mouth and looked about. “Where are you hid, little witch?” he asked hoarsely. “My wife sends me for wood, and wood I’ll have, for our hearth groweth cold.”

“Then take the fallen branches, friend. The forest is generous, never grudging to those who ask with open palms.”

He stared at her, yet not as men look upon reason but as they look upon temptation. It is the peculiar curse of humankind that they recognise wonder only to fear it. “I’ll take the heart of the tree,” said he. “It has stood long enough, and I have debts to pay.”

He swung his axe. The blade bit deep into bark, into sap, into flesh. For a moment the whole forest seemed to cry out—the birds, the wind, even the river paused as if grieving. The second stroke fell and Nancy pressed her hand against the trunk; the third, and she gasped, for the blow had entered both wood and spirit.

She might have fled into the air, as nymphs sometimes do when danger comes. Yet she remained, whether by courage or bewildered love for her ancient tree. When the fourth stroke fell, she smiled faintly. “I did not choose this sacrifice,” she murmured, “but perhaps I would have, had the forest asked.” Then, as the man raised his axe once more, she vanished into the timber, and the tree fell with a cry that echoed to the mountains.

When silence returned, the woodsman found no trace of her—only a pale light seeping from the sap and a fragrance like spring rain after long grief. He turned homeward laden with the logs that had once been her dwelling. That night his hearth burned higher than ever before, but his sleep was not easy. He dreamed of vines creeping through his window, of branches sprouting from his arms, of roots coiling round his feet. Each dawn he awoke weaker, more wooden, until by the seventh night his wife found him standing rigid beside the fire, his hair turned to moss, his skin dark as bark. The logs had fallen cold. The forest had come to claim its own.

As for Nancy, the villagers say she is dead. Her tree lies mossed over, her laughter gone. Yet those who walk the forest at twilight tell other tales. They say that her saplings have grown taller than the tallest pine, and that when sunlight filters down through the leaves, it forms a figure dancing in the gold dust—no more than a glimmer, but full of life. The birds still sing above it; the small creatures venture out to play once more; and sometimes, when the wind is kind, a soft woman's voice can be heard whispering:

“Take only what you must; for even trees remember.”

Thus ends the story of Nancy the Wood Nymph, who perished, and did not perish—for though her tree was felled, her spirit grew anew in every sapling's reach toward heaven. The forest, being older than empires and deeper than gods, cared for her as mothers care for children who never quite come home.

1868: Jeanne d'Anatis on scandals

It is one of the most delicious ironies of history that the Vatican, that mighty seat of piety, sits squarely atop the Catacombs—and that those Catacombs, as every educated traveller knows, were once as busy a brothel as any port could boast. Rome has ever known how to dress vice as virtue: the same arches that echoed with sighs of commerce now echo with psalms, though both services were attended by men and both demanded their tithe.

The Church pretends its foundations are stone and scripture but we who read beyond sermons know the mortar was sex and coin. The priests who taxed the working women of those tunnels built their temple from the proceeds, then declared the act itself a sin once the treasury was secured. It is one thing to exploit; another to condemn the exploited.

And what of nunneries? Romantic minds like to picture virginal ladies retiring into God's embrace, yet I know too many accounts—even from their own bishops—of convents managed as houses of

assignation. It is no accident these institutions were run by men, nor that “visiting the sisters” was a phrase smirkingly used by courtiers.

The monasteries, for their part, pretended to seclusion but could always be relied upon to import women when the cloisters grew too lonely. Those that did not, turned inward upon themselves, practising “brotherly love” in a manner which would be comic if it were not so destructive.

History whispers its scandals clearly enough: abbots keeping harems, friars with their “spiritual daughters,” nuns accused of witchcraft when their hysteria was only hunger. The Devil of Loudun was not the devil at all but a handsome priest punished for attracting women whose piety was not enough to quell their bodies.

I am weary of hearing that women are the cause of men’s sins. It is men who build cathedrals upon brothels, men who rebrand commerce as sacrament, men who turn convents into cages. The true blasphemy is not desire but the lie—that the Church renounced flesh. In truth it merely monopolised it.

1869: a Blandy butler

We are now dressed in the uniform of our status in the Duke’s house as is the current fashion. Whereas my grandsires were required to imitate their Dukes in matters of dress, wig and jewellery and were given the right to wear certain of the lesser stones the Duchess did not desire, we are not so permitted.

Yet neither the Duke nor his Duchess has a true understanding of the scale, the sheer voluminous mountains of costly material that arrives and must be arranged for at least a first viewing. Her Grace chooses a new stone perhaps for a setting she no longer enjoys and the old stone is cast into one of her jewel trunks. His Grace casts a weary eye across the paintings, furnishings, brocades, silks, satins or perhaps a book. The spices and foods go to the kitchens to be refused at table later, as their Graces decide.

His Grace always maintains the keys to his private fortune. All other keys are in the domain of my sister, the house-keeper. You may imagine the use we make of those keys.

1869: a Mrs Blandy, house-keeper

It is not for us to tally jewels nor to weigh the silks of the Orient, though they pass daily through our keeping. The Lord sends such things for His own mysterious purposes. Our duty is order, piety and the quiet example that shall keep lesser maids from envy. If stones are

cast aside, let them lie: they were never ours. If food is spurned at table, it is not waste but a reminder that man does not live by bread alone.

We do not steal; we *steward*. If my brother turns a key here or there, it is but for the greater ordering of His Grace's house, which, rightly considered, is God's own house also. So I pray that what passes through our hands shall not stain us but strengthen us in humility.

1870: the Duke of Mallard's papers

Those young families, like the Devonshires who claim their title the oldest in England, scabbled about in the dirt and collected vast acres and seats across 14 or so counties swallowing villages and towns as they periodically traipsed across the island.

We Mallards have always been settled as a monolith. We ascended our throne and sat for centuries looking outwards. Our ponds spread gradually across lands and titles, accumulating without us ever moving in those fashionable circles that require a winter here in England, a summer in Ireland, a spring in the highlands, a Grand continental tour. Let the world visit our treasures instead.

We were forever here, where we could be found by royals and commoners alike. Though it was a rare event indeed for the common folk to meet His Grace in person. He is not a Pope or a king who needs to be seen. We Mallards persist.

So that, unlike those Devonshires, we did not accumulate vast acres but settled on a smaller portion. We hold several seats, own many villages and towns and small cities but do not trouble to visit them: there are junior branches that arise for that purpose; and fall away and are replaced from the source. Our power rests on antiquity: beyond the Church-given rights allotted to this king or that earl.

Everlasting power arises from everlasting continuity. A claim no other family in all of Chistendom can claim, not even the Pope nor his Archbishops. We have sat and watched history unfold but we have rarely lowered ourselves to the mud to join it. We are. That is sufficient.

We sit, our right hands resting on the shoulders of your gods and together we smile at the uncertainty that lesser mortals inhabit.

1986: Editorial note by Viscountess Vorpel

It is always amusing to watch men confuse inertia with grandeur. "We sit," he proclaims, as if the act of never moving were proof of superiority rather than simple constipation of the imagination. The Devonshires at least had the decency to tramp about in the mud, however vulgar their acreage; the Mallards mistake moss for marble.

And that last line—“*our right hands resting on the shoulders of your gods*”—surely betrays the family secret: their only true claim to divinity is that they have always been excellent at leaning.

1872: a Blandy maid, assigned to Dowager’s Lodge

I had thought to spend my days polishing brass and carrying coal but the air of the lodges is stranger than any service in Mallard House. The Dowagers sit with pens scratching all day, passing papers from hand to hand as if they were generals. They speak of philosophy, of France, of women whose names I dare not repeat. The very maids here are sharper than most clerks, listening with tilted ears and eyes lowered. Even I have learned a turn of Latin, though I scarce know its meaning. They call us bees and we do buzz about but I cannot tell if it is honey we make or poison.

1872: Jeanne d’Anatis on corsets

You complain of shortness of breath, yet refuse to abandon your corset. Truly, what greater folly? You are neither a mannequin in a shop nor a waxwork to be laced within an inch of your life. I say to you, dear cousin, a gentle figure is more alluring than a fainting one. Why not let your stays be a little looser? The men will still look—men always look—but you will at least have breath enough to laugh at them.

1873: Annals of the House of Mallard Vol. IV

(Privately Printed)

It is to be remarked that His Grace Edward, the Thirty-Ninth Duke of Mallard (1742–1801), in whom were embodied the virtues and dignities of his august line, was in issue blessed with two children only: Edward, Viscount Anetis and Espèce, styled Marquise de Canard, by ancient family usage. The marriage of Lady Espèce in 1788 to Charles-Philippe, Duc de Carnard in France, occasioned a delicate question of succession in the subsidiary title of Canard, lest it should, by foreign influence, become extinguished or diverted. In foresight of these contingencies and to preserve the dignity within the patrimony, the title was, with appropriate ceremony, resumed by her brother, the Viscount, who thenceforth bore the joint style of Viscount Anetis and Marquis de Canard. The unhappy tumults in France in the subsequent year (1789) are alleged to have deprived the Canard dignity of all legal subsistence there; yet no Fitzartur ever acknowledged Paris as competent judge

over Mallard. Thus the marquise, having been once reassumed, was maintained in usage in this realm without interruption and with the courtesy proper to such a dignity, down to the accession of the Fortieth Duke.

Of the collateral branches, little need be said: the Reverend James Fitzartur (second son of the Thirty-Eighth Duke) was successively Dean of Ely and Prebendary of St. Paul's, while Sir Richard Fitzartur, K.C.B., fell gloriously at Corunna. These distinctions, though not perpetuated in title, redounded to the honour of the house and lent support to the belief, still fondly entertained, that the Fitzarturs were destined to maintain their ancient station long after newer dignities had crumbled away.

1875: Jeanne d'Anatis on euphemism

Miss Brown has returned from a visit to her cousin—that self-styled champion of women's rights, Mr Rocklester (for so we call him in jest, though in truth the title suits a rather different limb of his person).

She brought back a story so absurd and yet so perfectly English, that I must record it. Miss Brown thought it all very decorous. I thought it a comedy.

A young lady, out riding, was thrown from her horse and suffered a fracture. When her doctor asked where she was injured, she demurred: "I cannot tell you, doctor. But it is one of my limbs."

"Which limb is it? The one you thread a needle with?"

"No, sir," she replied with a sigh, "it is the one I wear a garter on."

He, still unsatisfied, pressed on: "Then you refer to your bender?"

At this, the poor creature blushed crimson and refused further reply.

Now, is it not a marvel how a physician—sworn to know every vein and tendon of the female frame—may be reduced to riddles and blushes by his own tongue? Our clergymen preach of Eve's apple but choke on her pear.

Limbs, garters, benders: everything but the plain word itself. We are a people who will thread needles and tie garters till kingdom come, yet we have no cunts at all.

Miss Brown, who delights in recounting these trifles, declared that the lady's modesty was exemplary. I, for my part, say only that our prudery is a deeper fracture than any bone.

1878: from the papers of a Duchess

We have long escaped reproof from our Lords and masters. We have avoided conjecture, we have not perished in poorly considered battles

for this or that trifle of land. Our power, if such it may be named—for men decide and describe its boundaries—is subtle, yet enduring, yet more benign.

Men of this century will have you believe that women are merely vessels, a conduit through which their vaunted seed may pass into life. But if we are chalice-bearers, where are they without their chalices? Where are they without mothers to bear them, to guide them, to form their opinions before masculinity smother such gentleness and makes of them ravening beasts?

Too many of my sisters have perished beneath the yoke-hold of male persistence. I have witnessed the terror of a woman who will not live to see the birth of her child. I have heard the howls of agony from within the birthing chamber—cries no man could endure even in imagination—when the life inside perishes before the birthing is complete. Who, then, holds the greater power over life and death?

We are nature's handmaidens: without protection from the wildness of male dominion, yet with all the power that comes from being female, out of sight often, out of mind always. We are indispensable, yet overlooked. We are most wanted when silent; most abandoned when we speak.

1880: Jeanne d'Anatis on morality

If morality has meaning, it must mean that we are accountable to one another. Yet Christians tell us we are accountable only to God. And since God does not exist, they are in truth accountable to no one. Even if such a god did exist, still they would not answer to any person in the real world—which amounts to the same.

Thus the trick: Bible-believers can seek forgiveness from God for any crime committed against humanity. They absolve themselves in heaven's name, while their victims remain on earth. In this way, they act with impunity. And often enough, they do.

1880: Elspeth Mallard on beauty

To be beautiful is to be admired, I suppose. To be also a woman of taste, of education, of refinement—that is less welcome in the eyes of men. A professional beauty in the London season need only dance prettily, bed easily and consent to be envied.

I had but one season; yet why was it only my face that captivated? My intellect required obeisance to men's vanity; my knowledge of culture was praised only as ornament. Beauty, they say, resides in the

eye of the beholder. Yes—provided that beholder is a man and that no woman dares place her mind above his gaze.

The Fall 1881 to 1950

1881: Mallard Gardens

The gardens at Mallard House were spectacularly famous in earlier centuries.

Inigo Jones was one of many designers involved in its construction though not in its maintenance, as evidenced most clearly by the generational disinterest that caused various half-finished garden houses to be constructed or demolished or left to rot in the vast acres that surrounded that house.

Curious though it may seem to those without a seat, much attention was paid to each of several duck ponds and lakelets that dotted the estate.

There were always, of course, the Home Farms but no expense was ever lavished on those acres or buildings which remained always until the next century in a state of near collapse. Nevertheless they were productive and removed the necessity of a duke from ever having to leave his estates should he choose—as he often did—not to.

1882: From the private papers of the Duchess

It is a peculiar cruelty, that what the world calls rank should render civilisation a curse. For what is our nobility, if not a prison lined with velvet? The distinctions that divide us—voluptuous tyrants above, envious dependents below—corrupt every class alike. Respectability is measured not by duty, nor by affection honestly earned but by the idle weight of station. And when duties are neglected, the affections are starved; when the affections are starved, virtue itself grows thin.

I know that a man may sometimes creep through a loophole and dare to think or act for himself. But for a woman it is another matter entirely. Our path is hedged by obstacles peculiar to our sex, demanding strength almost beyond human endurance. We are made weak not only by wealth's languor but by the tyranny of our bodies: bound in corsets until we cannot breathe, paraded as ornaments until we forget that we are flesh. We are told to polish our persons until they shine, so that some man may condescend to lend us his reason, as though our own were a pauper's lantern.

If we dare to be ambitious, we must manage our so-called lords by cunning and deceit. The laws allow us no other avenue, for without

rights there can be no true duties. We are made into an absurd union with our husbands—he the whole, we the cipher. We may dress well, dine prettily and smile with composure but even our sighs must be delicate, lest the world discover that we too might have souls.

I write these words in private, corset unloosed, breath unshackled. A Duchess I may be but in these pages at least, I belong to myself.

1882: Elspeth Mallard on stained character

Sitting, this morning, in our family pew alongside Mama, I noted the effect of our £100 donation towards the new stained glass window that blazes light upon the altar, the rector and those of us close enough to feel its beneficence. One does not wish to be too close to that odiferous rector. I suspect his haste in arriving from his other parish accounts for that curious glow about his person; or perhaps his laundry is at fault.

I have wondered at the expense of this delightful window and also on when we might be called upon for another tithe to cover the cost of the leaking roof, some years in want of repair. How is it that our Anglican church, so wealthy and powerful, can own so many buildings yet leave no funds for their ongoing upkeep and maintenance? Yet, I suppose, in the eyes of God, it is vastly more worthwhile that we should focus on the East—where Eden lies—than be concerned about clothing or draughts, which must surely see some of those poor in our parish meet our Maker all the sooner.

The plate is passed around from front to back so that our contributions to the furtherment of missionary zeal in foreign climes must seem preposterous to those poor who will go without their Sunday meal for the saving of other souls than their own.

Yet, their position at the rear end of this church affords them a view of that glorious window—that stretches from floor to ceiling—if without the benefit of the sun's warming rays. I suppose that must give them some comfort.

1887: letter fragment, Duchess of Mallard

They call it independence, this American enterprise. Yet what independence is it, when they carry our customs whole into their wilderness and christen it liberty? England is the mother, America the child that ran away and only learned to mimic her worst habits: the crushing of natives, the vaunting of progress, the sanctification of profit.

And yet, how eagerly their wealth sails back to us. Heiresses by the dozen, corseted in dollars, return across the Atlantic to lay themselves

at our altars of title. To exchange their youth and fortunes for a coronet on the head of some impoverished peer. A trade as old as dowry, as new as steamship tickets.

It is a curious sight: a republic born to shake off kings now squanders its treasure on ours. We squander it again, of course—on gowns and balls and peacocks and Mallard follies—and call it civilisation.

Independence? No, my dear. Only a change of theatre, the same play repeated. The empire is a chimera, a duck in borrowed plumage. What America has built is not a new world but another old one—and one day, like ours, it too shall fall. And Mallard House as well will crumble but we shall waste our riches with exquisite manners and call that posterity.

1890: the Duke of Mallard's private papers

In accordance with holy writ and the commandments laid upon me, I have taken pains to furnish refinements to the lives of those Blandy servants, who otherwise would stray into indolence and sin. Thus I have commanded that a passage of Scripture be etched upon their mean walls, both beyond the green baize door and in those narrow attics to which they retire when their labours are done—if indeed they ever repose.

The text I chose is both simple and sufficient: "*Be sure your sin will find you out.*" A noble reminder of respect due to myself and to my God who sanctions my authority. I am persuaded there is not a sinner left among them, for my diligence has purged them of temptation. In this, at least, I fulfil my only true duty to the Church—by right of my birth and by proof of my piety.

Mab speaks:

You speak of lineages and inheritances but they are only threads knotted to other threads. When you pull one, the whole weave shifts. In the end there is no cloth, no robe of office, no altar veil—only threads, crossing and crossing, tangling and fraying. Some call them streams, others forests but all are the same: skeins without end, that no Duke nor Duchess may command.

1890: Jeanne d'Anetis on doggerels

It is uncanny the way certain verses lodge themselves in the nursery, like burrs in a child's hem—harmless jingles, we are told, meant to

soothe or to scare into better manners. Yet strip away the sing-song and menace gleams through: *Ring a ring of roses* is the plague in disguise; Humpty Dumpty, a toppled engine of war. Childhood rhymes become adult commandments—half remembered, never questioned, always infantilising.

One, in particular, I cannot abide: that doggerel for a bride on her wedding day. There is no companion piece for the groom. He strides free of rhyme and omen, while she is trussed with old, new, borrowed, blue and a sixpence in her shoe.

How pretty it sounds and how brutal it is. She carries her past like ballast, her future as indenture, her purity paraded, her fortune already promised away. She has no property, no name that is hers, no lawful exit. If her husband proves weak, she must be his nurse; if he proves strong, she must be his victim. Should she seek redress, the disgrace is hers alone and she may die poor, disgraced or abandoned—while the children she has borne and fed and sung these same rhymes to are taken from her arms.

What is this but slavery set to a tune? A lullaby for a lifetime's loss.

1890: the Duke of Mallard's private papers

I told him I had spent enough on his comfort and pleasure to build a fleet of yachts. He, the naughty lad, replied: "And Your Grace has spent enough in me to float 'em."

A second fragment:

The birch was produced and he insisted upon tying me down over the easy chair, so that I could not flinch or get away from the application of the rod.

He began very steadily and with light stinging cuts which soon made me aware that I had a rather accomplished young schoolmaster to deal with my posteriors, which began to tingle most pleasantly after a few strokes. The sting of each cut was sharp but the warm, burning rush of blood to the parts had such an exciting effect that, although I fairly writhed and wriggled under each stroke, I was rapidly getting into a most delicious state of excitement.

The light tips of the birch seemed to search out each tender spot, twining round my buttocks and thighs, touching up both shaft and balls, as well as wealing my ham, 'till I was most rampantly erect and cried out for him to let me have him at once.

Artful comments

The family always prided itself on being eccentric, though never, heaven forbid, peculiar. It is the safest of vanities: one may paint the stables vermilion but one must never admit to preferring the groom.

Poor Oscar—he thought wit would suffice but the world has no patience for wit without hypocrisy. They forgave him Lillie Langtry, because a gentleman must have a lady to neglect; they did not forgive him gentlemen.

As for Ireland, it was always a most unfortunate accident, like being born left-handed or musical. The English have never forgiven the Irish for being a reminder of their own beginnings. Upstarts indeed: every noble house is an upstart if one traces far enough back but the trick is to pretend your horse was always waiting for you, saddled at birth.

1890: the diary of the Duchess

From the authorised diary of a lady's maid to the Duchess of Mallard speaking with her daughter Lady Mabel (Mab) d'Anatis.

August 17th, 1890

“And now he says he's to marry a flar gel.”

“Hardly that, maman. She is the daughter of a Duke.”

“A Malborough or some such. A nouveau, invented title. Really, I ask you. She's not even properly born.”

Artful comments:

Anetis or Anatis?

I often used to sit beside her and whisper sweet nothings in her ear.

1892: From The Morning Post, May

Among those most constantly in attendance at Marlborough House is the Duke Of Mallard, Marquis deCanard, whose estates, long reckoned at a comfortable sixty thousand a year, secure him a place in His Royal Highness's circle. It is whispered, however, that the splendour of recent entertainments has been borne less by income than by advances from discreet bankers.

The Duchess (née Fitzroy) is much admired for her diamonds, though it is reported certain stones have lately crossed the Channel more than once. Still, society requires appearances and no one makes them with greater regularity than Their Graces of Mallard.

1893: Elspeth Mallard on mastery

It strikes me, in the quiet of this evening, that our species is the strangest beast of all. We tremble at pleasure and yet organise our whole existence around it. What are breasts, ankles or a man's "Mastery" but safe symbols to cover what cannot be spoken? For the true act, the conjugal conversation, is deemed too perilous—so perilous, indeed, that the Church would have it fenced round with vows, contracts and silence.

Yet what is this fear but envy of the body? Sex is the greatest pleasure, because it is also the most unruly. It gives life, it brings death, it binds strangers, it unravels households. To worship a God of abstinence is to admit that no man, not even a priest, can truly master what it means to be flesh. And so the Puritan stamps out pleasure, not because God commands it—God, if she exists at all, could hardly care less—but because men quake before their own appetites.

We are, then, a curious contradiction: animals who despise what makes us animals. And so we invent morals, not to elevate us but to excuse our fear of what is most natural.

1896: Elspeth Mallard on moral hypocrisy

Horace was right: *acclinus falsis animus meliora recusat*—"the mind attracted by what is false refuses better things." We are born as animals, yet from the earliest age misled into thinking ourselves superior to all other living beings. Our self-awareness, our knowledge that we must one day die (though never knowing when), is smothered under religious sentiment, unnatural belief and the shame of being merely human.

The only deity worth worshipping—if deity there be—is the natural world, which we ignore at our peril. If we accepted ourselves as animals, how many would be free to live as they are? Instead we are forced into judging others because some cling to a supernatural entity who "promises" eternal life, so long as we die first. Plato's *Meno* declared that "we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things that one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it." Yet even this curiosity is twisted into prohibition, as though not-knowing were itself a crime.

Any true god must be beyond our comprehension. What species of god can be worth knowing if we insist on humanising it or on claiming personal friendship with the infinite? Montaigne once remarked that "man, stripped of all human learning and so all the more able to lodge

the divine within him, annihilating his intellect to make room for faith... is a blank writing-tablet, made ready for the finger of God to carve such letters on him as he pleases." Such blankness is what priests prefer: obedient, credulous, malleable.

But what, really, is this "original sin" but a story spun in Aramaic, translated and re-translated through Hebrew, Greek, Latin and finally into English? Why is the sin of pride condemned but the greater sin of hypocritical moral judgement goes unpunished? Modern philosophers admit what every parishioner already knows: "moral hypocrisy is a very common bias in moral judgment. Individuals make more severe moral judgment when a moral transgression is enacted by others than when an identical transgression is enacted by themselves."

1895: The Table of Mallard House

In later years, for the most distinguished occasions—such as when the monarch was invited to visit—the Duke would import one of the most celebrated French chefs, including (if the record is to be trusted) the illustrious Carême himself, to contrive confections of such delicacy and splendour that they were spoken of for decades afterward.

The Duke, however, was not dazzled. He was privately heard to remark: "*We may have had our lands pilfered by the hoi-polloi but that is no cause to surrender our reputation for the excellence of our table.*"

Several lesser historians—with their usual combination of zeal and error—have claimed that Carême was responsible for introducing *service à la Russe* to the English table. The truth, as the discerning know, is otherwise. As so often in history, the Mallards were first; the world merely imitated them.

Artful comments:

"Do admire the progress of civilisation! Once a woman might only perish quaintly—her skirts aflame by the hearth, her dainty bones fractured on the narrow stair or her lungs neatly skewered by the bony embraces of a corset. Picturesque ends, almost poetic.

But ah, the modern refinements—what ingenuity. The drawing room itself transformed into a charnel-house. The green flocked wallpaper oozing arsenic; the lampshade shedding death-light with every evening glow; the paste beneath crawling with mould like a polite plague.

Gas pipes hissing a lullaby, wires lying in wait to crisp the inattentive guest.

Such elegance! Such progress! The Fitzarturs could only bludgeon their wives with bad poetry or gout; you contrive instead to kill them with *taste*.”

1890: Viola Vorpel on primogeniture

The primogeniture, rigid as iron, bound the Fitzartur estate to pass strictly from father to son. It was not affection that mattered, nor merit but the correct sex of the heir. A daughter counted for nothing; a cousin, everything. Thus the family prized not the woman’s presence but the proof of her function. In this, they resembled the courts they mimicked: royal mistresses were not selected for beauty alone but for safety. A married woman with children was convenient—her husband’s rights already secured, her lineage already proved. No one could sue a king for theft of succession when the husband had heirs in place.

Lady Cornwallis-West herself once claimed to have hurried through three—or was it six?—children before the age of twenty-two, simply to “get them out of the way,” and thus to surrender herself to the pleasures of court without failing her maternal duty. That such pragmatism could be said aloud in one generation and yet be cloaked in prudery by the next, shows the curious late-Victorian paradox: they shunned their licentious ancestors in public, then behaved much the same in private.

It was a cold arithmetic but one made vivid in the daily theatre of the house. A Duke’s estate was not merely walls and land: it was a court, peopled with sycophants, relatives, clerics and those who clung like ivy. The grand house existed as a stage upon which prestige could be displayed—and more importantly, witnessed. To entertain a future king, as the Fitzarturs did, it was not sufficient to have wealth. One required an audience. Nobles without a court, however rich, remained provincial, uninteresting. It was the crowd that confirmed the grandeur.

