

**THE EMPIRE OF BEAUTY:
THE COMPETITION FOR JUDGEMENT IN
MID EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND.**

ONE VOLUME

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the modes of judgement and forms of social practice that were involved in the discussion of the Beautiful in the mid-eighteenth century. Concentrating exclusively on British thought it seeks to examine how the practices of tasteful discrimination were involved in wider cultural changes. Particular focus is given to the increasing prominence of commercial enterprise, and the increased public visibility of women. The nature and importance of these changes are made clear in the 'Introduction'.

'Chapter 1' describes the existence of two competing modes of social address within eighteenth-century culture: that formed by the aristocracy and derived from classical sources and that which was taken from the modern sensibility of the middle classes. Focusing on the latter I demonstrate how the Beautiful was increasingly made into an account of sensuous contemplation rather than rhetorical persuasion.

'Chapter 2' argues that after admitting the sensuous into the process of judgement, the criticism produced by and for the middle classes came to focus on the conduct and appearance of women. This emphasis had not been desirable in the aristocratic criticism of the early part of the century. As a result, accounts of Taste became accounts of the 'appearance' of women in a variety of social and familial locations.

'Chapter 3' examines a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds in the light of these developments. The portrait - of Elizabeth Gunning, a society beauty - is read as a complex social referent. One which images the uncertainties and ambivalences about the judgement both of art and women's conduct. I contend that Reynolds work reflects a bifurcation in mid-century accounts of art; between a narrative which stresses civic discrimination, and one which emphasises polite sensibility.

'Chapter 4' explores the latter theme in relation to a bourgeois moral politics which centred on physical appearance. The argument is conducted in terms of four novels by Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott. It is suggested that middle-class discourse is characterised by a resistance to the social and sexual authority of physical beauty. What was promoted instead was an attention to plainness, even to ugliness, as the sign of a retired, domesticated feminine subject.

The 'Conclusion' attempts a broader consideration of what was meant by a division of public and private in the eighteenth century. In this discussion the ideological aspects of the Beautiful are brought to the fore.

PREFACE

The account which follows concerns Beauty, and examines what shaped and defined what was thought to be pleasing, worthwhile or merely pretty in the middle years of the eighteenth century. Most importantly it is a study of what a discussion of the Beautiful meant in eighteenth-century culture, when a reference to the Beautiful constituted a claim to cultural fluency and intellectual participation. This was a debate, as I shall argue, which produced a number of competing theories. For what constituted the Beautiful was determined by the vagaries of the occasion, and by the class and gender of the speaker. In particular the 'beauties' of women received minute attention; the attractions of female society or the corruptions of the effeminate made for a compelling, if uncertain, debate. With this said I can make a hasty and pointedly unfashionable disclaimer: this is not a study of the body. Instead I focus on the techniques of judgement and the ideologies of conduct upon which the practices of discrimination were based. Crucially, the social structure within which such pronouncements were located was one riven by the emerging mercantile culture of city merchants as it clashed with the patrician claims of the established order.

More specifically I am interested in how, in the middle years of the century, the prominent role of commerce intensified the struggle to define good taste. In an increasingly commercial culture, the nature of desire and judgement is a matter of central concern, if only as a guide to 'good shopping'. For the citizens of a mercantile society, a society where the distribution of wealth is increasingly broad, there is a perceived need to have a clear

idea of what to desire - which pictures, which plate, and what costume or coiffure. There is also an urgent need for that desire to be expressive of difference and distinction, and not indiscriminate choice. It is not enough to wish to have one's portrait painted, one must know who is the best equipped for the task, or more importantly who has the most fashionable clientele. A country retreat is no marker of taste if it is only a "Cit's Country Box". This last example makes plain a process which is distinctive to the eighteenth century. The expansion of wealth production and distribution, particularly among the merchant classes, enabled a far greater number of people to participate in high culture, both as consumers and connoisseurs, than ever before. Certainly the number exceeded those able to play an active role in politics. The result of such a change was an intensified interest in the nature of taste, with more and more people wishing to know what was good or beautiful.

Despite this general requirement, what it was that each individual needed to know was strikingly different. Consequently each arbiter of taste speaks for a recognizably different constituency, or market. For example, the elite tastes and high political aspirations of aristocrats such as the third Earl of Shaftesbury did not countenance the poorly resourced judgements of the middle-classes, who were seen as deficient in both delicacy and wealth. Shaftesbury, amongst others, annexed his sense of both taste and morals to a politics most conveniently described as civic humanist, which he represented as centred on the participation of the landowning elites alone. While Shaftesbury had his successors (in art theory Reynolds is the most famous example) his vision of the place of the Beautiful and of the nature of politics did not go unchallenged. By the second quarter of the century it is possible to identify ways of writing on the nature of Taste wholly divorced from the civic priorities of the noble earl. This writing begins with Addison and Steele and with Jonathan Richardson, one of England's first theorists of Taste. Denied access to the realms

of both politics and large scale landownership, these figures fashion a discourse on the beautiful which articulates the aspirations of the minor gentry and the middling classes. This discourse is not concerned with patrician political claims, but with justifying a mode of cultural consumption based on the ownership and appreciation of goods which might otherwise be derided as luxuries. Indeed the attempt to raise the status of commercialized tastes is the decisive factor in much English writing on aesthetics after 1740. In the debate these texts constitute, Beauty emerges as a vital indicator of the structure of England's commercial culture, making possible the articulation of a number of competing ideas of judgement.

I am confident that this thesis will provide a challenging context for a reappraisal, not only of the major thinkers of the period, such as Burke or Hogarth, but also a more diverse range of writings encompassing the gossip of Walpole's *Correspondence* and the essays of the *Connoisseur*, texts which all have something to say on the nature of Beauty. Analysis of the Beautiful, however, has an importance beyond the consideration of individual figures or texts. It achieves this critical importance because it enables the study of at least two fundamental cultural and literary shifts. First, analysis of the Beautiful makes visible the relationship between ideas of taste and judgement and the experience of commodity culture. This is unquestionably a relationship that is central to our understanding of eighteenth-century society. Secondly, the issue of Beauty is crucially gendered. Any discussion of Beauty necessarily asks questions about the relationship of women to social and cultural practice. However, it is the high degree of mobility exhibited by the term, Beauty, moving between contrasting spaces and texts, which most strongly highlights the difficult and uncertain state of eighteenth-century culture.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF BEAUTY.

The Empire of Beauty: The Authority and Ambivalence of the Beautiful.

Research which focuses on eighteenth-century ideas of Beauty is faced with a particular challenge; that of following the term through the multitude of its diverse functions and often opposing applications. For while it is undoubtedly true that the Beautiful represents one of the most enduring, and certainly one of the more important concepts in eighteenth-century British thought, it is also one of the most mobile terms the period has to offer. The briefest survey reveals it moving between a number of different locations, both discursive and social. The mobility of the notion of Beauty frustrates any attempt to offer a simple account of the meaning of the term, or narrative of its function. The term has a mundane currency, a near ubiquity, that seems almost to make any specialised usage or significance impossible; but despite that, the ability to form an opinion on questions of Beauty, and the capacity to enter into debates on its nature, was perceived to characterise those aspiring to participate in the politics of culture. The discussion of possible definitions of the Beautiful distinguished those eager to enter the cultural arena that became increasingly important to the middle-classes in the second and third quarters of the century. It is this intersection of class and theory, gender and culture which makes the Beautiful so interesting, and yet so elusive. And it is perhaps for this reason that critics have recently begun to request a history of the eighteenth century written in relation, not to the individuating claims of the sublime, but to the complex bonds and sympathies represented by the Beautiful.¹

¹ Ronald Paulson has recently argued that a 'narrative of the Beautiful...seems to me, a corrective long-overdue'. See his *Hogarth vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-64*, (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1993), p. xvi. Frances Ferguson has also lamented

While there has, in recent years, been a considerable amount of work published on the nature of aesthetics - alongside studies of manners and painting - this work has been deficient in its failure to examine the social and discursive relationships which structure eighteenth-century culture. Too frequently single instances from the highly charged realm of 'Taste' have been selected for isolated, if exhaustive, study; work undertaken on the nature of sublimity is perhaps the most obvious example of this trend.¹ As an alternative to this my own investment lies in the exploration of diverse and divergent areas of cultural practice and social discourse. I take my lead from the mobility of the term itself and pursue it in a number of its particular locations, within, for example, the moral plenitudes of polite society (Sir Harry Beaumont and James Usher), but also the practice of a commercial portrait-painter (Joshua Reynolds); in the complex analytic inherent in the philosophical disputes of the mid-century (William Hogarth and John Gilbert Cooper), and in the moral politics of two women novelists (Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott). The power and authority of each of these aspects of eighteenth-century culture can be most fruitfully examined when their interconnections are explored. The idea of the Beautiful forms a strong link between

the neglect of the Beautiful. See her *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 44-45.

¹ The Sublime has been read consistently within Romantic Studies as if it represented a purely phenomenological experience. Such a mode of reading has a long and impressive tradition, in modern literary studies the work of Majorie Hope Nicolson has been particularly influential. See her *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959). For further examples of this approach see, W.P. Albrecht, *The Sublime Pleasures of Tragedy: A Study of Critical Theory from Dennis to Keats* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1975); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

these areas, which might otherwise seem to be divergent, or merely coincidental in their chronology, and permits a greater understanding of eighteenth-century culture and society and the connections upon which it is structured. I will begin by arguing that the Beautiful demands serious appraisal as a category of thought, one that will illuminate and enrich our understanding of the cultural and textual processes at the heart of eighteenth-century British society.

The "Empire of Beauty" is a phrase that can be interpreted in two distinct, but closely connected ways. In the first place it describes, much in the manner of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of fields of cultural production or Foucault's discursive practices, an area of investigation organized around a consideration of eighteenth-century taste, and of the beautiful in particular.¹ This is not, however, a history of aesthetics; I am not setting out to describe how the Beautiful emerges in the years between Frances Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and Archibald Alison's *Essay on the Nature and Principals of Taste* (1790) in terms of a precise 'philosophical' reading. There is to be no account here of the debate on what causes the Beautiful to be felt by the perceiving subject, nor will I focus on, though I will have cause to mention, qualities of utility, fitness or variety. These considerations, whilst proper to the study of a particular evolution in English philosophy, are not mine. My investigation is concerned with a different interpretation of the 'Empire of Beauty'; with the political uses and social affiliations which it was possible to describe, and to participate in, because one was able to discuss what was considered tasteful, or thought

¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (London: Routledge, 1992) and Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Tavistock, 1970).

beautiful. It is in the social aspect of the discussion of Beauty that the second definition of the phrase emerges as a consideration of the place and representation of women.

In the rapidly changing environment of the mid-eighteenth century, which, as J.G.A. Pocock points out, was not an era of 'Augustan serenity', but an 'age of bitter and confused debate over the relations between reason, virtue, and passion', an ability to talk knowledgably and with authority on the Beautiful served as a sign of philosophic disinterestedness and political suitability.¹ It was the capacity which traditionally established the character of the subject of political discourse; the citizen himself. It is here that the problematic Empire of Beauty begins to unfold, and its divisions and tribulations are made apparent. Most people living in the eighteenth century believed that they were living through a period of great, and perhaps unpleasant change. Commerce was most frequently held to be the cause of this, however, it was not the 'emergence' of commerce *per se* that was at issue. The processes of commercial exchange could, of course, be dated back to the middle ages. What troubled the majority of eighteenth-century commentators was the fact that the status of commerce, as much in discourse as in reality, was changing beyond recognition. As Paul Langford has observed:

Commerce not only expressed the peculiar modernity of the Hanoverian age, it also indicated the problems which preoccupied contemporaries and the

¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought Written Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 66-67. For an account which supports that of Pocock's work, though with a different emphasis, see Albert O. Hirshman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 9-66.

uncertainties which clouded their confidence.¹

What occurred in the eighteenth century was not the coming of mercantilism, but the fact that from the end of the seventeenth century onwards there was a move to reformulate the discursive nature and importance of commercialism. As Lawrence Klein points out, 'it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century that the English began to absorb the experience of commerce into their political self understanding'.² This change can be seen in terms of a shift from discourse on commerce describing its particular practices and laws to a discursive dynamic which sought to speak of, and for, commerce. Accounts of commerce no longer spoke merely of trade, but sought to represent the commercial classes as a vital and thriving community, a section of society which both sought and deserved a greater say in the running of the kingdom.³ This transformation of the ground of the social was a cause of a considerable amount of anxiety and class competitiveness.

Within a changing social order apparently propelled by a rapidly expanding commercial sector the number of subjects desiring to be, or claiming that they were already capable of, participation in cultural debate was set to increase.⁴ In this context

¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-83*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 2.

² Lawrence Klein, 'The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 18, no 2 (Winter, 1984-85), p. 187.

³ For an account of the social history to which I allude see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 61-121; and Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), see esp. pp. 13-129, 259-303.

⁴ Neil McKendrick, 'Commercialisation and the Economy' in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialisation*

the relations between 'reason, virtue, and passion' would indeed be fraught. Commerce provided a number of changes to unsettle the established orders of taste and criticism as they were handed down by Lord Shaftesbury in the second decade of the century. Mercantile wealth and the successes of financial speculation provided both new consumers, ready and willing to acquire, and new things to buy; there were new forms of wares, from the East and West Indies, from China and Africa as well as from the Americas and Europe. In this new environment there were not only more and different things to buy, but the objects bought had a new and for some unpleasant status and significance: the commodity had arrived.¹ Broadly speaking, the dominant modes of taste before the restoration had been based on objects acquired without apparent commodification, inherited or held in trust; neither the owner nor the object were thought possessed by any notably 'grotesque ideas'.² Capital, acquired with the stateliest of exploitation and the most accomplished rack-renting, had been lavished on goods and estates bought with a calm glance to endless futurity. Or, at least this is the idea behind

of Eighteenth-Century Society, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982), pp. 9-33.

¹ Susan Staves in an important study has charted the ways in which conceptions of property and authority changed during the course of the early modern period. See her *Player's Sceptres: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), especially pp. 43-110. For an alternative account of this process in the eighteenth century, and its 'semiological' significance, see James H. Bunn, 'The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism', in *New Literary History*, vol. 11, (1980), pp. 303-21.

² The phrase is taken from Marx's description of the fetishised commodity. See, Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols trans. Ben Fowkes, with an intro by Ernest Mandel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988; Pelican Marx Library), vol. I, p. 163. For an informed account of how commodity fetishism functions within capitalist ideology see Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (London: B.F.I., 1983), see esp. pp. 56-63.

the policy of patrician taste and acquisition.¹ Not so by the start of the eighteenth century, as with an almost Falstaffian disregard for form and restraint the merchant classes launched themselves on the spending spree of an epoch; demand began to appear insatiable: new plate, new chairs, new houses, new portraits (even of those long since dead), and wherever possible new relations, new friends and new occupations; in short, newer, richer lives. With such spending came the consumer: monied, acquisitive and interested in the novelty of the commodity. This caused something of a sea change in both the conceptualisation of ownership and the discussion of society. It had still been possible during the early seventeenth century for people to represent their purchases as if they were not commodities; but by the end of the century the expanding market had introduced too many new goods and too many new consumers for such patrician disclaimers to have any credibility.²

The enormous expansion in the consumer economy was, when viewed from the position of the aristocracy, looked upon with a weary disgust. For the new acquisitions of the suddenly wealthy merchant classes were seen by traditionalists as an abnegation

¹ The most cogent account of the politics of patrician taste, and the attempt to defend and redefine it in the eighteenth century, is provided by David H. Solkin. See his *Richard Wilson - The Landscape of Reaction*, (London: Tate Gallery Productions, 1982), see esp. pp. 56-76.

² For a fuller treatment of this theme see John Brewer and Roy Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, (New York: Routledge, 1993); James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977); Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

of all that was prudent management and good taste.¹ It was a vile, effeminate consumption, the stuff merely of the moment. Taste was corrupted; the word itself appeared to have lost something of the respect and assurance it was due, for 'who has not heard it frequently pronounced by the loveliest mouths in the world, when it has evidently meant nothing'.² Within this discourse the taste of the city merchants was represented in such a way as to deny them concomitant cultural, as well as political, enfranchisement. Their tastes were not virtuous, they were the work of weak, unregulated passions, womanly cravings after fripperies, fancies and chinese trash. I am particularly interested in this conflict between bourgeois and aristocratic forms of taste and consumption, a struggle which for J.H. Plumb marks the emergence of a recognizably commercial, bourgeois modernity.³

That the practices and desires of the merchants should be figured within the terms of an explicitly gendered discourse, which represented anything less than stoic resolve as degenerate effeminacy, is crucial to any account of the culture of taste in eighteenth-century England. It also indicates the second, equally important, signification, that I wish to attach to the phrase "Empire of Beauty". In this second sense, I have a more extensive sanction in terms of eighteenth-century usage, when the phrase was employed, not to define an area of research or philosophical speculation, but to name the particular area of women's government; the 'domain' of the fair. This meaning is something of

¹ McKendrick, 'Commercialism and the Economy', pp. 24-29.

² [?Edward Moore], *The World*, no. 12 (March 22nd, 1753) in *The World by Adam Fitz-Adam. A New Edition*, 3 vols, (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1770) vol. I, p. 55.

