

Some notes on *Order and Disorder*
By Katherine Hunt

I found myself thinking about printing, and archives, and scribal hands. Some aspects seemed to have to do with quite a traditional history of the material text; other bits were more about influence, literary circles, and circulation. One could talk about the content of this book a lot, but I'm going to focus instead on these other things.

Looking at the book in the library

The title page gives the title as *Order and Disorder: Or, the World Made and Undone, being Meditations upon the Creation and the Fall as it is Recorded in the Beginning of Genesis*. The British Library copy of the poem is a quarto, nicely printed in Roman script with a few woodcut initials and bits of ornament. The poem is glossed with scriptural references. It has been leather bound, but later: probably in the nineteenth century.

The text was printed by Margaret White for Henry Mortlock, and sold at his shops in St Paul's and Westminster Hall. Margaret White was probably a widow taking on her husband's business: quite a common occurrence in the late seventeenth century when there were lots of women involved in the print trade. The book was licensed on 10 March 1679 by Sir Roger L'Estrange, the Licenser of the Press.

It bears no annotations other than two very minor corrections in ink of typos. One of these corrects the catchword - the word at the bottom right-hand corner of a page that is identical to the first word on the page that comes next. It's given as 'istical', which is a part - but not the beginning part - of the phrase that begins the next page, 'this atheistical age'. This small mistake in the catchword suggests the materiality of the type and the compositor's handling of it, picking up the wrong letters but from the right phrase.

The poem is a re-telling of the Genesis story, in five cantos. There is no author given, but in the British Library copy there's a pencil inscription stating that

it is by Sir Allen Apsley.

It begins:

'My ravished soul a pious ardour fires
To sing those mystic wonders it admires,
Contemplating the rise of everything
That with Time's birth flowed from th'eternal spring' (1).

The ascription to Allen Apsley is, however, not correct. David Norbrook, in his 2001 edition of *Order and Disorder*, revealed that the poem was actually by Lucy Hutchinson, sister of Sir Allen Apsley. Norbrook's arguments are persuasive and the poem is now widely accepted to be by Hutchinson. Norbrook's edition gives the full 20 cantos of the poem as it exists in manuscript form, whereas the 1679 published version contains just the first five.

What questions did I have of the text at this stage? Firstly, questions about the writing of it - and about Lucy Hutchinson and her work in general. Why did she publish it anonymously? Why the confusion over who wrote it? Secondly, who was her audience? Who read it - especially given that it was anonymous? Thirdly, I was concerned with the content: as epic poetry, religious poetry, the relationship with Milton and *Paradise Lost*; and also a general concern with the juxtaposition of order and disorder in the seventeenth century. I decided, however, not to focus too much on the content, looking instead at the circumstances of the publication and circulation of the text, particularly from Hutchinson's preface to the work.

The content: the poem

Order and Disorder is a telling of the Genesis story. Genesis is the ultimate juxtaposition of order and disorder: from chaos, to the order of the created universe, to disorder with the fall, but - in Hutchinson's conception - order once

again at the end, with God's grace. The shape of the story - laid out in the first five cantos that are the poem in its published form - is of this gathering and scattering motion.

God created the world:

'Now was the glorious Universe compleat
And every thing in beauteous order set' (24)

Then invents man and woman as his companion. After Adam and Eve eat the apple, things begin to be torn apart:

'Deaths harbingers waste in each province make,
While thundring terrours mans whole Island shake.
Within, without, disorder'd in the storm,
The colour fades, and tremblings change the form' (52)

God punishes Adam and Eve and, although they are saved by grace, the universe is set in a divine order over which we have no control.