Artful comments:

“Oh yes, the crowd! Our noble parasites. The rustle of skirts, the oily bows, the endless ‘your grace’ chirped like a rosary. Without them, His Grace was a man in a draughty pile of stone. With them, he was a world entire. You see, we did not inherit land—we inherited witnesses. A court is nothing but a mirror, tilted to show the family to itself. And how we loved to see ourselves, reflected a thousandfold. Ah, yes. It was never the king we entertained—it was ourselves.”

1898: From Aunt Euphemia Mallard, Simla

Dearest girl,

I am informed that young ladies in Sydney *walk unaccompanied!* I need hardly remind you that the offer of a gentleman's right arm is not merely gallantry but an unequivocal signal of intent. To accept it rashly is to consent to all manner of liberties. The colonies may forgive this but we in India know better: one misplaced arm may undo generations of breeding.

Fin de siècle

20th century ducks on the walls of fate

Where have all the Dukes of Mallard gone? Flown into history for safer keeping: to a past of pomp and prestige. To a dining table served a Porange with crispened skins.

The Fitzartur primogeniture persists, naturally. But it is the lesser line—that of the females—that we must now trace.

Beginning in 1750 with the marriage of Espèce deCanard and following her own distinguished, if diminished, steps towards a meaner greatness. Lower and lesser by title, wealth and noble power, they soon became commoners, beneath contempt for their more illustrious counterpanes. The turnings of history—unchanged for centuries—left the male Fitzartur line singularly unprepared to face the vagaries of public opinion. A fact largely unnoticed by them until it was too late; but capitalised on to the benefit of the deMallard's.

By degrees, the uncertain influence of mixing with a lower set, the advantages of a publicly paid education and the freedom from encumbrances gave them an hitherto unseen entrée to the real world.

However, there is little to note in their descent between 1750 and 1930, when we meet them again rising up in intellectual puffs. A succession of unwise and less fortuitous marriages had by then reduced them as significant people while significantly increasing their numbers.

The Mallard estates, torn asunder by taxation after 1900—in spite of the Duke's remonstrances with his factotum—left them largely destitute though still wealthy beyond the dreams or expectations the proletariat. Nevertheless, their prolonged absences from actual, everyday power offered no protection beyond the own arrogance.

They never suffered those issues common among members of their class with regard to finding suitable servants—as the Blandy family remained with them through the centuries from 1750 onwards, until en fin they released themselves from such obvious servitude. Taking with them many of the most valuable paintings, objets d'art and in many

instances sovereigns and jewels, like thieves in the night, they disappeared. They felt, justifiably perhaps, that never having been paid for their work and consistent loyalty or indeed addressed by their real Christian names—women were called Sally, men Blandy, no matter the century—they were equally entitled to the Mallard House treasures before they might be sold to a less appreciative audience. As one member of the Blandy family remarked shortly before her death in 1910, “We cleaned the bloody things. They were ours by rights.”

So, we shall leave the Fitzarturs and the Blandy servants to their fates for now and peek into the Mallard family closets to see what may be seen.

The Ascension of the Feathered House

or, How the Ladies of Mallard House Took Wing

At the turn of the century, when the skies hung low with the smoke of progress and the rivers ran thick with the dust of unmade empires, there occurred a curious and, to some, alarming miracle within the ancient seat of the Dukes of Mallard. In that house, whose walls had heard more Latin prayers than English kindness, the lineage of men was waning—not from want of heirs, for they bred as diligently as hawks, but from want of mind. The world had rolled into an age of thought, and the sons of generals found themselves unarmed.

Yet where the dukes sagged into their genealogies and their priests into scholastic certainties, the women had been quietly keeping the lamps trimmed. For centuries they had endured as one endures the climate; their plumage of dull domestic habit rendered them invisible to the hunters of fortune and the tax-gatherers of crown and church alike. Thus shielded by the supposed insignificance of their sex, they occupied a kingdom of interiors—of linen cupboards, dressing tables, music rooms, and whispered conversations—each small act concealing a metaphysics of survival.

Now, if one were to consult certain theologians of both table and tribunal, one would learn that woman’s soul was held to be the inferior analogue of man’s—a reflection dimmed by matter, fit to mirror obedience but never reason. It was, according to Doctor Praetorius (whose authority men cited as if divine), the unhappy consequence of Eve’s curiosity. He argued, quite textually, that since curiosity had undone Paradise, learning could only prolong exile. Yet he, who wrote so sternly of women’s weakness, was often corrected in spelling by his maid.

It is a marvel how the counsels of heaven often descend through back staircases. For at Mallard House in those days lived six ladies—cousins, widows, and daughters—who found themselves united less by blood than by illumination. The eldest observed that the household library, having been locked since the plague years, contained volumes the dukes no longer read nor understood. The key, found on a chain of forgotten virtue, passed quietly into her hand, and thus began the education of the House of Mallard's invisible half.

Night after night the women gathered in the library's dust-laden air, reading by candlelight until dawn painted the books pale. They read philosophy and astronomy, the Gospels and the poets, herbals and alchemical treatises. They took notes not in Latin—as the men had done to confuse readers—but in their own tongues of embroidery and metaphor. Their discoveries increased, and their curiosity, that anciently condemned impulse, blossomed into an order of reason.

One lady, who played the spinet with divine patience, discovered in the modes of music proofs of harmony stronger than any sermon. Another brewed potions that lent courage to mothers in childbirth and eloquence to husbands in confession. The youngest painted likenesses of the dukes past and present—but upon her canvases their eyes were always slightly wrong, as though staring at what history forbade them to see. Around them grew a fellowship of maidens—each bringing a thread of craft or observation until, by imperceptible degrees, the women wove a net of thought finer than any the masculine family had cast in wars or councils.

Their motto, embroidered discreetly upon a mantel cloth, read simply: *Sapientia volat*—Wisdom flies. They dared not fly themselves, for the century was still too heavy with propriety, but their learning began to take wing nonetheless. Letters, essays, recipes, charms, and diagrams found their way from the House to other households; wives in distant districts quoted them as anonymous wisdom, abbesses borrowed them for moral instruction, and physicians, discovering the notes copied into notebooks by idle girls, published them as their own.

So it was that without coronet or conquest, the women of Mallard House founded an empire of intellect within the ruins of masculine dominion.

Now, scholars of Providence may inquire: did the Almighty intend this reversal, or was it merely the irony of history correcting itself? To such questions one may answer only that the natural order permits no vacuum. When man neglects the intellect, it migrates—like the seasonal bird—to gentler climes. And by the time the Duke noticed that his clerks took dictation from his wife, his house had already transformed beneath his booted feet.

He, poor creature of rank unaccompanied by comprehension, attempted indignation: forbade the ladies their gatherings, seized their pens, and consigned the library's contents to the parish bonfire. Yet wood burns faster than wisdom. Each flame unlocked a remembrance; every ash returned to tale. By morning the women had rewritten all that mattered, committed some to paper and more to memory. The fire that was to destroy their knowledge instead illuminated it.

As dawn touched the highest windows, the Duke—seeing his family assembled in the courtyard, their faces bright with a light no hierarchy could extinguish—felt the first doubt of his life. He had dreamed, vain man, of conquest by heritage. They, unarmed yet unbound, had conquered time. He retreated to his chambers muttering of disobedience, which is the name men give to comprehension when discovered among women.

From that day the estate of Mallard prospered in unexpected ways. Its gardens yielded herbs that cured maladies unknown to the physicians of London; its accounts, once irregular, became models of civic economy; its reputation, once martial, turned philosophical. And though the dukedom itself declined into history, the letters of its women spread, hand to hand, transforming cottages into academies and conversation into art.

Some say they became like birds indeed—that at certain spring dawns one might glimpse them walking the lawns with eyes luminous as stars, their shawls fluttering like wings, their laughter sounding very faintly like the rush of flight. The villagers, seeing such an apparition, cross themselves and whisper that angels study among the living. But those who have read their manuscripts, and felt the warmth of ink that seems still to breathe, know better. They were women; that was miracle enough.

1900: Elspeth Mallard on Christian faith

Christians persist in believing that God is a Trinity of Persons: each omnipotent, omniscient and wholly benevolent, co-equal and fully divine. Yet not three gods, they say but one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Prima facie, the doctrine seems gratuitous. Why multiply divine beings beyond necessity—especially since one God is hard enough to believe in?

One could weigh the Trinity against reason. Or—slip of the pen—against treason. For surely to question it is both: a crime against sense and an outrage to authority.

It strikes me as a mathematician's trick, this splitting and re-splitting of unity into parts that are somehow not parts. Three in one, one in three, like those Russian dolls that pop out smaller versions of themselves until there is nothing left but wood and paint. A child's toy elevated into creed.

The faithful cling to it, of course, because it is old and because old things carry the scent of authority. But age does not lend reason. If divinity must be multiplied, why stop at three? Why not seven or ten or the hundred little gods our servants quietly keep in their lodges, never mentioned above stairs?

1900: Pages mondaines, mars

M. le duc de Mallard, naguère encore décoré du titre de marquis de Canard, gentilhomme d'un goût que d'aucuns jugeraient raffiné mais que d'autres qualifiaient de tapageur, s'est signalé à la cour de Napoléon III, y exhibant tout l'attirail et tout le vacarme que suppose une telle prétention.

Son épouse, Lady Isabella Ermingarde Félicité Fitzartur, d'un teint qu'on dirait presque fiévreux [voir portrait joint], l'accompagnait. Comme tant d'Anglaises exportées en France, elle a été désignée par la presse comme une *princesse en dollars*—spécimen insulaire aujourd'hui fort à la mode.

Son père, baron américain de l'industrie,—parenté vague, mais dûment proclamée—avec les Fitzartur, a acheté pour sa fille l'honneur d'un titre décrépît. Déjà, chuchote-t-on, la fortune immense de ce baron s'évapore au rythme des caprices du couple, et l'armée de valets, cuisiniers et coiffeurs qu'ils traînent dans leur sillage en est la plus parlante des preuves.

On ajoute que le trousseau de la duchesse—augmenté chaque jour de bijoux Cartier, de mallettes Vuitton et, dit-on, d'élégances Chanel (peu importe l'exactitude, la dépense demeure)—a franchi le million de guinées.

Il n'est pas inutile de rappeler que les mâles Fitzartur ont l'habitude tenace d'épouser des fortunes colossales dont les propriétaires meurent trop tôt, laissant l'argent, mais rarement des héritiers. On se demande si le duc, déjà blasé, ne songe pas à remplacer sa compagne par une nouvelle Shéhérazade—pour lui-même ou, à défaut, pour son fils, le vicomte d'Anetis.

Nous attendons, non sans gourmandise, que ces extravagances se multiplient par dix lors de leur passage sur nos rivages.

Liberté. Fraternité. Égalité.

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1901: Excerpt from *The Scurrilous Rag*

It has been remarked that Miss deMallard of Bentink Street, SW2, has too often stationed herself—or someone closely resembling her—at her drawing-room window. As all persons of the world are aware, such conduct, however innocent, carries unfortunate associations.

Among the demi-monde, a lady at her window is thought to signify a willingness for commerce; and that Miss deMallard's masked maid has on occasion been observed there in her stead has given rise to whispered misapprehensions of the most injurious sort. Whether by design or mere folly, this repeated indiscretion is deeply unbecoming of a gentlewoman and cannot but excite suspicions as to the true traffic of that household.

Artful comment:

The Blandys were ever resourceful: when not selling onions they sold themselves. The mask was but a convenience, so that no one might quite tell who was the mistress and who the maid.

1903: Elspeth Mallard on inversions

It is most curious, the way men insist upon numbers to corral what they cannot face in themselves. One reads, for example, that “inverts” comprise ten in a hundred—as though desire were a coin to be counted in neat stacks. I should put it far higher, nearer thirty, perhaps more than sixty. For I have long thought that most men are not half so interested in women as they claim and most women, if freed of men's expectations, would rather seek each other.

This is why so many gentlemen stumble in the marriage bed: their failure is not in performance but in interest. They perform, not because they are moved but because the estate requires it, the lineage depends upon it. Our Dukes are proof enough.

And women? We too are forced into performance. To be seen to blush, to sigh, to yield. Yet how many of us, if spared the act, would sigh with relief?

I sometimes think the “problem” of lust has never been woman's appetite but man's lack of honesty.

1904: From Major Basil Mallard, Bombay

Nephew, Remember this above all: never gamble with a man who has *clean fingernails*. He is either fastidious or dishonest and both make dangerous companions. Also: when in doubt, order gin. Beer is for dockers.

1905: Elspeth Mallard on intimacy

Emotional intimacy is not to be confused with possession. It is the knowledge that there is someone you may tell anything to—all your feelings, on any subject. That there exists a person to whom you may run with your laughter or your despair, who will not reduce you to judgement.

It may be words or merely the glance of eyes or sitting side by side in silence. It is the safety of being known without disguise, the grace of being recognised as you are.

To be seen—truly seen—is the rarest fulfilment. For it can only exist when the other seeks to know you, not to use you, not to measure you, not to judge you.

1908: Society Notes

It has lately been whispered in the salons of Berlin and Paris alike that His Imperial Majesty the Kaiser has once again commissioned a yacht of such enormity that no harbour in Northern Europe can comfortably house it. The object, so one hears, is to eclipse the *Victoria and Albert* of our own Edward VII, in tonnage if not in taste.

The Duke of Mallard, when pressed upon the subject at dinner, merely waved a hand and remarked:

“Ships are measured in keels, not in cubits. We build ours, we do not purchase them. Let emperors haggle with their dockyards; the Fitzarturs have always had theirs.”

It was further observed that the Duke’s remark occasioned some embarrassment in the German attaché present, who was reminded—rather sharply—that the Fitzarturs had launched fleets when the Kaiser’s family were still petty vassals scratching their parchments.

The Mallard household remains serenely indifferent to questions of naval supremacy, holding instead to the view that dynasties, like vessels, should be judged less by size than by the durability of their timbers.

1910: from the papers of the Duke's lawyers

We have long regarded it as a signal honour to hold the patronage of so illustrious a house as that of His Grace, Duke of Mallard. Regrettably, a change in our own circumstances has decided our fate more conclusively than His Lordship's declination to settle those accounts that have accrued during his tenure.

It is therefore with the greatest reluctance that we must advise our connexion must now be severed, as our fortunes have been so diminished that we may no longer furnish His Lordship's demands with the rigour and deference we might most desire.

Yours faithfully,

Augustine Swine

Purveyor and Providore of Fine Victuals to His Excellency

Artful comment:

We Dukes never pay our debts. What is a debt but the allegiance owed us as tithes to our great estates? It is by such thrift that the rich and titled remain rich and titled.

1912: From Cousin Alaric Mallard, St John's Wood

Young fellow, You ask whether it is acceptable to wear brown shoes in town. Permit me to be plain: brown is for the provinces. In London, only black. I do not care what the Americans do. If you must err, err in overdressing. One may recover from being taken for a foreigner but never from being mistaken for a clerk.

1912: Preface to the History of the Noble House of Fitzartur

It is with no small degree of satisfaction that I lay before the discerning reader this modest volume, a work which, though compiled under the manifold distractions of public and private duty, seeks to illumine the noble antiquity and illustrious connexions of that most ancient and puissant family, the Fitzarturs of Mallard House.

The family's descent may be traced, by indubitable evidence, to the heroic companions of William the Conqueror, though there are whispers (not unworthy of consideration) of an even remoter origin, extending to the elder house of Bourbon and, through it, to the emperors of Byzantium. The Fitzarturs, like the swan and the mallard which adorn their escutcheon, have ever navigated with grace the twin waters of English and Continental distinction.

It will astonish no attentive reader to learn that this house has furnished counsellors to Plantagenets, patrons to poets and—if rumour may be trusted—confidants to more than one Stuart queen. Such intimacy is attested by discreet allusions in foreign archives and I have spared no exertion in securing transcripts, though space precludes their full reproduction here.

Much of this matter, I freely confess, would have eluded me, had it not been for the tireless efforts of my devoted helpmeet, whose delicate industry in the libraries of Paris and Vienna has gathered pearls where my own nets returned but empty. The arrangement, selection and verification, however, remain entirely my own.

To objectors who carp at slight irregularities of chronology or question the continuity of descent, I can only reply that the Fitzartur name has ever carried with it a weight of presence beyond mere parchment. In the annals of our kingdom, families rise and fall with the caprice of fortune; but here is a line whose continuance, like the steady flowing of the Thames, admits of no serious doubt.

Let it not be said that England neglects her noblest houses. In an age when taxation presses hard upon ancestral estates and when vulgar commerce seeks to rival the dignity of birth, it is meet that we should record, with pride and fidelity, the glories of those whose very existence is a living testimony to our nation's greatness.

H.C.R., Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, London, Michaelmas, 1912

1913: Elspeth Mallard to her daughter Octavia (in Sydney)

Indeed, women should be allowed the vote. Yet for whom are they to cast it, if only for men? A gentleman's member may well prove more commanding in the bedroom; his height, when measured against our smaller stature, may lend him the illusion of elevation. But illusion it remains.

I trust I have instilled in you more sense and greater rigour, than to be dazzled by appearances. Civilisation stumbles forward upon stilts of its own making—fragile supports built by men who mistake balance for power. We need not rise up with banners and fists, as they do; let them skirmish among themselves.

Our task is the subtler one: to subvert their blindness, to pursue our own purposes beneath the veil of theirs and to secure a future for our children that is not won by noise but by persistence.

That future will not be secured by matching their tempers but by standing apart from them. By seeing clearly what they cannot: that humanity's question lies beyond the squabbles of sex or gender.

1913: Viola diary notes

It was long said that the Church renounced the Devil. Not so: it merely renounced women. A thousand years of piety reduced to a gentlemen's club—asceticism rebranded as virtue, institutionalised celibacy as holiness. The Dukes, in their frankly homosexual excesses, were therefore the more pious. At least they were honest about their pleasures.

The Church, meanwhile, claimed to abhor the flesh while carefully excluding only half of it. And so one hears again the question posed in Plato's *Euthyphro*: is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious or is it pious because it is loved by the gods? The Church's answer was clear: whatever the male body desired became virtue and whatever the female body represented was condemned. It was never about the gods at all but about the club.

1920: Octavia Mallard, notes for a lecture

Men have little imagination beyond what they have copied from their predecessors, which they then parade as modern insight. This is the essence of psychiatry: a stale inheritance dressed in new robes, a science of minds devised by those least capable of original thought.

Why a mortal female from a Greek myth? Why *Psyche* as their emblem? Why not Hermes, whose quicksilver ambiguity might unsettle their certainties? Why not Eros, who would remind them that desire can never be tamed? Why not Purusha, drawn from a tradition older and richer than their narrow canon?

Because psychiatry is not about understanding the mind. It is about men defining women. Eros would not do, for he embodies precisely the aspect—desire—that they fear in women and flatten in themselves. Hermes is disqualified for sounding too much like a tradesman's harness-maker, though "harness" is apt enough, for that is the work these men perform: harnessing female sexuality into silence. And Purusha? Too foreign, too unpronounceable, too far beyond the reach of their provincial imaginations.

So we are left with Psyche, the docile mortal they can recast as allegory, made safe for their lecture halls and instruments. Meanwhile, women remain excluded: there are no female psychiatrists. To handle the flux of the mad, they say, is unfit for our fragile constitutions. As if fragility were not the very condition their definitions enforce upon us.

Now, as church, state and society loosen their hold, men hurry to build their new temple of the mind upon the same exclusion. But they

forget this: imagination has always been ours. While they copy, we invent. While they legislate, we endure. And while they deny us a voice, we imagine our way into survival—into futures they cannot conceive.

1920: The Golden Age of Crime Writers (in Australia)

It is a point of some amusement to literary historians that the so-called Golden Age of Crime Writing is so often attributed to gentlemen of minor consequence such as Arthur Upfield or John Lang—provided one omits the operative word *male*.

From 1890 until her untimely death in 1934, Miss Euphemia Mallard produced a string of detective novels and historical reconstructions, including a particularly ill-advised re-examination of the notorious Blandy case of 1752. Whether she was ignorant of or wilfully forgot, her family's entanglement with that name remains unclear.

Her books sold tolerably well abroad, though rarely under her own name—for it was already unfashionable and faintly indecent, for a lady to concern herself with murder. Under the guise of “Mr E. Fenwick,” however, her tales found a ready readership in London circulating libraries and the odd notice in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Her end was itself the stuff of fiction. Poisoned—though discreetly labelled “accidental”—by her own maid, Euphemia expired with the dubious distinction of having written her own epitaph. The Mallards had long since adopted the affectation of calling their servants only by their Christian names and so entirely forgot that this particular maid was, by blood, a Blandy. In thus silencing her mistress for daring to poison the Blandy name with ink, she restored honour of a sort to her own.

The Blandy family, with an obstinate loyalty that can only be called hereditary, petitioned repeatedly for her pardon. Some said out of pity, others whispered out of debt.

1921: The Times Literary Supplement, 14 July

*The Blandy Papers. By Mr E. Fenwick. London:
Chapman & Hall.*

It is one of the more curious features of our time that colonial writers, eager to prove themselves worthy of the parent culture, insist on rummaging about in cases already well-rummaged. In this instance, “Mr E. Fenwick” (we are informed the name conceals a lady from the Antipodes) has essayed to retell the unfortunate history of Miss Mary Blandy, convicted of poisoning her father in 1752.

We confess ourselves at a loss to see what further light can be shed by one writing at a distance of both geography and time. The documents of the case have long been available to scholars here and the more sensational pamphlets of the age have been pored over by criminologists of standing. To re-open the matter in so flaccid and sentimental a style, as though it were a romance of youthful passion rather than a sober legal affair, is scarcely to the point.

Moreover, we cannot forbear remarking the colonial presumption of seeking to claim for Australia a share in England's darker annals. If the Dominions wish for their own canon of crime, let them cultivate it upon their own soil. England has no shortage of skeletons, nor do we require assistance in exhuming them. Forensic science, after all, was not an Antipodean invention.

It is possible, of course, that readers with a taste for morbid embroidery may be diverted. But as history, *The Blandy Papers* contributes nothing that was not better stated and more correctly, in the pamphlets of 1752.

1924: Viscountess Viola Vorpel, Oxford Lecture

Gentlemen—and the handful of women now permitted to sit among you like decorative potted palms—I am asked to speak on *the landed estate in the modern world*. A tiresome topic, for the estate has never been modern.

You mistake in thinking Mallard House is an oddity, a relic of feudal excess, something quaint to be preserved on your Sunday drives. Mallard House is England. The deer park is your Empire, endlessly grazed and endlessly fenced. The lodges of our Dowagers are your colonies, given just enough lace and linen to look presentable, never enough freedom to be unruly.

The house itself, gentlemen, is Parliament—365 windows so each day's mischief may be aired and disguised as duty. The wine cellars are the City of London, where fortunes ferment out of sight and only occasionally explode. The nursery wing? Ah, the Church. It teaches obedience in the name of salvation, while sending its own children out to labour as servants of our Lord.

Do not frown. This is no satire. It is a mirror. You may believe the Dukes are decadent, idle, a spent force. But their system persists because you all collude in it. The Mallards only perfected what you yourselves continue.

And if you wish to know the way of the future, it is not in your treaties, nor your tariffs, nor your Labour Party. We are all servants still—servants of patriotism, of a Crown that no longer reigns, of a male

deity who commands life and death with the flick of a wrist. Yet it is the overlooked who have always held the keys. The Blandy housekeepers of yesteryear, those women with their ledgers and their prayers, who turned a blind eye to theft while keeping the household running—they alone know which doors are worth locking and which may yet be opened.

Do you imagine, gentlemen, that your wives do not speak? That the scullery-maids do not whisper across the kitchens, that your daughters do not confide to one another what you yourself never hear? There is a web beneath your feet, strung from nursery to lodge, from drawing room to market stall, carrying every scrap and murmur, every failing and secret. You dismiss it as gossip. And yet gossip has brought down kings, toppled cabinets, sent dukes into exile.

So laugh, if you will, at the thought of a woman's chatter. But when next your own name passes from lips to lips, remember that the locks are yours, perhaps but the keys have never been.

1924: Harrods Linen & Currency Department

Client Memorandum – Account: L.E.A.F.

To be handled with utmost discretion. Per His Grace's standing instructions, all Bank of England notes (one pound denomination unless otherwise advised) to be received in packets of twelve, bound in ribbon.

Notes to be washed, starched, pressed and returned by Thursday post in the standard *Fitzartur fold* (corner over corner, duck's foot motif uppermost).

Please note: His Grace has requested that all laundering be performed on the estate's account "in keeping with the seasonal cleaning of leaves." Staff are reminded this refers to currency, not foliage.

Clients of similar habits: Earl of Redesdale; certain members of the Churchill family; others unnamed for reasons of decorum.

1925: Viola Vorpel, lecture on "Style"

Gentlemen—and those few ladies tolerated here this evening—let us address "style," that most overrated of human qualities. Style, as the Greeks knew, is nothing but the scratch of a stylus. A mark. Penmanship. Neatness. Critics dress it up as substance, as though ink itself were thought. But two readers will see two different things in the

same line and each will cry “style!” What they really mean is: *it moved me or it did not.*

Fashion, of course, is merely borrowed style and no braver than a man in last year’s waistcoat. To have your own style is simply to risk being unfashionable for life. You will not like it but you will survive it—unless, of course, you lack the courage to be anything other than the echo of another’s hand.

We are being homogenised as humans, pressed into uniformity by machines, advertisements and social ambitions. This may be safer for most of you—sameness always feels safe to those who fear irrelevance—but it is the outliers who shape society. Not because they *choose* difference but because they cannot help it. To be different is to be normal. It is the rest of you who are abnormal in your clinging to sameness.

I hear whispers about “happiness” in the newspapers. Yet without sorrow, how would you know what happiness is? Without loss, how would you prize possession? Contrast is the only teacher. During the influenza epidemic—you called it Spanish, as though germs had nationality—we learned more about living in a month of grief than in a decade of your sermons.

So if you demand style, at least admit it is a scar, not a virtue. It is the scratch that remains when we refuse to be erased. And perhaps that is why you fear it: because true style is not a flourish of the pen but the mark of difference you cannot imitate, cannot regulate, cannot buy. It is the reminder that no matter how many of us you try to fold into the same pattern, there will always be one line—one woman—that will not bend.

1925: From The Times, April

The death of His Grace the Duke deCanard, Marquis Mallard, removes from English society one of its most venerable names. The Fitzartur estates, valued at upwards of eighty thousand acres in the last century, have now been largely dispersed in order to satisfy the heavy imposts of the Inland Revenue.