³ J.H. Plumb 'The Acceptance of Modernity' in McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society*, pp. 316-339.

a commonplace throughout the eighteenth-century. The phrase is an integral part of the vocabulary of an established masculine sensibility at once patronising and yet wary of women's role, while also denominating a particular set of female 'tactics' for gaining authority in a situation of disadvantage.¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu writing in the guise of a 'Humble admirer of the Fair Sex', dissects the unevenness of the situation with characteristic perspicuity:

I do not only look upon them as Objects of pleasure, but I compassionate the many Hardships both Nature and Custom has subjected them to. I never expose the Foibles to which Education has enclin'd them; and (contrary to all other Authors) I see with a favourable Eye the little vanities with which they amuse themselves, and am glad they find in the imaginary Empire of Beauty, a consolation for being excluded every part of Government in the State.²

Having delineated the position of women as being in possession of only an 'imaginary Empire' the writer does an abrupt about face, continuing that "he" is, 'shock'd when I see their Influence in opposition to Reason, Justice, and the common Welfare of the Nation'. Women first do not, and then do, have considerable influence over the actions of men; they can be merely the 'Ornamental halfe of Mankind' and yet a threat to the fabric of the state.³

The dual position of women as both agents of corruption and idle ornament is one of the most often repeated ideas about women - at least society women - in eighteenth-

¹ I use the term 'tactic' in the sense articulated by Michel de Certeau. See his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), esp. pp. 29-42.

² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Nonsense of Common Sense*, no. II (27th December, 1737), in *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy*, ed. R. Halsbrand and I. Grundy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 109.

³ Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems*, p. 111.

century culture. It is something to which Richard Steele, writing twenty or so years earlier, also alludes, though in slightly different terms. Early in the run of the *Tatler* its nominal editor, Isaac Bickerstaff, is called away leaving his half-sister, Jenny Distaff, in full editorial control. Jenny is portrayed by Steele as relishing the opportunity which has left her with a measure of command, a position she uses to question writings she has found in her brother's closet:

The First thing that I Lay my Hands on, is, a Treatise concerning *The Empire Of Beauty*, and the Effects it has had in all Nations of the World upon the publick and private Actions of Men; with an Appendix, which he calls, *The Bachelor's Scheme for Governing his Wife*.¹

Jenny outlines what Bickerstaff's proposals for such government are. In the main they consist of an attack on what Isaac sees as the follies and excesses of femininity. In the eyes of Jenny's big brother women are the cause of quarrels, and an effeminizing force which is to be guarded against, as their charms give them an authority over men wholly disproportionate to what is sensible, prudent and virtuous. It is this mixture of command and flippancy which disturbs Bickerstaff. The virtuous wife should, according to the Bickerstaff plan, forsake public assemblies, dote on her husband and remain utterly and steadfastly faithful. For Jenny this means that 'she shall be no Woman', as it means forsaking the very social pleasure which for Jenny constitutes the business of being a woman.

Steele, however, wants to have it both ways, and, in effect, to eat his syllabub and still have it. Jenny will, when disputing her brother's claim, accord some of the authority

¹ Richard Steele, *Tatler*, no. 10 (May 3rd, 1709) in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Tatler* ed. and intro. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 87.

to feminine beauty of which her brother is so wary. In such a vein she announces her approval of the opinion - actually one of her brother's - that 'no Man begins to make any tolerable figure, 'till he sets out with the Hopes of pleasing some of us'.¹ This is a sentiment with which Jenny agrees, adding that 'Every temper, except the downright insipid, is to be animated and softened by the Influence of Beauty'.² It is testimony to the polite audience that Steele addresses that animation and softening can be taken to occupy the same space. For Steele's contemporary, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, to be animate was the opposite of softness, and a choice between them was required.³ So that 'to be animated' by a Beauty cannot mean for Steele what it meant to Shaftesbury, and must entail an activity which is sociable; visits are the example offered by Jenny. Beauty, then, is accorded a significance and a demonstrable influence upon the actions of men, so that it reforms, as well as corrupts. While Jenny does not detail exactly what 'The Empire Of Beauty' contains, it is possible through a careful reading of the *Tatler*, *Spectator* and from later in the century the *Rambler* and the *Adventurer* to glean the substance of Bickerstaff's fears, and moreover to begin to examine the beguiling horror which feminine, or female beauty holds for Bickerstaff, Steele and the culture at large. In essence, Beauty will be a contested term used to signify a woman's public presence throughout the period; for some it will mark the spectacle women ought to make in society, whilst for others it is the symbol of a corruption which is best avoided, and if

¹ Addison and Steele, *Tatler*, vol. I, p. 88.

² Addison and Steele, *Tatler*, vol. I, p. 90

³ The Third Earl of Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper], *Second Characters; or the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 34-36.

possible extinguished.

For both Steele and Shaftesbury, the issue was one of virtue, understood as a profoundly secular and innately masculine concern. The maleness and worldliness of the debate - observing women, watching against their effect on men - combines with the definition of the Beautiful in the area of critical judgement to suggest an intersection of discourses which is profoundly social as well as thoroughly politicised. Shaftesbury deserves much credit for this alignment, as Robert Markley observes:

As an aristocrat, idealist, and whig, Shaftesbury is an historically important figure because he shifts discussions of morality and virtue way from the traditional rhetoric of religious orthodoxy to secular discourses of ideological power and prestige.¹

While it is possible to dispute as to whether Shaftesbury was solely responsible for this shift - as a case could equally be made for Pope - he was, as I shall be arguing, a potent force in the development of the discussion of beauty, and its relation to the social and to social virtue. The movement of ideas from the patrician Shaftesbury to the polite philosophers of the mid-century is however a complex one. In what I take to be a suggestive but undeveloped remark, Markley writes of the 'new kinds of misreadings' to which Shaftesbury's work became available in the decades after its publication.² That

¹ Robert Markley, 'Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne and the Theatrics of Virtue' in Felicity Nussbaum & Laura Brown eds., *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 213. A more general discussion of the discursive structures in which debates about religion, politics and the arts were conducted in the seventeenth century has been provided by Michael McKeon. See his 'The Politics of Discourse and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England', in Kevin Sharpe & John D. Zwicker eds., *The Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, (University of California Press, 1987), pp. 36-51.

² Markley, 'Sentimentality as Performance', p. 218.

a misreading, intentional or otherwise, provides a means of appropriating Shaftesburian ideas into the conduct and opinions of the middle classes is not perhaps the whole story. The processes of cultural transmission which in the eighteenth century moved the debate on virtue further from the terrain of religion and into the polite, worldly existence of the middle-classes was as tortuous as it was profound. For although Shaftesbury, as I explore below, employed the beautiful as a sign of order within an idealised state, the writers who followed him were to deploy a notion of the beautiful as a way of representing a harmonious and polite sociability.¹ This shift from a political to a social use of the Beautiful can be more profitably thought of as a shift from politics to cultural politics. It is this change upon which I will focus throughout the thesis.

It will be important for me to be able to refine and reformulate my argument as it progresses; however, much will be gained for the cause of clarity if I broadly outline the premises of my argument now, and then go on to rework it later. I want to argue that the accounts of taste, and of beauty in particular, which were reworked in the mid-eighteenth century are remarkable for the ways in which they seek to provide - often within the form and repertoire of existing critical models, of which civic humanism is the most pressing instance - an explanation of taste which was an appropriate discourse for describing the more consciously private and domesticated lives of the middle-classes. This is a move from philosophical representations of the order of the state to a means of representing the feelings and interactions of a middle-class and commercial culture.

¹ For an example of the newly social debate on virtue and beauty see Anon., *A Discourse Concerning the Propriety of Manners, Taste and Beauty, Being an Introduction to a work hereafter published intituled Moral Beauty and Deformity, exemplified and contrasted in two living characters*, (London: no publisher credited, 1751).

Once realigned in this manner, the discourse which defines beauty become specifically committed to the emerging bourgeois taste of the 1740s and 50s.¹ There was, however no new dawn breaking in 1740, no wholesale or irrecoverable transformation. Rather there was throughout the eighteenth century an attempt to redefine what constituted good or false taste, in a discourse which borrows from, and yet at other times contradicts, older and more authoritative texts.

If older aristocratic forms of taste were forced to compete with those of the middling classes then, the objects which were considered were also subjected to this new appraisal. It is I should imagine obvious that one of the more commonplace uses of the word 'Beauty' in the eighteenth century was to signify visual appearance. The word denotes, within the variously hierarchical schemes within which it exists, a sense of whether, and how, a particular object or person gratifies the viewer. The term is, however (and this is crucial to the vast majority of eighteenth-century uses of it), connotative of 'appearance' in a more specific and social sense. As a form of evaluation it was most frequently applied to women, who found their arrival in public described with reference to their beauty regardless of whether the writer sought to give praise, or to offer condemnation. However, before I can begin to expand on the nature and extent of my concerns, I need to ground them in a more specific consideration of their relation to eighteenth-century society. While the argument will necessarily become more complicated as it is extended, I do not want to lose sight of this central conjunction

¹ An appraisal of this change in terms of the criticism of the Fine Arts has been made by Stephen Copley. See his 'The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture' in John Barrell ed., *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 13-37.

between eighteenth-century accounts of taste and the account of woman's social presence.

A Term of Vague and Extensive Meaning: Beauty and Social Discourse.

Throughout the eighteenth century, to enter into a debate upon the nature of Beauty was as I have mentioned to do more than to signal participation in a process of aesthetic approval. For though the grounds upon which such a discussion were, as we shall see, hotly contested, the discourses describing Beauty remained available to, and formative of, argument across a much more capacious field. This range of address is vital, for it distinguishes the discourses of early commercial modernity from our own late-capitalist postmodernity, but also indicates that the process of ideology which, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, separated the 'aesthetic' from the 'social' are not yet fully in place.¹ It is therefore necessary to be clear about what constituted eighteenth-century conceptions of Beauty, and how the various theorizations of the beautiful participated - as twentieth-century aesthetics do not - in the social and cultural fabric of the period.² At the most basic level, to discern a thing of beauty remained, throughout the century, a process of registration and approval. To be tasteful entailed noting and defining the worth of any one of a number of objects. However, the beauty

¹ For an account of this process of separation see Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 29-32 and Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 13-30. Eagleton's account may be profitably contrasted with his assessment of Postmodernity in, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism' in *Against the Grain: Selected Essays*, (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 131-48.

² Jerome Stolnitz in particular bemoans Beauty's fall from cultural significance. See his "'Beauty": Some Stages in the History of an Idea' in *Journal of History of Ideas*, vol. 22, no. 2 (April/June, 1962), pp. 185-204.

of the perceived object could take the form of a series of apparently diverse entities, including, for example, the harmony of a well-proportioned figure; an estate laid out in the latest style; the usefulness of a tool, or the calculable pleasure of a worthily performed. These images provide snapshots, perhaps merely the marginal details, of the project I hope to define and explore. They are expressions alongside which may be placed the harsher analytic terms of fitness, utility, and uniformity, as appellations or as signs of what within the broad compass of eighteenth-century philosophical criticism was termed beautiful. These phrases fail, however, to register the ambiguities and frustrations which defining and monitoring the Beautiful involved throughout the period. A more persuasive list would have to address not only the relation of beauty to virtue, but the supposed sensibility of the observer and the known pleasures of appreciation and ownership. These latter revisions will serve to reintegrate the profoundly ethical nature of most eighteenth-century accounts of the beautiful.

To see an account of the beautiful as offering the means of an approbation that is only concerned with the isolation of particular forms in the world of art and letters, would be to misunderstand and to misrepresent the nature of the project at hand. During the eighteenth century the discussion of beauty did not belong in the closed and specific branch of philosophy known since the nineteenth century as aesthetics, but in a much more capacious field; that of Taste, a inquiry which sought to account for art, morality and the natural world. Importantly, the term 'aesthetic' does not appear in eighteenth-century discussions of the beautiful, and neither does its sense of an appropriately

separable form of inquiry.¹ For although the category of the aesthetic can refer to an account of particular pleasures and sensations, it addresses that issue in terms of why particular forms and objects are appreciated, whereas an account of taste, especially in its eighteenth-century usage, seeks to provide an account of 'correct taste' and to discriminate against that which is false.² It is not a question of defining what is 'correct' in the literal sense of veracity or accuracy in the delineation of the causes of sensation, but of finding and defining what is the right thing to say, to look for, to feel, and perhaps most tellingly, to own. Taste is principally a moral issue. The point is evidenced by John Gilbert Cooper's rejection - his distaste - for the environs of London in the mid-1750s:

I am sick...of the splendid Impertinence, the unmeaning Glitter, the tasteless Profusion and monstrous Enormities, which I have lately seen in a Summer's

¹ The 1961 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers two broad definitions of the term 'aesthetic'. First, Taste considered as a science or philosophy. Although this usage originates with Baumgarten in the period 1750-58, it is not found in common English usage until the 1830s. Secondly, as a science treating of sensuous perception. This is the more etymologically accurate definition, and was being used and defended as such by Kant in the 1780s, entering English around 1800. It is this second definition which provides the *OED*'s sole recorded use of the word in the eighteenth-century (and this from 1798), when a W. Taylor, writing in the *Monthly Review* (vol. XXV, p. 585), refers to the 'aesthetic', only to disparage it as part of the 'dialect peculiar to professor Kant'. See also Howard Caygill, *The Art of Judgement*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 38.

² Among the studies which have focused on a strictly 'aesthetic' approach to the beautiful W.J. Hipple's *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Art Theory*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957) remains the most comprehensive and the most persuasive of in its general concerns. See also W.J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises in Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New York: HarperTorch Books, 1961), and Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIIIth Century England*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960).

Ramble to some of the Villas in the Neighbourhood of our Metropolis.¹

Cooper has in mind (and we can assume his readers did as well) particular houses and developments, probably those at Twickenham and Richmond to which wealthy merchants were retreating in droves by the mid-century. It is not only the probable novelty of these habitations which causes Cooper so much disquiet, but the fact that the 'tasteless Profusion' they embody can be taken as representative of impending moral collapse and artistic atrophy viewed in explicitly historical terms:

Now, History informs us, that in all Empires a similar depravity of Taste for Arts and Sciences and natural Beauty, has ever attended a national Corruption of Morals.²

On these terms the new wealth of the merchant classes unfettered by either classical schooling or stoic restraint causes a visible weakening of the national fabric. Clearly a moral and political issue, the discussion of taste necessarily becomes responsive to, if not actually structured upon, the dynamics of class culture and the politics of gender, especially when presented in the quasi-patrician discourse offered by Cooper.

The various social groupings of eighteenth-century polite society - from the well-heeled country sets comprising the nobility, gentry and squirearchy through to the city crowd of merchants, bankers and shop-keepers - each sought a mode of address which would give sanction and credence to the propriety of its property. The result was an ambiguous oscillation of terms and meanings, and a high degree of diversity of application. Therefore, while it is possible within the analysis of a particular species of

¹ John Gilbert Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1755), p. 61.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 82.

beauty, say, that of equipage, to isolate particular qualities which form the basis of approbation, this is not what I wish to discuss. Such a level of debate concerned with axles, wheels and their bearings, while perhaps offering a pleasing side-exhibit in the history of carriage making and its excellences reveals little about the notion of beauty employed by political and social thinkers, or why it might be so vigorously contested within the periodical presses. This is because, above all else, the beautiful raises the question, not of particular taste, for this phaeton or that, but of general taste. Taste once it is figured as a claim to a discernment which rises beyond immediate use or gratification could grant its user, if successful, a prestige and licence in other areas of social life; most notably political and cultural debate. The question of taste becomes therefore a means of distinction. This is the reason why there is such a frenzied debate upon the meaning of these terms, and how it came to be recruited into the social discourse from which Cooper speaks.

With so many different constituencies attempting to define what the words 'Taste' and 'Beauty' encapsulated, and how they were to be defined, it is not surprising that the situation grew as confused as it did by the middle decades of the century. One writer was to claim, 'of all our favourite Words lately, none has been more in Vogue, nor so long held its Esteem, as that of TASTE'.¹ The comment captures something of the uncertainty of the debate, as it refers to both to the changing nature of fashion, and to the more certain qualities which have held the debate 'so long' in public view. Most thinkers in the period engaged to write something on the nature of Taste or Beauty,

¹ [Henry Baker], *The Universal Spectator. By Henry Stonecastle*, 4 vols, (London: A. Ward, J. Clarke et al., 1747), vol. III, pp. 46-47.

often aiming to 'fix' or to 'ascertain' the 'true' standard of taste in the process. I am most interested in those who looked on the issue as a social one, and looked for cultural causes of appreciation and difference of opinion. David Hume, for example, in his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', aims to explore the diversity of opinion in this matter - its 'great inconsistency and contrariety' - and to provide at least some measure of regulation.¹ His opening remarks are significant for the way in which they highlight the predicament of Beauty as a discursive counter:

The sentiments of men often differ with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds, even while their general discourse is the same. There are certain terms in every language, which impart blame, and others praise; and all men, who use the same tongue, must agree in the application of them. Every voice is raised in applauding elegance, propriety, simplicity, spirit in writing; and in blaming fustian, affectation and false brilliancy: But when critics come to particulars, this seeming unanimity vanishes, and it is found, that they have affixed a very different meaning to their expression.²

Dr. Johnson was of much the same mind, observing that, 'the idea of beauty is vague and undefined, different in different minds, and diversified by time or place'.³ Cooper remained less charitable, writing of the 'poor prostituted word TASTE', and representing the word as a term used without discrimination to sanctify every passing fancy, or current whim.⁴ For Cooper true taste must ever be in conflict with what is merely the 'motley production of modern refinement'. His drive to clarify what constituted taste,

¹ David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste' in *Essays, Moral, Literary and Political*, (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), pp. 226-249.

² Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', p. 227.

³ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, no. 92 (2nd February, 1751), in *The Rambler*, ed. W.J. Bate & Albrecht B. Strauss in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 14 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. IV, p. 121.

⁴ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 62.

however, ultimately lead to precisely the forms of instability which he sought to remove.¹

Burke writes more specifically, and compares the misuse of the word 'sublime' to the ways in which 'beauty' is employed, claiming that: 'the abuse of the word *Beauty*, has been still more general, and attended with still worse consequences'.² Accordingly Burke writes with the aim of fixing and setting what is truly beautiful. It is however a near impossible task. Unlike the sublime, the beautiful is not confined to a given nomenclature or range of experiences. It was possible in the eighteenth century to agree that the sublime was manifested in a certain greatness, or obscurity. This is not so in the case of beauty, as the properties to which it can refer are innumerable and extremely mutable. Writing half a century after Burke, Richard Payne Knight is able to give a clear picture of the problem:

The word Beauty is a general term of approbation, of the most vague and extensive meaning, applied indiscriminately to almost everything that is pleasing, either to the sense, the imagination, or the understanding; whatever the nature of it be, whether a material substance, a moral excellence, or an intellectual theorem. We do not, indeed, so often speak of beautiful smells, or flavours, as beautiful forms, colours, and sounds; but, nevertheless, we apply the epithet to a problem, a syllogism, or a period, as familiarly, and (as far as we can judge from authority) as correctly as to a rose, a landscape, or a woman. We speak also, and, I believe, with equal propriety, not only of the beauties of symmetry and arrangement, but of those of virtue, charity, holiness &c. The illustrious author, indeed, of the *Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, chooses to consider such expressions as improper, and to

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 62, 10-11, 26-28. I provide a fuller reading of Cooper's position in chapter one, below.

² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J.T. Boulton, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 1.

confine beauty to sensible qualities of things.¹

Burke wanted, as Payne Knight suggests, to exclude several forms of beauty, and to tie the term to a much narrower range of signification. In this endeavour Burke largely failed. Knight thought that this was inevitable; it is impossible, he writes, to change the meaning of words, to make them more precise, and yet still be understood. The problem is not merely one of language, however. Frances Fergusson comments that, 'the beautiful continually needs watching, because it can never be purified enough - for the very reason that it is allied with society'.² Fergusson is writing here about Kant, but the remark also makes sense in relation to Burke. Burke's desire to define conclusively that which please was therefore frustrated by the project itself. Too much was engaging, a fact which, as Neil Hertz suggests, left Beauty as a kind of wish-fulfilment, a hoped for end to signification.³

What Knight's appraisal of Burke's predicament suggests is that by the middle of the century, the word 'Beauty' had itself become an over-abundant commodity. As a result its meaning in any given context was ambiguous. I can borrow a description of a similarly uncertain moment - Raymond Williams's description of the 'languages' of post-war Cambridge - to make clear my point, and my sense of its importance:

¹ Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principals of Taste*, (London: T. Payne and J. White, 1805), p. 9.

² Frances Fergusson, 'Legislating the Sublime', in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 142.

³ Neil Hertz, 'The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime' in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 62-85.

What is...happening through these cultural encounters, which may be very conscious or may be felt only as a certain strangeness or unease, is a process quite central to the development of a language when, in certain words, tones and rhythms, meanings are offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed. In some situations this is a very slow process indeed; it needs the passage of centuries to show itself actively, by results, at anything like its full weight. In other situations the process can be rapid, especially in certain key areas.¹

It is my contention of course, here, and throughout this study, that the mid-eighteenth century preoccupation with the beautiful is one such rapidly moving 'key area'. As so much of Williams's work demonstrated, the 'development of a language' constitutes one of the foremost processes of cultural evolution. For Williams language and culture exist in a productive relation to one another, and he writes that: 'a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world'.² It is important to Williams's account of these fraught linguistic encounters that 'no single group is "wrong" by any linguistic criterion, though a temporally dominant group may try to enforce its own uses as "correct"'.³ This is an important distinction for my work, as I am little concerned with the philosophical accuracy of any of the texts upon which I have written. The disregard is neither cavalier, nor casually made. I am not interested in how beauty is caused or apprehended, but what claims can be made for that discernment. I want to focus instead on the instabilities and ambiguities of competing

¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, (London: Fontana Press, 1983), pp. 11-12.

² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 21. For a more extensive elaboration of this theme, see *Keywords*, pp. 11-26. Of more direct relevance to eighteenth-century studies are *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), especially pp. 13-19, and *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), especially, pp. 60-141.

³ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 11.

modes of social address, viewed in terms of their gendered implications and class defining powers, regardless of their philosophic accuracy.

This distinction is important because from a strictly philosophical perspective it is often difficult to find a single coherent or even consistent argument in the vast majority of the texts which describe taste in the mid-century. This is something of which participants in these debates were aware, in Burke's fine and accurate assessment:

We find people in their disputes continually appealing to certain texts and standards which are allowed on all sides, and are supposed to be established in our common nature. But there is not the same obvious concurrence in any uniform or settled principals which relate to taste.¹

Burke's comment seems to me characteristic of so much of the writing on taste in the mid-century. Uncertain in its address, and perhaps of the terms of the argument, Burke's *Enquiry* attempts to clarify the nature of taste. But as Burke concedes, 'the term Taste, like all other figurative terms, is not extremely accurate...and it is therefore liable to uncertainty and confusion'.² It is a mood captured by the *Connoisseur* in a vitriolic article, first published in May 1756, a little under a year before Burke's *Enquiry* was first offered to the public:

Taste is at present the darling idol of the polite world and the world of letters; and, indeed, seems to be considered as the quintessence of almost all the arts and sciences. The fine ladies and gentlemen dress with Taste; the architects, whether *Gothic* or *Chinese*, build with Taste; the painters paint with Taste; critics read with Taste; and in short, fiddlers, players, singers, dancers and mechanics themselves are all the sons and daughters of Taste. Yet in this amazing superabundancy of Taste, few can say what it really

¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 11.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 12.

signifies.¹

The term taste attains on this reading an unpleasant, near useless ubiquity, so that it does not really signify anything very much. For the *Connoisseur*, taste is being appropriated by those who have no legitimate claim upon it; the fashionable, the foreign and the mechanic. Its superabundancy signifies not its triumph, but is exhaustion. There is much here in common with Cooper's condemnation of the villas by the Thames, as both texts desire a delimitation both of modern wealth and new consumption in ways which mirror Burke's concern with words.

That taste should generate such furious polemics indicates the tremendous importance of the term during this period.² I do not want to argue that a reference to beauty, or to taste more generally, invades every sphere of activity, however appealing this may be. Instead I shall focus on the eighteenth-century discussion of the beautiful in a way which highlights its participation, as a keyword, within a wide variety of apparently divergent or merely coincidental areas. I want to explore how it is possible in the eighteenth century to use claims made about the nature and status of the beautiful, to move from an account of the appeal of a given object - often quite easily and intentionally, on other occasions by an unintended process of slippage - to a less bounded, more socially and morally active form of address. This can take the form, as it does for Lord Shaftesbury, of a simultaneous selection and appeal to those capable of

¹ George Coleman, et al., *The Connoisseur*, no. CXX (May 13th, 1756) in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town*, 4 vols, 4th edn., (London: R. Baldwin, 1761), vol. IV p. 121.

² For a fuller account of these debates see, Robert Donald Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion during the Seven Years' War*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 241-311.

apprehending beauty (alongside order and proportion) and a call to the performance of civic virtue. At other times and on different occasions the claim made may be more properly thought of as concerning a less obviously austere, masculine public, and more directed towards a sociable and polite environment in which both sexes are present. As a result Beauty can have a different signification, a difference which is dependent on not only the object to which the reference is made, but, perhaps more importantly, to the status of the speaker making the assessment in relation to his, and less frequently to her, audience.

To analyze the disparity and conflict generated by the Beautiful requires a conceptual framework which will allow for the confusions and collisions of competing modes of address, often occurring within the same text. In order to accomplish this I will employ the tool of discursive analysis. Given the prominence of the 'discourse' within my account, and the confusion which may attend its application to what is an obviously less than unified field, it is necessary to say something about how I will be employing the term. A discourse can be thought of a series of presuppositions or preoccupations, which in addressing a particular object form a recognizably distinct set of tropes and modes with a productive and dialectical relationship to the object they purport merely to describe. Stephen Copley has argued that a discourse will define, manipulate and organise its own object fields so as to select:

the subject it will treat in distinctive ways, formulating and giving prominence to particular problems effectively excluding others from consideration. In so doing each develops a characteristic vocabulary, establishes a particular order of priorities in its discussion and implies

particular valuations of the subjects it has defined.¹

There can as a result be more than one discourse on any given topic - Beauty for example, generates several - each providing a different, potentially hostile or perhaps sympathetic version of the issue at hand. A discourse within this rendering of the problem suggests the production of a distinctive view, or views, about a given idea, text or society.

It is important given the productive nature of discourses that they are not seen as stable objects; they mutate and change, often at great speed (though the process can also be slow). As John Barrell suggests, a discourse:

is a mode of thinking or writing which may co-exist, whether comfortably or in conflict with other discourses within the same texts; and it is not a static object, but may be modified by the contexts in which it is discovered, and may modify its vocabulary and its objects to some degree.

Too great a level of change, however, may lead us to 'choose to decide that a new discourse can be identified as having emerged from the matrix of the old'.² In the case of beauty this will be an almost constant refrain: writers such as Burke and Cooper often embark upon one project framed within a particular discourse, but, for reasons which may be theoretical or historic, they elect or are compelled to form a different mode of argument, or to mix accounts, so that another discourse is initiated.

As my quotation from Hume, Williams and Burke has indicated, such changes happen frequently - and noticeably - in this 'key area' of eighteenth-century debate. As

¹ Stephen Copley, 'Introduction' to Stephen Copley ed., *Literature and the Social Order*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 2.

² John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 8-9.

a result there is not one discourse on beauty, but several - a fact which produces the superabundance and promiscuity of which Cooper and the *Connoisseur* complain. Each discourse refers to different kinds of objects - this may be the beauty of landscape, Homer, women or virtue - and present those judgements in distinctive ways, which are reliant on different criteria and particular notions of approval. It is important therefore to produce a model which will deal effectively with the level of conflict, hesitation and interrelation which any complex discursive situation necessarily produces. Peter de Bolla describes such a situation when he writes that:

at any specific historical juncture a discursive network articulates the real, it allows and controls the possibilities for representation. This network is made up of a number of discrete discourses which interact sometimes without hostility, at other times with considerable violence. The distances and line of force between specific discourses vary to a great extent, so that a particular discourse present to a specific discursive network may have almost insignificant connections to all the other discourses within the network.¹

Different discourses are therefore present at any one cultural moment, and how they relate to each other is variable - the discourses which describe beauty in the fine arts may or may not have cause to refer to an appraisal, say, of women, or poetry - consequently, there is a considerable 'difficulty in describing the precise distances or connections discrete discourses have to one another'.² What I find attractive in this model of the network, despite its complexity, is its capacity to accommodate not only a diversity of discourses, but a difference of reading and function. With the interconnections of discourses conceived as an open-ended 'network', de Bolla's analysis

¹ Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 7.

² de Bolla, *Discourse of the Sublime*, p. 8.

allows for different points of access and assessment within the same framework of discourses and texts.¹ This enables an effective consideration of diverse reading positions: aristocrat and merchant, male and female. This is precisely the challenge made by eighteenth-century constructions of the Beautiful. The Beautiful is a phenomenon which intersects with new kinds of subjectivity and of distinction, which emerge in a context to a large degree governed by the old, and which emerge from within the already existing framework. I cannot, however, make this process of transition and translation apparent without describing the nature and power of civic discourse, and it is to this that I now turn.

The Re-Education of Hercules: from Civitas to Civility.

To a large degree, the uncertainties attending any description of the Beautiful arose because of the way in which discussions of Beauty were located within texts which argued for profoundly ethical positions. One such discourse was the republicanism articulated by the Earl of Shaftesbury, and later, on slightly different terms, by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Both Shaftesbury and Reynolds employ a theory of the beautiful, not merely as a way of making claims about art, though this is important, but as a way of forming arguments about morality and politics as well as the conduct of public and social life. For Shaftesbury the proper order of society, and indeed the universe, could be visualised by reference to the Beautiful. Furthermore, a sense of that Beauty would encourage the subject both to seek and to preserve that order, thereby maintaining the political and social status quo. It is to this ideal that Shaftesbury refers when he writes

¹ de Bolla, *Discourse of the Sublime*, pp. 10-11.

that:

the admiration and love of order, harmony and proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affections, and highly assistant to virtue, which is itself no other than the love of order and beauty....if the order of the world appears just and beautiful, the admiration and esteem of order must run higher, and the elegant passion or love of beauty, which is so advantageous to virtue must be improved by its exercise in so noble and magnificent a subject.¹

Shaftesbury's sense of what is entailed by 'beauty' and 'virtue' was distinctive, and was to have repercussions throughout the eighteenth century. Put rather too simply: it was possible in the eighteenth century from the publication of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men* in 1711 through almost to the 1830s to use the beautiful to signal a particular kind of affiliation. This was an affiliation which sought to establish a distance from the individual concerns of private life, and perhaps more importantly from the sordid preoccupations of commercial practice, and as such it claimed a position distinguished by its capacity for universal rather than partial interest. This is a claim that Shaftesbury underlines when he writes that:

Even in the Arts, which are mere imitations of...outward grace and beauty, we not only confess a taste but make it part of refined breeding to discover amidst the many false manners and ill style the true and natural one, which represents the real beauty.²

Spoken of in these terms appreciation of the Beautiful provided an analogy with entrance into the more ideal world of the *polis*, and the realisation of true citizenship. Without this discrimination, the ability to grasp the universal, it is impossible to 'represent merit and virtue, or mark deformity and blemish', whether in the political

¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times etc.*, 2 vols, ed. with intro. by John M. Robertson, (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), vol. I, p. 279.

² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, p. 217.

realm of the citizen or in the appreciation of the connoisseur.

As the relationship of the Beautiful to that which is virtuous is important for Shaftesbury, it is important to be clear about how he is defining virtue:

to deserve the name of good and virtuous, a creature must have all his inclinations and affections, his disposition of mind and temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind, or of that system in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a part. To stand thus well affected, to have one's affections right and entire, not only in respect of oneself but of society and the public, this is rectitude, integrity or virtue. And to be wanting in any of these, or to have their contraries, is depravity, corruption and vice.¹

It was an ability, in short, to rise above particular concerns or personal interests. All personal gratification is deferred, even denied. Public identity, the allegiance to the universal good, becomes as a result an existence beyond the self. Shaftesbury makes public, or 'social', virtues paramount, but restricts the capacity for their observance to men of his own social position.² Within such a group Shaftesbury believed that it was possible to instill the kind of lesson which would ensure that liberty was preserved and corruption thwarted. It was a lesson he had learned from reading ancient histories. Of the early Greek and Roman citizens he wrote:

By such an early discipline they were fitted for the command of others; to maintain their country's honour in war, rule wisely in the State, and fight against luxury and corruption in times of peace and prosperity.³

According to Shaftesbury, it was with this stern self-regulation, and guided by the

¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, p. 280. The most detailed examination of this theme in Shaftesbury's work has been provided by John Andrew Bernstein. See his 'Shaftesbury's Identification of the Good with the Beautiful' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Spring, 1977), pp. 304-25.

² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, pp. 293-300.

³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, p. 82.

pursuit of beauty and virtue, that the ancient republics maintained their freedom and their dignity.

We have come to describe this form of republicanism as 'civic humanist', and it is in reference to this conception of politics that much of the recent criticism of the politics of taste in eighteenth-century England has been conducted.¹ The term owes its origin to the discipline of intellectual history, and most prominently to the work of J.G.A. Pocock.² In this context it is used to describe the resurgence of the idea that political life was to be organised around the classical ideal of the citizen's allegiance to, and participation in, a free and secular state. In English thought this revival is most marked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and is most illuminated by considering the careers and opinions of Harrington and Bolingbroke before the discourse's sentimental revision by Burke.³ A convenient summary of this version of republican ideology has been provided by Pocock himself:

Since the rival of the ideal of active citizenship by Florentine civic humanists, there had been a gathering reemphasis on the ancient belief that the fulfilment of man's life was to be found in political association, coupled with an increasing awareness of the historical fragility of the political forms in which this fulfilment must be sought. *Virtue* could only be found in a *republic* of equal, active, and independent citizens, and it was a term applied both to the relations between these citizens and to the healthful condition of

¹ Foremost in this approach has been the work of John Barrell. See his *Political Theory of Painting*, esp. pp. 1-68.

² See in particular his *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 361-505. His discussion of Burke is also to be found in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays in Political Thought and History*, (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 202-232. See also Isaac Krammnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

the personality of each one of them; but the republic was peculiarly exposed to *corruption* - a state of affairs often identified with the dependence of citizens upon the powerful, instead of upon the public authority - and the corruption of the republic must entail the corruption of the individual personality, which could only flourish when the republic was healthy.¹

In eighteenth-century England the ability to be a citizen was thought to rely on the practices and principles of patrician landownership. In what is arguably one of the most blatant fulfilments of Marx's dictum, that 'the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships' the ownership of land was not thought of as ownership at all.² Or if it was, it was not the possession of anything as vulgar as a commodity, but rather the possession of a permanent fixed interest in the state, held in trust for succeeding generations. So conceived, owners of land were thought to lack the kinds of particular or divisive economic interests which debarred the East India merchant from the exercise of citizenship fully as much as the cobbler and the tallow-chandler.