'But though free grace did future help provide,
Yet must he [Adam] present loss and woe abide;
And feel the bitter curse, that he may so
The sweet release of saving mercy know.' (60)

It is not clear whether Hutchinson had read *Paradise Lost* and she may have been writing at the same time as Milton; the two shared a patron in the Earl of Anglesey, so there was a connection. It is definitely an epic poem, and one of the first by a woman in English. It is rather different from some of the other women's writing of the Restoration. Unlike Cavendish, Behn et al, Hutchinson's political and religious views led her to remain anonymous.

She writes in the poem about women's lot: that they have been cursed with lust and desire for love, which will always end in tears: 'With strong passion their own shackles choose' (69). Childbirth and children are especially bad. Birth kills mothers, children die, or they might just be ungrateful:

'What sad abortions, what cross births ensue:
What monsters, what unnatural vipers come
Eating their passage through their parent's womb;
How are the tortures of their births renewed,
Unrecompensed with love and gratitude.' (Norbrook 2001: 70).

The poem has a strong scriptural basis, with many references glossing the text as well as occasional headers added by Hutchinson on topics such as 'Society'. I'm going to talk now more about Hutchinson and her reasons behind writing this poem and, particularly, publishing this book.

Lucy Hutchinson

Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681) was born in the Tower of London where her father, Sir Allen Apsley, was the lieutenant. She married Colonel John Hutchinson who, like Lucy, was a committed Puritan. John Hutchinson was one of the signatories of Charles I's death warrant, and in favour of the republic, but didn't get on with Cromwell. He avoided the death sentence in 1660 by promising not to get involved in politics but was arrested anyway in 1663 and died in prison.

Lucy Hutchinson wrote the *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, completing it in 1671: though it was circulated in manuscript form and only printed in 1806. She also translated the *Aeneid* (which doesn't survive) and Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (which does), and wrote other things, both poetry and prose. *Order and Disorder* is her only work to have been published in her lifetime: everything else was circulated in manuscript form. And the published

version is only the first five cantos of the full 20-canto epic, which survives in manuscript form. Why was this work published when others were not? And who was her audience?

In the preface to the published edition of the poem, Hutchinson sets out what she's doing, and gives some clues about who she expected to read it. Firstly, she states that 'these meditations were not at first designed for public view, but fixed upon to reclaim a busy roving thought from wandering in the pernicious and perplexed maze of human inventions; whereinto the vain curiosity of youth had drawn me to consider and translate the account some old poets and philosophers give of the original of things'. (Norbrook 2001 3). This is a reference to her translation of Lucretius: she is repenting for having spent her time with these 'foolish fancies' and 'ugly wild impressions'. She realised that 'I found I could know nothing but what God taught me, so I resolved never to search after any knowledge of him and his productions but what he himself hath given forth.'

This preface is a reworking of the preface she wrote for the version of the Lucretius manuscript she gave to the Earl of Anglesey in 1675, though the Lucretius was written long before that. *Order and Disorder*, too, was written before 1679: Norbrook guesses she drafted it between 1660 and 1664, as the surviving manuscript of it is dated 1664 (itself written by two different hands, neither of which are likely to be Hutchinson's).

Hutchinson suggests in her preface to *Order and Disorder* that she's sending out this - published - work as a kind of guard against anyone thinking ill of her because of her earlier translations of classical authors. 'Lest that arrive by misadventure, which never shall by my consent, that any of the puddled water my wanton youth drew from the profane Helicon of ancient poets should be sprinkled about the world, I have for prevention sent forth this essay; with a profession that I disclaim all doctrines of God and his works, but what I learnt out of his own word, and have experienced it to be a very unsafe and unprofitable thing for those that are young, before their faith be fixed, to exercise themselves in the study of vain, foolish, atheistical poesy.' (Norbrook 2001: 4)

She knows that her work is already out in the world - that this 'puddled water' has been 'sprinkled about'. Is this work, then, to her the most important and therefore why it's been put in print? Why anonymously, especially because she deliberately wants it to refute the earlier work which, even if it did not bear her name, was at least known to be hers? The fact that she refers to herself and to previous work in the preface strongly suggests that her audience would know who had written *Order and Disorder* - and that it was published anonymously because it is written from a position unfavourable to Charles II and the religious establishment.