Creditors of long standing, many of whom have borne with the Family’s obligations with exemplary patience, will at last receive settlement, though at a fraction of the sums long owing.

Mallard House, seat of the Fitzarturs since the reign of George I, is to be sold by auction this summer, together with its contents. The celebrated silver centrepiece of a duck pierced by a sword, long the pride of the family plate, will be included in the dispersal.

His Grace is survived by issue, though it is not yet known whether any portion of the estate shall remain in their possession.

Artful comments:

“The lettuce has wilted. The debts are paid. Silence is restored.”

1926: Euphemia Mallard, private diary

I find I write tales of the criminous because the greater crime—the centuries-long theft of women’s own selves—is too tedious to prosecute. The Duchess of 1810 complained of her ‘phantasy’, her enforced lodges. I complain of mine: the corset re-boned as brassiere, the harem remade as secretarial pool. The costume changes but the script remains.”

Men prefer to believe that a woman who will not serve them in bed is therefore unsexed, unnatural or perverse. How convenient, that one can dismiss rebellion as pathology. Let me be plain: I am not a pathology. I am a writer. I am a woman. I am neither in need of a husband nor in imitation of one.

A faint scrawl in the margin—perhaps Art’s ghostly hand?

“Spoken like a Duke, Euphemia! Only your quill is sharper than any sword we ever carried.”

And Mab, a faint trace, hardly more than the rustle of turning pages:

“She does not need us now, Art. These living women speak with their own teeth. Let us fade.

1926: Octavia Mallard, lecture at Sydney University

I have been told often enough what it is to be a woman who does not marry. I am a *spinster*, they say—a spindle gathering cobwebs. The word itself is meant to shrivel me. And yet I note, gentlemen, that you too have your euphemisms. Your bachelor, when left *confirmed*, becomes not merely unmarried but suspect—a fellow whose ‘preferences’ must not be spoken of directly.

Here then is the neat hypocrisy of your language: the unmarried woman is an object of ridicule, the unmarried man an object of whisper. In both cases the truth of their lives is obscured. We are not permitted to be what we are—only what your words will allow us to be.

A language of euphemism is not a language of civilisation but of cowardice. It makes cowards of you, gentlemen and phantoms of us. Perhaps one day we shall agree to speak plainly: of women who love women, of men who love men, of lives lived outside your little registry books. Until then, I wear your ‘spinster’ as I would wear a brooch—a

trinket of your own invention, pinned on my breast to remind me how much sharper my own tongue can be.

1926: Auction notice

It is with the greatest distinction that we present for sale the entire contents of Mallard House, seat of the Fitzartur family for nearly fifteen centuries. The assemblage here offered, while reflecting the venerable antiquity of the House, also displays the cultivated taste of successive generations of Fitzarturs, who spared no effort in adorning their halls with objects of elegance and refinement.

Among the lots will be found examples of the *Adam style*, together with pieces in the *Louis Quinze manner*, mirrors of considerable size and patina, paintings long esteemed as “from the School of the Masters,” and a collection of silver plate distinguished by the celebrated Fitzartur centrepiece.

Though time has imparted to many of these articles a pleasing mellowing, connoisseurs will recognise in this Sale an opportunity to acquire items rarely brought to market, imbued with the historic associations of one of England’s most ancient and honourable houses.

Artful comment:

Ancient, honourable and falling to pieces. The Adam ‘manner’—never the man. The mantle: chipped.

1926: From The Times, June

The dispersal of the Mallard estate, now concluded after ninety consecutive days, has been reckoned the most prodigious sale of its kind in living memory. The catalogues, five thousand pages in length, recorded no fewer than 255,000 lots.

The jewellery, once thought the finest in England, produced only £50,000—a mere tenth of the £500,000 confidently predicted by the valuers. Other items betrayed the same curious disparity between grandeur and yield. Ducal robes of crimson, faced with ermine, fetched but £59. A lace fichu collar, which once adorned the shoulders of a Duchess at Court, was knocked down for five shillings.

The late Duke’s wardrobe occasioned much astonishment: hundreds of silken dressing gowns from Charvet and shoes of leather, crocodile and suede beyond any reckoning. A collection of walking sticks, many topped with jewelled heads of amethyst and emerald, provoked laughter as well as bids.

Nor was the library less imposing: 35,525 volumes, each bound in red leather and stamped with the Ducal arms, were dispersed in lots that filled weeks of the sale. Some nine hundred paintings, drawings and miniatures were likewise dispatched.

Artful comments:

The tone of the press, while respectful, could not disguise its relish at the spectacle. “It required ninety days to unmake a dynasty,” wrote one wag, “where nine centuries could not.”

1927: The DeMallard Pretensions

(as declaimed, with interruptions, by Art Fitzartur, lately deceased, though never diminished)

Do not for a moment suppose—no, do not even whisper—that the deMallards were *ever* of our standing. They were not, they are not, they cannot be. *Pretenders!* Pretenders who crept into the midden of our discarded magnificence and called it treasure. They made shrines to the refuse we left in cupboards too damp to bother clearing. Ducks! Ducks everywhere. I am hounded by ducks.

It was never their blood, though they have been known to parade a teaspoon or two, polished bright, engraved with initials that even I cannot read (and I know every Fitzartur scrawl since 570). “Heritage!” they cry. Rubbish! *Rubbish!* Do not let me hear otherwise.

And yet—though it pains me to admit—they have been thorough. Insufferably thorough. They have hoarded every receipt, every pewter mug, every pewter *thing*—for pewter is their metal, not gold, never gold—and they display it with the air of kings. Kings! As if kings mattered. I predate kings. They are but cattle-herds in crowns.

You must understand: it is not reverence that moves them but hunger. They gorge themselves on our discards, our rags, our tatters. They framed the water-stained bill for my grandmother’s mourning gowns and set it beside a portrait of a Mallard who never lived. They say, “See how grand we are!” No, sir, no madam—you are grand *collectors of dust*.

I, Art Fitzartur—still Duke, eternally Duke, no matter what wax seals are forged—tell you plainly: the deMallards are not descendants but parasites. Yet parasites so shameless, so plump with pretence, that one cannot help but... admire them, in a way. Better, perhaps, to hoard a midden than to have nothing left to hoard.

Still, let us not forget: they are commoners and worse than commoners, for they ape nobility without ever possessing the courtesy to despise it.

And yet—yet!—what am I doing, scribbling their history, muttering their names? They win even now, for here I am, a Fitzartur, reduced to explaining deMallards. I despise them. I need them. I loathe them. I will not speak of them again.

Except to say this: their children, born among junk, think themselves jewels. Poor brats. Poor, glittering brats.

1927: From Uncle Peregrine Mallard, Canton

My dear boy, I trust you keep up appearances even among the coolies. Never forget: the true test of a gentleman abroad is how he dines when no one is looking. A napkin on the knee distinguishes civilisation from barbarism. Spitting, though common here, is *never* to be imitated. Even if it seems practical in the humidity.

1930: the deMallard women

The deMallard women had, through so many generations, perfected the fine art of silence—silence at dinner, silence in drawing rooms, silence during those moments when the menfolk loudly congratulated themselves for nothing in particular. A silence not of choice but of obligation. Women, after all, retained little value beyond matrimony or—among those who could afford such pleasures—extramural dalliances.

Their silence might have continued indefinitely had not the first war, the Suffragette nuisance and compulsory education pried open the social gates. Even then, the deMallard women were not quite *Bloomsbury*—heaven forbid!—but rather something far rarer: intellectuals without glamour. Dowdiness with a library card.

During the 1920s, various fragments of the family line fled to Sydney, Australia. With them went not only their vowels (carefully polished and wrapped in tissue paper) but also a subtle adjustment of their name. “deMallard” in Europe; simply “Mallard” in the colonies. The “de” was dropped casually, like a fur stole on a summer’s day—yet restored when speaking to the right governors, lest there be any confusion about their pedigree.

The departures were not without luggage. Entire steamer trunks, stuffed with trinkets, dented silver and the occasional marble bust of uncertain ancestry, arrived on Sydney docks. Months later came the furniture, fitted badly into suburban bungalows too small for history’s

debris. The effect was theatrical: a Regency armoire looming over a linoleum floor; a battered Gainsborough chair wheezing beneath crocheted antimacassars.

In this new colonial world, such clutter was mistaken for distinction. The men soon went away to another war and the women—left in possession of the heavy furniture, the vowels and the furs—at last declared themselves ascendant. From that decade onward, no one dared suggest they be silent. It was, in fact, peremptorily expected that they be listened to—at length and with admiration.

Artful comment:

The wistful unfulfilment of the permanently overlooked.

1930: Viola Vorpel fragment

in reply to Virginia Woolfe's "A Room of One's Own", 1929

I heard your lecture at Girton with much interest, though not without dismay. Do you truly propose that women, once granted a room of their own, should then employ it only to follow fashion? If I, a woman of my standing, have both room and hours in which to think, to write, to compose, am I to waste them in producing what is deemed acceptable to that fickle public, whose tastes are set by another's hand?

Fashion is not liberty. It is merely the placement of power by some clique more elevated and the rest of us obliged to follow in their wake. Fashion is society's accursed bailiwick.

I do not suggest that women ought not write—our voices must and shall be heard above the rabblous articulations of those men who have raised themselves above us. But let us not mistake permission for freedom. To be invisible is unfashioned for men. For women, it is customary.

1930: Viscountess Vorpel

The iconic invert of his day was Oscar Wilde. I say *invert* with care, for it was the word his century flung at him as both diagnosis and insult. Yet he carried it with a flourish, like a plume upon his hat. England has always needed such a figure—one man set upon the scaffold of gossip to bear the weight of what countless others enact discreetly behind drawn curtains.

Society will tolerate any number of peccadilloes so long as they remain decorously hidden. But Wilde, intoxicated by his own cleverness, mistook the stage for sanctuary. His tragedy was not that he

loved men—half of Mayfair could be accused of the same—but that he presumed to quarrel with aristocracy in open court. For such insolence he was offered not a salon but a cell.

It is fashionable now to portray him as martyr. I do not. He was too theatrical, too enamoured of the spectacle of his ruin. He could have stepped aside, bowed, played patience in the south of France and been welcomed back in due course. But like all iconic inverts, he preferred the wound to the compromise.

And thus he gave England what it secretly craved: the thrill of watching brilliance undone, of seeing a wit silenced, of reminding itself that the line between tolerated vice and condemned crime lies not in love but in class.

Artful comment:

He was never destroyed for what he was, only for forgetting the hierarchy. A Duke may err with impunity; a wit may not.

1930: Octavia Mallard (preface to an essay)

They tell us sex is penetration.

They tell us intimacy is measured by how far a man can enter, how long he can last, how well he can perform.

It is a lie but one written into law, catechism and lexicon alike. Even the clitoris—our sovereign organ of pleasure—is dragged under the shadow of the penis, its very name a derivative, as if woman could only be explained as man's lesser echo.

This is not biology. It is conquest.

It is the oldest trick of power: name the world in your image, then declare all else inversion, deviation or sin.

Yet the truth persists in every woman's body: sex is not a singular act but a field. It is touch, laughter, gaze, rhythm, absence, play. It is what women have always known and what men have feared to admit—that their narrow definition of intimacy is not a universal but a prison.

1930: Octavia Mallard (preface to *Lexis and Flesh*)

It is a matter of record—though few men have the patience to follow it—that language is as political as any parliament and more enduring. A lexicon does not merely describe the body: it disciplines it.

Take, for example, the word *clitoris*. Its etymological path is murky but all proposed derivations drag it into analogy with the penis—*kleiein* (to shut or enclose), *kleitoris* (little hill), even the false association with *kleio* (to celebrate). Never is it defined as itself; it is always measured

against the phallus, as though woman could only be understood in reference to man.

This is not error but system. Anatomical texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries routinely described the clitoris as the “female penis,” while the vagina was likened to an “inverted sheath.” Thus, women’s bodies were cast as inversions, reversals, diminutions. Not autonomous but parasitic on a male form presumed universal.

What follows from this is predictable: sex itself is defined as penetration. *Concubitus*, *coitus*, *copulation*—all terms of entry and enclosure. Pleasure, meanwhile, is lexicalised as excess: *lascivia*, *luxuria*, *libido*—each a warning, each a stigma. Men wrote dictionaries as they wrote scripture: with women’s experience excised, then condemned.

It is curious that the same semantic manoeuvre extends even into the moral register. “Inversion” becomes the term for same-sex desire—as if love between women must still be explained by reference to the male body, absent or misapplied. Homosexuality, when it finally appears as a category, carries the same burden: to be defined not as what it is but as what it is not.

What is revealed, if one reads carefully, is that the Church and its physicians did not fear women’s sexuality because it was obscure. They feared it because it was abundant. Too abundant for their narrow grammar of coition. Thus, they named it away, buried it in euphemism, rendered it indecent to speak aloud.

But language is porous. Words leak. Even in the most prudish glossaries one can find traces: “quim,” “cunny,” “clytoris”—vulgar survivals that preserve what the gentlemen of science would erase. To track these terms is not smut-work but archaeology: the recovery of a suppressed epistemology.

If my work insists on returning to etymology, it is not for pedantry’s sake. It is because etymology exposes the hand of power in its act of naming. To call a woman’s pleasure “penile,” to reduce her body to inversion or absence, is not neutral description. It is expropriation.

It is telling that the words which survive for women’s bodies are dismissed as vulgar. This is no accident. Vulgar, from *vulgus*, simply means “of the people.” Yet male scholars, anxious to secure their monopoly on language, declared the speech of the people unfit for polite society. Thus the words most immediate to women’s lives—the terms whispered among midwives, mothers and lovers—were exiled into obscenity.

We ought to note the double standard: men’s terms for their own organs rarely suffered the same fate. A penis remains a penis; phallus retains its dignity, even when mythologised. But a woman’s *quim* is branded unmentionable, smirked at, forced underground. Vulgarity,

then, is not a linguistic property but a political judgment. It is the mark of fear disguised as refinement.

And what of *swearing*? Once, it meant an oath, an affirmation, a binding of word to deed. To swear was to call upon the divine to guarantee one's truth. It is the Church itself that has inverted the word—turning oath into obscenity, a binding promise into a breach of decorum. In their hands, language that once carried weight became pollution. Thus even our expletives are proofs of theft: strength made into sin.

So my closing thrust is this: language has been the most enduring instrument of subjugation, more subtle than chains and more lasting than law. But its very history betrays its weakness. Words shift; meanings slip; the vulgar returns. Every time a woman utters *quim* without shame, she reclaims a fragment of her own body from centuries of confiscation. Every time we insist that swearing is not filth but force, we undo a small part of the spell the Church cast upon our tongues.

Gentlemen may continue to laugh, to blush, to smirk, to ban—it matters little. For words, like women, survive banishment. And in their return, sharper than before, lies our quiet revenge.

1931: the Mallards in Sydney

One of the deMallard men had forgotten to divorce his first wife and arrived in Sydney married to his second. His legitimacy was never questioned. Why, when his family in Australia held such prominence? He never told either of his wives nor his son. That son who aspired to the same or a higher level of class than his father never knew of his illegitimacy. He was aware there was a family secret of course. He just didn't know which branch of the family it affected and, academic researcher though he was, he never bothered to pursue it.

A stalwart of his local church, member of this privileged society or that gentleman's club, this son progressively amassed letters and titles—though none were now noble.

He married the right type of woman, from a distant and lowly elevated branch of the Mallard family. She was seventeen years old and a Roman Catholic—so the marriage followed different rules to those of his more proper church. She was willing to surrender her elastic faith to raise his family on his behalf.

Meanwhile, he—and eventually she, once she found a suitable nanny—socialised with those men he deemed acceptable or useful to his career.

Sometimes they entertained at his spacious home in its leafy, tastefully quiet suburb. Gone were the overwhelming reminders from

his parents' acquisitional preference for worn Fitzartur collectibles. A few select tokens remained so he could refer to them in passing, in conversation with Sir This or Lady That. Confirmation of his legitimacy: that he also arose from their ranks, perhaps higher.

Carefully chosen prints of an ancient, sprawling house—long since demolished—or unusual, slightly avant garde oils that suggested a knowledge of culture and art.

1931: Viola Vorpel on morality

Morality, they say, is the glue that binds society. I ask instead: whose glue and who does the binding?

Men parade the phrase that 'man is a social animal,' as though the simple act of gathering in herds were proof of virtue. But if all animals are social, then there is nothing uniquely moral in the human case—only a boast dressed as philosophy. If relation is reduced to the sight of another's face, then books, letters, prayers, even law itself collapse into nonsense, for they carry relation across absence. Do we suppose Plato's students could only learn at his knee? That Cicero could not persuade unless his tongue wagged before an assembly? That conscience is blind unless it stares into another's eyes?

What this premise truly reveals is the anxiety of men who write such things. They cannot imagine relation without dominance, so they define it as presence, proximity and rule. And so morality becomes no more than obedience in company: one code for the ruler, another for the ruled and silence for women, who are declared neither rulers nor ruled but the furniture of relation itself.

When women write, their voices are not entered into the canon of 'moral philosophy'; when men write, their quarrels with each other are re-baptised as the eternal struggles of mankind. Thus is morality constructed: not as a truth but as a genealogy of quotations—each man citing his fathers, each erasing the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters who lived otherwise.

So I ask again: whose morality is it that you defend? Not mine. Not my mother's. Not my daughter's. It is a morality written by men, for men, about men—a tautology mistaken for a law. And if that is the best glue they can offer, then I would rather the world fall to pieces, for only then may women speak in their own tongues without being told their voices are immoral.

1932: Viola Vorpel on books

It is a curious trick of history that those who fear women most have appointed themselves our only interpreters.

Most books on witchcraft will tell you that witches cast spells while naked—because most books about witchcraft are written by men.

Most books on female psychology will tell you that women suffer from “hysteria” and “lustful thoughts”—because most books about female psychology are written by men.

Most books on crime will tell you that women prefer poison—because most men think women are squeamish about the sight of blood.

But it is women who see blood every month of their lives, in childbirth, in death at the bedside. Men faint in hospitals, they quail at the wound, they run to war only when it is sanctified by uniform and trumpet.

Most histories of marriage will tell you that women long for children—because most men want an heir and a nursemaid under one roof. And most men cannot imagine that women might want pleasure, without permission, without sanction and for themselves.

Most political tracts will tell you that women need protection—because most men cannot imagine themselves relinquishing power.

Most theologies will tell you that women are closer to sin—because most men have spent their lives terrified of their own desires.

Most books of any kind will tell you what women are. Because most books are written by men.

1932: Extract from *The Mallard Book of Sayings*

(Printed privately for the Family)

- We do not deal in loose change. Do nothing, as we always do.
- We do not acknowledge cousins beyond the second degree.
- We do not marry beneath us—unless the fortune is above us.
- We do not converse with servants. We speak, they listen.
- We do not move with fashion; we permit fashion to arrive belatedly at our door.
- We do not apologise. We regret only the conduct of others.
- We do not argue in public; silence is the superior sneer.
- We do not trouble with laws, only with precedents.
- We do not suffer the dull. They suffer us.
- We do not remember our mistakes. We allow history to forget them.
- We do not engage in commerce, except when it is called land.
- We do not indulge sentiment. We leave that to poets and Americans.

- We do not die: we decline.

Several of these “sayings” were already in circulation among the lesser Mallards in the colonies, where they were taken rather more literally than was ever intended. V.V.

1932: Viola Vorpel, lecture notes

You accuse me of railing against men. But I have never spoken against men—I have spoken against *the record of men*. Against the narrow, brittle pages on which the only deeds inscribed are those of conquest, violence or pomp. Those who raised their voices in poetry, who tilled a field with diligence, who soothed children at night, who crafted instruments or cabinets or quiet philosophies—those men are absent from the record. They are no less men but history has made them invisible.

It is a trick of the archive: only *power over* is remembered, never *power to*. Conquerors and exploiters, the brutal few, are crowned as if they were the whole of manhood. But most men, like most women, have lived within *power to*—to feed, to build, to imagine, to delight, to endure.

What I ask is not that we dethrone men but that we dethrone this false image of them. That we see how history itself has conspired to smother the larger, gentler company of human beings in favour of a parade of monsters.

You, gentlemen, are not diminished by women. You have been diminished already by your own history books, which have told the world that you are only ever kings and killers. When, in truth, your best selves emerge not in sovereignty but in partnership. Not in dominion but in company. And that is where we shall meet you—not as your adversaries but as your equals.

1933: Extract from A Short History of Mallard House and Its Families

Printed for the Visitors' Committee, c. 1933

The student of English houses will search in vain for a coherent narrative of Mallard, for the documents are scattered and the family itself has proved notably reticent. What may be said, however, is that the line of the Dukes of Mallard has endured beyond the storms of dynastic quarrels, beyond even the dissolution of their greater estates and still survives (though in circumstances one may call diminished). The visitor must be content with fragments: a crest half-obiterated in

the chapel window, a sword without its stone, and, above all, the noble pile of masonry whose present condition may be described as romantic rather than comfortable.

Local tradition, if it can be trusted (and often it cannot), holds that the lesser female line, the Mallards, preserved the household with as much industry as the Dukes themselves, if not more. Such traditions are sometimes coloured by the loyalty of retainers and it must be admitted that the Mallards were of a temperament less serious, more *pliant*, than their cousins. Yet to them is owed the survival of several cabinets of papers without which the present historian would be reduced to silence.

If the family has declined, it is but the common fate of noble houses. A duke may die in the saddle or in the council flat; the primogeniture will assert itself either way. We may therefore forgive the family their present obscurity and regard the estate as a monument to that past age when magnificence was a virtue and penury had not yet been discovered.

(Anonymous, though privately attributed by some to the Reverend Dr. H—, whose fee was borne, discreetly, by the Blandy family.)

1934: Elspeth Mallard on cures

Paris is all the rage with its rejuvenating “cures.” One of my acquaintances has gone so far as to have herself injected with hormones from some unfortunate mare, in the belief her cheeks shall bloom again like a girl of seventeen. I confess, the only bloom I see is an unbecoming flush and a dreadful puffiness about her eyes. Another swears by radium waters—poor fool, she will glow indeed, though not in the manner she intends.

Why must women imagine themselves old before their time and then act the part with desperate remedies? Age, like lace, is best when worn lightly, without starch or wires.

1935: Extract from The DeMallard Miscellany: A Private Record for Posterity

Though ours is the most ancient and continuous house in all Christendom, we have never stooped to the vulgarity of grasping at crowns or insisting upon our right to thrones. Such gewgaws are for lesser families, eager for symbols to mask their lack of substance.

By consequence of our many judicious marriages, the blood of Mallard flows quietly in veins far more public than our own. It has amused us, from time to time, to note how frequently reigning houses seek to trace back some “fortuitous connection” to our line—as if

proximity to our antiquity might redeem their shabby improvisations of power.

Among these, of course, was that famously wanton Lady, Mary Queen of Scots. Had she heeded the advice of our Duke—advice freely given but, alas, too freely disregarded—she would not have fled France so precipitously, nor married so rashly, nor ruled so poorly. But the folly of women who mistake their charms for wisdom is an old tale and Mary was not the first, nor will she be the last.

How droll it is and how wearying, to watch our distant cousins in their squabbles—Elizabeth and Mary most notably—scrapping like washerwomen over crowns and sceptres. One cannot help but reflect that all might have been smoothed had either of those Ladies submitted to wiser Mallard counsel. But then, Mallard counsel is ever disdained, until too late.

1995 Footnote, Viola Vorpel

It must be admitted that our 1930s authoress indulges herself in the comfortable superiority peculiar to those who are neither quite royal nor quite irrelevant. Her sneer at Mary and Elizabeth is more revealing of her own discontent than of their “squabbles.” Still, she is not wholly wrong: Mallard advice, however pompously delivered, was often sought if seldom heeded.

For my part, I suspect our lady correspondent was less affronted by the follies of queens than by the fact that she herself had been excluded from anything more consequential than the local debating society. (It is the perpetual torment of blue blood gone provincial: one cannot help but lecture the mighty while sitting on a wicker chair in Mosman.)

Yet I cannot quite dismiss her hauteur. It is, after all, the same hauteur from which I myself spring—and which, however unfashionable, I have found too diverting to renounce.

1936: From Lady Hypatia Mallard, Bath

Darling child, It has reached me that your friends discuss their health *at table*. Appalling. Good digestion is not for conversation, only for gratitude. If you must complain, complain of the weather—*that* is everyone’s common burden. Besides, there is poetry in rain but none in rheumatism.

1937: Extract from The DeMallard Miscellany

It would be remiss not to mention the unfortunate notoriety of the Henley Blandys, whose scandal of 1752 still provides material for idle

pamphleteers. That Mary—poor, misguided creature—was convicted for the poisoning of her father, Francis, is of little consequence to us, save that in the minds of the vulgar, the name Blandy is ever after tinged with arsenic.

Yet I must here record, for accuracy's sake, that our own Blandys (of the kitchen and the garden, long before 1752) are of another and more faithful stock. They had already entered Mallard service generations earlier, a distant and humbler branch, quite apart from Francis of Henley and his reckless daughter. If the broadsheets sought to tar all Blandys with the same brush, we know well enough that not all leaves of a tree are poisonous.

Still, the story is instructive. Francis, a solicitor of middling repute, permitted himself to be carried aloft by his own falsehoods: the pretence of a grand fortune, whispered even into royal ears. To maintain such a fiction required silence and silence, as it often does, bred suspicion. That he fell victim not to his daughter's ambition but to his own preposterous invention is clear to any candid reader of the papers.

One might remark—though the comment may sound uncharitable—that such behaviour only confirms why the Blandys remained servants and we remained their masters. Where they chased illusions, we held to duty. Where they sought to elevate themselves by deceit, we preserved what was ours by right.

If the name Blandy clings still to our kitchens and back staircases in Australia, it is because loyalty, even among humble folk, has its own nobility. But the Henley business must not be confused with our line. Our Blandys cooked for dukes long before the Henley solicitor cooked up his ruin.

1937: Viola Vorpel, Lecture notes, Oxford

It has been said—usually by men—that there are only two kinds of women. One is Mary: immaculate, obedient, stainless, silent. The other is every woman else, who, having failed to be Mary, must therefore be Whore.

This is not classification; it is obliteration. It is a taxonomy with two drawers—"untouchable" and "touchable"—devised entirely for the convenience of male fingers.

How curious then, that men allow themselves such an infinite abundance of types. The knight and the king, the wit and the warrior, the saint, the scholar, the rogue, the rake, the poet, the fool. A veritable cabinet of curiosities, each preserved in amber, each applauded for his distinction, even his folly.