With these preoccupations in place it is not surprising that theories of representation, which included or were centred on the arts have focused so strongly on those 'conceived of by the discourse of civic humanism as a ruling class'.³ The most comprehensive account of this political position in terms of a theorisation of the Arts

¹ J.G.A. Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian' in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall*, ed. G.W. Bowerstock and John Clive, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 103-104.

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Student's edn., ed. C.J. Arthur, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 64.

³ John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 63.

was provided by Shaftesbury himself. In strict adherence to the civic humanist doctrine of a free citizen capable and willing to exercise their virtue as much as their discrimination, the triumph of the arts described by Shaftesbury is a vision of a free polity:

Everything co-operates, in such a State, towards the improvement of art and science. And for the designing arts in particular, such as architecture, painting and statuary, they are in a manner linked together. The Taste of one kind brings necessarily that of the others along with it. When the free spirit of a nation turns itself this way, judgements are formed; critics arise; the public eye and ear improve; a right taste prevails, and in a manner forces its way.¹

In such an environment all art becomes good, and a 'right taste' unmarked by fashion or caprice reigns supreme. Beauty is conventionally thought of as existing in such a state, as it is only such an environment that it can be free from luxury and despotism. That Shaftesbury is locating his account of the arts within a conception of the state indicates something of the nature of his civic humanist politics.² Civic humanism, as Pocock makes plain, laid great stress on the integrity of political office as the guarantor of liberty.³ The fear of corruption, suspicion of singularity were offered alongside calls for disinterested virtue and public spiritedness as the basis of the civic description of the social. To read Shaftesbury's remarks on painting and on the arts in general is to discover that language transposed into an account of taste, such that the 'public eye and

¹ Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, pp. 22-23.

² For an account of Shaftesbury's politics relative to his views on art see Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, pp. 3-13. A more explicit marxist engagement with Shaftesbury has been made by Terry Eagleton, see his *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 34-38.

³ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 40-41.

ear' comes to expect and to judge only that which is free from the taint of particular customs and affectations. Painting, argued Shaftesbury, can only exist in a free polity; the point being that England should be made one, and if it could not then it was necessary to imagine that it could.¹

This was to remain the prevailing fantasy of English theorists and proponents of art for the next century and a half. Reynolds certainly endorses it, while Mark Akenside, one of Shaftesbury's earliest adherents, describes the process of rejuvenation of the arts thus:

Arm'd with a lyre, already have we dared
To pierce divine Philosophy's retreat's
And teach the Muse her lore; already strove
Their long-divided honours to unite,
While tempering this deep argument we sang
Of Truth and Beauty. Now the same fair task
Impends; now urging our ambitious toil,
We hasten to recount the various springs
Of adventitious pleasure, which adjoin
Their grateful influence to the prime effect
Of objects grand or beautiful, and indulge
The complicated joy.²

The 'complicated joy' is that of taste as it returns to an England finally accepting the trappings of true greatness. The image refers at once to the refinement of all judgement and to the reunification of truth and beauty in the form of the reconnection of 'Philosophy' and 'Imagination'. However, Akenside takes the debate beyond the ground upon which Shaftesbury was prepared to travel. Continuing his celebration of the return of true taste Akenside writes of art's rejuvenation in terms of the pleasure given to the

¹ Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, pp. 60-61.

² Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, (London: R. Dodsley, 1744), Bk II, ll. 62-73.

faculty of the 'Fancy', making it much more sensuous than does his predecessor:

... The Sweets of sense,
Do they not oft with kind accession flow,
To raise harmonious Fancy's native charm?¹

That Akenside is moving the debate along, elaborating and changing what he takes from Shaftesbury, will be important in later chapters; here, though, I want to stress that Akenside, like Shaftesbury, is engaged in a project in which the Beautiful is closely related to the political as a representation of the political order and public obligation.² Indeed his confidence that the arts will improve is based on the precisely civic hope of a return to 'public Liberty'.³

It will be clear from my argument so far that I have only begun to describe why it was that the beautiful attained the prominence and the currency it did in the eighteenth century. I have said nothing as yet about how it could become the source of conflict and contestation comparable to that described so vividly by Williams. In many respects what I wish to concentrate on is the very moment of 'historical fragility' of which Pocock has spoken, or rather the processes both of revision and retrenchment which constitute the signs of that weakness within the sphere of public activity. There is a problem structurally inherent within the kind of argument propounded by Shaftesbury. While Shaftesbury, and immediate followers like Akenside, may aver that 'the order of the world appears just and beautiful', he can say nothing of what this order might be, or

¹ Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, Bk. II, ll. 67-9.

² See, for example, the representation of Beauty as an abstract (though physically perceived) manifestation of truth and order, and as an inspiration to good deeds in Book I of the *Pleasures of the Imagination*, see especially, ll. 372-75, 418-21, 474-80.

³ Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, See the 'Argument' to Book II.

what form it might take. It is suspended, with a circumlocution typical of Shaftesbury, as a kind of general category - 'order, harmony and proportion' - and a generalised mode of reception, 'the elegant passion or love of Beauty'. What 'Beauty' might entail, and who and what may possess it, is left unstated, for to state it would be to render it visible, and hence to vulgarize it. This is the problem which besets civic accounts of the beautiful throughout the eighteenth century, for in order to be represented it must take a particular form, once embodied it necessarily loses much of the generality which originally gave it moral and rhetorical force.

The source of this conflict lay in the very founding exclusions of civic humanism itself: in the forms of particularity it could not and would not tolerate. Particular tastes were to be the major source of problems for civic theorists. Principally there were two forms of 'bad' particularity which could corrupt the civic virtuosi: the quest for commodities, or the consumption of particular goods and services; and the desire for (and ultimately the desires of) women. Shaftesbury writes on the latter issue - as does his follower Joseph Spence - counselling an avoidance of the corrupting charms of individual beauties, and their luxuriance.¹ Accordingly the texts on taste favoured by patricians like Shaftesbury were formed in a visibly homosocial environment wedded to the ideal of aristocratic male independence. However, women remained, as participants of refined society, the most readily available example of beauty, and sign of the instant gratification which attended its comprehension.²

The pressing problem of commodities - the luxuries Shaftesbury chooses to call

¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, pp. 116-18, see also pp. 178, 213-14.

² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol I, p. 93.

'Lady fancies' - became an increasingly intractable issue for civic theory from the 1720s onwards. The exclusion of commercial interest, so central to civic humanism, became ever more difficult as the century progressed. The claims which could be made against, or on behalf of, commerce was decisive in all these debates, largely because of the questions trade provoked about the practice of virtue and formation of political (or public) personality. From the civic perspective the growth of commerce made for a new depravity; in 1744 Akenside described English 'Taste' as shrouded in a 'Gothic Night' of ignorance and interest.¹ While commerce polished and improved, it also assaulted and softened the basis of republican personality. As Pocock writes:

the growth of refinement was the corruption of personality....In a commercial society, men became more refined, more enlightened, and more specialised - women aiding them in this to the limits of the capacity that social theory assigned them - but they moved away from the single-minded devotion to the city which characterised the warrior, the citizen, the patriot.²

Pocock argues that the expansion of commerce in the eighteenth century forced contemporary thinkers to redefine personality; no longer could the participatory virtues of civic humanism, with its strident requirements for public and military life, operate in a society divided along conflicting lines of private interest. The response was the discourse of civility, a language and a code of social practice which did not demand the martial and manly skills of the seventeenth century, but which sought instead a polite public culture; a society at once tasteful and polite, yet adapted to the business of making money. It is in the space of such refinement, and within the campaigns for the reformation of manners, that, the majority of texts I shall be discussing can be most

¹ Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, Bk II, l. 6.

² Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume', p. 105.

profitably situated. In such an environment masculinity and femininity were to change their meaning. As both sexes sought the company and conversation of the other in the increasingly heterosocial world of the market and the assembly room it became necessary to redefine the roles of each sex. In order to bring the sexes together men shed, or were at least expected to, their more violent and boorish tastes, while women were increasingly required to display an engaging fineness of feeling.¹

New Spaces: Public and Private

It is with these problems in mind that a greater consideration has been given recently to the complexities of the relation between the public or private spheres and class, or class aspiration. Concluding his important essay on the 'Dangerous Goddess' John Barrell writes that:

The prestige of a male ruling class, it is claimed by the civic discourse on the fine arts, has to be earned by that act of renunciation; but the prestige of the middle class critic and connoisseur comes to be earned in a more comprehensive fashion. It is won by a public *display* of renunciation, which by granting a legitimacy to an interest in the aesthetic gives a licence to what it appears to have renounced.²

Barrell is describing the process by which a sexualized aesthetic pleasure is made acceptable by an act of stoic self-denial. The most pressing question in this context concerns precisely what constitutes the public sphere in which this act of disavowal is to take place. Those like the Earl of Shaftesbury, who employed a civic humanist

¹ For a discussion of this process see Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1986) and G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

² Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*, p. 87.

vocabulary had, by and large, a narrow though sophisticated notion of what the public entails; the space of political office and of magisterial, parliamentary and military responsibilities. Defined by public participation, its predominant mode of address is that of rhetoric, both moral and political. The opposition of this space to that which is considered 'private' is therefore conventional and easily apprehended. For the private in its virtuous form must be: the practicalities of landownership, particular acts of personal generosity or mercy, and the formalities of the court and social round, as well as those areas of life which are considered intimate or merely domestic. The other form of the private, that which is illicit, would have included vices ranging from gambling and drinking to visiting prostitutes. What unites these divergent areas is that they are assumed to have no public significance, unless through their excessive or vicious pursuit they impinge on the practice of a public life.

This distinction is not compatible with the bourgeois definition of public life. Without the obligations of office to give it coherence, the idea of the public which defines middle-class virtue is less easily apprehended, and less obviously separable from private life.¹ The definition of 'Public' offered by, and to, this largely unenfranchised group must therefore be distinct from the aristocratic version if it is not to be anything

¹ I am aware that there is a problem in any attempt to posit a given, bounded notion of the middle class in the eighteenth-century. In many respects the middle classes did not gain political coherence, at least in the parliamentary sense, until animated by the major political events of the latter-half of the century. However, work by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall suggests that 'although the eighteenth-century middling groups had many affinities with the aristocracy and gentry, the basis of their property and their value systems and, not least the non-conformity of many in their ranks, set them apart', Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men, women and the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 18. See also Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 94-107, 151-71.

but an unattainable ideal. What is so marked therefore in the first half of the eighteenth century is an attempt by middle-class (and largely professional) intellectuals to reformulate the civic discourse on virtue or to promote a new account sanctioning the actions that the middle-classes could accomplish - notably industry, compassion, prudence - actions which were to be given the status of genuinely moral or social virtues. Any description of this process requires a complication of the public-private model with which I began. For in the minds of middle-class intellectuals, unwilling to accept their exclusion from cultural debate, the public could not be imagined as merely that which was defined by the political. It included much of what had been thought private. When refining his argument Barrell notes:

The public sphere is involved not in one but in two binary relationships with the private. In the binary I have so far considered the public is constructed as the *opposite* of a private sphere which is openly theorised by the discourse of civic humanism, and which defines what the citizen *should* do in his private capacity. In the second binary, there is another version of the private, constructed as the *contrary* of the public....and defines what the citizen *may* do in private, so long as he is not thereby disabled from maintaining his public character and performing his public function.¹

I have dealt thus far largely with this second definition, concentrating on the middle class culture which is defined and disavowed by republican ideology as 'effeminate' - though I have not provided Barrell's account of the techniques by which that culture is rendered privately admissible.² Importantly, Barrell's account implies only an apparent renunciation, he leaves '*display*' hanging between honest practice and deliberate disingenuousness. I would like to expand upon the hesitation, which seems to me a

¹ Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*, p. 82.

² Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*, pp. 84-87.

shrewd one. It is I will argue a mere 'display of renunciation' that characterises Francis Hutcheson, Jonathan Richardson, William Hogarth as well as, less willingly, Joshua Reynolds and John Gilbert Cooper.

In contradistinction to the political realm described by civic humanism, the notion of the public sphere described by the middle-classes, and in which they accomplish acts of self-regulation, was comprised of 'public spaces' conceived of as locations of polite assembly, commerce and leisure.¹ It was not fundamentally an arena in which gratification was expected to be denied, even if it was to be controlled and channelled. Given the importance of this second, middle-class notion of what it is to 'be public', it is necessary to consider eighteenth-century society as a culture in which there are at least two accounts of the private and two forms of the public - the civic and the sociable - in circulation at any one time. Theorists of the period frequently focus on the relationship between the two, and their ambiguous recruitment of one another; and this is particularly so in the case of Joshua Reynolds (see chapter three, below). Addison and Steele, along with Defoe, are the foremost exemplars in this initiative.² Addison in particular sought to refashion the idea of public space into a sphere appropriate for what were previously thought of as private acts. In reality the process of cultural change had begun slightly earlier in the last years of the seventeenth century with the 'rise of

¹ For an account of eighteenth-century leisure in relation to both commerce and politeness see, J.H. Plumb, 'The Commercialisation of Leisure in the Eighteenth Century' in McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society*, pp. 265-85; Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilisation: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 1-109; David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 106-156.

² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 462-67.

politeness’.

The kernel of the phenomenon was given in a simple phrase: "the art of pleasing in company". As such politeness encompassed technique, norm, and social environment: it was a set of attitudes, strategies, skills, and devices that an individual could command to gratify others and thus render himself truly sociable.¹

Lawrence Klein argues that politeness was the discursive technique through which the strategies of a commercially based social life were reconciled with the traditional claims of virtue.² As Nicholas Phillipson remarks, Addison 'set out to show anxious men and women how to reorganise their conduct by bringing their morals and manners into alignment and becoming acceptable, virtuous agents in the process'.³ As a result:

Addisonian politeness [was] presented as a mechanism for integrating the modern citizen's moral and social self and of overcoming a form of alienation which commerce brought with it.⁴

To accomplish this was indeed a 'historic achievement'.⁵ The moral programmes propounded by Addison and Steele are familiar to most scholars now working in the field of eighteenth-century studies. Found in the pages of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* they provide a convenient, and relatively coherent picture of the realignment of virtue in the first decades of the eighteenth century.

To give a slightly different picture, I want to take my example from the writings

¹ Klein, 'The Third Earl of Shaftesbury', p. 190.

² Klein, 'Third Earl of Shaftesbury', pp. 187-88.

³ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicanisation of Eighteenth-Century Scotland' in R.A. Mason ed., *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1987), p. 235.

⁴ Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicanisation'. p. 237.

⁵ Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicanisation', p. 233.

of the mid-century portrait-painter, Joseph Highmore. Highmore is an appropriate as well as a slightly novel instance of bourgeois sociability. A professional painter of the generation before Reynolds, he represents a particularly good example of the kind of subject I have in mind: civil, restrained, prudent and above all polite. His work as an artist is remarkable for the exactness and nicety with which it replicates ideas of manners suited to a commercial culture.¹ Therefore it is of no surprise that his essay, 'Of Politeness and Complaisance, as Contradistinguished' is noteworthy for the precisely bourgeois caste it places upon the nature of politeness. For Highmore politeness is a means of interacting with the world which at once allows Highmore to appear courteous and refined, and yet does not require either the possession of landed wealth or deferral of gratification for its accomplishment. It is a quality and a performance which Highmore can define with well-practised ease:

politeness may be considered as a habit of saying and doing obliging things, or an apparent endeavour to give pleasure, and to avoid giving pain; with a particular attention to the taste and inclination of all, in which the manner is as significant as the matter, and will be as visible in little circumstances as in greater.²

It was common, at least in aristocratic or traditional statements on politeness, to worry about, or to defend, the forms of social interaction it proposed against the charge that it was a mere show.³ Highmore appears unconcerned with this critique, cheerfully

¹ For an account of Highmore's practices as portrait-painters, see David Mannings, 'A Well-Mannered Portrait by Highmore' in *Connoisseur*, vol. CLXXXIX, no. 760 (June, 1975), pp. 116-19.

² Joseph Highmore, 'Of Politeness and Complaisance, as Contradistinguished' in *Essays, Moral, Religious and Miscellaneous*, 2 vols, (London: B. White, 1766), vol. II, p. 48.

³ Klein, 'Third Earl of Shaftesbury', pp. 190-92, 197-99.

allowing politeness to be an 'apparent endeavour...in which the manner is as significant as the matter'. What does concern him, however, is that politeness can over-balance into an 'indiscriminate subjection to the caprices of all'; such is the mere complaisance from which Highmore wishes true politeness to be 'Contradistinguished'. Politeness is, as he defines it, a moral good, a suitable companion virtue to personal benevolence. And yet he is cautious:

though benevolence is a most aimiable natural quality, and politeness an excellent and artificial accomplishment, of which the one is essential to a good mind, and the other to a well-bred man; and both absolutely necessary, to extend a man's influence in the world; yet he may possess and exercise both these, in all the instances wherein they can be useful, without subjecting himself to the tyranny of unlimited complaisance, which is so far from being necessarily included in these, that it often interferes with them, and sometimes unseasonably wears out an opportunity, not to be recovered.¹

On this account, complaisance is politeness and benevolence carried to an excess; it is a 'yielding up of ourselves' to all and sundry. The result is a waste of valuable time and money. Politeness, on the contrary, allows you to 'dismiss' people when your duty - and perhaps your pleasure - relies upon the avoidance of such supine attentions. Highmore argues for the importance of opposing dissipation firmly - recommending that engagements are broken if they are contrary to self-interest. For while, 'politeness in the sense here exhibited, is to be industriously cultivated'; it is not intended as a blank cheque against which others can draw time, money or even compassion. Its purpose instead is to allow for, and to enable, the exercise of a busy life within a courteous and morally respectable manner. His 'opportunities' represent specific, local departures from the pursuit of his business interests; Highmore is indeed making a 'display of

¹ Highmore, 'Of Politeness and Complaisance', pp. 46-47.

renunciation’.