The poem displays a very strongly Calvinist theology that went against the religious orthodoxy of the Restoration. There is much about grace:

'...Here doth appear
Infinite Wisdom plotting with free grace,
Even by Mans Fall, th' advance of humane race.' (Canto 5. 59)

In the preface to her translation of *De rerum natura* Hutchinson had written about seventeenth-century philosophers who talk about the swerve of the atom in Lucretius, indicating free will. She writes that they are 'reviving the casual foppish dance of atoms, and denying the Sovereign Wisdom of God in the great Designe of the whole Universe' (quoted in Norbrook 2001: xxxii). Divine grace - Calvinist double predestination - is constantly referred to in *Order and Disorder*.

What she writes about the proper place of kings would also have been unpopular at court:

'But God his daily business did ordain
That kings, hence taught, might in their realms maintain
Fair order, serving those whom they command
As guardians, not as owners of the land.' (C3. p.51)

Norbrook suggests that *Order and Disorder* is itself a deliberately conservative

title, one that would have helped it get past the licenser, Roger L'Estrange.

Hutchinson writes that she wants people to read and be edified by it. 'If any one of no higher a pitch than myself be as much affected and stirred up in the reading as I have been in the writing [...] it will be a success above my hopes; though / my charity makes me wish everyone that hath need of it the same mercy I have found.' (Norbrook 2001: 4-5)

She also offers a disclaimer about her style: 'I know I am obnoxious to the censures of two sorts of people'. One sort is those who think Scripture shouldn't be in verse, but she points out that it was originally in verse, and also that 'we are commanded to exercise our spiritual mirth in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (A2r). The other sort is 'those that understand and love the elegancies of Poems, They will find nothing of fancy in it; no elevations of stile, no charms of language, which I confess are gifts I have not, nor desire on this occasion; for I would rather breath [*sic*] forth grace cordially than words artificially. I have not studied to utter any thing that I have not really taken in. And I acknowledge all the language I have, is much too narrow to express the least of those wonders my soul hath been ravisht with in the contemplation of God and his Works. Had I had a fancy, I darst not have exercis'd it here; for I tremble to think of turning Scripture into a Romance; and shall not be troubled at their dislike who dislike on that account; and profess they think no poem can be good that shuts out drunkenness, and Lisciviousness, and libelling Satyr, the theams of all their celebrated songs.' (Preface, A2r)

(This last is possibly a dig at Rochester whose mother, Anne Wilmot, Countess of Rochester, had a full manuscript copy of *Order and Disorder* which is now in Yale library. It is possibly through her that this was ascribed to Allen Apsley, Hutchinson's brother, as he and Wilmot were cousins and, possibly, lovers. It is very unlikely it was by Apsley, as he was royalist.)

Hutchinson's deliberate refutation of any artistic skill seems very Puritan, but is a bit disingenuous. In a similar vein, she wrote in her preface to Lucretius that women shouldn't really write, and again in the *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* that what she has written is a 'rude draft' by an 'unskilled hand' (*Life*

16-17). She deliberately plays down what is actually lengthy, intelligent, and opinionated, in a false protestation of modesty that is not uncommon among women writers of the period.

The preface is a text that encircles and excludes others: it is a sort of justification of the present published work, and a kind of step-sibling of the remaining fifteen cantos that were not included in the book. It is a defence of the anonymous author who was also behind the manuscript translations that bear her name, ones whose own prefaces are earlier incarnations of the present address, and whose material texts have been 'sprinkled about' and are now disseminated beyond the author's control. It reminds us of lost texts, forgotten texts, texts that threaten from the sidelines but may never turn up. It indicates the way in which work in manuscript form was circulated, amongst friends and strangers alike - but also of the finality and the endurance of a text that has been put into print.