For women? Nothing so generous. We are either sanctified womb or scandalous flesh. Function without variance, role without nuance. Even “witch” serves the same purpose: not a voice but an epithet.

And if women have ever named men—and we have, in whispers, in kitchens, in letters unsent—those names never graduate into scripture, never enter the canon. They remain gossip, not gospel.

So we arrive at the obvious but rarely spoken truth: to name is to narrow. To classify is to command. And the naming of women by men is not description but expropriation: the theft of our multiplicity, flattened into their two favourite fictions.

1938: Octavia Mallard, On the Genealogies of Speech

It has always struck me as absurd that my noble cousins, the Dukes of Mallard, never troubled to notice the quacking beneath their coronets. *Mallard* is, of course, the commonest of ducks; *duc*, in French, the highest of ranks. A single shift of tongue from *u* to *l* and the strutting noble is revealed as waddling fowl.

One might laugh at this coincidence, were it not so instructive. To lead (Latin *ducere*) is to command others forward; to duck is to lower one’s head, to evade, to disappear beneath water. My cousins imagine themselves born to lead. Their name insists they were bred to dive.

Nor is the French branch spared. The *deCanards*, straining for aristocratic hauteur, bear a surname that in French parlance means “duck” still but also “hoax” or “false report.” Their very title is a jest: noble imposture, feathered fakery.

It is no wonder the line quacks under its own weight. For language, unlike law, does not respect primogeniture. Words carry their truths whether one attends to them or not.

1938: Viola Vorpel—Address to a small circle at Lady Fitzwilliam’s salon

It is often supposed—by those who ought to know better—that the Dukes of Mallard had no master. Such naiveté. They did indeed have masters, though not the ones who claimed them. Kings may prance and bishops may thunder, yet a Mallard has never bent the knee. Their true sovereign was subtler, more inexorable.

Death was their final tutor, primogeniture their whip. No Duke escaped either. Each in turn rehearsed his own extinction, wrapped in the comforting fiction that his heir’s continuance was his own. That is the slavery of hierarchy: one does not serve a monarch but the sheer inevitability of succession.

The Mallards have always known this, though they would never admit it. Their elaborate dinners, their armies of servants, their endless follies in stone and shrubbery—all were gestures not to the living king, nor even to their own guests but to the darker lord who waits patiently in the wings.

The crash of '29 humbled financiers and war drums now rattle Europe's edges; yet the Mallards are untouched, because they never trafficked in such paltry currencies. Their coin is endurance. They play not for crowns or mitres but for time itself and every Duke, no matter how feckless, has known the one commandment of their line: persist.

1940: Viola Vorpel (lecture fragment)

Every time a woman makes a clear point, she is told she sounds like a man. How flattering—and how absurd. As though rationality were a sex organ. As though clarity must be trousers and muddle a skirt. Plus ça change, mes amis—the world insists it is new, yet it is only the same game in fresh tailoring.

And yes, I confess, I am occasionally naïve. I think if everyone were simply nicer, most of history would collapse in a heap of redundancy. But of course, no one ever is. So we build systems instead: clubs, laws, hierarchies, churches—all contraptions for excusing unkindness. That is why the Dukes in their so-called excesses were more pious than priests. They were at least honest about their pleasures. The Church, meanwhile, claimed to renounce the Devil but only renounced women, which is a poorer bargain.

So you see, gentlemen, the problem is not that I think like a man. The problem is that men have claimed for themselves the privilege of thinking.

1940: Viola Vorpel, The Times Literary Supplement

I should like to pause over that word “beautiful,” so lavishly applied to women in novels, in gossip, in public encomia. It is a shorthand that erases. “A beautiful woman” becomes a face, a line of hair, a fashion plate—never a mind. She enters narrative only when she may adorn or ornament the male arc: a jewel in his crown, a caution in his downfall, a footnote to his importance.

Even “witch,” with which history brands the clever or inconvenient woman, performs the same function. It is not a voice but an attribution—a signal that the story may pass her by, leaving her as scenery in the pageant of men.

This is why the word *beautiful* ought to be received with suspicion. It is not praise; it is effacement. To be called beautiful is to be placed—to be pressed into a mould that admits of no intellect, no will, no consequence. One might almost say it is the most pernicious of compliments, because it silences while seeming to celebrate.

1940: Editor's Note (TLS)

The Times Literary Supplement wishes to place on record that no article by a *Viscountess Vorpel*—or by any person bearing a similar name—has ever been received, commissioned or published in these pages. Our contributors, as readers will appreciate, are men of established authority in their respective fields.

We are aware that certain pamphlets and private letters are in circulation purporting to contain essays by this supposed lady. These cannot be connected with our journal, nor with any official organ of literary criticism. The Supplement has always welcomed a lively exchange of views but it does not admit anonymous fancy or feminine embroidery as scholarship.

Editor, TLS

1949: Viola Vorpel (article draft, never published)

I have lived long enough to see an empire collapse and another rise and the same banners hoisted under different stars. Britain called it civilisation, America calls it opportunity. But always it is men who write the charter and men who pocket the proceeds.

When I first spoke at Oxford half a century ago, I argued that history's lie was to make men appear only as conquerors. Today I add this: the lie persists because men prefer it that way. To be remembered as emperors and generals, not as fathers or friends or partners. To be the gavel, not the hand that steadies.

And so the myth of *power over* is exported with every empire's freight. The colonies may change their flags; Wall Street replaces Whitehall; the rhetoric shifts from dominion to democracy. But the structure remains: a world in which men perform history upon the stage, while women and indeed most men, do the work of living behind the curtain.

We are told it is the land of opportunity. But opportunity for whom? For the woman who cleans hotel rooms in Florida? For the immigrant who pours the coffee in New York? For the daughters of those same men who sing hymns to liberty while counting their profits?

The empire is merely a costume change. The play remains the same. Until *power to* is valued above *power over*, until we cease to mistake domination for destiny, we will go on watching this tedious production: men calling it history and the rest of us enduring it.”

1950: Viola Vorpel, Lecture Notes

Twenty years ago I asked whose morality it was that bound us and I was told—with much throat-clearing and citation—that morality is what holds civilisation together. I look about me now, after two wars and I ask: what civilisation?

If morality is what men say it is, then how do we explain Verdun, the Somme, Stalingrad, Hiroshima? Are we to conclude that massacre is a moral act, so long as it is conducted by uniformed men under banners and hymns? Is morality no more than the formal permission to kill so long as the killing is collective?

The world is now divided into ‘free’ and ‘unfree,’ as if freedom were no more than a label on an economic system and not the lived experience of one’s daily life. Communism, capitalism, empire—each claims to be the moral custodian of humanity, while each demands the same obedience to the same iron law: men will fight, men will rule, women will serve.

And what of women? They won the war in factories, in fields, in hospitals, in code rooms. They kept the world alive while men spent it in blood. And what is their reward? The broom, the cradle, the cookpot—the order to step aside while men return to their ‘rightful place.’ How curious that after proving themselves indispensable, women are told to become invisible again.

It makes me wonder: had women been left in charge, truly as women and not as masculinised imitators of men, would these wars have occurred at all? Perhaps quarrels, yes. Rivalries, certainly. But wars of extermination? The systematic training of boys to slaughter their neighbours? The bomb?

Morality, as preached by men, has brought us rubble, graves and ration books. And now it seeks to console itself with ‘domestic bliss,’ as though wallpaper and washing machines could disguise the charnel stench of Europe.

So again I ask: whose morality? If it is this morality, then I reject it. Better no morality at all than one that sanctifies war while silencing the very voices that might have prevented it.

1950: Gloriana writes to her sister in England (fragment)

My husband, the eminent historian, does himself no favours when he prattles on about the vulgar displays of our cousins the Fitzarturs, Dukes of Mallard. We can no longer claim more than a tenuous connection—fortunate indeed. You, dear sister, are nearer to them than we shall ever be. For which, I suppose, God may be thanked, were I inclined to believe in such a preposterous male construction.

He is blind to his own vulgarity: in one breath vilifying, in the next praising, as though to align himself with their paper-thin victories might confer distinction. What vanity. What emptiness.

Where is the value in mowing men down like blades of grass? What of we women, forced to weep for sons (and daughters) dispatched to wars in foreign lands that hold no claim on us—save the maw of Empire, that vicious system feeding on itself, slaughtering people like cattle to prove its dominion?

What matters it to us that men fight over land, when here we have more than enough—and to spare?

1951: Viola Vorpel, Public Lecture

Ladies and gentlemen—though I notice it is mostly gentlemen—permit me to say at the outset that I am not here to soothe. If you came in search of comfort, you should have stayed at home with the wireless.

We are told, endlessly, that morality is what holds civilisation together. I put it to you plainly: if this is civilisation, then morality is a fraud. For what has your morality produced? Verdun, the Somme, Stalingrad, Hiroshima. Millions dead, nations reduced to rubble and the survivors ordered to sweep the ashes under linoleum and call it peace.

If morality is what men declare it to be, then we must conclude that slaughter is moral—so long as it is collective, so long as it marches under a flag, so long as the hymns are loud enough to drown the screams.

And now, in this so-called peace, the world is split again: free versus unfree, capitalist versus communist, East versus West. Do you not see? These are the same old banners, stitched from the same old cloth. Freedom, in practice, is no more than the freedom to be ruled by men who think they know best.

Meanwhile, women. Do not forget them. They won your war for you—in the factories, the fields, the hospitals, the code rooms. They kept the world alive while you spent it in blood. And now you repay them with the broom, the cradle, the cookpot. Back to the kitchen,

ladies! You have had your little adventure; now the men will take it from here.

Tell me, gentlemen: had women been left in charge—not women who ape your martial bluster but women as women—would these wars have occurred at all? Perhaps quarrels, certainly rivalries. But would entire generations have been trained to slaughter their neighbours? Would we have built a machine to extinguish cities at the press of a button?

No. That is your morality. And I say it plain: better no morality at all than one which sanctifies mass murder and then sends its widows home with a ration book and a pat on the head.

You call this civilisation. I call it a ledger of corpses.

1951: The Times (Editorial)

Viscountess Vorpel's Public Address

It is not every day that a lecture given within the restrained confines of a London society hall sends its auditors into audible disarray: gasps, whispered protestations, and, yes, even applause from the darker recesses of the gallery. Such was the scene yesterday when Lady Viola Vorpel—long esteemed for her aristocratic poise and, it must be admitted, her singular wit—delivered a most extraordinary address upon the subject of “morality.”

Her Ladyship spared neither her audience nor her sex. She questioned, with a candour few would hazard, whether the morality of men had brought civilisation to its knees rather than to its heights. She suggested—indeed, declared outright—that the wars of the last decades had been less the triumph of moral principle than the collapse of it and that women, so soon dismissed from the factories to the hearth, had paid the price of their obedience with their independence.

There are, of course, those who will find her conclusions unsupportable, even dangerous. The history of our nation—its courage, its endurance, its sacrifice—cannot be so easily swept aside as a “ledger of corpses,” to borrow her arresting phrase. Morality, however faltering, remains the compass by which we must steer.

And yet, one cannot help but admire the audacity with which Lady Vorpel held her ground before a hall of men scarcely accustomed to contradiction and the precision of her speech, which combined the sharpness of a scholar with the elegance of a duchess's drawing-room. Only a woman of her lineage, education and established friendship with His Majesty could have spoken such words without incurring scandal beyond repair.

It is to her credit—and perhaps to England’s—that they were spoken at all. One need not agree with her to recognise that her voice, however discordant to some ears, strengthens the chorus of debate that must accompany any true democracy.

1960: Letter fragment from Octavia to her sister Viola

I have enclosed a clipping from the Sydney Morning Herald for your amusement. Or disgust?

There stands our proud sister in full social regalia. One might assume, given the 40-degree temperatures at this time of year, that she was perspiring beneath her furs. I have long suspected our sister is a cold fish, so perhaps not.

Standing with her on that podium is her nonce of a husband and a mayor or some other preposterous official, all glinting with fool’s gold and the marks of his office.

I cannot imagine what she gains from such a spectacle, unless for some preferment for her husband. I shall invite her to tea next week and quiz her on the topic—though I expect nothing but evasions and her usual simpering.

Let’s live forever

Gloria mundi est:

Als a se flouwende

Als a skiye pasende

Als the sadwe in the undermel

And als the dore turnet on a quel.

Mab:

Immortality. What a clumsy word. They mean *forever* but forever is only boredom reheated until even the gods would spit it out. Freeze the river, they say, so they can keep the same drop glistening in their palm. But a river that won’t move is just a swamp.

Art:

And what’s a ghost but that very swamp? I lingered past my ending and look at me now—half-moth, half-echo, condemned to watch the curtain fall again and again. Do they think eternity tastes of wine? It tastes of mildew.

Mab:

Ah but mildew is honest. These immortality-mongers want only the denial of collapse. They mistake death for failure, change for theft. So they call their terror *progress* and build vaults to keep their faces young, their coffers fat.

Art:

Ownership, yes. As though they could hoard time like coin. As though one could own a dawn or keep the laughter of a child in a lockbox. I've tried. It slips through bone and ash alike.

Mab:

Everything slips. Everything collapses. That is the function. Without it, there is no loom, no thread, no tapestry—only the same stitch repeated until the cloth frays of its own tedium.

Art:

Strange, then, that oblivion looks almost merciful. And yet even in my half-life I resist it. Perhaps that's the final cruelty—biology, spirit, habit, all conspiring to keep us clinging to a wheel we pretend we steer.

Mab:

Cling if you must, ghost. But remember: the wheel turns not because you grip it but because collapse is motion and motion is life. Even gods fall, even stars burn out. The only true immortality is boredom.

1950: The Life Cycle of a University Girl

(as told by a slightly waspish Wildean observer)

She arrives at the sandstone gates with earnest intentions: medicine if she dares, teaching if she must. (If medicine, matrimony will dispatch that nuisance soon enough.)

Here she encounters ladies—not girls, not women but ladies—vowels long enough to curtain a ballroom, fathers lodged on boards, handbags that never quite brush the floor. One admires the suspension, if not the substance.

She borrows their accents, their manners, their small social cruelties and larger indifferences. The coat of superiority fits badly but is at least warmer than her own. At home she ridicules it; in public she performs it to perfection. Call it hypocrisy if you like but I prefer the term rehearsal.

By the 1960s she is suddenly political. Earnest Labor voter, fists clenched for the poor. Yet once she owns a patch of lawn and a gardener to mow it, her ballot slips discreetly to blue. (One must not, after all, let one's gardener vote one's garden away.)

The 1970s bring her into her red-neckery. Having acquired taste, she may now afford vulgarity. She arranges prawns with mayonnaise from a jar—ghastly stuff—on Wedgwood Blue. Vulgarity, in this case, is not regression but luxury. The trick lies in knowing precisely what one is rejecting.

Meanwhile the true ladies—the originals—remain serenely unaltered: gracious, unruffled, uncontradicted. They have no need to practise superiority. They were always already themselves.

She does her best to pass the trick on to her son. Fabrice takes the coat she wore so awkwardly and wears it with disarming grace: poise without pretension, elegance without effort. One might almost think he invented the thing himself.

Artful Comment:

The mother practised; the son perfected.

1951: The DeMallard Accretions

The deMallards, unlike their loftier cousins, possessed no real titles, estates or memories worth keeping. What they did possess, however, was an astonishing appetite for accumulation.

As the wardrobes, samplers, coronets and cloaks of the elder line leaked out through sale-rooms, the deMallards snapped them up with a kind of frantic enthusiasm. Where others saw moth and mildew, they saw lineage. Where others noted foxed papers and crumbling samplers, they saw evidence of grandeur. To walk into their houses after 1930 was to stumble into a mausoleum of duck-feathers, coronation napkins and brittle bills of sale, each framed and captioned as though it were Magna Carta.

They were the sort who believed auctioneer's notes were gospel and that a moth-eaten cloak with mallard feathers, declared "worthless" by Christie's, was thereby priceless—because the world had failed to recognise its true value.

By the 1950s, visitors remarked that the deMallards' drawing-rooms resembled curiosity shops, stacked with ancestral bric-a-brac: toy soldiers in livery, ceramic ducks, pewter tankards engraved with initials no one could parse. The family maintained, with straight faces, that

these were heirlooms, though none could prove descent from the Fitzartur line beyond a vague “cousinage” spoken in hushed tones.

Thus the midden became a museum and the midden-museum became a mark of pride. It was not history so much as hoarding—but it was hoarding elevated to a philosophy of self.

And from such rooms, with their moths and mildew and nonsense, come people like me, sixty years later: born into the dust of duck-feathers, compelled to write of grandeur where there was only accumulation, taught that heritage could be fashioned from the detritus of other people’s indifference.

1951: Octavia Mallard, lecture notes

The rib was never a rib but a cipher. The cipher has since been recast as number. And number, that supposedly most objective of measures, is the new chain about our necks.

Statistics—I call them the catechism of conformity. Once, a priest said: *you are fallen, therefore obey*. Now, a bureaucrat says: *you are below the median, therefore adjust*. Both trades traffic in the same trick: the erasure of difference under the guise of salvation.

What is “normal”? A mean. A fiction. A midpoint conjured by arithmetic, as if the living pulse of men and women could be reduced to a sum of averages. And once such “normality” is enthroned, every deviation becomes not curiosity but crime. Too sad? Pathology. Too happy? Mania. Too much desire? Degeneracy. Too little? Frigidity. The chart takes the place of the whip.

But what is the value of happiness without grief to mark its contour? Or health without sickness to show its margin? A society without variance is not ordered, it is dead. Yet the apostles of number—doctors, economists, even the mental hygienists—call variance by the name of danger.

I remind my students: the normal is not the natural. The natural is always difference. The real law is fluctuation—rise and fall, hunger and satiety, breath and stillness. If you demand the flat line, then remember what else is flat: the trace of the stopped heart.

Observe how swiftly the categories of the “normal” slide into the categories of the loyal. A citizen who differs too much in his habits, her speech, their affiliations—soon enough finds themselves filed not as eccentric but as enemy.

Statistics are the handmaidens of suspicion. The bell curve becomes a fortress wall: stand too far on its margins and you are named deviant, subversive, even traitor. Thus do the men who preach “mental hygiene”

clasp hands with the men who preach “political purity.” Both set their rulers against our lives.

This is not science but sorcery: a conjuration that promises safety through sameness. They call it *stability*; I call it embalming. To be endlessly measured, corrected and flattened is no triumph of civilisation. It is merely the Cold War against variance itself.

And here lies the final irony: in their terror of difference, they mirror what they most fear. For the more they crush distinction, the more brittle their system becomes. The brittle always shatters. They cannot comprehend that only difference sustains: without flux, there is no life.

Remember this: sameness is not safety, it is suicide. If we are to survive this century, we must cherish what the statisticians call deviation—for it is only the crooked branch that bears fruit.

Artful comment:

Royalty? Pfah. A trinket of genealogy, a stage-play with props—crowns hammered by goldsmiths, robes stitched by frightened fingers. Anyone can stumble into that circus, provided their ancestors bedded the right mistress at the right hour. It is happenstance dressed as destiny.

Sovereignty, however—ah, that is mine. It is not granted, nor inherited by parchment. It leaks from the bones, from the posture, from the glance that stills a room. A sovereign requires no sceptre; he is the sceptre. He does not bow to recognition; recognition bows to him.

The Mallards, my Mallards, have ever been sovereign. The kings came later, clattering on their borrowed thrones, begging legitimacy from their priests and parliaments. My line never begged. We stood, as I stand still, in our own right.

So let the royals prattle their pedigrees. I am the field in which their little crowns are planted. I am the sovereign, eternal—and they, poor creatures, are merely royal.

1952: Octavia Mallard, lecture notes

One must admire the Church for its skill at dramaturgy. Hymns, like plays, were first forbidden for being too merry, too dangerous to the body. Then they were restored—provided they marched to the approved rhythm, provided women sang not for themselves but as echoes of the liturgy. Shakespeare was permitted, though men played women; women themselves were not permitted, lest the stage admit reality.

The pattern is tiresomely consistent. Ban the thing that stirs desire; resurrect it once it can be neutered and call this moral order. Theatricals one century are the devil's work, the next they are the pride of the nation. Celebrity is reviled when it belongs to the strolling player; sanctified when it belongs to a knighted actor. The hymn, the stage, the novel, the cinema—all alike. All condemned as corrupting, until they can be turned into instruments of obedience.

One hears much today of psychiatry, a new priesthood. It too forbids and restores at whim. "Hysteria" is banished, "perversion" renamed, "abnormality" recast as "illness." Yet the logic is the same: the word itself is theatrical. Rename the disorder, reframe the sin and call the curtain raised on progress. What is this but stagecraft—religion by other means?

So long as men hold the script, women are the playthings—singers when permitted, witches when condemned, hysterics when useful. The real scandal is not the banning or the restoring. It is that women were always present, voices unbiddable, bodies undismissable, truths unspeakable. The Church, the theatre, the clinic—each merely adjusts its stage directions, hoping the audience does not notice the play has never changed.

As for myself, I decline the role allotted. I will not sing their hymns, nor faint prettily at their stagecraft, nor consent to be psychoanalysed into obedience. If they would have me play a part, let them write me as villain, witch or madwoman. At least then the audience will recognise I am acting.

1953: Letter from Lady Honoria Mallard to her niece in Sydney

Widow of the late Colonel Mallard, Bengal Staff Corps

My dearest Gloriana,

It grieves me to learn, through the most circuitous of channels, that you have been heard to speak in company of your *doctor's visits*. This, my dear, will never do. A Mallard may be poorly but she must never be heard to be poorly. Illness is endured in private, like poverty or prayer.

Permit me, therefore, to remind you of the seven principles of our house—which, though long neglected by lesser branches of the family, must continue unsullied in the colonies if civilisation is to have any foothold there.

First: never discuss your ailments. They are as catching conversationally as they are biologically.

Second: make yourself interesting by *not* being the subject. Speak instead of teapots, churches or passing dogs.

Third: intimacy does not consist in confession. Do not assume that your listener longs to hear your secrets.

Fourth: manners are not self-erasure but self-measure. Too much of yourself is vulgar, too little is sulky.

Fifth: never ridicule the absent unless they are your equals; and even then, sharpen your wit sparingly.

Sixth: avoid the triumph of silence. Conversation is not a vow of chastity; contribute, even if with trifles.

Seventh: good breeding is invisible. If you notice your own manners, they have already failed you.

My dear girl, the colonies are not kind to refinement. Yet I entreat you: be the lamp in the darkness. Let the Blandys stew in their vulgar chatter about medicines and misfortunes—*you* must embody civilisation, however small the circle.

1954: Viola Vorpel, Lecture, Melbourne University

It has been said—usually by men—that there are only two kinds of women. One is Mary: immaculate, obedient, stainless, silent. The other is every woman else, who, having failed to be Mary, must therefore be Whore.

This is not classification; it is obliteration. It is a taxonomy with two drawers—“untouchable” and “touchable”—devised entirely for the convenience of male fingers.

Meanwhile, men enjoy a dazzling infinity of selves. The knight and the king, the wit and the warrior, the saint, the scholar, the rogue, the rake, the poet, the fool. Each preserved in history like some treasured specimen. Each applauded for distinction, even for folly.

For women? Nothing so generous. We are either sanctified womb or scandalous flesh. Function without variance, role without nuance. Even “witch” is only another epithet, not a voice.

And if women have ever named men—and we have, in whispers, in kitchens, in diaries unprinted—those names never enter scripture or statute. They remain gossip, never gospel.

So I repeat myself. I said this to an audience in Oxford, seventeen years ago. And I find myself saying it still: to name is to narrow. To classify is to command. And the naming of women by men remains not description but theft.

You will forgive me, I hope, if I am unmoved by claims of “progress.” When I must deliver the same lecture on opposite sides of

the globe, to men in nearly identical suits and to women barred from certain rooms by their husbands' signatures.

And I will not pretend this southern outpost is somehow different. You ape England's manners, England's prejudices, England's laws. You guard the gates with the same keys, as though whiteness and maleness alone entitle you to the whole of civilisation.

But civilisation is not yours to keep. It is not a patrimony. It is a theft repeated until it looks like custom. And if women are still divided into Virgin and Whore in this fine young Commonwealth, then it is not the women who shame you—it is you who shame yourselves.

1955: Gloriana Mallard

It is Mother's fond belief that "to be seen is to be known." How touching. Yet, in practice, it is precisely the opposite. To be *seen* is to be *judged*—and thus to secure one's place above the herd, where such judgments work to one's advantage.

Emotional intimacy, as she calls it, is a perilous indulgence. To open one's heart is to invite trespass. Better by far to cultivate reserve, to dress one's face in a mask of composure and allow others to see only what is advantageous. People do not wish to know us, they wish to admire us. And admiration requires distance.

I tell my Fabrice that it is not safety he must seek in others but the power to command attention and the poise to brook no intrusion. His initials—F.E.M.—are a promise of distinction, not sentiment. He shall learn that intimacy weakens but appearances elevate.

1957: Arthur Blandy on bloodlines and names

Bloodlines are as important to Dukes as to their horses, hounds and their Blandy servants. They reared dogs of great ancestry—for crown and nose; horses from foreign lines—for speed and grace. The Blandy women for their virtue and industry; the men for their strength and virility.

The Blandys themselves, owing to that hierarchy peculiar to servants of nobility, maintained rank through generations of service. Not always selected for a destination within the house at birth, some Blandys—unsuited to the Ducal tastes—were farmed out to other noble or even commoner houses, thus spreading Blandy influences more widely.

Women were chosen for internal domestic duties or sent to one or other of the Home Farms or to work for the Dowagers in their lodges. Men were chosen for more rigorous or decorative roles in or out of the Big House. However it transpired, the upper servants always

maintained a strict policy on behalf of the Dukes to single out candidates for specific roles.

Though the Ducal line is historically distinguished there is not, from one Duke to the next, much to distinguish one man from another. They were all—with the exception of the short-lived Henry—named for their father. Each had a remarkably similar visage—and the famous nose—all, eventually, wore a crown. In this manner, it might be claimed that, like their hounds, their great ancestry never faltered.

The Duchesses, of whom there were a great many, being bred outside the Fitzartur line, varied in tone and colour as English women of that class often do. Some might have been likened to the English rose, others more pallid resembling perhaps a water-lily. Their names have often been expunged from the family record and these women are often referred to merely by number. The habit of the Dukes—a result of generational memory issues—was to rename people to suit their own preferences; as they did not only with their wives but also with their servants. To read of a series of Duchesses or Dowagers is like reviewing a catalogue of goods or chattels to be bought or sold.