This is an avowal of moderation and prudence in one’s social and charitable dealings with which Addison was broadly in accord. Though Addison praises charitable giving he notes that:

we should manage our Charity with such Prudence and Caution, that we may not hurt our own Friends or Relations, whilst we are doing good to those who are Strangers to us.¹

It is for this reason that Addison praises the exemplary Eugenius, a man whose careful management and frugality ensure that it is possible to be charitable without damaging his own fortune or position. What both Addison and Highmore accomplish is the presentation of an account in which benevolent action, polite conduct and the practices of prudent social living are reconciled with a measure of personal interest and appropriate self-regard. There is no requirement in either account to be the selfless citizen who sets aside their needs and aspirations in order to support the greater interest of the state. Accordingly the location of the discourse on virtuous sociability is different in terms of the social class for which it is addressed.

This relocation is consistent with Addison’s most famous statement of intent in an early issue of the *Spectator*, published in March 1711. Here Addison images a social space distinct from the elite ‘*Club*’ to which Shaftesbury referred:

I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables in Coffee houses.

I would therefore in a very particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated Families, that set apart an Hour in every

¹ Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, no. 177 (September 22nd, 1711) in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. II, p. 198.

Morning for Tea and Bread and Butter; and would earnestly advise them for their Good to order this Paper to punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a Part of the Tea Equipage.¹

Addison's delineations are important because they fashion a new notion of sociability, and public involvement. His notion of publicity is based not on an oligarchy of male aristocrats, but a collectivity of individual families, who in combination form the public and express opinion on matters of mutual concern. This is something like the 'public' as defined by Jurgen Habermas in which an association of private, atomised individuals is taken to be the foundation of the public sphere. For Habermas this public is almost exclusively male, geared toward the expression of 'Public opinion' in the realm of politics. As a result Habermas has little sense of the anxieties and contestations which accompanied the emergence of polite publicity in eighteenth-century Britain. The place and role of women in the sociable environment described by Addison was central to its constitution as a distinct social space, and to its claims to politeness and refinement.²

According to Lawrence Klein, Addison's 'tea-table' philosophising is:

indicative of wider changes both in the maps of discourse and in the actual landscapes which such maps attempted to interpret. Obviously, these changes had implications for the gendering of discursive practices and for women's relation to discourse in society.³

¹ Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12th March, 1711), in Addison and Steele *Spectator*, vol I, pp. 44-5.

² Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, assist. Frederic Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989). For a critique of Habermas's gender politics, see Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern' in Linda J. Nicholson ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 234-277.

³ Lawrence Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in early Eighteenth-Century England' in *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) p.

Habermas's failure to respond to the gendered nature of the public highlights the degree to which he refuses to see the formation of the 'public' as in any way contested or even problematic. The presence of women, an anathema to older notions of the public, was one of the key features of polite society, that Habermas ignores this important change, must question the utility of his theory for eighteenth-century studies.

The space for tasteful contemplation of the beautiful that will be described as a result of this emerging definition of social space is therefore very different from the schoolroom for young princes outlined by Shaftesbury. This is something to which Spence, even as he compiles an essentially civic rendering of the arts, cannot but draw attention. Describing the excellences of the *Venus di Medici* he remarks that:

From her [Venus's] breasts, her shape begins to diminish gradually down to her waist; which I remember to have heard an English Lady at Florence, criticising at first sight, as not fine and taper enough. This probably proceeded from our beauties in England carrying this nicety generally too far; as some of the Grecian beauties did formerly too, at Athens. And I am more persuaded that this was the case, because the same lady, (who one would think should be a good judge of beauty, because it is what she must see, at least, every time she looks in her glass,) after having seen the Venus di Medici several times, had the grace to own herself in the wrong; and even to exclaim against the excess of this mode among us. The Venus di Medici, with all her fineness of shape, has what the Romans call corpus solidum, and the french embonpoint; (I do not know that we have any right word for it in English). And her waist in particular, is not represented as stunted by art; but as exactly proportioned by nature, to all the other parts of her body.¹

According to Spence's account the English seem to lack an appropriately specialist vocabulary for this kind of appraisal. If the English were to acquire a special word for

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¹ Joseph Spence, *Polymetis; or An Enquiry Concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1747), pp. 67-68.

the beauties embodied by the *Venus di Medici*, it would, on this reading, have to accommodate a vision of aestheticised plumpness or a pleasingly curvaceous form. The inability of the English language to provide Spence with an appropriate set of terms reveals the uncertain discourse in which his remarks are written. One the whole, Spence, as I have already observed, is concerned with the public lessons it was possible to draw from the consideration of ancient statuary and classical poetry. Here however, he wanders from that theme. He may begin coherently enough, but he soon slides into an account of the depredations of contemporary dress. The woman's poor judgement is represented as entirely owing to the commodifying nature of current fashion. According to Spence, when she finally judges aright it is a move propelled by a narcissism which collapses the difference between subject and object. However, her acceptance of a better taste is a concession accomplished with a refined and pleasing 'good grace'.

More important perhaps than these specific points is the sense that the commentary on the judgement of Venus, the high point of a civic act of repudiating manliness, becomes a judgement more particularly concerned with women, and their conduct, for which the touring 'English Lady' stands as a metonym. Significantly, her function is twofold; to stand as representative of women as a whole, and to represent all those whose taste is defective. Her appearance at this point, both in terms of her entrance into the text, and the form of her personal charms and fashionable foibles, is then important, if ambivalently so. What might have begun in terms of an obligation (perhaps playfully made) for men to restrict their sexual appetites, becomes a required renunciation for women to give over fashion, judgement and the capacity to be anything more than the recipient of male pedagogy. The 'English Lady at Florence' becomes the object of

culture - the fetishised object of Beauty and Taste - and only occasionally the subject of that discourse.¹

However, while Spence has disparaged and exploited the figure of the 'English Lady' she remains included, and her presence is recorded. This represents an important change in English thinking about judgement and society. *Polymetis* begins with a gathering of male worthies tired after 'the business of a long session'.² It is therefore a social gathering characterised by the apparently private leisure interests of public men. In this passage Spence has moved away from that arena, and describes a moment of polite sociability: discourse with, as much as about women. He is anxious about the change, and represents *Polymetis* as wary, though playful about the role and effect of women, and their beauty. In what follows I shall be focusing on this form of appraisal and examining how in the period 1740-68 the account of taste does indeed concentrate on the consideration of femininity and the feminine. Importantly, this is an account of the changed public participating in the discussion of taste, and as such reflects the turbulent nature of a culture in transition.

The Scope of the Argument and Summary of the Thesis.

Evocations of the beautiful are designed to manifest, or to express, certain social,

¹ For a discussion of the politics of women's taste see Anne Bermingham, 'The Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship' in *The Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 16, (1993) no. 2 pp. 3-20, and Chloe Chard, 'Effeminacy, Pleasure and the Classical Body' in Gill Perry and Michael Rossington eds., *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth Century Art and Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 142-61.

² Spence, *Polymetis*, pp. 1-2.

cultural and even psychic needs. These needs change, refiguring themselves almost perpetually. At times the debate returns to a previous agenda, the Aristotelian or the Neo-platonic, and at other times develops new lines of inquiry; those determined by empiricism, sensibility and so forth. As a result the theory of the beautiful attains a motion that is never linear. It is impossible, therefore, to construct a single history to explain the phenomenon of the beautiful in western societies. There is, for example, no direct transmission of ideas from the Neo-Platonism of the 1690's (which may or may not have been an influence upon the Earl of Shaftesbury) which travels through the associationism and sensibility of the mid-century, to find some resurgence, or at least restatement in such figures as Richard Payne Knight and Archibald Alison at the close of the period. I do not wish to offer a history of the beautiful within the cycle of the western episteme. I am not sure for one thing that such a project can, or should, be undertaken. It would I believe stabilize an object field which holds critical interest precisely because it denies such narration. To confine the history of Beauty to one narrative would be to obscure its nature, and to deny its multiple intersections with the cultural fabric of the period.

As the needs which promote the changing definition of the Beautiful alter and shift so too do the discourses and the practices in which the Beautiful participates. There are a number of ideas of Beauty in circulation within the context of eighteenth-century society: the excellences of material objects; the attraction of beautiful women; painterly beauty, moral beauty; and theological and social graces. It is the aim of this thesis to find a history and a method which brings some of them together. Roughly speaking the following text is divided into two closely related halves. The first part explores the mid-

century debate about what constitutes the beautiful, and how taste is defined. In particular I am concerned to isolate a particular middle-class definition of taste emerging from the late 1740s onwards. The possibility that the change in discussions of taste has a strong connection with the social codes and notions of etiquette which emerged in the 1740s and 50s is examined in some detail. In particular I explore how the discourses on Beauty increasingly become a discourse on women.

The first chapter focuses on the first aspect of this evolution. Beginning with a discussion of Lord Shaftesbury and Joseph Addison I describe the existence of two competing modes of social address within eighteenth-century culture. First, that formed by the aristocracy and derived from classical sources, and secondly, that which was developed from the modern sensibility of the middle classes. Focusing on the latter I demonstrate how the discussion of Beauty increasingly became an account of sensuous contemplation rather than rhetorical persuasion. This is an important shift which permitted an appreciation of individual objects considered as 'property'. A lengthy discussion of the work of John Gilbert Cooper explores the ambiguities of this dual investment (in feeling and in property) in the context of debate in the 1750s.

Following this discussion of how discourses on taste become increasingly commercialised in the mid-century, I focus on two of the consequences of this reappraisal. First, the changed space in which discourses of taste and virtue are necessarily produced. Second, the realignment of virtue to examine more closely the public and private acts and characters of women. In Sir Harry Beaumont's *Crito; or, a Dialogue on Beauty* the instability of Beauty as an object for discussion is redeemed by aligning the discussion around the moral virtues - the 'beauties' - of chaste and modest

women. This is an important shift in the nature of discourses on beauty, and it is one which has a mounting influence as the century progresses. I contend that the analogy between Beauty and beautiful women, originally employed to solve a particular problem in the discussion of taste, becomes in the end its defining feature.

In the second part of the argument, I examine in detail two examples of the specific use and application of ideas of beauty. First I look at the portrait of a society beauty by Joshua Reynolds, and secondly I consider a selection of novels by Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott. The third chapter is concerned with the forms of address and the economies of consumption set in motion by Sir Joshua Reynolds portrait, *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* (1760). The image is a complex one, ambiguous in its address to the sitter and uncertain in its relationship to the public. The discussion I provide of this important portrait attempts to explore these two areas, which, when viewed concurrently, reveal the complex workings of the representation of women, but also the ways in which Reynolds sought to project and to insist upon the status of his own art. I contend that the image of a beautiful woman produces a 'discourse' on the role of women in society organised through the myth of Paris's judgement, and a means by which an audience for art might be constructed beyond the confines of the aristocratic connoisseurship envisaged by the Earl of Shaftesbury, and later by Reynolds in his *Discourses*. The chapter is concerned therefore with how the changing nature of public space, or at least changing conception of what might be expected from the public, altered the ways in which a portrait in the 'historical style' might be considered.

The fourth chapter, 'Affectionate Addresses and Sociable Seductions' follows on closely from the discussion of Elizabeth Gunning. I am concerned again with the

function of the Beautiful as a means of describing a woman's social and public presence. In this instance however, Beauty is contrasted with the presence of ugliness. I argue that ugliness is endowed by Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott with a moral quality that is wholly opposed to the sexual licence that has come to be associated with Beauty. Crucially, ugliness defines a certain domesticity and obedience. That Lennox and Scott define their central characters in relation to ugliness makes for a complex interaction between the practices of these woman writers and the discourses the of dominant culture.

In the Conclusion I expand on some of the recurring issues of the thesis, and in particular the relation of women to the 'public' or 'social' sphere. Structured around three examples of different encounters between women and publicity the argument seeks to demonstrate the futility of any fixed public-private divide. I also endeavour to illustrate the precise nature of the gender politics involved in such a conceptualisation. The thesis therefore makes what I believe to be a provocative rereading of the mid-century debates on taste. It seeks in particular to demonstrate that the attenuation of civic humanist appraisals of Beauty in the 1740s is not the whole story. That in fact the problems of civic humanist criticism before Reynolds's intervention in 1768 should not obscure the dynamism of bourgeois discourses on art and morals. In exploring this area it is necessary to describe, and to critique, that discourse's highly gendered implications which are many and varied.

CHAPTER ONE
THE THEORY OF BEAUTY: PHILOSOPHICAL
CRITICISM AND COMMODITY CULTURE

Beauty and Cultural Transformation.

The political and social nature of the Beautiful made the concept an attractive ideological weapon across eighteenth-century society. In a period in which competing modes of social address sought to reflect class positions mediated through a discourse on taste and judgement, a reference to Beauty could be employed to establish a wide range of class identities. The concept was variously and simultaneously to evidence and enforce the power and ambition of the aristocracy, while alternatively it could be used to describe and defend the social relations which the middle classes found attractive. The feelings and the sensations which the Beautiful was said to generate could therefore, depending on who was speaking (and for whom), announce claims to patrician excellence or bourgeois social affinity. The prominence of these accounts, which can be considered as the two dominant theorisations of the Beautiful in this period, is further established by the degree to which they compete with each other, and endeavour to secure the preeminence of their own claims. Despite this struggle, these two narratives of taste rarely exist as free-standing or distinct ideologies which inhabit exclusive discursive positions. Rather the arguments adopted by the middling sorts, and by the aristocrats whose authority they craved, existed within what were frequently highly compatible, or at least closely related discourses.

There were, of course, important and valuable exceptions to this general description. Most notably William Hogarth and Allan Ramsay, two painters, who, in the 1750s were able to establish belligerently middle-class perspectives on the nature of

taste, views which had no allegiance to aristocratic practice or discourse.¹ Most writers however, and I would include figures as apparently diverse as Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Spence and Joshua Reynolds in this definition, offer an account that emerges from within previously existing categories. There were, however, a number of significant realignments of the patrician or civic agenda during the eighteenth century. Foremost amongst these changes was the movement of the Beautiful from an abstract philosophical category to a sensuous thing upon which specific, and not universal, relations could be described. This chapter describes that transformation, and the class politics it represents. As Lord Shaftesbury is in many respects the origin of this debate, it to his work that I will now turn.

The third Earl of Shaftesbury was, throughout both his literary and political career, committed to a notion of the public which required the regular performance of acts of disinterested public virtue if it was to remain free from corruption.² It was his firm belief that it was only when the citizen was prepared to act solely for the 'commonweal' that the state could hope to remain free from faction and intrigue. He writes accordingly that the ability to rise above individual interests and concerns, to conceive the general view is the highest moral excellence attainable:

¹ For an account of Hogarth's work in relation to the patterns of aristocratic taste see Ronald Paulson *Hogarth Vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1993), pp. 65-76. For Ramsay see Aliaster Smart, *Allan Ramsay: Painter, Essayist and Man of Enlightenment*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 139-48.

² For an overview of Shaftesbury's life and career, see Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984). For a further general discussion of Shaftesbury's sense of public virtue, see Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1967), pp. 164-83.

To love the public, to study universal good, and to promote the interest of the whole world, as far as lies within our power, is surely the height of goodness, and makes that temper which we call divine.¹

Such a vision, and the actions to which it gave rise, could, Shaftesbury suggested, be encouraged by the contemplation and appreciation of Beauty which, because it represented that which was ordered, regular and harmonious provided an inspiration for those actions which were the requirements of civic virtue. In short, the Beautiful possessed in Shaftesbury's philosophy the dignity and decorum of a noble conception of the universe, a prospect he found infinitely attractive.²

While Shaftesbury's conception of the Beautiful possessed enough of the sensual for it to function, as Terry Eagleton argues, as a 'political unconscious', it remained little concerned with the appreciation of the body, or even of particular forms.³ Current taste in particular was derided and represented as effeminate consumption, represented throughout the *Characteristics* as the product of women's unwanted intrusion upon men's reasoned and reasonable society. Women presented an especial problem for Shaftesbury, who frequently counselled his readers against association with the 'fair sex' as an activity likely to prove injurious to their civic virtue and to their public reputations.⁴ To Shaftesbury's mind, the presence of women led to adoration that was

¹ The Third Earl of Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper], *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times etc.*, 2 vols, ed. with intro. by John M. Robertson, (Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith, 1963) vol. I, p. 27.

² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, pp. 89-93.

³ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 37.

⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. I, pp. 178, 213-14.

far from manly. Furthermore, he thought their beauty too particular and too sensual to lead to the contemplation of a higher order of being. As a result, the ability to define real beauties and not just passing fancies or mere pleasures (of the kind women might offer) was crucial to the exercise of the civic mind. The concept of Beauty was therefore endowed with great power as well as ambivalence by Shaftesbury. Within his discourse Beauty acts as both a conception of the order of the universe, and as a kind of test against which the citizen can be measured.