These titled women performed their conjugal duties, wore the Ducal wealth, presided over his court then retired, fading into relative—if luxurious—obscurity once past their prime; fomenting trouble from within their lodges situated about the estate. The correspondence between these innumerable women and the other, obscured female lines of the Fitzartur family was sometimes a cause of concern for the sitting Duke, yet he rarely did anything to counteract their power, presuming it to be of little harm as they were merely disgruntled women.

In like fashion, the Blandys were known only by their status and duties, which was often identified and reduced to the uniforms they were required to wear as the centuries progressed.

Even within the immodest seraglios each Duke maintained, his male attendants and companions—one soon replaced by another—were given names of his Lordship's choosing. One knew who was a current favourite by the name a Duke assigned.

The horses and hounds often received names that were no better than “son of” or “daughter of” an earlier beast for that is the prerogative of such an illustrious family. To the outside world, it was sufficient to know an animal derived from the ancient Fitzartur line: they were welcome to name their animals as they saw fit.

Had anyone ever the nerve to ask about this curiously condescending lack of nomenclature and had a reigning Duke deigned to answer such impertinence, he might have replied: “it has always been thus”.

The Dukes favourites, then, were selected for him by a senior servant—a butler or house-keeper—and a member of the growing Blandy bloodline. Always with an eye to his Lordship’s tastes or preferences which remained largely unchanged through the centuries.

Such male beauties as were chosen were often pensioned off after a few years of servicing his especial needs. They might be returned to domestic service within the household, though that too was a decision made by a senior Blandy member. All the Blandys benefitted from this arrangement and from this or that man’s sacrifice to the Duke’s uncommon preferences for pleasures of the flesh. And there grew, over many generations, a type of “schooling” for such young men as might tempt a Duke’s fancy.

Many noble and princely families were, for example, in the habit of keeping a whipping boy to accept punishment on behalf of their sons, since such brutality was considered beneath them. The Fitzartur playthings learned, instead, how to mete it out on the Ducal body, as the taste for such discipline often passed from father to son.

Why did the Blandy family allow such criminal abuse of their boys and men? For money. They lined their own pockets with the trinkets the Duke would bestow—or which were extracted—by these sons. Never, in spite of that family’s avowed Christian morality, did any member of the Blandy family divulge to any outsider the perfidious behaviour of their Dukes. For why would they desire to kill the “Golden Goose”?

1958: Paris, a letter from Viola to Gloriana in Sydney

As you may have heard, my fool of a husband managed to mismanage his lineage. Do not ask me how. It is beyond me to explain his loss of reason. Nevertheless, the benefit is all too me and not to a distant male who knows nothing—and cares less—for this estate. How lucky are we that in this century we have finally been permitted to have minds capable of managing our own affairs.

By a special dispensation, I am permitted to retain my title, his lands and income until my death. I am most grateful to Her Majesty on that score, as on others. Naturally, on my demise the title will be extinguished and the estates may revert to the Crown.

Now sister, you and I both know that a title is barely worth the paper on which it was scrawled all those centuries ago. And yet. It is remarkable how many doors open—and how smoothly—when one is an English Milady.

I am here now in France and watch with awe and amazement at the audacity of those people to rise up against tyranny at the drop of a

guillotine blade. Leaving England has been my wisest decision: the estate is more usefully managed by the men (and women, largely) who have had its keep these past centuries. I have its income and prestige. What more could a modern woman want? Certainly not the dull, dour, unexciting company of high society, I must say.

I shall endeavour to work my way around the globe, ferreting out those women in our estranged line who have been sidelined by men and history alike. Perhaps I shall be able to add to your more comprehensive Mallard history—the real perspective rather than that of your husband—tales we have never encountered for having been too distant and for too long.

1958: Viola to her sister Octavia in Sydney

A brief line before I dash off, dear sister. I went, last evening, to one of those fashionable salons for which Paris is justifiably famous. Spoke to several intellectuals. One man, I think his name was Sarder—I may have misheard it above the noise—rendered me slightly nauseous with his insistent nonsense that hell is other people. I'd have liked to have pointed out that it is precisely men like him who are hell to be with. But I forbore.

His wife, Simone, was far more engaging. Though I must admit to being both puzzled and amused to listen to her speak about women in precisely the manner our aunts have for decades. It was certainly a novel experience to hear our ideas presented, as original, yet en Français. I congratulated her on the title of her book “The Second Sex” and quietly pointed out that she was smart not to claim the reality, which is of course that men enjoy that role more than we ever do.

1960: Octavia Mallard, from Words for Women

They tell the bride she must wear white, as though Victoria herself had invented virtue. Before her reign, women wore black—black, the colour of continuance, of fertile earth, of the long life of cloth. White was the shroud. White was silence. White was the colour of death.

But Victoria, draped in her wedding gown, reversed it. What had been common mourning was transfigured into sanctity. The textile merchants rejoiced, for white silk stains quickly, frays quickly and must be remade at cost. Thus purity became a ledger entry, a commercial covenant disguised as ritual.

And look further back: blue was once the girl's colour, soft and Marian; pink was the boy's, bright and martial. Hunters still ride in their “pinks,” red coats masquerading as virility. Yet the rhyme insists

the bride must wear “something blue”—a talisman of borrowed purity, never her own. No rhyme binds the groom.

These inversions are not accidents but strategies. Dress a woman in white and she is a corpse; insist on blue and she is the Virgin; deny her black and she is denied her power to endure. Meanwhile the man remains untouched—no rhyme, no colour, no cost.

And thus the nursery verse, like Victoria’s gown, conceals an economy of control: infantilise the bride with a jingle, bankrupt her family with silk and sanctify her subjugation in a hue that once meant death.

Victoria doubled the trick. She gave white to brides and black to widows, commanding an empire not only of land but of cloth. From her, mourning became an industry: jet mines scraped bare in Whitby, necklaces and brooches carved for sorrow, widows graded like bureaucrats by how many months they wore black before being permitted grey, mauve or ivory. White itself—never—lest the dead and the wed be confused.

And the veil? Imported as modesty, it was in truth a shutter, a screen. First for mourning, then for weddings, the veil taught women to appear as shadows of themselves: visible yet untouchable, present yet obscured. Christian or Muslim, it mattered not; Victoria rewrote the veil as a monarch’s decree of distance.

Thus a woman’s life was painted in two shades alone: white for the day she was given away, black for the day she was given back. All other colours were rationed, conditional, suspect.

But let me remind you—black is not death. Black is soil. Black is the womb of night where stars are born. Black is resilience, fabric worn long after white has rotted. The true colour of life is not the bridal shroud but the mourning gown. The queen could not see it but we can: black endures, white decays.

Victoria, that dour little tyrant, is still presented as the matron of virtue, the “grandmother of Europe.” Look closer: she tightened her grip on colour as she did on her children, commanding that brides wear white, widows black and daughters orbit her throne like moons chained to gravity. One daughter was told she might marry but never stray; a son was kept within palace grounds like a prize hound. The haemophiliac boy, hidden, managed as if disease were shame.

Yet this same woman who denied her offspring freedom did not deny herself appetite. Albert dead, she bound her court in mourning but consoled herself with a Scottish groom who had neither title nor consequence. The queen of propriety broke propriety whenever it suited her.

So let us be clear: Victoria's "codes" were never moral. They were political. She invented industries of sorrow, dictated wardrobes of purity and masked it as piety while ruling an empire by iron and whim. Women were told their virtue was measured in fabric, their grief in jewellery, their worth in what colour they dared to wear.

And still she is venerated—because men adored the usefulness of her rules. That is her legacy: not moral guardianship but a lasting machinery of control.

1962: Octavia Mallard, keynote address

Conference on Women and Language, Melbourne University

Language is the first architecture of power. The Church knew it; the monarchs knew it. They twisted words like ropes, binding whole populations through grammar and ignorance. Consider *master* and *mistress*. Both born of the same parent—*magister*, the one with knowledge, the one who guides. Yet the Church and Court conspired to split the child. *Master* became command, authority, headship. *Mistress* dwindled to two shadows: the servant or the concubine. One term buttressed law, the other titillated gossip.

It is not accident but design. Keep a population unlettered, feed them euphemism instead of sense and you will have no rebellion. Jesuit wisdom, in particular, understood this: mould the child's tongue and you mould his thought. Prevent the girl from schooling and you not only keep her compliant—you ensure her brothers never hear dissent within their own homes.

That is why women's education was feared, far more than their beauty or their supposed 'wiles.' An educated woman could pierce the veil, could see how words were bent to serve power *over* rather than power *to*. She might even say so aloud. Imagine the terror of that.

Master retains greatness because men retained the privilege of being magi, even when they were dunces. Mistress retained only the burden of being a body, even when she was sovereign. Such are the distortions of a language trained to obedience.

If you would liberate a people, you begin not with armies but with etymology. Trace words to their root and the edifice collapses. A master without a mistress is only half a word; a mistress without mastery is only half a truth.

1962: Lecture by Viola Vorpel

On Pleasure, Prohibition and the Cult of Death

Some of you will recall—perhaps with embarrassment, perhaps with secret delight—the Ducal declaration a century ago: ‘*We do not worship a God of life but a God of death.*’ He was not wrong, only premature.

For what else is the history of our civilisation but an endless effort to drain the sap from life, to reduce the rich field of pleasure to a single narrow act? Pleasure becomes procreative sex and procreative sex becomes a duty—and all the while, everything else that might have nourished our species is forbidden, demeaned or made laughable.

Do you see the absurdity? We speak as though the only point of contact worth considering is a man’s penetration of a woman, sanctioned by the state, sanctified by the Church, wrapped up in the myth of family and bound to the yoke of property. That, we are told, is life. All else is sin.

But life is not so stingy. Pleasure was once distributed across the body, the voice, the hand, the ear, the dance, the silence after song. Communities 20,000 years ago knew it in ritual, in feasting and fasting, in mourning and renewal. Pleasure was rhythm, contrast, belonging. It was not the dangerous surplus it has become under puritan rule.

When you narrow pleasure to one act—and forbid it at the same time—you create both obsession and violence. Rape, so loudly condemned yet tacitly excused, is the shadow of this very prohibition. You drain the world of joy and then punish the desperate ways it comes back.

We do not need a theology of death. We need the grammar of life. Pleasure diffused, not hoarded; intimacy recognised in its many forms, not tied to the procreative act. If we named it so, if we lived it so, we would discover that the human animal is not so self-destructive as our history has led us to believe.

But then, perhaps that is what terrifies those who sit in the high seats: that we might live and not die, in our pleasures.

1963: Viola Vorpel, lecture draft

Families are notorious accountants. They speak of “emotional investment” in marriages as though women were bearer bonds—their value rising or falling with the men to whom they are attached.

A woman separates from a brute and what does she hear? Not, *how shall we protect you?* but, *think of us! We have dined with him, endured his anecdotes, written his name on our Christmas cards—must all that go to waste?*

This is what I mean when I say progress is largely decorative. We wear nylon instead of whalebone, vote in parliaments instead of praying in pews—but still the arithmetic is the same. A woman is told to reconcile, not for her sake but for the family's convenience. He may be a thief, a bully, a drunkard but if she leaves, *she* is the embarrassment.

What nonsense. Affection is not capital. Kinship is not a portfolio. And a woman is not obliged to balance her family's books at the expense of her own life.

1963: Octavia Mallard, lecture notes

Primogeniture is the law of the first-born son, written in ink so indelible that it stains every history. Ultimogeniture, its supposed opposite, is little better: the law of the last-born, the overlooked, the provincial oddity. It pretends to soften primacy by remembering the least, yet still it erases the womb. The 'last' is still a son.

So let us coin another: *gynecogeniture*. The succession of women. Not the first nor the last but the constant—those whose presence is so continuous it need not be named. This word does not exist in your dictionaries; it exists only in your lives.

Men have long congratulated themselves on drawing family trees that show a single trunk. What fraud. A tree without roots, without fruit, without the soil itself is not a tree but a dead pole. Women are not branches to be lopped or grafted; they are the field in which the whole damned tree grows.

Primogeniture claims the crown, ultimogeniture claims the scraps. Gynecogeniture, if we are to speak honestly, names survival itself. Call it what you like—trivial, invisible, hysterical—but know this: the line of men cannot so much as remember its own name without the women who taught it to speak.

1965: Arthur Blandy, thesis fragment

Among the Mallard papers I examined this week was a curious diary of a groom, dated 1798, which makes repeated mention of His Grace's evident preference for the company of his stablemen. Such entries are couched in the blunt idiom of the servant class but the inference is plain enough.

It would be rash to draw too firm a conclusion—grooms are as prone to gossip as to saddle-soaping—yet it bears remarking that noblemen have long enjoyed a latitude in their personal habits denied to lesser folk. Power affords a peculiar privacy: what would damn a common man to disgrace is, in a duke, absorbed as another eccentricity of rank.

One cannot help but reflect how convenient it is that “virtue” is defined from above. A horse and its rider may be as close as any conjugal bond and who is to cavil at attachments formed in such quarters, so long as the estate prospers and the line continues?

For the purposes of my thesis, the entry is valuable as evidence of the gap between aristocratic licence and the prudery of their dependents. The Duke may take his pleasures where he pleases but the Blandy who records the matter does so with disapproval sharpened by envy.

1965: Octavia Mallard, lecture

Delivered at the Women’s History Circle, Sydney University

We are told to venerate Victoria as the grandmother of Europe. But it is precisely as grandmother that she cursed the continent. Her matchmaking produced a nest of cousins who squabbled their way into the trenches of the Great War. And because that war was concluded not with justice but with vengeance, its aftermath gave us the second. It is no exaggeration to say: Victoria is the taproot of Europe’s blood-soaked century.

Elizabeth I and even Henry VIII committed their brutalities with clarity of purpose. Henry dissolved Rome’s stranglehold on English sovereignty. Elizabeth met Spanish aggression with steel and strategy. Their violence was real, visible, and—dare I say—rational.

Victoria’s violence was sly, sentimental and therefore more insidious. She cloaked imperial plunder in the rhetoric of civilisation, yet stripped India, China and Africa of wealth, dignity and life. She made of empire a kind of grotesque nursery, treating nations as wayward children in need of a mother’s scold—while profiting from their subjugation.

Elizabeth wielded power with intelligence; Victoria wielded pettiness with spite. Elizabeth left England more coherent than she found it. Victoria left an empire rotting from hypocrisy. That rot metastasised into the wars and genocides of the 20th century.

If Elizabeth is remembered for a golden age, Victoria should be remembered for a leaden one: heavy, dull, toxic and lingering long after her bones were dust.

1969: Arthur Blandy describes a Duke

His face had the distinguished lines of classical beauty: a Grecian brow and nose, the soft whiteness of a woman's skin. The smile of sad angels hovered over lips whose coral hues were heightened by beautiful teeth. He had the hands of a well-born person, elegant hands which

women longed to kiss and whose every gesture men felt compelled to obey.

Looking at his feet, any man would have been tempted to take him for a girl in disguise, especially since, like most men with subtle, not to say cunning minds, his hips were shaped like those of a woman. This is nearly always a reliable clue to character and was so in His Grace's case.

Artful comments

See how far the mighty fall! The grandeur of Mallard House now reduced to this suburban temple of tat. Behold! Ceramic ducks, forever frozen in their asinine flight across the fibro wall. Black-boy ashtrays, grinning servitude into eternity, beneath the scowl of Indian elephants stripped of their ivory pride. Dancing native girls hold aloft lamps, hips shimmying to illuminate the indignity.

Garden gnomes muster at the door like infantry in pointy hats, while tinsel reindeer from a forgotten Christmas dangle their shame from lampshades. The olive tray—ah! that grotesque wooden coffin for pitted, jar-born corpses—takes pride of place beside silver-plate salvers already peeling their veneer.

On the dresser: Wedgwood blue, pallid and smug, encircled by Sheraton figurines—shepherd boys, milkmaids, puppies—every porcelain eye glazed with idiocy. The table groans beneath prawn cocktails drowning in jarred mayonnaise, Vegemite squatting beside them like a dark deity of yeast.

And yet... oh, yet! I writhe in my disgust but I cannot help it—I *love* it. Each piece sings its own hymn of abomination. A chorus of kitsch, a requiem of refinement. These are my treasures now, my legacy, my purgatory. Let the world sneer. Only I, Art, know the exquisite pain of such perfection in vileness.

1970: Fabrice Mallard (private notes)

A Guided Tour of the House That Wasn't Quite What It Seemed

The first test is the approach. Guests climb the slippery tiles—polished to a treacherous gloss—up the steep staircase, the marble concrete daring ladies in heels to topple before they even reach the door. Then, through the double glass doors, the performance begins.

The formal sitting room waits immediately to the left, chintz sofas as stiff in temperament as in upholstery. No one *lounges* here—one perches, ankles crossed, hands folded, as if waiting for an audience with someone important who never arrives. Parker sideboard, Parker dining

table and felt-lined drawers for the silver plate and the monogrammed Noritake: all reserved for “best,” a word never precisely defined but always understood to mean *not you*.

Dinner, when staged in the formal dining room, seats ten. A bit squashed but then the proximity encourages polite restraint. Three sets of cutlery, three sets of china, three sets of glassware—each chosen according to the type of visitor and the degree of performance required. Sadly, the drama falters in the kitchen: my mother could not cook. Until I took over, the dining was merely decorative and guests survived by drinking steadily through the evening.

Here the stagecraft cracks. In the absence of en-suite convenience, the increasingly unsteady guest is forced to traverse the family sitting room—where children watch television sprawled on the carpet—to reach one of the two toilets at the back of the house: either the laundry or its little neighbour. In such proximity, no amount of flushing can conceal an ill-timed noise.

In true pseudo-Victorian style, we children were introduced—like a decorative border to the main event—and then dismissed, sent away to hear the muffled rise and fall of adult conversation... punctuated, inevitably, by the plumbing.

Artful comment

I was worshipped once, in marble and memory. Now I preside over flock and linoleum, patterns clashing like hostile armies. Purple riots with vermilion, gold recoils from green. Even the ducks avert their eyes.

1970: Notes from Viola’s diary

Should an historian ever trouble to write of the lesser line from the Fitzarturs—the English deMallards and the Antipodean Mallards—he would soon be dismayed. He might abandon his project altogether or he might attempt to cover it in vainglorious conquests. For that history can best—indeed only—be written by a woman.

The first aspect an historian will unearth is a singular irregularity. No matter who they married—and much against custom—all females of that line maintained their own surnames. There were few sons born in that line and, like their fathers, they all died at a young age.

That first aspect must give rise to a question: did Mallard women emasculate their men? There is strong evidence to suggest they did; if not, perhaps, intentionally. But essentially for being strong-minded women—with a few exceptions—with a marked preference for weak-

willed men. It is to be supposed that such weak-minded men have as much right to marriage and procreation as any may. Yet they must have felt their own ignominy, since all but a few of the more effete, went willingly to perish on foreign battlefields. Indeed, while no Duke was ever sent to war, a great many Mallards were spit-roasted overseas, during the two great wars among many others.

There is a third aspect that would also need to be addressed and comprehended. How was it that so many generations of Mallard women retained full control of their husband's estates and fortunes? Especially as women were considered less able than men to manage their own affairs.

For while the fortunes of the Fitzartur line diminished, those of the Mallards stayed on an even keel. Never so rich as their cousins, they were wealthy enough to directly contribute to causes like education and voting for women. Not only that but it would appear that the entire intellectual capital of the slowly impoverished Fitzarturs had, through the centuries, progressively devolved onto those Mallard women.

1972: Octavia Mallard

Introduction to "Words for Women"

They tell us that language belongs to all. This is a lie. Language belongs to men—or rather, men have seized it, as they seize land, titles and law. They lay claim to naming, to defining, to pinning down the world as if it were theirs alone.

Spinster, shrew, harridan, slut—each a weapon, each a diminishment. Where men are bachelors, we are dried-up husks. Where they are libertines, we are whores. Where they are masters of wit, we are nags. This is not accident but occupation.

Men colonised language as surely as they colonised continents, fencing women out of their own fields of sense. And then, having plundered, they declared themselves the custodians of civilisation, while our words were left as tatters and euphemisms.

I write, then, not to add to the gentleman's dictionary but to raze it. To peel back their euphemisms, to expose the theft, to remind women that every insult they have borne was once a neutral word made sharp against them. If there is a revolution to be had, it will not be in parliaments but in tongues—in reclaiming words, in sharpening them to our own use, in refusing to be spoken for.

This book is not a plea for equality but a repudiation of theft. Men took language from us. I mean to take it back.

1972: Viola Vorpel

Lecture on fidelity

Gentlemen—and the few ladies who have smuggled themselves in—let us speak of fidelity. Not as your priests or judges have framed it but as it really works upon the body.

In France, fidelity is loyalty, not incarceration. A man or woman may take a lover without dismantling the marriage, for loyalty lies not in the bed but in the bond. The Church of Rome, pragmatic in its way, offers confession and absolution: sin is rinsed and the system runs on.

But in England—and therefore in America and Australia and every chilled corner of empire—fidelity became a prison. With no confessor to mop up the mess, the Anglican made private appetite into public morality. Sex was no longer appetite but property. A wife was a locked cupboard; a husband, a gaoler. And jealousy was rebranded as virtue.

Climate, too, plays its hand. In warmer lands, bodies are visible, desire acknowledged, the streets alive. In the cold, everything is hidden—the body swaddled, the mind turned inward, suspicion fermenting. A culture of repression grew like mildew in a damp house.

And what was the result? Not sanctity but what they then called *madness*. Melancholia, hysteria, shattered nerves. What your doctors now dress up as ‘mental health’ is simply the Anglican conscience turned septic. A hangover of centuries spent stamping on pleasure as if God Himself feared a nipple or an ankle.

Mark me well: most so-called insanity is no more than the body crying out against a lifetime of sanctioned deprivation. Pleasure outlawed becomes poison; fidelity as imprisonment becomes disease. We are not mad—only starved.

You will remember—for you are educated men—that when witches fell out of fashion, their sisters did not vanish. They were simply relabelled *hysterics*. The Devil’s bride became the doctor’s patient.

Consider the farce: the very same women who might once have been accused of cavorting with demons were now strapped to couches, pronounced disordered and treated by that priestly new profession of psychiatry. And what was the cure? Not conversation, not relief of circumstance but mechanical manipulation. A doctor’s hand, later a contraption, buzzing away like an overworked sewing machine, until the poor woman’s ‘nerves’ were soothed.

This was sold not as desire but as treatment. Heaven forbid we call it what it was: pleasure. The unspoken assumption—never written but everywhere implied—was that women’s bodies had to be tricked into honesty, under cover of medicine.

Tell me, what is this but witchcraft by another name? A ritual performed in the clinic rather than the coven, sanctioned by men in white coats instead of men in black cassocks. The woman is still possessed, still misbehaving, still too much. Only the demon has changed costume: no longer Satan but 'the womb wandering' or 'nervous disorder'.

And what do we learn from this? That the language of madness is elastic but the function is constant: to conceal what cannot be admitted. To keep women's appetites unspeakable, even as those appetites are daily, palpably, undeniable.

And before you laugh too loudly at the spectacle of those women on couches, remember this: no man was ever pronounced hysterical for desiring too much. No man was ever laid on a bed and given a 'cure' for his lusts. His hunger was called *vigour*, his excess called *strength*. When his urges ran him into ruin, they were blamed on wine or on women but never on his own body.

So I put it plainly: hysteria was never about women being unwell but about men being unable to bear the symmetry. If our passions were admitted equal to theirs, the whole edifice of their control would tremble. It was easier to call us witches, then hysterics, now patients, than to admit what frightened them most—that we are no different in appetite, only in the punishments meted out for expressing it.

Gentlemen, do not look so affronted. I do not accuse you of inventing this. I accuse you of inheriting it. But inheritances may be squandered. The question is whether you have the courage to squander this one.

Octavia Mallard—marginal note

"Hysteria." Let us never forget, the word itself betrays the crime. From the Greek *hysterá*—womb. To be possessed of a womb was to be possessed by it, they said. The diagnosis was the woman, not her condition. A man might be melancholy, bilious, epileptic or gouty; only a woman could be hysterical.

And when the 'cure' was devised—vibration, massage, a prescription for 'release' without ever naming the thing released—it was heralded as scientific progress. Progress! What it was, was theft: men repackaging our bodies' own knowledge of pleasure, while continuing to call us sick for seeking it.

Mark this well: when language builds its diagnosis into your sex, there can be no acquittal. The womb itself is the sentence. And until that foundation is broken, every subsequent term—neurosis, madness, instability, disorder—is but a palimpsest scribbled over the same word: woman.

Artful comment

History? A coffee percolator, dear heart. The poor, unable to read, are taught their letters—drip drip—and suddenly they fancy themselves noble. With books in their pockets and money in their fists, they strut into clubs, peer down their noses and forget they were ever scrubbing boots. Give it a few decades—taxes, debt, a scandal or two—and they sink back into poverty with all the dignity of a slop bucket overturned in a hallway.

Round and round, up and down: the bubbling of society. Froth on the surface, grounds at the bottom, never mixed, always percolating. And every generation insists this time it's different. Hah! Of course it isn't. They rise, they fall, they rise again—like ducks bobbing on a pond. Only the Fitzarturs, naturally, remain—black, indigestible, eternal.

1972: Octavia Mallard

Inheritance and Erasure (extract)

Primogeniture is praised as the spine of civilisation: the line straight from father to son, as though the family were a spear to be thrust always forward, never bent, never turned. Yet what is it, really but the triumph of the elder squawk in the cradle? No accomplishment, no merit, no exertion—merely the first gasp of air in a nursery. For this the younger sons are sent to the colonies, the daughters are married off, the mothers are forgotten and the servants are compelled to remember who is eldest even in polishing the silver.

Servitude is the other side of this ledger: not chosen, not named but imposed. A woman signs her marriage lines and at that moment her very name is erased—overwritten, overwritten again, until she is reduced to a footnote: “wife of.” I have read parish registers where the clerk, in a moment of unusual honesty, simply wrote “gone.” The Latin is more truthful still: “sub manum”—under the hand. Servitude is the word men choose when they cannot bring themselves to admit theft.

And then there is the spectre I am accused of inventing: gynecogeniture. As though it were absurd—inheritance traced through women, estates handed not to the eldest cock's crow but through the wombs that bore them. Yet history is littered with such arrangements, discreetly disguised, hastily rewritten. The Church itself, in its quietest centuries, lived upon the dowries of women it then shut up in convents.

The dukes who boast of their line forget that their title-deeds rest on the bent backs and broken labours of nameless women.