The most explicit, and the most famous example of this formulation occurs in Shaftesbury's 'Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of Hercules' which was written in 1712-13, towards the end of his life. The text comprises an account of how to represent the 'Choice or Judgement of Hercules' in the historical style.¹ According to Shaftesbury's design Hercules is to be shown standing between the emblematic figures of Virtue and Pleasure. Following the story taken from Xenophon, the ancient hero is to be depicted choosing between the two, and in so doing determining the course of the rest of his life. The decision is of immense importance, as 'it is on the issue of the controversy between the two, that the character of Hercules depends'.² If Hercules chooses Pleasure, he will sink into inactive luxuriance; if his choice, however, is for Virtue then he will pursue a life of honour and courage. It was the 'agony' of this choice which made in Shaftesbury's mind for the principal action of

¹ Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of Hercules' in *Second Characters, or the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 31-33.

² Shaftesbury, 'Notion', p. 33.

the piece.¹ With this in mind, the emphasis was upon Hercules himself, for, wrote Shaftesbury, 'the interest of Hercules himself is at stake. It is his own cause which is trying. He is in this respect not so much the judge, as he is in reality the party judged.'² His decision as yet unmade, Hercules stands on trial, suspected of harbouring an unprincipalled desire for effeminate softness. To attain glory he must renounce these sensual gratifications, and in so doing he will have proved himself able - like the true citizen - to proceed beyond his own concerns and to have become a man capable of virtue in its highest civic sense.

While this act of stoic self-denial is evidently the important action of the image, Shaftesbury's account also reveals a problem, one which is found throughout the *Characteristics*: that of conceiving individual or embodied forms of beauty. Throughout the third Earl's work *Beauty* is an abstraction which can only be given a particular form problematically. This is evident when Shaftesbury accounts for how *Virtue* and *Pleasure* should be represented. He is careful to prescribe the form of *Virtue's* beauty exactly. It is not to be voluptuous but must represent 'aspiring effort'. The representation must also exclude all that is 'mere gentility or modern luxuriance', as there can, he writes, 'be little of that fashionable mein, or genteel air admitted'.³ Shaftesbury is keen therefore to preserve the 'heroic style', though his prose also reveals the difficulty in achieving this in relation to the representation of a woman. Shaftesbury is more indulgent in his advice on the portrayal of the figure of *Pleasure*. While he is specific in his account of

¹ Shaftesbury, 'Notion', p. 35.

² Shaftesbury, 'Notion', p. 39.

³ Shaftesbury, 'Notion', pp. 44-46.

her attitude, he permits the painter more flexibility in the portrayal of her physical appearance.¹ He remains however, anxious that she could become too alluring, thereby injuring the intended and judicious effects of the composition - the painting would fail rhetorically if either the viewer preferred Pleasure, or choose Virtue only because she was more sensually appealing. Pleasure can be left to the painter, but Virtue must be monitored closely - as the emblem of all that is good, Virtue must not be too modern or anything like the real women whose enthusiastic ranting Shaftesbury found unpleasant.

Hercules's judgement, which once correctly made is an act of self-preservation, becomes a choice between the physical realities of pleasure and a more philosophical conception of virtue. The choice would appear therefore to be easily apprehended. It is to decide between a preference made on the basis of instinct and that promoted by reason. Shaftesbury's position in the 'Notion' is one of stern disavowal: Hercules as the patriot hero, must reject all the temptations of the recumbent Pleasure and ascend instead the rugged path of virtue. In this late piece Shaftesbury is clear that to do other than one's civic, public duty is to fall into an insipid, amoral effeminacy. The choice of which path to take is apparently stark, and once the false trail had been taken it should appear difficult to leave. For the particular, sexualized pleasures of luxury drain the vigour required for proper conduct. On no occasion does Shaftesbury swerve from this commitment to a civic narrative. However, it does not always follow in the texts which were to succeed Shaftesbury's own work that this agenda was accepted with anything like the vigour which Shaftesbury would have desired.

¹ Shaftesbury, 'Notion', pp. 47-48.

An intriguing example of this lessening of civic stoicism is the work of Joseph Spence, whose monumental dialogue *Polymetis* was published in 1747. It is clear from reading *Polymetis* that the form of historical narrative to which Spence subscribes is that of classical or civic humanism. His history of the Roman poets, and of their relation to the visual arts, employs a historical narrative which follows poetry's progression from early force and rudeness through various glories before the arts sink into what Spence describes as 'a certain prettiness, and glitter, and luxuriance of ornaments'. It is an account which in proposing a 'kind of sympathy between all the polite arts', sees them 'languish and flourish' together according to the prevailing morality of the times.¹ Thus far Spence is in agreement with Shaftesbury, who in the *Characteristics* similarly charts the decline of the ancient arts into luxuriant decay and the pursuit of false beauties.² Spence believed, in common with Shaftesbury, that it was only by a robust resistance to the unmanly pleasures of luxury and effeminacy that a society and its arts could proceed.³

Despite this firm allegiance Spence departs from even his own distaste for the pretty and the luxuriant and begins to appreciate, even to enjoy, that which is mere softness and sensual delight; the *Venus di Medici*. The statue, a copy of which is in

¹ Joseph Spence, *Polymetis, or an Enquiry Concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*, (London: R. Dodsley, 1747), pp. 28, 43.

² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol I, pp. 162-64.

³ Spence's account of the rise, excellence and eventual fall of the Roman poets conducted over two of the dialogues which compose *Polymetis* represents the fullest version of this thesis in the text, see pp. 17-27, 28-35. Importantly Spence believed that under Augustus poetry reached a respectable middle age, an era which was both 'manly and polite', *Polymetis*, p. 35.

Polymetis's garden temple is the object of his devotions, she has in fact, 'one of the prettiest faces that can be conceived'. Hers is a figure which he can only describe in less than disinterested terms. The statue is indeed a 'bewitching' and 'wanton' piece. Spence describes the statue as 'the standard of all female beauty and softness', and delights in describing the softness and delicacy of the breasts.¹ There is much less sense in Spence's account of the need for restraint, or for seeing the *Venus di Medici* in terms other than those expressing Polymetis's own sexual delight. Pleasure is at issue, and it would appear pleasure alone. Accordingly Polymetis delights in describing how Mars was entrapped by her charms, claiming that it is a 'pretty' act of imagination to recount the story.² Mars's fate can be repeated, so that it is possible that the goddesses has 'made a conquest of you'. Spence was aware of what is at stake here, and has Polymetis confess that:

to confess the truth to you, I am so much in love with the Venus di Medici, that I rather choose to court this impropriety, than to prefer any other figure to hers. The thing is not perhaps quite so reasonable, as it should be; but when did lovers ever act with reason?³

There is then some retention of the civic sense of the danger of 'galante' adoration, of the idea that it represents a loss of the self. However Spence is beginning to show a interest in the idea of Venus's character, speculating that, while she is often thought of as 'treacherous', she is in reality, 'all graceful, and bewitching, and charming'.⁴ By

¹ Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 66.

² Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 73.

³ Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 68.

⁴ Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 66.

degrees Spence has cautiously begun to change the terms of the debate. While for Shaftesbury the 'character' of Hercules was secured by abstaining from pleasure, for Spence it is the pursuit of what pleases which is the ground of character. The relationship between the virility of the male subject and the chastity of the feminine object is made the issue. As a result, the character who is judged is more likely to be Venus, than Hercules. Polymetis is allowed to play around, announcing that though Venus 'is not really modest, [she] counterfeits modesty extremely well', because he is not being judged as Hercules was by Shaftesbury.¹

By far the most blatant rejection of civic priorities in the mid-century occurs in Burke's *Enquiry*. Burke makes it clear that he has no interest in the suggestion that there is a connection between Beauty and Virtue.² Burke, on the contrary, is entranced by the gendered nature of beauty. This is a problematic conjunction which at once constitutes the Beautiful, and yet threatens to disrupt its appraisal through the unwarranted intrusion of desire. The problem becomes clear in what is a justly infamous passage:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface continual and yet hardly perceptible at any point which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?³

¹ Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 67.

² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and intro. J.T. Boulton, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 112.

³ Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 115.

Burke, here, as throughout the *Enquiry*, has rejected 'Fitness' and 'Harmony' in favour of minute observations of size, texture and form. The placidity and poise of civic proprieties have been replaced by an appeal to pleasure and variety. The rejection of decorum flirted with by Spence is brought out into the open by a largely carefree Burke.¹ Although Burke notes that 'I can strengthen my theory in this point by the opinion of the very ingenious Mr. Hogarth; whose idea of the line of beauty I take to be extremely just', there is in reality little sense of anything very much having been demonstrated or theorized in any strict philosophical sense. Seeking to prove that 'perfectly beautiful bodies are not composed of angular parts' Burke has drifted lazily but excitedly from a consideration of a dove's 'downy' chest to a ravished appraisal of a headless woman.²

What I think the hesitant playfulness of Spence and the eager desires of Burke illustrate is that in the decades following the publication of the *Characteristics* it was possible to consider forms of judgement and contemplation which indulge in private gratification. Furthermore Burke suggests that these pleasures are of a social and socialising force that cannot be dismissed merely because they partake of the sensual. The sensual becomes in Burke's argument not the opposite of the public realm, but its sign.³ Foremost in this acceptance of the validity of particular choices is a discourse of

¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. 107-109, 112-17.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. 114-15. For a discussion of this passage in Burke's text, see Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 51-53.

³ Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime*, pp. 8, 21, 31. For a more extensive discussion of Burke's theories relative to his political ideology see, Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution*,

sexual appreciation. Burke writes that:

Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*. I call beauty a social quality; for where women...inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affections towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them.¹

Burke refuses to make the appreciation of women a solely private act, and indeed makes the pleasure inherent in contemplating beauty the sign of both individual virility and social sympathy.² I have already indicated something of the extent of the shift by expanding on the ambiguous status of a mere 'display of renunciation' suggested by John Barrell. In this way mid-century theorisations of taste increasingly establish the unhindered virility of the observer, and more ambiguously the chastity of the object as the basis for an appreciation of the beauties of both nature and society. It is through this discourse, which was elaborated into an ideology of possession, that private acquisitions have a social, and sociable, meaning. It is this process of cultural formation on which I will focus in the remainder of this chapter, exploring how personal possessions and private tastes are made into a matter of greater significance.

In order to explore this process it is necessary to take a more extensive view of the middle decades of the century than Barrell does at least in his *Political Theory of Painting*. Barrell writes confidently about the transmission of civic ideas from

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). A stimulating account of the *Enquiry's* textual operations has been provided by Peter de Bolla. See his *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), esp. pp. 61-72.

¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. 41-42.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. 42-45, see also pp. 92, 113.

Shaftesbury to Spence and Turnbull.¹ After this he tends to write about civic humanism as something which 'attenuates' until, with the inception of the Royal Academy, Reynolds places it on what is described as a 'new footing'. Given these formulations the account he offers is unadventurous in its treatment of mid-century developments. So that although Barrell's work remains the most authoritative account of high civic taste, it is in need of some revision in the area of middle-class responses to that agenda.²

It will be my contention that in the middle decades of the eighteenth century the question of taste becomes, not merely an account of consumption, but of the subject who consumes. Within middle-class theories of society the subject was defined, and then judged, according to the kinds of social affiliations and relations he (or she) was capable of maintaining. That the consideration of these relations was multiform, and could often encompass marital and commercial transactions, meant that the ideal of a stoic allegiance to the state as representative of universal good was largely disregarded. Social relations, the relations expressed by mutual feeling, that existed between commercial subjects who both need, and yet remained in competition with each other, gained a position of dominance.³ This shift is sufficient to constitute an extensive change in the

¹ John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 3-39. Barrell's reading of Turnbull has recently been questioned. See David Solkin, *Painting for Money: Public Sphere* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 170-71, 193-94, 228-30.

² For what I take to be an important contribution to this areas of research, see Stephen Copley, 'The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture' in John Barrell ed., *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700-1850*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 13-27.

³ The most expansive formulation of the ideal of 'Sympathy' as the foundation of social interaction was put forward by Adam Smith. See his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982 ,

forms of social affiliation and cultural personality which are expected from those possessed of a refined and correct taste. This account of more complex than the attenuation of a discourse, and will be the subject of all that follows. Consequently the nature of taste is changed, adapting to the new social needs of the period. How this was achieved will provide for the basis of this chapter as I examine texts by Hutcheson, Hogarth and John Gilbert Cooper. First however, I want to be clear about how 'Taste' is changing in this period and how that alters not only the presentation of the Beautiful, but also the claims which here made about it, and those who claim to perceive it.

Price and Prejudice: Connoisseurship in a Commercial World.

The most illuminating point at which to begin is with Addison's 'Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination', which was composed in a series of papers for the *Spectator*. The 'Essay' is a mile stone in eighteenth-century discussions of taste.¹ Addison's contribution, which drew on the recent discoveries of Locke and Newton, can be considered relatively novel, indeed the discussion of taste was one which Addison boldly, though justifiably, felt to be 'entirely new'.² Most importantly, Addison's essay is one of the founding texts of the discourse through which the middle-classes sought to wrest away the discussion of taste from nobles like Lord Shaftesbury. Throughout the essay the 'public' nature of the contemplation of Beauty, beloved by Shaftesbury, is

esp. pp. 9-16, 38-43.

¹ Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, No. 411-421 (21st June-3rd July, 1712) in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, 5 vols, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. III, pp. 536-582.

² Addison, *Spectator*, no. 409 (19th June, 1712), in *Spectator*, vol. III, p. 531.

noticeably absent. Addison is insistent on the privacy and particularity of the sensations he describes. The pleasure of beautiful landscape is, he writes, a 'secret refreshment', and the 'Gaiety or Variety of Colours' correspondingly produces a 'secret Delight'.¹ These were unique experiences and pleasures belonging to a notion of the subject that is neither keen to deny personal gratification or anxious to define universal truth. Accordingly the essay gained a discursive currency because of the ways it was able - as were all subsequent middle-class accounts of beauty - to make the appreciation of particular goods, not only more widely available, but also capable of extrapolation into a general principal of virtuous and socialized taste.

Addison's essay is concerned with illustrating the excellences and experiences of the Beautiful, the Grand and the Novel. Addison wished to explore the causes and the sensations associated with tasteful perception. He writes that there is:

nothing that makes its way more directly to the soul than *Beauty* which immediately diffuses a secret Satisfaction and Complacency thro' the Imagination, and gives a finishing to anything which is Great or Uncommon.²

Addison remains somewhat vague, however, about what precisely causes Beauty, merely asserting that 'by Experience' we know that there are 'several Modifications of Matter which the Mind...pronounces at first sight Beautiful or Deformed'. Addison is, despite this ambiguity, able to determine what makes certain objects pleasing to the eye. It is a property (a key word this) which consists:

either in the Gaiety or Variety of Colours, in the symmetry and Proportion

¹ Addison, *Spectator*, no. 411 (21st June, 1712) and no. 412 (23rd June, 1712) in *Spectator*, vol. III, pp. 538, 543.

² Addison, *Spectator*, no. 412, (23rd June, 1712), in *Spectator*, vol. III, p. 542.

of Parts, in the Arrangement and Disposition of Bodies, or in the just Mixture and Concurrence of all together.¹

The identification of pleasing qualities is, though, not solely an empiric assessment dependent on the perception of proper qualities. The action of the perceiving mind plays a crucial role in the registering of delight. Addison divides the pleasures given by the objects of beauty into two distinct types, which he terms the primary and secondary pleasures of the imagination. The two forms of gratification, stemming from either the presence of beautiful objects, or some semblance of them are crucially only available to the 'Man of Polite Imagination'.² His experience was of a range 'the vulgar [were] not capable of receiving', and it was a tribute to his regime of innocent pleasures and broad knowledge that he was capable of such a survey.

Addison's emphasis on imagination and its pleasures reveals a preoccupation with the nature of taste which is finally more than the enjoyment of particular scenes. He establishes what is a complex ideological position in regard to the act of looking and contemplating. It is a process in which Addison proposes that the spectator:

meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him indeed a Kind of Property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasure.³

The 'Man of Polite Imagination' is therefore in a position of some command. Empowered with an improving and active gaze he appears at once to own everything,

¹ Addison, *Spectator*, no. 412 (23rd June, 1712), in *Spectator*, vol. III, p. 544.

² Addison, *Spectator*, no. 411 (21 st June, 1712), in *Spectator*, vol. III, p. 538.

³ Addison, *Spectator*, no. 411 (21st June, 1712), in *Spectator*, vol. III, p. 538-39.

and yet nothing in particular. The concept of pleasure is left deliberately void of visible politics. It is an apparently libertarian moment, an expansion of opportunities. The free movement of the eye enables the middle-class viewer to participate in the aristocratic survey of landed property. There is no inheritance of taste or property strictly speaking, for the person viewing the land is able to exchange their position with that of the owner to become, if only imaginatively, the lord of all he surveys.

Addison's argument is in marked contrast to the high-minded deliberations of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury, as he makes clear in the key passage of the *Moralists*, was committed to a distinctly disinterested form of contemplation. For Shaftesbury a notion of possession was unlikely to provide the key to pleasure, rather the reverse. Ownership of an object, even the mere ability to own it, would he argued diminish it, and render it unbeautiful and the pleasure 'absurd'.¹ Shaftesbury's sense of the Beautiful seeks to be disinterested, to rise above a concern for property. Addison, by contrast, with his emphasis on 'private' and 'secret' delights is committed to precisely the kind of pleasure which can be embodied by property, by objects which are owned. The difference says much about the respective careers, backgrounds and opinions of Addison and Shaftesbury. It says a great deal moreover about the politically contested nature of debates about Beauty, particularly in an increasingly commercial culture.