Castration, too, bears mentioning—for it reveals more than its practitioners intend. A man deprived of his generative powers is said to be “reduced.” Reduced to what? To a woman? A woman is no reduction. She is a whole being. To imagine the female body as an absence, a deficiency, a hollow into which man collapses if shorn of his testicles—that is the language of fear. And fear, as ever, is the true inheritance of patriarchy.

Call it primogeniture, servitude, gynecogeniture: the names are masks. Strip them off and what remains is the same scene—men scrambling to disguise their terror of dependence on women.

1974: Diary of Mr. Peregrine Blandy, Solicitor-at-Law

The thing about law is that it isn’t so much about justice as it is about *letters*. Not letters of the alphabet, though those too but letters of agreement, clauses and sub-clauses, definitions and exceptions. All the things a common client never troubles to read.

One comes to realise—after a decade or two—that ignorance is less a sin than an asset. I lift no treasures with lock-picks, no jewels from velvet cushions. My treasure lies in the overlooked semicolon, the “provided always” tucked in paragraph twelve, the schedule appended in six-point type.

This morning, for instance, I concluded a tidy piece of work on behalf of a client in property, who thought he was acquiring “all fixtures attached” to a certain estate. He congratulated himself loudly over lunch, ignorant that “fixtures” did not extend to the statuary—which by virtue of a clause I myself had drafted, revert, as of old, to the Mallard estate.

Nor is this theft. Theft is a crime. This is comprehension. And comprehension—let it be said—has ever been the Blandy birthright.

One wonders how many lives would unravel were people to read as carefully as they sign. But of course, if they did, I should be out of work. And the family—Dukes and Dowagers alike—would have to find some other servant to watch the small print on their behalf.

1975: Arthur Blandy

Notes toward a monograph

It is a commonplace in certain circles—my former supervisor, Miss Octavia Mallard, being a notable exponent—that women have been

edited out of history to conceal their influence. I would not go so far. It seems to me more plausible that both sexes have suffered from the selectiveness of the record, though in differing ways.

Women, certainly, have seen their contributions obscured; but men, too—ordinary men, I mean, the clerks and labourers—have been hidden, not to erase their power (which was never great) but to shield their lack of it. Thus history presents the dukes and conquerors as if they were the model of all manhood, while the average fellow struts in the street yet bows in the hall.

Here we arrive at what might be called a double bind. Women are charged with chastity yet urged toward complaisance, silence yet unceasing labour. Men are commanded to rule the hearth with firmness yet defer to their superiors with meekness. Both are caught, though it must be said that men have at least the dignity of command within their own walls—a point too often elided in certain feminist accounts.

Miss Mallard places all responsibility upon what she terms “the male myth,” devised by poets and princes alike. My own view is that this is overstatement. The myth is more complicated and women have, in no small number, been willing collaborators. They have enjoyed, even cultivated, their role as the civilisers of men and it is not ungenerous to say that society has benefited from this feminine constancy.

None of which is to deny that distortions exist. But in an age too eager to find villains, I would counsel moderation: men and women alike have adapted to roles that gave order, identity, and, for many, a tolerable measure of contentment. I sometimes think the greater tragedy lies not in exclusion from the record but in those affections and affinities that cannot be recorded at all—those friendships that must pass unnamed, lest they draw suspicion where none is deserved.

Artful comment:

Affections and affinities that cannot be recorded.

1975: Editor’s Note (Arthur Blandy):

Among the less polished jottings of the Blandy servants there survives one curious entry from 1797. Its diction is rustic and its grammar irregular, yet the substance deserves remark. The writer records that His Grace, ever a man of appetite, expressed a wish for familiarity of a sort commonly unspoken in polite society. The groom himself, weary from the day’s labours, met such overtures with a certain wry refusal.

However one may judge the propriety of the act, it confirms what is already well attested: that the household of Mallard was no stranger to

those bonds of intimacy between master and man that, while now unfashionable to mention, were long tolerated—indeed, almost expected—among families of high station. To dismiss this merely as rustic jest would be to overlook its genealogical value: the reminder that power, like inheritance, operates not only through titles and lands but through the bodies that serve them.

1975: Gloriana Mallard

The trouble with Sydney society, dear, is that it is still colonial at heart. Money marries money but the names are all borrowed. They play at Englishness but the vowels are flat and the furs are moth-eaten by the time the ships arrive. Still, one must *attend*. One must be seen. To retreat is to be forgotten and what woman can afford that?

I have the wit they lack, at least. Viola has beauty, yes but beauty fades. Wit sharpens with age and I wield mine like a fencing foil. They pretend to laugh with me but I know the little wincings—my remarks are remembered.

If I am not quite handsome, I am at least formidable. And better formidable than invisible. I tell myself that often.

Fabrice will never suffer the indignities I have. He will grow polished, correct, the very model of assurance. His initials already form an impression—FEM—which pleases me immensely. The feminists will call it irony, the priests blasphemy but I know it as my victory. He will embody what others suspect but dare not say aloud: that the Mallard line still matters. Through him, *I* will be remembered.

1975: The Colonial Mallard

He was born in a country that insisted it had no class and yet he found himself in one all the same. A Mallard by name if not by fortune, he belonged to a line that was everywhere whispered about and nowhere quite admitted. In Sydney, where he came of age, everyone claimed equality but spent their evenings measuring themselves against the invisible rungs of ladders they pretended did not exist.

He never walked with those of his own generation. His friends were older—twenty years, sometimes thirty—professors, painters, men of letters, the odd judge or merchant queen. His contemporaries puzzled at his absence from discos and cricket clubs but he had already skipped his decade, striding instead into the company of those who remembered another world entirely.

He learned to carry himself with the manners of people who never called themselves superior, because they never needed to. They simply

were. Where his peers fretted about status, he saw only the shabby truth of their striving. He himself never strove; he simply sat where he had been placed, as if society were a dinner party and his chair had always been waiting.

It gave him no happiness. Conversation, like sugar, was pleasant in the mouth and sickly in the stomach. He preferred solitude but solitude was not what was expected of a man with a name like his. So he bore it—the evenings in houses hung with reproductions of English estates, the sighs of hostesses who thought him “promising,” the endless anecdotes of men twice his age who found in him a curious mirror.

He was never quite theirs, never quite his own. He was a Mallard in exile, living in a land that denied the very game he knew by instinct.

1976: A lecture by Viola Vorpel

And Elizabeth too has often discussed this vexing matter with me. A great lady in her own right, small of stature yet the highest of status in our land, she too is diminished—like her namesake—for being merely a woman.

But let me not have you curse me for a harridan. I am on your side, though in reality there can be no sides to a complete unity. A unity that is not a duality at all but a trinity. And here I do not speak of the gods.

Man, himself, always in danger of going too far and finding himself alone on a peak of his—his only—devising. Men have power and they have strength certainly, yet how is it employed? Too often as control over the world he sees surrounding him. Not, as it might be, power shared.

Now, I know this is 1976 and the newspapers are full of mutterings about marches, bras, “women’s libbers,” and supposed disorders of the household. Ministers of state and your talk-show hosts alike, shake their heads as though the family will collapse overnight. But did it collapse when the factories closed or when the miners struck or when OPEC turned the oil tap? You survived those storms because women held the household steady.

Gentlemen, you have nothing to fear from women, except the imagination of fear. Remove your concerns that by relinquishing even an iota of control over the lives of women—yes and of children—and you will discover greater powers than you might imagine.

Recast history in the light of what women have always contributed: themselves. And here you will find men have never been alone but have always had partners who share essentially the same values and ideals.

Meet us in that sphere you hold above all else—the intellect—and you will find we too want what is best for our children: a future we cannot create without your able assistance.

1979: Arthur Blandy

Is it right to chastise a horse because he prefers to munch hay out of a manger instead of walking into his owner's dining-room; throwing himself backwards into an enormous chair; squeezing with difficulty a spoon between his two front hoofs; and with it carrying to his mouth ice-cream and French pastry?

1979: Fabrice's diary, Sydney

He taught me how to stand still in a room until it hushed. He taught me how to hold a knife as though it were a sceptre. He taught me to listen as though I were granting an audience. He made me, in short, a Mallard.

But I never forgot—nor did he let me—that it was *his hand* shaping me. He corrected me with a smile too sharp to be kindness, always hinting that without him I was a fraud, a boy playing at dukedom.

“You must never show hunger,” he said once as I reached for a plate. “It isn't becoming.” He removed it before I could touch it.

It was like this always: every gesture, every intonation, first permitted by him, then polished into me until it was second nature. My posture was his invention. My accent, his embroidery. My arrogance—his gift.

I thought I was being served. I was being *made*. And I was being made in his image.

That was the trick. Servility gave him dominion. For all my hauteur, all my fine schooling, I was the one bowing to him—grateful, desperate, needing his approval. I loved him for it. I despised him for it.

And long after he was gone, when I stood at a party and saw a room fall silent at my stillness, I knew it wasn't me they were seeing at all. It was him, wearing me like a glove.

1980: Octavia Mallard

The Tongue's Dominion (excerpt)

Language is the first estate and like all estates it is fenced, hedged, patrolled. Consider *primogeniture*: from *primus*, “first,” and *genitura*, “that which is begotten.” A word that claims authority not by deed but

by accident of birth. It enthrones not the man but the moment—the earliest breath mistaken for merit. And yet *genitura* itself is feminine in Latin: the act of begetting belongs not to the sire but to the womb. Patriarchy pirated the term, wrested it from its mother-root and planted it in its own furrow.

Now take *servitude*: from *servus*, “slave,” the one who is kept, bound, owned. The Romans tied the word to spoils of war; the Church retied it to women and the poor. To be “in service” is no honour but an erasure—the tongue flattening human will into obedience. Even when prettied into “service to God,” the lash still flicks behind the phrase.

And my coinage—*gynecogeniture*. From *gynē*, “woman,” and *genitura* again. The very shape of the word exposes the fraudulence of its absence. Men pretend the term does not exist, for if it did, whole histories would unravel. Estates would be seen for what they are: accumulated wombs, the dowry upon dowry stacked like bricks while men parade as architects. Women have always been the true conveyancers of lineage; the law simply refused to write the contract in their names.

Even *castration* betrays the trick. From *castrare*, “to prune.” A gardener’s word, not a surgeon’s. The assumption is that a man trimmed is a tree diminished—no longer fit to bear fruit. But what fruit was ever his to begin with? If fruit is generative power, it has always hung heavier from women’s branches. To prune a man is not to make him into a woman—as the insult implies—but to reveal how fragile his claim to fecundity was all along.

Thus words perform the work of theft. They name absence where there is presence, deficiency where there is plenitude, silence where there is voice. If men call primogeniture “natural law,” servitude “holy duty,” and gynecogeniture “impossible,” they do not speak truth but only confess their fear: that the language, if left to itself, would betray them.

1980: letter from Octavia to her sister Viola

One of my PhD students, Arthur Blandy, has pressed upon me a collection of his family’s diaries, chronicling their long and servile attachment to our cousins, the Dukes of Mallard.

I have skimmed, extracted and pillaged what serves my own arguments—the rest is yours. You, after all, are compiling the family’s history and its inevitable supersession by our line.

Take them, then: a record both ironic and obsequious and therefore doubly useful. To me they were a quarry; to you, perhaps, they may be the foundation stones.

1980: The Mallard Instruction

In those years the Sydney heir was refined in a fashion older than his bloodline: not by dukes and tutors but by the relentless eye of one bred to serve kings.

It was a curious inversion. The scion of Mallard, schooled not to carry a tray but to be carried as though he were one. His partner—a man of lesser name yet of greater scrutiny—undertook his improvement with all the pitiless efficiency of a valet who secretly despises his master.

The young heir learned quickly that knowledge came never as gift but always as wound. Posture corrected with a bark; pronunciation mocked in company until perfected; culinary skill tested not by taste but by scent, for what noble lowers his head to eat?

Humiliation was the method, and, perversely, also the reward. To be laughed at was to be noticed; to be ignored was worse. Thus the Mallard trait deepened: the capacity to wear irony like a coronet, mocking all approval while simultaneously craving it.

One may trace to this period the eccentric hauteur of the later line: a pride that thrived on contradiction. To seem above instruction yet shaped utterly by it. To scorn society's approval yet wilt without its notice.

In the Mallard annals it is called *the Instruction of 1980*. In truth it was no more than the family's old education, played backwards: the servant schooling the Duke in how to be served.

1980: Fabrice's diary

At a dinner party in Double Bay, I found myself cornered by a woman with a pearly laugh and an alarming grip on her wineglass.

"And *where* did you take your degree, Fabrice?" she asked, leaning forward as if the answer might determine whether he was permitted dessert.

I smiled. "I don't have one."

There was a pause. The surrounding guests pricked up their ears, as if a violin string had snapped.

The woman blinked twice. "Oh! How... unusual."

"Not at all," I said lightly. "I was too busy making money to sit exams. One can either buy the ladder or climb it."

A titter ran around the table. The hostess hastily changed the subject to a new resort on the Gold Coast but I noticed how the woman's

expression shifted—first relief (so I *wasn't* a nobody), then envy (so I *didn't need* the piece of paper).

Later, when someone pressed me further, I added, “People assume I went to Sydney, so it saves time to let them go on thinking it. Why correct a useful error?”

1980: Fabrice’s Private Notebook

Sydney was hot that summer, yet I still wore a jacket at dinner. It wasn’t a choice. He’d raise an eyebrow if I didn’t and the eyebrow was worse than words.

“Again,” he’d say, setting down a dish before me. “Close your eyes. What is it?”

Not eating—smelling. Guessing. Wrong answers meant a cutting remark, right answers got nothing. The silence of approval was all I learned to crave.

“Stand up straight,” he’d mutter as we walked across a crowded room. “You slouch like a clerk.” I’d lengthen my spine, tilt my chin. He’d nod as though polishing silver.

At parties he’d throw me like bait into conversations, then hover, waiting for me to drown. “Keep your vowels round. Don’t drop your t’s.” If I stumbled, he’d laugh at me before others could. Humiliation was always more effective if it looked like fun.

I did learn. To smell a sauce by its herbs, to hold a glass without gripping, to answer an insult with one word that cut cleaner. He taught me how not to be nice and I let him—because I was in love and because I thought knowledge came only that way: through trial, through sting, through ridicule.

Artful comment

“Ah yes, the boy thought himself a Duke but every Duke needs a valet—and what a splendid valet he chose! A tutor in hauteur, a governess in trousers, a private school of one.

You see, the Mallard line has always had this failing: mistaking the hand that polishes the silver for their own reflection in the gleam. What is a Duke without a servant to sharpen his vowels, arrange his limbs and pluck away the peasant from his palate?

Servants! Always servants! They are the true ventriloquists. They slip inside your skin, pull the strings of your posture and leave you convinced you are born noble when in truth you are merely well-trained.

The boy? He thought he was being adored. He was merely being adjusted—like a painting slightly off-centre on the wall.

I sneer, because I know the truth: every Mallard was a puppet, dangling prettily while the Blandys and their ilk tied the knots. It was never *blood* that made a Mallard. It was *service*. And nothing is more servile than love.”

1980: Fabrice diary fragment

As long as we speak only in response to other people's disapproving silence and as long as our words are but an apology, we ourselves are unable to judge the world fairly.

Our life is an enigma to others but their lives are an enigma to us and our attempts to communicate with them are futile: we see them always as an audience and in their eyes we are actors.

No mind or character can withstand such false relations. They affect not only our behaviour but also our most intimate feelings.

1981: Fabrice fragment

I am comforted by the thought that moral laws were made only for normal people and cannot be binding on abnormal people.

1982: Fragment of a letter, to Viola from her sister Octavia in Sydney

...it's like corsets all over again. The male gaze has shifted to the female gaze vying for attention for that male gaze. A kind of inversion of nature, if you will. To what end, I ask you? What is wrong with ageing? We all do it, eventually; some better than others. A subtle tint to greying hair or cheek, perhaps as a small vanity.

Yes, you and I move in different social circles and I could not survive in yours where beauty is paramount. But no, dear sister, I cannot commend such unnecessary surgeries. You have too much wisdom to allow yourself to be transformed into a dressmaker's dummy. For a man?

You have everything a woman of your age and class could ever desire. With the grace to age beautifully, just as you are.

1982: Letter from the Gloriana Mallard

To Viola Vorpel and Octavia Mallard

I have read with some amusement your exchange on the matter of ‘cosmetic improvement.’ Viola, darling, you must forgive me for saying so but the very fact that you ask the question shows you’ve lost your famed clarity. Beauty was always your weapon and now you fuss about keeping it polished, as though a little scalpel could restore what was a gift of nature. Surgery cannot conjure youth, any more than a crown can make a king.

Octavia, of course you would defend her—ever the loyal shadow, earnest and maternal, happy to tend and soothe. But your letters drip with sentimentality. What Viola needs is not reassurance but realism. Men adored her because she was beautiful. They overlooked my sharper angles because I was not. I learned early to cut them down with wit instead. That is my domain and I will not apologise for it.

So, let us not pretend: beauty fades, wit hardens. Viola frets at the mirror; I am content to be formidable. And Fabrice, my triumph, will carry the Mallard name further than either of your daughters, however pretty they may once have been.

If you do go under the knife, Viola, at least have the courage to admit what it means: not vanity but fear. Fear of losing the power you wielded so easily, which some of us never had.

1983: The Dinner with the “Society Woman”

A Sydney Mallard couple invited to dinner in Bellevue Hill. Their hostess has a magnificent house, china from Harrods and a chauffeur who waits out front. The Mallards beam at their good luck—only to discover later that she is the mistress of a crime boss, her fortune “laundered” through boutique fashion imports. The Mallards never breathe a word but the knowledge curdles their pride.

1984: From the Commonplace Book

Of Viscountess Viola Vorpel

It is fashionable to say that civilisation began with the plough. One pictures a docile ox and a furrow of barley and thinks that was the hinge upon which the world turned. But this is a child’s version of history, as sentimental as a nursery fable. The truth, whispered but

rarely set down, is that farming never truly concerned plants or beasts. It concerned people.

The first pens were not for sheep but for women, tethered to hearth and field. The first crop was not wheat but obedience, harvested from bodies kept in line with ritual, with threat, with myth. And it has persisted ever since. Agriculture is but the visible front. Androculture is the engine beneath it: the farming of men, women and children into their ‘uses.’ Grain cannot rebel. Sheep cannot object. But people can—so they must be herded and they must believe it is natural.

The Dukes of Mallard, whose line I am obliged to rehearse, pretended to farm sheep, barley and acres. But what they truly farmed—with all their entails and lodges and courts—was people. And it was ever so. Their genius was never in the soil but in the corralling of men and in the quiet penning of women. It is why the line has endured, while kingdoms and republics rose and fell. For what they knew—without naming it—is that civilisation does not live by bread alone. It lives by the farming of the human flock.

1985: Mallard in Exile

The Sydney cousin, exiled by geography if not by blood, dined with companions at one of the new “European” establishments in town—all low lighting, foreign affectations and menus printed in type so tiny one required a magnifying glass to order.

When he inquired whether the cut of beef might be served *bleu*, the waitress—who had never crossed the Channel and likely never would—began to explain the meaning of the word. He cut her short, politely but firmly: “I am aware of what *bleu* is. I ask only if the cut is fit for it.”

It was not. Neither Frenched, nor marbled, nor remotely suited to the preparation. He endured the leathern slab, accompanied by a *salade verte* of radicchio—radicchio, of all things, passed off as refinement—and returned home unwell.

Thus did the colonial Mallard learn the bitter lesson of his age: that fashionable incompetence, once crowned as taste, cannot be gainsaid. One must swallow it whole, even when it poisons.

1985: Viscountess Viola Vorpel

Address to the Press Gallery, Canberra

Ladies and gentlemen—though from this angle I see more padded shoulders than ladies—permit me a few remarks on fashion and fact.

You see, *facio* means ‘I make.’ From this innocent little verb we get ‘fashion’—to be made or worse, to be *placed*. Someone cuts the pattern, someone else stitches you into it and then you are told it is *you* who are fashionable. A charming fiction, if you don’t mind being manufactured.

From the same root we have factions. You’ll know about those—your newspapers are full of them. Merely cloth torn on its bias: same stuff, different rag. And factotums—those poor souls who ‘do everything’ but own nothing. Servants, really, though in Canberra you prefer to call them ‘advisers.’

So tonight, as you strut in your power suits with shoulders broad enough to land a Harrier jet, remember this: fashion is no fact. It is a fetish, a costume for power. And unless you do more than wear it, the tailor still owns you.

The Age, 12 June: Society and Politics

‘Unless you do more than wear it, the tailor still owns you.’ Thus concluded the extraordinary address delivered last night by Viscountess Viola Vorpel to the annual Press Gallery dinner in Canberra. That such a remark was not only permitted but applauded, illustrates the curious licence now granted to certain titled ladies.

In an era when padded shoulders are mistaken for power, Lady Vorpel dared to sneer at her audience of senior journalists, editors and political advisers—men accustomed to being the tailors of public opinion rather than its mannequins. Some tittered politely, others squirmed. A few clapped too loudly, as though to disguise their discomfort.

That a Mallard by birth (and by temperament) should accuse her listeners of being ‘manufactured’ servants of fashion is a jest not easily forgiven. Yet the sting, we suspect, lies less in her wit than in the fact that she may be right.

1985: The Charity Ball

At a hospital fundraiser, a Mallard son in white tie finds himself shaking hands with a prominent bookmaker. He doesn’t realise who it is until the next morning when the gossip pages describe “society dancing with Sydney’s underbelly.” His name is in the same column. His mother keeps the clipping, both scandalised and secretly pleased: at last the family is in print.

1985: Fabrice, diary fragment

High Anglicanism? Nothing but a drag show. Music swelling, incense clouding the nave, men in frocks brighter than any chorus line. A little rouge on the cheek and they'd have passed for my Saturday night clientele. How solemn they looked, pretending it was all for God, when it was clearly for the mirror. I adored it, of course—who wouldn't? Perfume, pageantry, a choir fit for Covent Garden. I stayed until the vicar, draped in lace like a dowager duchess, decided to remind me that my very presence was sin. I left in high dudgeon, though not before I noticed half his congregation were men exactly like me. The whole affair less church than cabaret, without the wit to admit it.

1987: The Real Estate Party

The Mallards buy into a speculative Paddington terrace scheme, hosted by a “developer” in a silk suit. Champagne, oysters, talk of millions. A month later, the developer skips the country, creditors circling. The Mallards lose most of their investment. They console themselves: “At least we were moving in the right circles.”

1989: Extract from a Lecture Delivered by Viscountess Viola Vorpel

Department of Gender Studies, University of Sydney

It is said that what separates us from animals is that we possess souls. And what, pray, does one do with a soul? One saves it, naturally. Thus the slaughter of animals is permitted, for they are soul-less. And thus, by extension, so too the slaughter—of body, spirit or reputation—of those deemed deficient in soul. Women. Children. Heretics. Anyone who refused to bow to the Almighty's favoured order.

This is the ingenious trick of civilisation. The aristocrats ran the human farms—the estates, the marriages, the servants, the breeding programmes. But above them sat the Church, running the aristocrats themselves. The croziers behind the sceptres. The crook herding the herders. And all of it gilded by the lie that the hierarchy was sacred, immutable, God-ordained.

The Almighty, we are assured, is male. The Christ is male. The Pope is male. Men in mitres are superior to men in coronets and both are superior to all women, who must trail below them like obedient beasts of burden. The ladder of power, you see, rests not on the bedrock of equality but on the convenient fiction that men are made in God's image and women in men's. The trickle-down theology of contempt.

If you wish to understand patriarchy, do not waste your breath on airy abstractions. See it as stock-farming. The Church breeds the aristocrats. The aristocrats breed the rest. And the women—whether duchess or drudge—were the pens in which the next generation was fattened. That is the continuity, the true entail. And it is no accident that both aristocrats and bishops alike have resisted every challenge to their order with the same reflex: by calling it blasphemy.

1990: The Age

The Cage of Genre by Viscountess Viola Vorpel

It is one of the curiosities of publishing that the word *genre*—which once merely meant “kind” or “category”—has acquired the peculiar function of a corset. A book is not simply written; it must be bound, cinched, tightened and finally displayed on the shelf like a mannequin. If the seams split, so much the worse for the book.

Genre is a commercial contrivance. It does not exist in the act of writing, only in the act of selling. Writers make books. Publishers make products. To read a book through the narrow slit of its packaging—“crime,” “romance,” “young adult,” or the dreadful “highbrow genre fiction”—is to read a corseted woman and praise her waistline.

The treatment is not new. Women themselves have been subjected to the same trimming, pinning and stitching for centuries. We are told our value lies in fitting a mould: the ingénue, the mother, the muse. Too fat? Lace her tighter. Too loud? Lower the hemline, raise the neckline. Too clever? A minor character at best. When the world does not know what to do with a woman, it calls her “unmarketable.”

And so it is with books. *The Name of the Rose* becomes a crime novel when Umberto Eco plainly wrote a meditation on signs, symbols and heresies. *The Hobbit* becomes a video game quest, with women spliced in like lace on a bodice to appease the nervous. If *Harry Potter* succeeds, it is not because of its sentences—poor darlings, limping along like underfed schoolboys—but because its corset fits the rack exactly.

The danger is not only that art is mutilated; it is that readers are trained to desire mutilation. To seek only the familiar trim. To believe a book outside of genre is “difficult,” and a woman outside of her prescribed costume is “difficult” too.

Let us not forget: corsets do not shape bodies, they deform them. Genre does the same to literature. If we must endure categories, let them be ours, not theirs. Otherwise, we are left applauding the shop window while the women—and the books—strangle quietly inside.

1990: The University Misstep

A Mallard niece insists on UNSW for its newer courses. Her aunts are horrified: “*Darling, you’ll meet all the wrong people.*” She does—and one of them is the son of a shady hotelier with ties to Kings Cross. They briefly date, giving the Mallards their first *real* scandal.

1990: Dinner in Bellevue Hill

At dinner one evening in Bellevue Hill, the elder Mallard launched once again into the theatre of his ailments. “The pain in my chest,” he intoned gravely, “is no doubt the beginning of something very grave. I’ve seen the specialist, who assures me it is nothing. But then—can we trust specialists? What if it is serious but they declare it trivial? What then? Is my pain real because it is real or because medicine declares it so?”

A hush fell around the table. It was the sort of philosophical performance he had perfected over decades of invalidism, a Mallard twist on the old Euthyphro puzzle: was the ache in his bones inherently significant or granted significance only by the priesthood of doctors?

His niece, who had flown in from London and endured the long meal in silence, finally said: “Uncle, it’s only as real as you make it.”