Before progressing to discuss treatises by Francis Hutcheson and William Hogarth, I want to spend some time considering Jonathan Richardson. This seems appropriate because, like Addison, Richardson is aiming to refine taste with a consciousness of the importance of a new constituency for discussions of taste. Richardson's aims in writing

¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, vol. II, pp. 126-7.

both his *Two Discourses* of 1719 and in his *Essay on Painting* published some years later are admirably clear, as is, on the whole, his manner of expressing them. Both works are concerned with the need both to elevate painting as a more than mechanical art, and to fashion new critical tools for the establishment of correct taste. Richardson wanted to promote the status and the cause of painting, and wishes to do so by proposing a 'Science of the *Connoisseur*'.¹ It is this latter point, the foundation of rational connoisseurship, which made Richardson distinctive amongst his contemporaries.² He was in his own words, eager to 'open to Gentleman a New Scene of Pleasure, a New innocent Amusement'; it was to be furthermore a space in which 'one Man may be as Good a Judge as another.'³ Richardson was therefore free from the sense of the dangers of visual pleasure which bedeviled seventeenth-century scholarship. He had, on the contrary, a clear and ultimately moral view of what pleasures are most acceptable. In short, he took painting to be a refined as well as refining pleasure, one which instructs as much as it entertains.⁴

Richardson uses this argument in order to claim that painting is more than a merely mechanic art, and that its practitioners are independent and free. He cites

¹ Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses. A Essay on the whole Art of Criticism as it relates to Painting, shewing how to Judge I. Of the Goodness of a Picture; II. Of the Hand of the Master; III. Whither 'tis an Original, or a Copy. II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur; wherein is shewn the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage of it*, (London: W. Churchill, 1719), II, p. 8.

² For an overview of Richardson's critical agenda, see Carol Gibson-Wood, 'Jonathan Richardson and the Rationalisation of Connoisseurship' in *Art History*, vol. 7 no. 1 (March, 1987), pp. 38-56.

³ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, p. 7; I, p. 16.

⁴ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, I, pp. 38-39.

Raphael's politeness and learning to support this aspiration.¹ In so doing Richardson shares with Shaftesbury the sense that for art to raise itself above the mechanic it must, in Shaftesbury's terms, obtain a liberal view than that obtained by the production of goods.² That painting is a liberal art is the central claim Richardson wants to make in the *Essay on the Art of Painting*.³ To achieve it he makes claims for the intellectual function and social role of the painter, and bases this capacity on the ability of the painter, and the connoisseur, to stand outside the temptation of the market. For Richardson there is naturally a pleasure inherent in this process. Furthermore there is also a gratification to be acquired from possessing knowledge about painting. It was part of Locke's claim for the disinterested status of philosophy that only the philosopher can stand outside of the circuit of demand and desire.⁴

Richardson clearly intended something similar for the painter; a decision which informs not only what he has to say about painters, but also about painting. According to Richardson, again following Locke, paintings 'raise' ideas in the mind; indeed painting is held by Richardson to be uniquely good at raising such 'communication'. First painting is about the conveying of ideas - in a specifically Lockean sense. Indeed painting is another 'language' or, as he later suggests 'Painting is a sort of writing.'⁵ In

¹ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 86, 209.

² Shaftesbury, 'Notion', pp. 61-62.

³ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, 2nd edn., (London: A. Bettesworth, 1725), p. 26.

⁴ For a discussion of Richardson's indebtedness to Locke, see Gibson-Wood, 'Rationalization of Connoisseurship', pp. 40-41.

⁵ Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 3, 74.

order to achieve this dignity of function the painter must engage with both history and poetry.¹ A sense of history is needed even by the 'face-painter', who must express the character and biography of their sitter.² However, this 'History' must be raised by the painter to a new pitch.³ To gain these heights the painter must in effect think like a gentleman: he must not only read the best works, but also frequent the most eminent society.⁴ For although 'Invention' is aided by a varied social acquaintance, it is most assisted when the painter mixes with the 'best' people.⁵ This is particularly true for the portrait-painter, who, having his clientage in elite circles, must be able to enter the minds of 'People of Condition' if he is ever to gain a 'Resemblance' of them. He must therefore have a mind like theirs; indeed the painter's mind should be noble and beautiful in itself, as well as virtuous.⁶

To render these pleasures visible requires the practice of a connoisseur. Richardson's account of this new figure (along with his sense of the painter's potential for learning and politeness) establish the distance he was prepared to travel from the opinions of Shaftesbury. In Richardson's terms connoisseurship has a numerous advantages: first and foremost, is that it represents a new pleasure, all the more so because the pleasure received is such that it reforms the viewer. Finally painting is good

¹ Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 19-22.

² Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 45-46.

³ Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 40-54.

⁴ Richardson, *Essay*, p. 202.

⁵ Richardson, *Essay*, p. 85.

⁶ Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 209, 214.

for the nation: it raises manners, improves the common people, encouraging opportunities for industry and export. Most importantly, connoisseurship is, and Richardson is absolutely committed to this, a rational pursuit: a profoundly learnable activity, located in an account of improvement. This is a crucial claim and Richardson makes much of defending connoisseurship's claim to be as rational as any other form of knowledge.¹ To be a connoisseur is consequently to be divested of prejudice and to resist the impositions of arbitrary authority. The good connoisseur thinks for himself, and is free from the persuasions of custom, as from the blandishments of aristocratic authority.² The rules employed in the judgement of painting must be the connoisseur's own (or at least arrived at through their private study), and as such are a property of the connoisseur's personality. The business, or skill, of a connoisseur has a number of identifiable parts: intellect, polish, scholarship. As such connoisseurship becomes a horizontally organized, middle-class meritocracy: a status that is independent, but acquired.

The necessity of free-thought and independence is enforced by Richardson repeated emphasis on the limits of Man.³ The influence of theological argument on the nature of the 'science' is important: the ideal of Protestantism, for example, is a vital influence, as Richardson acknowledges, 'Here we are all *Connoisseurs* as we are Protestants'.⁴ There are no priests in Richardson's account, no specialists who can claim special access

¹ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 130-4.

² Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 18-26.

³ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, I, pp. 113, 111-2.

⁴ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, 231.

to appreciation of art. The Truth in painting is consequently the product of a 'General Consent'.¹ However, while connoisseurship is based on judgement and discernment it is fundamentally a form of pleasure. With both connoisseurship and painting providing various species of pleasure Richardson's account becomes one which is little concerned with stoic self-denial. There is here no austere turning away from pleasure, nor the suggestion of a 'judgement of Hercules'. Richardson does not want, unlike Shaftesbury, to promote the avoidance of private pleasure, he recommends instead an easy road to polite or 'social virtues'; and stresses that connoisseurs should '*learn to be pleased*'.² However discernment is still required; Richardson argues that the Connoisseur's role is:

*To Judge of the Goodness of a Picture, Drawing, or Print, 'tis necessary to establish to our Selves a System of Rules to be apply'd to what we intended to give Judgement of;...And these Rules must be our Own.*³

It is surely significant that Richardson is quite consciously raising the status of connoisseurs as a quasi-professional body with a particular range of skills and concerns, and while he claims for the painter a 'liberal' status he does little to disguise this fact. Furthermore, he spends much time discussing and defending (though with little embarrassment) the status of the face-painter. The establishment of a mercantile meritocracy *within* an account of taste and gentlemanly conduct seems very much his aim, one he succeeds in fulfilling to no small degree. It is perhaps easy to see why Richardson's writings were read so favourably by the young Reynolds. That he regards painting, and portrait-painting in particular, a 'national treasure' can only have

¹ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, I, p. 144.

² Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 23, 183.

³ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, I, p. 26.

underlined the excitement.¹ Indeed Richardson claims that England needs Art in order to fulfil its greatness as a polite and commercial nation.²

Richardson's *Essay* and the *Two Discourses* were successful in combining a discourse on the particular and unique values of art, and as objects to be considered by a broadly defined audience, with the high moral aspirations of civic humanist ideology. It is tempting therefore to consider Richardson as an example of what has been termed 'bourgeois civic humanism', and to assess his importance to Reynolds and others in the light of an essentially middle-class version of civic discourse. The case of Richardson would seem to support John Barrell's assertion that the discourse of civic humanism continued to act throughout the eighteenth century as the most available and the most effective means of making substantial claims about either morality or art.³ While this is broadly true the republican discourse outlined by Shaftesbury was to be challenged from outside and from within; and Richardson's work participates in the latter project. However, the occasion of this transmission was variable and uncertain. Richardson's affinity with Addison and his friendship with Hogarth suggest a moment of middle-class allegiance which rests uneasily with his at times civic description of painting.⁴ His account of taste, in particular, seems bifurcated in its vocabulary and in its concerns, alternating from a civic conception of the liberty of the arts to an avowed sense of the practice of painting as a professional and acquired attribute.

¹ Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 15, 222.

² Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 220-22.

³ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, pp. 23-27, 45-54.

⁴ Richardson, *Two Discourses*, II, pp. 41-43, 47-49.

Proper Feelings, Proprietorial Tastes: Francis Hutcheson's 'Inquiry'.

It is to precisely this tension between a conception of beauty produced by an aristocratic culture and that propounded by an aspiring middle class to which I now turn in my consideration of Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson's, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, which he first published in 1725 as part of his larger *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* represented an important extension of debates about the cause and reception of the Beautiful.¹ Hutcheson is, as he makes clear, a follower of Lord Shaftesbury, and although his is worried by his predecessor's treatment of Christianity, he supports wholeheartedly Shaftesbury's doctrine that Virtue and Beauty are coincident, and that a combination good manners and good breeding are the best guarantees of proper judgement in taste and criticism.² Hutcheson's programme is therefore twofold: on the one hand he wishes to expunge deism from philosophical inquiry, while on the other he wishes to defend and to enforce Shaftesbury's general moral position.³ This latter affiliation has a number of distinct consequences which can be rehearsed relatively quickly, and would include the assertion of the agent's predisposition to receive the sensation caused the beautiful and the virtuous as a defining

¹ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises. I Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design. II. Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, 3rd ed., (London: J. & J. Knapton et al, 1729).

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. xv, xix-xx.

³ For an overview of Hutcheson's career, see James Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: on the origins of the Scottish Enlightenment' in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 37-59. A more specific treatment of Hutcheson's views on Taste can be found in W.J. Hipple, *The Sublime, Beautiful and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), pp. 25-36.

characteristic of man as a sentient being. He also agrees with Shaftesbury on the rightful exclusion of custom, interest and association as causes of philosophic or moral sensibility: the truly beautiful is appreciated because it is perceived, or felt, to be intrinsically so, and not as result of education, training or habit.

Hutcheson begins the *Inquiry* by announcing his adherence to the 'noble *Sentiments of Virtue and Honour*' that he has taken from Shaftesbury. Like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson argues that the pursuit of Virtue and Beauty is independent from considerations of need, interest or desire. To quest after the Beautiful is to pursue a pleasure which has no regard to future expectation, and still less to property. He writes that:

The Ideas of Beauty and Harmony, like other sensible Ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately so; neither can any Resolution of our own, nor any *Prospect* of Advantage or Disadvantage, vary the Beauty or Deformity of an Object.¹

It is clear from this passage that Hutcheson is committed to the notion that the love of Beauty is disinterested, claiming that while an object may be esteemed from a consideration of advantage, that esteem is itself 'antecedent' to such calculation.² To secure his position Hutcheson introduces his doctrine of the 'INTERNAL SENSE', and with it the notion that the foundation of appreciation, or taste, is feeling rather than reflective judgement.³

The Internal Sense was Hutcheson's major contribution to post-Shaftesburian

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 11.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 12-13.

³ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 2-3.

investigation into the perception of the Beautiful, and it is worth spending time spelling out exactly what Hutcheson means by the term. In essence Hutcheson argues that the perceiving subject has an innate propensity for receiving pleasure, or displeasure (in the form of actual pain), from the impressions made upon them by 'complex ideas'. Hutcheson uses this Lockean terminology to denote the ideas produced by forms which are beautiful, regular and harmonious.¹ The disposition to respond is held by Hutcheson to be analogous to, if not actually identical with, that exhibited by the external senses of sight, hearing and touch when they apprehend the 'simple' ideas of colour, sound and texture. Hutcheson makes this point most emphatically early in his argument when he states that:

THESE Determinations to be pleas'd with any Forms, or Ideas which occur to our Observation, the Author chooses to call SENSES; distinguishing them from the Powers which commonly go by that Name, by calling our Power of perceiving the Beauty of Regularity, Order, Harmony, an INTERNAL SENSE.²

It would appear from this passage that naming functions as the sole means of differentiating between the external and internal senses. Both types of sense function in the same way, each responding rapidly to external phenomena before reason can be exercised. However, Hutcheson's account makes the beautiful a matter of imagined apprehension and not the result of the existence of a characteristic actually inherent in any given object. Hutcheson continues in this vein writing that in his treatise, 'the word *Beauty* is taken for *the idea rais'd in us*, and a *Sense of Beauty* our *Power of receiving*

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 6-8.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. xiii.

this idea'.¹

Given this complication it is important to be clear about what the Beautiful is thought to be, generally speaking. Although Hutcheson sets out to describe the 'qualities' which make an object beautiful - he suggests that it is a compound ratio of uniformity and variety - the process of perception and approval is so dependent upon the doctrine of the Internal Sense that this becomes almost irrelevant. True he describes, as he puts it in a 'mathematical style', the manner in which the feathers of fowls are beautiful, precisely because of the qualitative relation of uniformity and variety, yet he keeps the location of the Beautiful mental, or sensory:

For Beauty, like other Names of sensible Ideas, properly denotes the *perception* of some Mind; so *Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter*, denote the sensation in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us, however we generally imagine otherwise.²

On this account Beauty as the 'idea rais'd in us' not a property of the object itself but the perception raised in the mind as the result of viewing that object.³ Rather confusingly Beauty is said to be an 'idea' but is one which has a 'nearer resemblance' to objects. Indeed the resemblance is sufficiently close to make it appear that there is little difference between the perception of Beauty and its existence in an object.

The extent to which these 'Determinations' to experience pleasure is a property of the object or idea in question and how much it is the response of the perceiving mind upon a belief in the presence of such qualities is, however, problematic. The nature of

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 7.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 14.

³ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 6.

this distinction may be clarified by a brief example. It is not clear from Hutcheson's account whether, say, the dome of St Paul's cathedral pleases because the sense registers its size or some other quality, or whether that pleasure arises from a belief in the existence of some quality or other. Furthermore the nature of pleasure's relation to beauty is unclear, Hutcheson leaves it ambiguous as to whether the two are linked casually, or are in fact one and the same thing. This confusion may have arisen because while Hutcheson describes beauty as being like a 'complex idea', he assumes that it affects the perceiving subject in the manner associated more readily with a 'simple idea'. That is to say instantly, and without reflection. So that the pleasure of a symphony would be registered in a way similar to the experience of a single note; an instantaneous effusion of either pleasure or pain.¹ These two points render the language of approval - how Hutcheson accounts for the sense of Beauty - profoundly ambiguous.

The most salient point, however, is that, following Addison, Hutcheson attributes a 'felt quality' to the apprehension of the beautiful, even when the form of Beauty at stake is as apparently devoid of life as that 'of Theorems'. The 'delight' he writes which accompanies the reading of theorems 'may really be call'd a kind of *Sensation*...distinct from bare knowledge itself'.² The consequence of these properties is therefore explicitly pleasurable, Hutcheson speaks of the:

pleasure we enjoy even when we have no Prospect of obtaining any farther *Advantage* from such a manner of deduction, than the immediate pleasure of contemplating the Beauty.³

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 1-2, 9-10.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 34.

³ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 35.

There is something rather closed about such a reading scenario. The move to refute the doctrine that self-interest is the cause of such inquiry seems to imperil the project as a whole by denying the reader any particular purpose whatsoever: 'all that thence can be infer'd is...that as in our external Senses, so in our *internal* ones, the pleasant Sensations generally arise from those Objects which calm Reason would have recommended, had we understood their use'. Theorems - which Hutcheson upholds as a special kind of Beauty - are innately the cause of a sensory pleasure regardless of their content.¹

The account Hutcheson gives of the 'Beauty of Theorems' therefore lacks any form of critical distance between sensation (pleasure) and the object. As a result the status of Hutcheson's categories, especially in relation to those put forward by Locke and Addison, are rendered problematic because Beauty's relation to what might be called secondary (or mental) qualities is nothing if not vague. This is because Hutcheson is not clear about how mental processes operate in relation to objects. Unlike Addison, Hutcheson does not really discriminate between primary and secondary sensations - or between subjects and objects - such that they seem at times to merge.² Furthermore at this point the relations between Beauty and Pleasure become ambiguous. The relation of the Beautiful to the pleasurable is crucial, and bespeaks much of the way in which Hutcheson is conceiving the moral sense at this point in his career. As Peter Kivy and V.M. Hope have argued, there seems to be a problematic hesitation about what

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 30, 36.