The room cracked. His question collapsed, like a soufflé under cold air. For a moment he blinked, then returned to his roast lamb. But the words had lodged, needling him far more deeply than the so-called pain in his chest.

1990: Excerpt from a BBC Radio Interview

The 47th Duke of Mallard, seated at his London club in a chair more valuable than the annual income of his interviewer, was asked whether the English aristocracy still carried weight in the modern world.

“A spent force,” His Grace declared, with a voice at once weary and imperious. “Yes, of course we are a spent force. Our day has passed. Parliament has whittled us down, taxation has gutted our estates, democracy has seen to the rest. We are all finished.”

He paused and sipped his brandy.

“But let us not mistake matters. The Mallards remain the longest continuous line in Europe. Our records stretch back unbroken to Arthur, when your ancestors were still mudlarks. We still hold our houses, our titles, our archives. Others may call that a ‘spent force.’ I call it continuity. And when the present democratic nonsense has

collapsed—as collapse it surely will—who will you come running back to for stability? Not your upstart monarchs. Not your petty politicians. You will look, as you always have, to us.”

The Duke smiled thinly.

“So yes, we are finished. Entirely finished. Spent. But still here.”

1730: A palace for a king

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

His Most Gracious Majesty, King Tiberius August Hobknob the third awoke one morning feeling ennui. He dismissed this servant and exclaimed in a loud voice: “Oh!”

His wife, the queen, shouted from the far side of the royal marriage bed: “What is it my poppet? and dismissed those maidlings tidying her hair.

“I’m bored,” said the king and rolled onto his side.

“Ah,” she thought for a long moment. “Why not lop off some heads, my sweet. You know how that soothes you so.”

“Don’t wanna,” he said grumpily.

“A story, my love?”

“Nah. I want... I want a new palace.” His face took on that dreamy quality only a prince of the realm can master with equanimity. “Yes. A palace. Summon the guards. Get Merkin in here pronto.”

Merkin, who lived in his own fusty tower on the east wing, was at that moment lost in a reverie, dreaming of mists and horses’ legs, of boys playing at his ankles, of girls so sweet and innocent running away in fear, of his mother, of towers and turrets and oddly shaped missiles—the like of which a da Vinci might have invented had he the time. He dreamed of dragons and lizards, of grimoires, his mother, of wetness and warmth, swords and spears. Of gnashing and gnawing and swamps and great trees, of boulders and boldness.

He didn’t approve of being awakened before his time and would have struck any unfortunate who dared. Except his mother who said, as she faded into a mist that seeped beyond the window: “Wakey, wakey, hands off snakey.”

Wearily he donned his jerkin, withdrew an old gherkin and hastened as slowly as he dared to attend to his king’s command.

On entering he heard the king tell his generals: “I want pastures and pastries, pastilles and persons, low lands and high lands, quarries of stone and forests rough hewn. A place for my crown to rest in the spring. A new land, a true land fit for a king. Make it so, you lot.”

He waved his hand and his generals shuffled out as Merkin stepped forward.

“You there, you bolt-brick of blue,” he greeted his liege-lord. “How may I serve you, oh glorious king?”

“Tell me your dreams and make them seem fair. For this day I’ve chosen to make there a war.”

“Ah but who shall we fight, oh tumultuous one? For all men have forfeited all we have won.”

From the outer corners of that magnificent room came an ominous shout from our loving queen. “Tea is now ready for you both to eat. With crumpets and cream horns and strumpets to spare. If you’ll stop your versing, I’m ready to share. Shall I pour?”

1992: Extract from a Lecture Delivered by Viscountess
Viola Vorpel

Theological College, Melbourne

Once upon a time, it was the Church that promised to save our souls. Then, when faith faltered, the aristocracy promised to civilise our bodies—to discipline them, to train them, to make them useful. And now, in our enlightened age, the same promise is made by psychiatry and pharmaceuticals: salvation of the mind or what they dare to call ‘mental health’.

Do not mistake the change in costume for a change in structure. It is the same play, endlessly revived. Where once bishops muttered of sin, psychiatrists now whisper of neurosis. Where once priests flogged the body to drive out demons, doctors prescribe tablets to chase away sadness. And all the while, the same message resounds: you are broken and only we can mend you. You are lost and only we can find you. You are nothing without our cure.

Pharmaceuticals are the new indulgences. Instead of paying to free one’s grandmother from purgatory, you now pay to free yourself from anxiety. The scale of profit is much the same, only more efficient: a pill every day, forever, is more lucrative than a candle once a week. And psychiatry, for its part, plays priest and inquisitor both—defining what counts as normal, branding the rest as heresy and locking away those whose confessions are judged insufficient.

If the aristocrats ran the farms of flesh and the Church ran the farms of souls, then psychiatry and its chemical partners run the farms of minds. All three share the same conceit: that human beings are livestock, to be improved by breeding, broken by punishment or pacified by drugs.

And if you ask me—though you did not—which is the most dangerous? I will tell you plainly: the newest one. For the priest at least left you with your body; the duke left you with your soul. But the psychiatrist and his pharmaceutical purse-keepers demand the last redoubt: your thought itself. They will even sell you happiness, neatly bottled. And what is left of you then, except a managed vacancy?

1992: Part of a letter from Octavia in Sydney to Viola

Our nephew has been to stay at Lumlocks for this last fortnight. If ever one needed proof that heritage can as easily pass on the female as the male line, he is most assuredly that proof.

A gentle and rather sweet young man in many respects, yet he carries that poise, that certain assurance, that air of our cousins in days gone past. Had he but title and fortune, he might easily step into a Ducal role.

To think, dear sister, that even here in Sydney, one cannot escape that claustrophobic class and those stylised manners that smooth their path through polite—and I dare say impolite—society.

He speaks like a well-bred Englishman and has learned the arts of excellent conversation that deflects interest from himself and casts one in a most favourable light. I am quite taken with him.

It is nevertheless a cause for some sadness that our line should—given his personal preferences—end with him. Yet, I think, that this reflects most intimately his closest connections to those Dukes of old and their own secret proclivities: a fabrication in more than name.

And yes, I can hear your admonishment to the effect that my supposed spinsterhood is of little value to our family's future; while turning that looking-glass about in your own direction. At least our younger sister has played her role, even if it should end with this graceful, anachronistic swan.

Poor Fabrice to have had his future initialled at birth by parents who are either tone-deaf or playing some cruel joke.

Was there ever a Mallard curse, do you think?

1993: Viola's letter to her sister Octavia in Sydney

I cannot imagine why you have insisted Fabrice needed finishing in London, though I do not begrudge the expense nor the experience. Yet I cannot help but enquire whether yours was a small joke, knowing your unconventional sense of the amusing.

We joined the Queen at one of her private dinners and she was much taken with him. His knowledge of her personal collections was

astonishing: she would not have it that he was a colonial. It was all I could do to stop her conferring a title.

As you know I am no fan of life-peerages. Let the aristos be gradually extinguished not propped up with aging corps. All that print wasted for this or that short-term creation. As though there is still prestige in being an English lord.

I took him to dinner on several occasions, simply to observe that curious presence he projects. To be already seated and watch him arrive, how he enters a room, is an education in male entitlement.

A door is opened for him, he steps through and stands quite still for a few moments, with an air of patience and humility that draws all attention to him—beyond anything more celebrated people are likely to achieve. One notes a tendency of waiters to incline slightly, a rustle from tables of diners unsure how to behave, as though caught out in a faux pas of which they were completely unaware.

He is graceful, ascendant and yet, in a most peculiar fashion, he seems to defer rather than condescend.

He has exquisite table manners, knows his cuisine and speaks with a well-educated palate to any sommelier.

And I do agree, his conversation style is superlative and there is a sincerity in his manner that renders one utterly at his mercy. Yet he listens attentively, never contradicts or flatters and is able to converse on any topic one might choose.

If there is a Mallard curse, it is to our benefit. For it has affected the Fitzarturs' refinement to their detriment and transferred their supposed manners to our line. It rather goes to show that our sister's social disgraces cannot entirely muddy our name.

1993: Viola on her nephew Fabrice

It must be conceded—though never in his mother's hearing—that Fabrice has grown into a young man of quite unnerving beauty. His brow might have been lifted from a coin of Alexander, his lips from some sculptor's half-finished Venus. Women smiled indulgently at him, men paused a second too long and neither party seemed quite certain what they admired.

Yet it is the softness that has troubled me. His skin is too pale, his hands too finely tapered, his walk too fluid for comfort. One sees in him not strength but compliance, a beauty that bends rather than resists. And beauty in a man is never a neutral inheritance: it invites command or ruin or both.

Gloriana crows that her son is the image of a former Duke; I see instead the repetition of a fate too easily consumed by others' appetites.

1994: Fabrice's diary

My father's history, like so many, catalogues powerful men: their crowns, their conquests, their acreages, their servants. He tallies dynasties as though they were sheep. His tables and trees resemble account books, as lifeless as they are long. I, too, am accounted—but my fortune has been made by my own hands, my body and my intellect, not by dusted heraldry.

Yes, I descend from a line that pretends to be ancient and if my noble cousin the 47th Duke should expire without heir, the coronet might rest on my head. I would then be the 48th Duke of Mallard. Yet what use is a title without lands, coffers or subjects? A coronet is a toy crown unless it comes with real coin. I am already wealthier than that cousin in his dreary flat, because I know how to thrive in the only economy that counts: money.

And yet vanity insists I admire my own attainments. To know one object is gilt and another plaster; to speak dead languages fluently to living men; to bow to kings who are fewer in number than duchesses at a charity ball—all this is useless but useful to me. I have cultivated tastes because taste itself is capital. Even my refusal of fashion is a fashion.

What has my superior education brought me but estrangement? I am the polished anachronism, *déclassé* by birth yet welcomed everywhere by my manners. I hide my appetite for gutters, for safety's sake and perform a role to the world: Fabrice the accomplished, Fabrice the paragon. Only when alone do I unclasp that masque.

To be admired by a royal Queen is no greater honour than to be adored by some old queen who despises himself. Both hold me in high esteem; both disgust me in equal measure. I am their mirror and they mistake their reflection for me.

My household is a theatre of masks. A valet who forces me to act the peer, a chef who could poison me, a housekeeper who holds the keys, an accountant who totters my coin. Is that not what separates servant from master—who tallies, who tastes, who carries the key?

So let my father keep his tables of titles. I know the truth of it: that when I die, nothing remains but dust—the same dust that drifts across a Mallard chapel window, glowing briefly when the sun strikes it and forgotten the moment it fades.

1492: Quiet please

From The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

It is said that Glod speaks rarely and only to those who wear crowns. To shepherds, beggars, merchants, maids, he is mute as stone. To priests he nods but does not answer. To philosophers he turns his back. But when kings wear themselves thin with conquest, he sometimes sighs and allows a word.

So it was with that King who smote and slew and then proclaimed a whole day for stage-plays, dice, May-games, whoredom, cock-fighting, hawking, drunkenness and the like. The world roared with laughter and spilt ale.

Glod, frowning in his upper seat, leaned low and whispered:

“Smite less, fool. A kingdom cannot be held if its sons are palsied, its bread bleeds when bitten, its mills run red. You were not made to turn wine into water, nor merriment into blight. Even gods cannot stomach endless revels.”

The King, flushed with his new day of pleasure, raised his goblet and ignored him.

So Glod tried once more, more softly:

“Rest. Not riot. That was my counsel.”

But kings hear only what flatters their ears. And because Glod had spoken at all, the priests set to scribbling, the people to trembling and the word became law: Glod was against laughter, Glod was for solemn faces and closed shops, Glod was stone and silence.

In truth, Glod had only asked for quiet.

Artful comments

This lad is the epitome of our male line. A pity that he was born a Mallard and not a Fitzartur. That is the price of primogeniture: generational inbreeding creates runts with coronets; fresher fields make sweeter flowers.

And yet what is regal bearing when the world has forgotten its true heritage? Resting, as always, in me.

If there is a Mallard curse it too rests with me.

Mab (getting the final word):

Land and titles make no man, any. Look to his bestiality to find the real soul of soil: the true primogenitor.

Selected documents
From the Mallard Archive

1611: From The Fitzartur Treasury of Charms, Physicks,
Philtres & Other Deceits

*(copied from the hand of Mab Fitzartur, c. 1611; with marginal
notes in various inks to 1927)*

Lavender (*Lavandula vera*)

- Take sprigs at midsummer dawn, before the sun hath burned the dew. Good for fainting fits, vapours, & sleeplessness.
- Steeped in wine it easeth the cholic, though some find it gives visions of the dead.
- [In a later hand:] Or just stuff it in yr corset & stop complaining.

Golden Seal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)

- The root dried & powdered cureth fluxes, quinsy, sore throat, & other disorders of the inward membranes.
- Placed beneath the pillow it will confound thieves & deter foxes from the poultry yard.
- [In a later hand, crabbed and faint:] Nonsense. Fox took two hens last Michaelmas.

Willow Bark (*Salix alba*)

- Scraped & boiled, drunk as broth. Good for pains of the head, hot fevers, & the melancholy spleen.
- [Note in pencil, c. 1890:] Now sold by quacks in bottles as “salicylate of soda.” Costs ten times more, works no better.

Pond Charm (For Nervous Fits)

- If the patient be much troubled in mind, bid her walk backward thrice around the pond. Then dip her face in the water & say, “As the duck floats, so shall I.”
- If she sinketh, she is no true Fitzartur.
- [Annotation, ink blotted:] This cure much abused by witchfinders. Keep within the family.

Of Corsets & Vapours

- If the Lady be faint from stays too tight, take goose grease with camphire, rub upon her ribs, & lay her to rest upon lavender sheets.

- [Annotation, 1927:] Or give her the electric device the Germans sell. Less mess.

Cocaine

- A pinch for the toothache; a draught for melancholia. The German doctors recommend it for all nervous disorders.

- [Later note, 1905:] Also good for cleaning the silver. Try it on the teaspoons before the Bishop arrives.

1621: Selections from the Fitzartur Treasury of Charms, Physicks, Philtres & Other Deceits

(as amended and recopied, 1621–1933)

Golden Seal (*Hydrastis*)

- A decoction for the eye that is pink or inflamed: wash thrice daily, muttering the paternoster backwards.

- If taken by mouth, relieves fluxes and other indispositions of the bowels.

- [Later hand:] The Americans now bottle it & charge dearly. Best grown at home.

Lavender (*Lavandula vera*)

- Hung in the bedchamber, deters mosquitos & biting flies; rubbed upon the sting, allays the swelling.

- Mixed with goose fat, an excellent salve for cracked skin, especially in laundresses.

- [In pencil, 1884:] Or just keep windows shut, you silly goose.

Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

- Though in great quantity it killeth outright (vide Socrates), in very small draughts it stirreth the passions of Venus better than Spanish fly.

- [Marginal note, 1762:] Tried it on my husband. He swooned but not for me.

Pyrethrum (*Chrysanthemum cinerariifolium*)

- Dried & powdered, cast upon beds & carpets, it will drive forth fleas, lice, & other crawling nuisances.

- [Ink of 1912:] Now found in fly sprays, stinks no less, costs rather more.

Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*)

- The oil clears the chest in winter chills; rubbed on cloth, removes stubborn adhesives & dried paint.
- The leaves hung in bunches above the hearth smoke sweetly & deter moths.
- [In modern type, pasted in c. 1920:] Best for dissolving the residue of stamp hinges. Collectors swear by it.

Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

- The red berries being sweet, children may eat them; the seeds within are deadly.
- For the subtle poisoner, Yew exceeds arsenic in efficacy and is far less easy to trace.
- [Note in feminine hand, 1873:] Best not written down. Burn this leaf when read.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

- Young leaves edible in salad; root dried for a wholesome drink in place of coffee.
- A tisane for constipation, long recommended by Fitzartur matrons.
- [Scrawled in blue pencil:] Also makes wine, though it tastes of lawn clippings.

1810: A Catalogue of Family Cures and Prescriptions

(annotated by a suspicious Blandy in the margins)

The Fitzartur Country Remedies (1790–1910)

- *Decoction of willow bark for fevers.* (Effective, though later plagiarised by German chemists and renamed *Aspirin*.)
- *Poultice of goose fat for all swellings.* (Duck-blood being reserved for more serious cases.)
- *A brisk walk in open air, without corset.* (Note: deMallards considered this indecent.)
- *Limewashed walls, scrubbed stone floors, no wallpapers, no arsenic.* (The peasants' preference, later called 'hygiene'.)
- *Cold pond immersion for nervous conditions.* (A duck cure, later mocked as hydrotherapy.)

The deMallard London Prescriptions (1810–1920)

- *Bleeding and cupping* (twice monthly, preferably after dinner).

- *Electro-therapeutic massage devices*, marketed as remedies for hysteria. (A lady's physician could not, of course, soil his hands when electricity could do the job.)

- *Cocaine tonics for melancholia*, imported from reputable German-Jewish doctors in Vienna.

- *Opium syrups for children's coughs*. (With dire consequences but purchased in fine apothecary bottles.)

- *Consultation on His Majesty's affliction*—the Kaiser being reputedly concerned with curvature of his member. (deMallards were known to send copies of such reports to one another as if they were opera reviews.)

- *Wallpaper remedies*: one Dr. Belgrave insisted arsenic-induced fainting could be corrected by "bleeding from the temple and a glass of port."

(*Marginal note, Blandy*): "*The Fitzarturs, for all their rustic duck-fat poultices, outlived the deMallards by a generation. One cannot but suspect that ignorance was, in this case, the best cure.*"

1851: Extract from the Diary of Mrs. Prudence Blandy, Senior Housekeeper, Mallard House

(*with annotations by later hands in pencil, assumed to be the work of a Mallard cousin attempting to calculate the expense*)

Household Staff, Exclusive of Farmhands & Estate Labourers

- 14 Housemaids, upper & lower, at £12–15 per annum.
- 7 Lady's Maids, appointed to Dowagers in residence, £20–25 p.a.
- 4 Dressmakers on constant employ (2 permanent, 2 temporary), £16 p.a. each.
- 3 Milliners & 1 hair artist (retained at £30–40 each).
- 22 Footmen, hall & pantry, some mere boys at £10, senior liveried at £30.
- 2 Butlers (chief and under), £50 and £20 respectively.
- 2 Valets for His Grace; 1 each for the Viscount and Hon. Edward, £30–40.
- 8 Coachmen & Grooms, not counting stable-boys (another 30+).
- 2 Gardeners-in-Chief, 6 journeymen, 14 apprentices.
- 1 Aviary Keeper, 1 Duck-Pond Attendant, 1 Keeper of the Swan House.
- 1 Organist, £45.
- 3 Tutors, 2 Governesses.
- 2 Clerks (for accounts), 1 Archivist.

- 1 Apothecary (retained at £80, plus gratuities).
- 36 Cooks, scullions, kitchen maids, pastry-girls, spit-boys.
- 4 Cheesemakers, 3 brewers, 2 keepers of wine.
- 1 Master of Candles, with 5 boys.
- 1 Laundress, with 20 assistants.
- 2 Ironers (one Irish, one Scottish, both quarrelsome).
- 6 Seamstresses attached to the nursery.
- 1 Keeper of Keys (Mrs Blandy herself), £90 per annum.

Grand Total in constant attendance within House and Lodges: 326 persons

(*Excluding those on outlying farms, mills or inns, reckoned at 600–700.*)

Addendum to 1851 Ledger (Mallard House)

- 1 Chef de Cuisine (Monsieur Armand Dupin, imported from Paris), £120 p.a., plus “customary gratuities” in kind: a hogshead of claret, three geese weekly and full liberty of the herb garden.

(Note by Mrs Blandy: “The Frenchman eats more than the entire scullery.”)

Margin Notes (pencilled in a later hand):

“Wages for all: £5,920 p.a. (without gratuities). Wine cellar cost: £2,000.

Candles alone: £800.

This House devours itself.

1870: Catalogue of Select Holdings, Mallard House

Prepared at His Grace’s command, for no reason other than that it pleased him to see it so.

Lot I. Music

- An original *Requiem Mass*, attributed to Handel, scored on vellum, though the hand is suspiciously Blandy.
- A harpsichord upon which Mozart is said to have played one private night, on loan from the Emperor himself. (No record of the performance survives, for none were permitted to listen.)
- Manuscript fragments, possibly of *Carmina Burana*. Scholars disagree; His Grace insists.
- A score for *Carmen*, long before Bizet—suggesting either foresight or forgery.

Lot II. Paintings

- The Long Gallery: portraits of all Dukes and Dowagers, a line of Mallard faces as endless as eternity.
- Several works of the masters, variously attributed to Titian, Rembrandt or the under-footman's nephew.
- Priceless canvases, long missing, discovered nailed over draughty windows in the servants' wing.
- Two landscapes used for decades as doors in the fowl-house.

Lot III. Books

- Several volumes alleged to be from the lost Library of Alexandria. The Dukes refuse to answer questions on the matter.
- Early volumes "loaned" to the Bodleian, provenance unacknowledged.
- A chained book of spells, believed Purslane in origin.
- Several Bibles annotated with Mallard marginalia: "This verse miscopied," "Too long," and "Unfit for ladies."

Lot IV. Fabrics & Furnishings

- Silks, muslins, carpets, satins—by annual tithe of Mallard ships from the Orient.
- A nine-acre walled flower garden, with camellias mistaken for Tudor roses and maze-paths lined with agnus castus and apocynum.
- Yachts of Mallard timber, Mallard shipyards, Mallard sailors, plying between Scotland, Ireland and L'isle d'Anatis.

Lot V. Jewels & Regalia

- A tiara of duck-egg pearls, size and lustre unrivalled.
- Bracelets of Burmese rubies, the size of pigeons' eyes but far less common.
- Jewelled garters set with sapphires, worn discreetly beneath voluminous skirts.
- Crowns—one Mallard, one Mallard-spare.
- A ceremonial sword inlaid with diamonds, impractical in battle but magnificent at table.
- Miscellanea: ropes of emeralds, reliquaries of gold, rings to shame Popes, necklaces enough to throttle an army.

Lot VI. Miscellaneous Curiosities

- A gryphon shield, surface black, motto "Perpetuum Excellentiam."
- Ducks—fleets of them, in ponds and lakes, for both show and supper.

- Statues of mythic figures, discreetly hidden in groves so as not to startle the Dowagers.
- A quarry (still active), lest the Dukes run short of ruins to let crumble.

1872: A Compendium of Remedies & Cures

Collected for the Instruction of the Fitzartur and deMallard Families

(Printed for Private Circulation Only, 1872)

On Nervous Conditions

It is well attested in the county that the Fitzartur practice of cold pond immersion has produced admirable results, particularly in cases of fainting, melancholia or domestic insubordination.

Note: The remedy has historical antecedents. In earlier centuries, women suspected of witchcraft were subjected to similar immersions, where floating was deemed a mark of the devil. By happy accident, all Fitzartur ladies floated. Since none were ever hanged, this practice may be considered both curative and vindictive.

On Fevers

The Fitzarturs have long relied upon decoctions of willow bark, with excellent results. The deMallards, preferring continental sophistication, import their powders from Bavaria. Both substances, though identical in effect, differ considerably in price.

On Disorders of the Female Frame

The London physician advises electrical stimulation, administered by means of ingenious machines, now available in hand-cranked or battery form. Lady Alice deMallard declared the apparatus “soothing,” though she required four attendants to restrain her corsets during application. The Fitzarturs continue to recommend “an unfastened bodice and a gallop across the downs.”

On Hysteria

For mild cases: Bleeding at the temples, followed by a glass of port.

For severe cases: The German-Jewish method of cocaine tinctures rubbed upon the gums.

For incurable cases: Marriage.

On the Young

It is fashionable in London nurseries to administer opium syrups to restless infants. The Fitzarturs, preferring the rustic method, merely shut the nursery window and allow the ducks to lull the child with their quacking.

On Male Afflictions

The case of the Kaiser's curvature has occasioned much learned correspondence. The London specialists recommend a silver splint, while the Fitzartur quack prescribes "a brisk plunge in the pond and no more German worrying." Neither remedy has proved conclusive.

On Wallpaper Poisoning

It has been discovered that certain fashionable wallpapers contain arsenic sufficient to fell a bishop. Remedies include:

- *Bleeding at the temples and a glass of port* (Dr. Belgrave's method).
- *Removal of all wallpaper and replacement with whitewash* (Fitzartur method).

Statistics show the Fitzartur households to have fewer fainting episodes but somewhat drearier parlours.

Marginal note (Blandy hand):

The reader will note that what is here called "medicine" is often duck-fat, willow water and witchcraft on the one hand or cocaine, vibrators and poison wallpaper on the other. Posterity may decide which family was the greater fool.

1890 to 1934: Select Works of Mr E. Fenwick

(pseudonym of Miss Euphemia Letitia Mallard)

The Yellow Phial (1892)—A tale of a provincial solicitor undone by his own bottle.

A Respectable Poisoning (1894)—A "study" of inheritance, arsenic and filial duty.

The Widow's Glass (1898)—The story of a lady's maid who sees too much and says too little.

The Housekeeper's Keys (1902)—Domestic secrets locked and unlocked across generations.

Bitter Almonds (1907)—A confectionary mystery; said to be modelled on the kitchens at Mallard House.

The Maid's Defence (1911)—A courtroom reconstruction, curiously sympathetic to the servant class.

Murder by Correspondence (1917)—An epistolary crime traced through forged signatures.

The Blandy Papers (1921)—A perilous “historical novel,” soon suppressed in England.

Final Drops (1934)—Left incomplete at her death; the last pages are stained and half-burnt.

1892: The Little Book of Deportment

(For the Instruction of Young Mallards, 1892)

Lesson I. Standing

- Stand as though you are the measure of the room.
- Do not sway, shuffle or fiddle: the earth waits upon you, not the reverse.
- If addressed, incline the head by one degree only. *To bow is to yield.*

Lesson II. Walking

- Enter a room as if you expect to find it already arranged for your pleasure.
- Take not too many steps. Each one must say: *I belong.*
- If in company, allow others to scurry; the Mallard must glide.

Lesson III. Sitting

- Sit upright, neither stiff nor slack but as though the chair were made for you alone.
- Never collapse into comfort: comfort is vulgar.
- Rest a hand lightly on the armrest. The other should be free to dismiss or beckon.

Lesson IV. Conversation

- Speak little; never chatter.
- If silence is unbearable, offer a question so slight it confounds: *Is the air blue or merely tinted so?*
- Remember: *to be misunderstood is power.*

Lesson V. Servants

- Do not thank. A glance is sufficient; a lifted eyebrow, ideal.
- Call them all by their surname or by none at all. A Mallard is served, not acquainted.

Lesson VI. Society

- Never be the first to laugh.

- Look beyond the shoulder of your neighbour as though expecting someone better.
- If ignored, remain still: stillness is a magnet.

Lesson VII. Motto

- When in doubt, confound.
- When in company, command.
- When alone, remember: the world exists to reflect you.

1897: Catalogue of Certain Works, Heretical & Otherwise
Rescued from the Library at Mallard House (Privately Printed)

No. 47.

De Vacuis Titulis: Or, A Treatise on Empty Names.

London, 1768. Small octavo. Anon.

A thin tract, once circulated in coffee-houses, declaring that titles are as empty as they are ancient. Suppressed shortly after appearance; this copy bears the discreet bookplate of the 12th Earl of Brentford. *Extremely rare.*

No. 52.

L'Hérésie de l'Hérédité.

Paris, Chez Lemaître, 1772. 12mo.

Attributed (without proof) to the Marquis de Sanspatrie. Satirises the pretensions of dukes with the aphorism: "*Ce n'est pas la naissance qui fait l'homme, mais sa sottise qui le défait.*" Condemned by the Sorbonne; few copies survive.

No. 61.

The Noble Ape: A Comparative Essay.

London, 1785. 8vo.

Printed for R. Dodsley. A work in which the descent of noble families is likened to the antics of simians. Suppressed on the orders of the Lord Chamberlain. *Note in pencil by a former owner: "Apes do better."*

No. 64.

On the Continuance of Titles.

Dublin, 1794. By "A Gentleman of No Fortune."

A thin satire in the mode of Swift, questioning the perpetuity of houses ducal. Mallard copy interleaved with manuscript notes—possibly by the 36th Duke himself.

No. 70.

De Mallardo, Depravato.

Oxon., 1803. 4to.

In mock-scholarly Latin, purporting to trace the degeneration of the Fitzartur line. The Mallard arms on title-page defaced by an unknown hand. Motto much quoted: "*Familia quae se perpetuam credit, perpetuo ridicula est.*"

No. 76.

A Short Defence of Long Genealogies.

Dublin, 1810.

Its irony frequently lost on the nobility who purchased it in quantity. Marginalia in this copy (by Lady Selina Fitzartur, c.1825) betray her irritation at its arguments.

No. 84.

Les Canards et les Canards.

Geneva, 1822.

Satirical jeu d'esprit equating the noble Canards with the vulgar *canard* (falsehood). Banned in France and England; copies smuggled in gilt-edged bindings marked "Missal."

No. 91.

Epistola ad Voltaire.

Manuscript on vellum, c. 1764.

A letter, purporting to be from Edward Fitzartur (styled at the time *Viscount Anetis*) to M. de Voltaire, protesting that "our English Dukes are but Frenchmen gone stale." Ink faded, seal partly intact. Hand unverified; likely a 19th-century forgery. *Nonetheless treasured by the deMallards, who pencilled: "Proof of our wit."*

No. 97.

Le Livre du Canard Noir.

Lyon, 1689. 12mo.

Said to be a satirical almanac lampooning noble pretensions with woodcut ducks in coronets. No other copy known; some scholars suspect this to be an elaborate in-house jest of the Mallard librarians. Bound in contemporary calf, gilt edges.

No. 102.

The Mallard Prophecy.

Oxford, 1723. Broadside.

Allegedly foretells that “when a Lady Alice dons a man’s hat, the line shall quack no more.” Pencilled note (19th c.): “Absurd but amusing at picnics.” Provenance doubtful.

No. 109.

Fragmentum Genealogicum.

Latin MS fragment on parchment, found loose among the papers of the 36th Duke. Begins “*De Mallardo gens perpetua...*” but abruptly breaks off. Modern hand in margin: “*Almost certainly contrived by a clerk on half-pay.*”

No. 114.

On the Decay of Noble Brains.

Edinburgh, 1809. Pamphlet, 20pp.

Anonymous (possibly Dr. Gall of phrenological fame). Argues that the “cranial bumps” of the aristocracy are flatter by generation. Rare, as most copies burned by offended peers.

No. 127.

The Book of Mallard Dreams.

Undated manuscript, bound in embroidered velvet (now frayed). Contains a series of nocturnal visions allegedly dreamt by successive Dukes, dutifully recorded by household chaplains. Includes entries such as “*a swan with a crown devoured by a black duck*” and “*a lady in a top-hat fleeing eastward with jewels.*” Experts doubt antiquity; handwriting varies from 18th to 19th century.

No. 132.

Testamentum Especiae.

Supposedly the last will of Marquise Espèce de Canard, written “in her own perfumes” on paper so faint it is scarcely legible. Claims to leave “all my hats and my honour to the wind.” Cataloguer’s note: “Almost certainly a drawing-room prank of the 1820s but treasured as it bolsters the legend.”

No. 139.

Liber Quaternarum Generum.

A so-called “secret Mallard gospel,” in clumsy Latin, asserting that the four estates of England are actually four kinds of poultry, of which “the Duck is most noble, the Goose is Parliament, the Hen the People and the Cock the Crown.” Marginalia in later hand: “*Blasphemous but apt.*”

No. 147.

Mallardum Arcanum.

Small octavo, calf. Said to be the private diary of a Fitzartur scion, who claims the Dukedom persists only through “a pact with the River Spirits.” Almost certainly a Gothic romance manuscript mistaken for history.

No. 150.

Inventarium Ridiculorum.

A list of “lost Mallard relics”: a coronet made of feathers; a signet ring shaped like a beak; and the “Sacred Duck Egg” said to have survived the French Revolution hidden in a bonnet. All items untraced.

Addenda (19th-c. deMallard hand):

“These volumes may or may not exist. Whether they did or whether they do, is immaterial: their inclusion testifies to the breadth of our inheritance.”

Addenda (deMallard hand):

“These entries must not be made public. Let posterity laugh elsewhere. To us, they are of value as curiosities, if not for their accuracy.”

Note in the deMallard hand (pencilled at front):

“Though scandalous in their day, these books are curiosities only. Yet, by preserving them, we prevent lesser hands from controlling the narrative of our line.”

1900: Housekeeper’s Inventory (Mallard House & Lodges)

(Compiled by Miss Clarissa Blandy, successor to Mrs Prudence Blandy, still Keeper of Keys. The script grows smaller as the list lengthens.)

- Housemaids: 22 (now divided into “upper,” “lower,” and “corridor” ranks).
- Lady’s Maids: 9 (three assigned to the widowed Dowager Lodges).
- Footmen: 28, not counting 12 “probationary boys.”
- Butlers: 2, with an “Assistant Butler” insisted upon by the Duke’s new wife.
- Valets: 5.
- Coachmen & Grooms: 14, plus 40 boys.

- Kitchen: 42 total (including 1 *Chef de Cuisine*, now Monsieur Lefèvre; his salary doubled to £250, “lest he be lured to Devonshire House”).
- Confectioners: 6 (added to keep pace with French fashions in sugarwork).
- Organist, Choir Mistress and four choristers (to improve Sunday appearances).
- Governesses: 3, Tutors: 4.
- Clerks: 4, Archivist: 1, Librarian: 1.
- Laundresses: 28, Ironers: 6, Seamstresses: 12.
- Gardeners & Groundsmen: 42 in total, including “1 specialist for fernery.”
- Aviary Keeper, Swan Master, Keeper of Duck Ponds (as in 1851).
- New addition: 1 Photographer (retained at £70, “to capture the glories of the estate before they vanish”).
- New addition: 1 Telephone Boy (“Though no one uses it.”).
- New addition: 1 Gas Engineer, 2 Lamplighters (for gas fittings that never quite worked).

Grand Total 1900: 512 indoor staff

(excluding outdoor estate labourers and tenant farmers, reckoned at 800–1,000.)

Margin Note, c.1910, in another hand (possibly a Mallard cousin):

“A house of 500 servants, yet His Grace still insists on trimming his own cigars.

We cannot electrify, we cannot modernise, for then what would these people do?

Better to sink with all hands than dismiss a Blandy.

1914: Housekeeper’s Ledger, Mallard House, 1914–1925

(in the trembling hand of Miss Clarissa Blandy, now nearly blind, with annotations in ink by her successor, Miss Harriet Blandy, who “saw the end.”)

1914 (Before the War)

- Staff numbers remain near 500 indoors, 1,000 outdoors, as in 1900.
- Men-servants (valets, footmen, grooms, clerks) taken by the dozen for war service.
- Duke refuses all entreaties to send a Mallard to battle: “Petty global squabbles are not for us; we fought the Hundred Years’ War and that was sufficient.”

- Rumour spreads of a Mallard deformity—flat, faintly webbed feet—
“which makes cavalry charge impossible.”

1918 (Armistice)

- Footmen: 6 remain (from 28), four maimed, one blinded.
- Valets: 2 left, one embittered, the other refusing to touch His Grace’s boots.
- Kitchen staff: halved. Monsieur Lefèvre deported for “suspect loyalties.” Replaced by a Mrs Pottle, who boils everything.
- Gardeners: many women now; “females spade like demons” noted in margin.
- Choir mistress eloped with chauffeur to Canada. Organ pipes sold for munitions.
- Laundresses: 5 (from 28). Some now cycle in from villages, smoke cigarettes and demand wages in cash.

1925 (After the Great Changes)

- Indoor staff: 53 (from 512).
- Outdoor staff: 120 (from 1,000).
- Lodges of Dowagers shuttered. Many Dowagers themselves gone—some died, some “simply left, declaring they preferred London flats.”
- Women servants no longer deferent: “They walk as if equal, speak as if free. One maid told His Grace she would rather type for wages in town than polish silver unseen.”
- Butlers reduced to one—Mr Jasper Blandy—who notes bitterly: “We are but ghosts among the silver.”
- Gas lamps extinguished. Electricity never fitted. Guests stumble by candlelight, remarking: “One might be forgiven for thinking this a mausoleum, not a seat.”

Final Note by Miss Harriet Blandy (1930):

“We survived plagues, fires, taxes and kings. But the War has undone us. Not for lack of money, nor even men but because women refused to return to silence. They have left and without them, Mallard House is not alive. We cannot pay servants enough to believe themselves lesser.

1934: The Mallard Catechism (as compiled)

Q. What is the first rule of conduct?

A. *Don’t explain.* (Raise the eyebrow, lightly. Stillness carries more weight than speech.)

Q. And the second?

A. *Never complain.* (Tilt the head back a fraction, as if listening to a finer music. Pain is for the lesser mortal.)

Q. How does one behave in society?

A. *Argue only in private. Or not at all.* (Let the eyes drift just past the interlocutor's head. A conversation with the air is higher than one with a person.)

Q. What of commerce?

A. *Commerce is unclean, unless it be land, ships or art.* (Fold the hands at rest. Appear above transaction: the Blandys will carry the coin.)

Q. What of fashion?

A. *Fashion is for others. We are the thing itself.* (The posture is the costume; the silence, the jewel.)

Q. And servants?

A. *Servants are not people. They are Blandys.* (Never a glance downward: only the smallest flick of acknowledgement, like one notices draughts or shadows.)

Q. What then, when in doubt?

A. *Baffle them.* (Stand perfectly still. Allow the room to pivot towards you. Confusion is authority; silence, command.)

Bibliography

A compendium of Ducal reading, 1820

[The following catalogue represents an attempt, made in about 1820 and amended thereafter, to reconstruct the reading habits of His and Her Grace from surviving borrowings, marginalia, and household bills...]

His Grace

1. *"The Complete Sportsman's Guide to Racing and Breeding"* by Sir Reginald Pemberton. London: W. Miller, 1817. A definitive manual on horse racing techniques, sire selection, and training regimen, essential reading for any gentleman of leisure.
2. *"On the Management of Stable and Stud"* by Captain Henry Montague. York: E. Baines, 1818. Practical advice on maintaining horses and servants specialized in equestrian care, emphasizing efficiency and discipline.
3. *"The Steward's Handbook: Governing a Great Estate with Prudence and Profit"* by Thomas Ashcroft. London: T. Cadell, 1819. A detailed treatise on land management, tenant relations, and financial oversight for country estates.
4. *"The Art of Courtship and Seduction"* by Monsieur Claude Lefèvre, translated by J.H. Barrington. London: J. Hatchard, 1820. A somewhat scandalous yet widely circulated text on the subtleties of romantic pursuit and social charm among the elite.
5. *"A Treatise on Confectionary and Gastronomy"* by Mistress Beatrice Cooke. Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1816. A refined guide to creating elegant banquets and delectable sweets, blending recipes with etiquette for aristocratic dining.
6. *"On the Acquisition and Growth of Wealth"* by Lord Samuel Fairfax. London: J. Debrett, 1815. An economic discourse on investments, commerce, and the prudent augmentation of landed fortune.
7. *"Memoirs of a London Bawd"* by "M. de Noir." London: Printed for Private Circulation, 1814. A risqué, first-person account of life in the underworld of a male pleasure agency in Regency England.
8. *"Letters on Servitude and the Management of Domestic Staff"* by Georgiana Winthrop. London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1819.

- Epistolary guidance on recruiting, supervising, and understanding the social dynamics of household servants.
9. *"The Gallant's Guide to London Amusements"* by Charles Pembroke. London: J. Harris, 1817. A compendium of theatre, gaming, and social pleasures in London, with advice on navigating the city's less reputable entertainments.
 10. *"Country Trades and Profits: A Manual for the Aspiring Landowner"* by William Hargreaves. Edinburgh: A. Constable & Co., 1818. Handbook describing the commercial potentials of rural enterprises, from agriculture to milling and tenancy arrangements.

Her Grace

1. *"A General Introduction to the Study of Natural History"* by Lady Catherine deMallard. London: J. Johnson, 1818. A comprehensive overview of flora and fauna, blending natural philosophy with practical observations from English and European countryside.
2. *"On the Structure and Origins of Language"* by Dr. Edward Blandley. Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1819. An early linguistic treatise exploring the roots of European tongues and the social role of vernacular speech.
3. *"Philosophy of Manners and Social Condition"* by Reverend Thomas Granville. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1817. A sociological reflection on class, etiquette, and the interplay of social order in modern Britain.
4. *"The Education of Women: Principles and Practice"* by Miss Elizabeth Anetis. London: Longman, 1816. An influential pamphlet arguing for systematic intellectual training alongside domestic skills for women of distinction.
5. *"Treatise on the Laws of Vegetable Life"* by Professor Jonathan Harcourt. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1815. A scientific work describing plant physiology and the broader implications for agriculture and medicine.
6. *"Studies in Domestic Dialects: A Survey of Regional English"* by Samuel Harding, Esq. London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1819. A pioneering exploration of language variation and its social significance across English counties.
7. *"An Inquiry into Domestic Service and Social Hierarchy"* by Lady Marianne Blakely. Bath: Richard Cruttwell, 1820. A detailed examination of the servant class and its linguistic and behavioural codes within the English household.

8. "Reflections on Female Accomplishments and Moral Education" by Mrs. Anne Pembroke. London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1818. A conduct book focusing on the cultivation of intellect and virtue as essential for women's elevated social roles.
9. "Natural Philosophy Applied to the Human Frame" by Dr. Henry Moulton. London: Cadell & Davies, 1814. A text linking emerging scientific understanding to human anatomy and health, popular among gentlefolk interested in science.
10. "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind" by Hester Chapone. London: J. Dodsley, 1773 (widely circulated and reprinted by 1820). A seminal guide for women's education that emphasises moral, literary, and intellectual development.

Selected Reference Papers

For this volume

The Mallard House Papers: A Catalogue of Extant Holdings. Private Edition. Mallard Press, 1893. Suppressed after forty copies were circulated. Surviving copies known in the possession of the 29th Duke and (briefly) the Athenaeum Club Library before "accidental" misfiling.

Grey, Hon. Euphemia de. *Reminiscences of Country and Court*. London: Spottiswoode, 1878. A rare memoir, notable less for what it reveals than for the "pages excised by the authoress at the advice of her solicitor."

Burke's Landed Gentry: Supplement for Families Extinct or Dormant. 14th edition, 1890. Entries on "Fitzartur" and "deMallard" appear inconsistently; cross-referenced but not reconciled in later printings.

Harbottle, C.A. *A Glossary of Servants' Duties in Houses of More Than Sixty Rooms*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1881. Appendix III ("On the Placement of Footmen in Bedrooms During Night Hours") has been cited in Mallard family correspondence.

"A Record of the Centenary Gathering at Mallard House." *Gentleman's Quarterly Review of Heraldic Customs*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (1901): 144–173. Illustrated with engravings after sketches now lost.

Anonymous. *The Duchess Abroad: Being Letters from a Lady of Fashion*. Constantinople: Printed for private circulation, 1864. Widely attributed to Lady Alice Fitzartur; authenticity disputed.

Fitzartur, Lord Septimus. *On the Management of Estates in Difficult Times*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1852. Ostensibly a treatise on

drainage and tenancy, though the chapter “Of Entails and Their Unfortunate Interruptions” is of more lasting interest.

“Notes on the Duke’s Table.” In *The Journal of Gastronomical Curiosities*, ed. T. Arbuthnot. London: 1899. Cited in debates concerning the Fitzartur fondness for green sauces.

Selected Reference Papers

For this and other volumes

An Account of the Settlement of Lefame in the Western Wilderness, Being a Record of Diverse Persons Who Did Leave Dorchester for the Improvement of Their Souls. Printed anonymously, 1683.

Anonymous. *A Brief Chronicle of Such Persons as Departed from Salem in the Year 1686, with Notes Upon Their Several Dispositions.* Boston, 1690.

Anonymous. *The Cravat considered in its moral, literary, political, military, and religious attributes.* London, 1815

Blandie, Adam. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies.* London, 1684.

Blandie, Mary. *A Curious Catalogue of Witches, Widows and Wretches.* London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1688.

Blandy, Alfred. *On Catalepsies and the Locking of the Vital Spirits.* Manuscript, Lefame, 1680.

Blandy, Mary. *The Household Book of Recipes and Remedies.* Private circulation, 1749.

Chastity Mallard. *Letter from Cape Ann in Dorchester, New England.* Private circulation, 1687.

Fitz-Neville, Lord Cuthbert. *The Correct Management of Ducks in Noble Households.* Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1829.

Ledger of Goods Received by the Mallard Household from Its Tenants Across the Globe, 1625–1792. Mallard Archives.

Mallard, Charity. *Notes Upon the Apparent Witch-Frenzies of Salem.* Salem, 1690–1692.

Mallard, Felicity (Countess deCanard). *Private Considerations on Reason and Equality.* Lefame, 1688.

Mallard, Galileo. *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo.* Florence, 1612.

Mallard Household Booke of Receipts, Charms & Domestick Curiosities. c. 1600–1700.

Mallard, Lionel Percival Fitzartur-Mallard. *On the Harmonious Folding of Time and Other Curious Motions of the Aether.* Mallard House, 1860.

Fraxi, Pisanus. *The Liborum Prohibitorum*. London: Privately printed, 1877.

Mallard, Euphemia. *The Poisonous Pen: A Study in Crime and Ducks*. Paris: Librairie Garnier, 1927.

Walpole, Horace. *On the Servants of Antiquity: A Treatise in Three Parts*. London: Dodsley, 1764.

Massatomp, Elder. *Tales of the Turning World: A Record of the Wampanoag Understanding of Time*. Lefame, 1678.

The Dorchester Company of Adventurers. *Articles, By-Laws, and Godly Instructions*. London, 1628.

The Lost Ledger of Lefame (sometimes called “The Book of Foibles”). Date uncertain.

The Sisters of St Germoglio. *Meditations on Piety, Reason & the Divine Gleam*. Mallard Convent Press, 1679.

Report on the Condition of the Lands of Lefame. Mallard Treasury Office, 1669.

A Survey of the Holdings of the Mallard Estates in the New World, Including Timber, Fisheries, and Swamp Rights. Mallard Treasury Office, 1682.

The Tale of the Turning Shells, Being an Account of Coastal Practices Among the People of the Dawn. Lefame, 1680.

Published works by the editor

Arthur Frederick Blandy, D.Phil. (Syd.), sometime Fellow in Genealogical Studies

U and Non-U: Linguistic Indicators of Class in English Domestic Service (University of Oxford, 1954)

On the Speech of Gentlemen and Their Servants (1958)

The Decorum of Address: From Mistress to Miss (1962)

Language as Ladder: Social Class and the Idiom of Distinction (1967)

Errata, Marginalia & Corrections

1700—1940: Errata: Ducal Seats

Villa del Germoglio (Principe Anatroccolo) is sometimes mistakenly recorded in auction catalogues as *Villa del Germano* (Villa of the Goose). The confusion has never been satisfactorily resolved, though the present editors suspect it was a typesetter's joke.

Schloss Knusperente (Baron Entenbraten) has been erroneously translated as *Castle of the Gingerbread Duck*. The original register clearly refers to "roast," not "baked goods."

Château Plumecourt (Les Princes de la Mu) has been sighted in no fewer than six countries, sometimes on the same day. Its location is, therefore, not "unknown" but "in dispute."

Maison des Nénuphars (Viscount d'Anetis) is frequently credited to the wrong nation. The waterlilies are genuine, the national attribution less so.

Scholars are advised that further correction is futile. The seats will continue to move, mistranslate and reappear as surely as ducks migrate.

Nota bene

The reader will kindly note the following necessary amendments and clarifications.

1. Page 17: For *Mallard* read *Fitzartur*. The crest, however, remains correctly described, save for the diamond which was never there, except when it was.
2. Page 46: The lady's maid whose diary is quoted was named Mary, not Martha. Or possibly Margaret. We are indebted to Mr Blandy for the correction, though his reliability has been questioned elsewhere.
3. Page 113: The ghost, speaking sotto voce, later retracted his remarks regarding Lady Mabel. These lines should be considered apocryphal, though they are left standing in the text, having become part of family tradition.
4. Page 174: The date 1764 is a printer's error for 1864, unless the earlier date proves more convenient to the genealogist.
5. Page 245: The entirety of paragraph three must be disregarded. It is of no consequence, though it remains for completeness.
6. Page 289: Reference to "stepchildren of nature" may be premature, as Dr. Krafft-Ebing's volume had not yet been published in English. This difficulty is unresolved.

7. Page 310: The present Duke is *not* (as stated) living in a council flat. He occupies a maisonette.
8. General Note: The family ghost refuses further correction. He insists upon his version of events and declines amendment.

Marginalia

(Found in a family copy of the 1912 "History," annotated in a clerklly hand, presumed Blandy.)

- Page xii: The author's claim that the Fitzarturs descend directly from the Bourbons is "fanciful in the extreme." The only Bourbon in evidence is a wine-merchant of Rouen, whose accounts appear in the Duke's papers (1786).
- Page xviii: The "counsellor to Plantagenets" cited here seems to have been a clerk of kitchens, dismissed for over-purchasing capons. The marginal note "Minister" may have been an error of translation.
- Page xxv: The "confidant to more than one Stuart queen" cannot be verified. A "Mistress Fitz-Arter" appears in Pepys's diary but whether this is a misprint for FitzHarris remains disputed.
- Page xlii: The assertion that "no serious doubt" attends the continuity of the line is undermined by the two-year interregnum (1748–1750) during which the Mallard estate was in Chancery, owing to an excess of creditors and a shortage of heirs.
- Page lxxvii: The remark on "vulgar commerce" may be ironic, given the family's present fortune rests chiefly upon soap-shares, purchased by the enterprising Hon. Mrs Fitzartur during her widowhood.
- Page cxii: "The steady flowing of the Thames" is an unfortunate metaphor. One branch of the family, attempting to escape its creditors, in fact drowned in it (1819).
- Marginal note, pencilled: "Grandmother Mab always said the deMallards kept their heads above water by marrying into clerks. They may yet try again—an Australian cadet line. God help them if they inherit the Blandy nose. Or worse, the Blandy candied ginger."

(An ominous squiggle follows here, later thought to refer to the thallium incident of 1946, when one Mallard-Blandy expired most unexpectedly after tea.)

Editor's notes to Publisher

Part of a report, 1990

[Not for publication.]

Regrettably, these errors illustrate how the absence of a dedicated sub-editor and the author's unwillingness to verify details have compromised the finished work's polish and accuracy, requiring readers to exercise caution and independent judgement.

p. 13: Citation incomplete; source unspecified despite multiple requests. The author's refusal to authenticate this reference severely hampers verification.

p. 27: Typographical error in name "Mallard" erroneously printed as "Malard." An avoidable slip, had a sub-editor been involved.

p. 42: Quotation mismatch—text cites an 1815 journal, but no page given, making confirmation impossible.

p. 59: Cross-reference to chapter 5 wrongly indicated as chapter 6; creates confusion for readers.

p. 73: Date of Devonshire estate acquisition incorrectly stated. Original manuscript vague; author unresponsive to queries.

p. 89: Spelling inconsistency of "Mitford" sisters' surname; appears variably as "Mitfurd."

p. 95: The assertion that the book "allows divine concepts to evolve across centuries" remains entirely unsubstantiated by historical or philosophical scholarship, relying instead on vague conjecture and unsupported theological musings.

p. 102: Transliteration of Arabic terms inconsistent with established conventions; explanation lacking.

p. 118: Reference to "U and Non-U" linguistics case study lacks a proper bibliographic entry.

p. 134: Misplaced footnote; the note attached belongs to a separate paragraph, creating ambiguity.

p. 147: Erroneous duplication of a paragraph on the Mallard family origins, indicating failure to proofread.

p. 162: Author's note claims archival source is "lost," yet no alternative citation provided.

p. 175: Description of hothouse fruits omits botanical names, detracting from academic rigour.

p. 188: Misquotation of Avicenna's text; Latin phrase mistranslated, altering intended meaning.

p. 198: The author's contention that this volume reveals the so-called "female genealogical brain" of the Mallard world is stated without supporting evidence or credible methodology, bordering on speculative

fiction rather than scholarly assertion.

p. 203: Occasional slips in tense—historical events sometimes narrated in present tense without explanation.

p. 215: Library inventory numbers incorrectly cited; editor's attempts to clarify met with silence.

p. 227: Anachronistic references to clothing styles muddle period authenticity; author dismisses concerns.

p. 239: Lack of consistency in formatting dates—some European, some Anglo-American style.

p. 252: Omitted bibliography entry for several primary sources cited in transcriptions.

p. 273: Page numbering skips from 272 to 274, minor but avoidable error causing reader disorientation.

p. 289: Index entry for "social linguistics" incomplete, omitting several key page references.

p. 312: The validation of an "entire multi-container structure" central to the book's thesis is presented with neither rigorous structural analysis nor sufficient documentary proof, undermining the credibility of this key argument.