² For an account of this problem in Hutcheson's work, see Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1976), pp. 48-55.

constitutes the beautiful, and where that property may be located or perceived.¹ The question which might be asked here is what, in Hutcheson's terms, differentiates Beauty from any other occasion of pleasure or enjoyment. For if there is no difference, then Hutcheson would appear to be suggesting that the sense of Beauty is nothing more than a disposition to receive certain forms of pleasure. This would be close to the 'secret satisfaction' and diffusive compliance Addison accords perceivers of the Beautiful. There is an underlying tension in Hutcheson's account between those passages where beauty is regarded as a 'Kind of *Sensation*' and those where it is considered as an 'idea' raised in the mind. The former implies a process of instantaneous, unthinking gratification, while the latter, given the complexities of Hutcheson's Lockean inheritance, imply the role of cognition in the action of taste. The situation remains confused, with the ever present danger that the whole project will collapse back into a subjective pleasure seeking in which no position can be valued or esteemed

Hutcheson is, I think, motivated by a sense of some of the problems that I have been describing, when he begins his final section of the *Inquiry*. In his closing remarks Hutcheson claims justification for his argument and for his methodology in two ways. The first concerns the pleasure of the internal senses being the cause of the pursuit of 'Wealth or Power'.² This suggestion is offered by Hutcheson to counter any possible charge that his speculations have been nothing more than the 'airy Dreams of an Inflamed Imagination'. Property is therefore a worthwhile object of pursuit for the

¹ See Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, pp. 42-60, 61-85; and V.M. Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 25-27, 38-40, 45-49.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 93.

'sensible part of Mankind' as it allows them to enjoy pleasures impossible without that ownership.¹ Hutcheson further justifies his methodology by suggesting that it is of the kind appropriate to the limited capacity of mankind:

The Manner of Knowledge by *universal Theorems*, and of Operation by *universal Causes*, as far as we can attain it, must be the most convenient for Beings of limited Understanding and Power.²

This is because theory reduces the 'Multiplicity of proportions and Toil' to one agreeable object which may easily and enjoyably be apprehended. The two positions can now be brought together, so that:

it follows, "That *Beings* of limited Understanding and Power, if they act rationally for their own *interest*, must choose to operate by the *Simplest Means*, to invent *general Theorems*, and to study *regular Objects*."³

The introduction of interest is belated, and perhaps somewhat contrived. Yet Hutcheson accords it great importance, as 'beside this Consideration of *interest*, there does not appear to be any necessary Connection, antecedent to the Constitution of the AUTHOR of *Nature*' to associate beautiful objects with that 'sudden sensible *Pleasure* exalted in us upon observation of them'.⁴ Earlier in his treatise Hutcheson dispensed with 'interest', but it is brought in now, so it would seem, to prevent the collapse into pleasure which the discussion of Beauty has generated. In fact Hutcheson is prepared to give this 'interest' a distinctly proprietorial caste, alleging that the 'full Enjoyment'

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 94-95.

² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 98.

³ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 99.

⁴ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 100

of music, dress, architecture and equipage is impossible 'without *Property*.'¹

That the '*interest*' Hutcheson describes is conceived of as property, as objects owned so that they may be pleurably consumed, indicates an important shift away from the idea that the consumption of individual goods has no social value.² Hutcheson, however, remains hesitant, and it is finally to the munificence of the Deity that he attributes the beauties of the created universe. His reticence on this point is indicative of the inadequacy of the bourgeois subject position which Hutcheson addresses. Embarrassed by the apparently mercantile cast of his conclusions, Hutcheson introduces a providential cause for man's grubby materialism. Adam Smith writing later in the century is not so inconvenienced and is able to state that: 'As the idea of expense seems often to embellish, so that of cheapness seems as frequently to tarnish the lustre even of agreeable objects'³ Smith's breezy disregard for the proprieties of cultural acquisition was not one many were able to make in the mid-century, most theorists were to remain sceptical about the connection between 'wealth' and the 'full Enjoyment' of the senses.⁴ Hutcheson's account, however, remains of interest for the way in which it connects the

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 94-95.

² For a more detailed consideration of Hutcheson's positions see Daniela Gobetti, *Private and Public: Individual Households and the Body Politic in Locke and Hutcheson*, (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. pp. 111-37.

³ Adam Smith, 'Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called the Imitative Arts' in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects with Dugald Stewart's Account of Adam Smith*, eds. W.P.D. Wightman, J.C. Bryce & I.S. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) p. 183.

⁴ A notable exception to this trend was Smith countryman, David Hume. See his 'Of the Refinement of the Arts' in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), pp. 268-80.

acts of possession with sensible gratification. The connection was new and important in the mid-century, but most significantly it allowed a greater constituency of owners to justify their possessions with an authoritative moral framework.

The Thrill of the New: Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty.

While Hutcheson, along with Addison and Richardson, can be thought of as producing a discourse in which the appreciation of the beautiful became a gratification acquired either from the senses, or most radically from property, most mid-century accounts of taste can best be understood as engaged in a serious and problematic negotiation with the emerging commercial culture. In this context the status of the new social order was profoundly ambivalent.¹ This hesitation is particularly apparent in the work of the writers such as Hogarth and Cooper. The extent to which their work was in opposition to commerce will be the issue here, as I want to explore how each moulded their account of taste in response to with the aspirations of a mercantile age. It was a sympathy which in Hogarth's case caught the attention of the *World* in April, 1753:

A great comic painter has proved, I am told, in a piece everyday expected, that the line of beauty is an S: I take this to be the unanimous opinion of all our professors of horticulture, who seem to have the most idolatrous veneration for that crooked letter at the tail of the alphabet. Their land, their water must be serpentine; and because the formality of the last age ran too much into right lines and parallels a spirit of opposition carries the present

¹ For a general discussion of this moment in English culture see, James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 157-82, 201-48.

universally into curves and mazes.¹

The satire is pointed, if a little wide of the mark. The *World* illustrates a common strategy in representing commercial acquisitions as particular tastes existing in a fragmentary state. The attack on modern commercial culture becomes more explicit when the paper cites squire Mushroom's villa, on the sight of which 'the eye is saluted by a yellow serpentine river...over which is a bridge, *partly in the chinese style*'. Consequently the hapless Mushroom is 'chef d'oeuvre' of 'modern impertinence'.² The traditionally minded periodicals, like the *World* and the *Connoisseur*, portrayed the tastes of the middle-classes as random, unprincipled and above all indecorous. The middle class is represented as able only to spend, to consume without judgement.³

To a degree Hutcheson and Richardson responded to this charge by seeking to restrain it within the security of Shaftesburian connoisseurship and a civic humanist commitment to universals. Hutcheson looked for 'uniformity amidst variety', and while he did not deny the diversity of objects thought beautiful he was anxious to incorporate that range within a permanent order or fixed 'Design'. Hogarth, by contrast, is committed to the pursuit of novelty and variety as the foundation of visual pleasure. To

¹ [Edward Moore], *The World* No. 15 (April 12th, 1753) in *The World. By Adam Fitz-Adam*, a new edition, 3 vols, (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1770), vol. I, p. 74.

² [Moore], *The World*, vol. I, p. 75; see also, *World*, no. 12 (March 22nd, 1753); *World*, no. 26 (June 28th, 1753), in *The World*, vol. I, pp. 57-58, 134-38.

³ For further examples of this form of criticism in the mid-century periodical see, *Connoisseur*, no. II (Feb. 7th, 1754); *Connoisseur*, no. XXXIII (Sept. 13th, 1754); *Connoisseur*, no. CXIII (25th March, 1756); *Connoisseur*, no. CXXXV (August 26th, 1756); *Connoisseur*, no. CXXXIX (Sept. 23rd, 1756), in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General*, 4th ed. 4 vols, (London: R. Baldwin, 1761), vol. I, pp. 11-12, 255-61, vol. IV, pp 65-71, 223-36, 266.

an important degree Hogarth exploited the possibilities and opportunities represented by Addison's *Spectator* papers and extended them.¹ His position therefore, unlike Hutcheson's, embraced commercial modernity without embarrassment, and proposes a conception of taste in which variety, novelty and heterogeneity are given decisive roles.² This was indeed 'entirely new'.

The *Analysis of Beauty*'s novelty can be conceived of on two levels. First, there is the newness and variety described in the text; in Hogarth's discussion in 'Of INTRICACY', for example. Secondly, there is the novelty of the *Analysis* as an exposition of the beautiful. David Bindman has written of the 'essential loneliness' of Hogarth's position in the 1750s, suggesting that Hogarth's position was one upon which few would have ventured. As Bindman argues 'his determined empiricism and attempt to reduce the Beau ideal to an observed method could hardly appeal to those influenced by the classical idealism of Rome'.³ Hogarth was of this view, writing that:

I have but little hopes of having a favourable attention given to my design in general, by those who have already had a more fashionable introduction into the mysteries of the arts of painting and sculpture. Much less do I expect, or in truth desire, the countenance of that set of people, who have an interest in exploding any kind of doctrine, that may teach us to *see with our eyes*.⁴

¹ For a discussion of Hogarth's indebtedness to Addison see, Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth vol. I: The Modern Moral Subject, 1697-1732*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1991), p. 76, *Hogarth vol. II: High Art and Low, 1732-1750*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1993), pp. 292, 335, 378, *Hogarth vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1993), pp. 68-69.

² Paulson, *Hogarth vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-64*, pp. 63-67, 73-76.

³ David Bindman, *Hogarth*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), pp. 151-53.

⁴ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste*, (London: J. Reeve, 1753), p. 2.

Hogarth goes on to announce that the theoretically-minded are the 'instructors and leaders' of the fashionable. Hogarth's adherence to an 'observed method', describing what the viewer might actually see, led him both to describe in common English the process of observation, and to extend his account of beauty to encompass the everyday sights of London. Most infamously this new capaciousness included stays, candlesticks and smoke jacks.¹ It was this apparent lack of discrimination which, despite a number of favourable reviews, most notably in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, aroused the ire of his critics.²

Hogarth begins the *Analysis* by announcing that it was his aim to rectify the bad taste of the connoisseurs, and to enable a greater audience to appreciate the nature of Beauty. To Hogarth's mind the connoisseurs were not, as Richardson described them rational men guided by their own judgement, but were instead a group of fashionable, over-polished dilettanti. In short a set of people overly persuaded by the reputation of antiquity and by the effeminacy of foreign art.³ In one of the most famous passages in the *Analysis* he rounds upon them, alleging that:

Who but a bigot, even to the antiques, will say that he has not seen faces and necks, hands and arms in living women, than even the Grecian Venus does not but coarsely imitate.⁴

Here, as throughout the *Analysis*, the warm sensuousness of a living English woman is

¹ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 40-42, 46-47, 49-50.

² [?Samuel Johnson], *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. XXIV, (January, 1754), pp. 11-15. For an account of the reception of the *Analysis*, see Paulson, *Hogarth vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, pp. 132-151.

³ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. iii-v.

⁴ Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 66-67.

preferred to the dusty lure of the ancient statue.¹ The statement is curious in view of the subsequent remark that 'Ladies always speak skilfully of necks, hands and arms; and often will point out such particular beauties or defects in their make, as might easily escape the man of science'.² Hogarth is enlarging the community which is thought capable of judgement - butchers and smiths are also given some credit. However, the extent of women's judgment is restricted, most obviously by the exposure of the body: a restriction which keeps women's taste confined to that which can be seen with propriety.

The restriction of women's judgement is sexual, as well as social. It marks women's exclusion from the forms of pleasure which are associated with less chaste forms of beauty. Elsewhere in the *Analysis* Hogarth makes the occasion of Beauty a matter of excited exploration:

Intricacy in form, therefore, I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines, which composes it, that *leads the eye a wanton kind of chase*, and which from the pleasure that gives the mind entitles it to the name of beautiful.³

Real excellence is therefore located in '*the beauty of a composed intricacy of form*'.⁴ It is an image which is, once again, best exemplified by common examples. He remarks that the 'principal' of intricacy 'recommends modesty in dress, to keep up our expectations'. But it is in the description of the face (of which women are the best judges) that Hogarth is most specific:

¹ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 64-66.

² Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 81.

³ Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 25.

⁴ Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 28.

The face indeed will bear a constant view, yet always entertain and keep our curiosity awake, without the assistance of either a mask, or veil; because vast variety of changing circumstances keeps the eye and the mind in constant play, in following the numberless turns of expression it is capable of. How soon does a face that wants expression, grow insipid, tho' it be ever so pretty.¹

Clothing and faces are successful because they encourage 'imaginary pursuits'.² These circuits of pleasure, like the 'giddy maze' Burke finds between women's breasts, connect pleasure, feeling and polite sociability together. In Hogarth's polemic the '*beauty of a composed intricacy*' comes to be equated not only with the pleasures of variety, but with the sensations of delight which attend the sight of the women whose modesty and sexuality inhabit the same uncertain space. Beauty is therefore made into a mode of intricacy and pleasure which he terms a '*wanton kind of chase*', a moment of delight reliant on the excitement of the viewer's senses.³

In these terms there is something genuinely innovative about the *Analysis*, though it may not be the 'first anti-academic treatise in the history of aesthetics'. This examination depends on the fact that 'Hogarth places the onus of judgement on the sensitivity and training of the observer'.⁴ It has been suggested, by Ronald Paulson, that Hogarth's realignment of beauty with the sensory can be profitably located with the context of the 'new poetics' of the 1740s and 50s.⁵ The poetry and criticism of the

¹ Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 36.

² Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 36-37.

³ Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 28, 25.

⁴ Michael Kitson, 'Hogarth's Apology for Painters' in *Walpole Society Notes*, vol. XII, (1966-68), pp. 65, 71.

⁵ Paulson, *Hogarth*, vol. III; *Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, pp. 81-85.

1740s marks a transition from the moral disquisitions of Pope, towards a poetic sensibility based upon the reaction of the subject to emotional rather than political or social events. Poets like Mark Akenside and James Thomson had begun this transition, but it was to find its greatest expression in the poetry of Young, Collins and Gray, and in the criticism provided by the Warton brothers.¹ The long digressive poems produced by Thomson and Akenside strove to find a language, not for the description of nature or ethics, but for the presentation of felt experience. Key passages in *The Seasons* and in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* suggest that it is through a sensational and emotive personality that beauty is to be found.² For example it is only when Thomson has Lyttelton joined by his 'lov'd LUCINDA' that 'Nature all/Wears to the Lover's eye a Look of Love'.³ Akenside perhaps goes a little further. It has been observed of his poetics that he sought to 'use the beauties of nature as an occasion for discussing and describing the operations of the human mind'.⁴ Certainly Akenside makes feeling - and particular feelings of pleasure central to his project, along with a liberated notion of the

¹ A useful account this transformation in poetry and poetry criticism has been provided by Richard Wendorf. See his *William Collins and Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 27-55. A more general, but less satisfactory account, can be found in Joan Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton*, (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 1-74.

²For a discussion of this aspect of the *Seasons*, see Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of the "The Seasons"*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 73-75.

³ James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. and intro. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 'Spring' ll. 935, 936-7.

⁴ John Norton, 'Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination: An Exercise in Poetics*' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol.3, no. 3 (Spring, 1970), p. 370.

Fancy.¹

According to Paulson, the shift to a more effusive account of the pleasures of the senses ensured an important change in the Shaftesburian topos of the judgement of Hercules in which the indulgence of feeling replaced the stern nature of judgement.² This suggestion seems particularly persuasive in relation to Hogarth's highly sexualized pursuit of beauty and pleasure as represented by the attractive living woman. For Hogarth the interest and delight of beauty lies precisely, as it did for Burke, in the excitement of feeling. The Beautiful is made sensuous, the product of a personal response. The pleasures of contemplating beautiful intricate forms give rise to a:

kind of sensation..., which I have since felt at seeing at a country-dance; tho' perhaps the latter might be somewhat more engaging; particularly when my eye eagerly pursued a favourite dancer, through all the windings of the figure, who then was bewitching to the sight, as the imaginary ray..., was dancing with her all the time.³

These terms perhaps indicate why the country-dance as a moment of social complexity and aroused passion came to be such an important image for Hogarth.⁴ For it was here that the sensual nature of both Beauty and society could be most readily, and most exuberantly realised.⁵ Above all, the *Analysis* suggests that a consideration of sexual

¹ Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, (London: R. Dodsley, 1744), Bk. I, ll. 124-25, 127-29; see also Norton, 'Akenside's *Pleasures*', pp. 371-72, 382-83.

² Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, pp. 95-96

³ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 27-28.

⁴ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 137-38, 147-50.

⁵ For an alternative reading of the function of the 'Country dance', and particularly its role in *Plate 2* of the *Analysis*, see Paulson, *Hogarth vol. III: Art and Politics 1750-64*, pp. 112-31.

difference is central to the analysis of taste within a modern, commercial culture. For it is in this difference, one which can be apprehended by everyone, that taste can begin to be manifested with something approaching concreteness.¹ It is with this in mind that I now turn to John Gilbert Cooper, who in common with Burke and Hogarth produces an account of the beautiful which is highly sensitive to the distinctions of gender.

John Gilbert Cooper and the Luxury of Feeling.

In contradistinction to the texts already discussed in this chapter John Gilbert Cooper's *Letters Concerning Taste* represent an ambitious, if ambivalent polemic. Cooper has been read, most notably by David Solkin, as an exemplar of 'patrician' culture.² What interests Solkin is the extent to which Cooper can be seen as the supporter of the aristocratic and landed elites of mid-eighteenth century England. Solkin goes so far as to suggest that 'Cooper's line of reasoning comes straight out of Lord Shaftesbury'. In so doing Solkin has concentrated on those passages in the *Letters* where Cooper images the rural retreat as the proper environment for tasteful and genteel contemplation. Solkin does not focus in the precise mechanisms though which value is attributed or judgement conducted. To read this process is to discover a great deal more modernity in Cooper's polemic than Solkin is prepared to allow. However, as recent work, including that by Solkin himself, has pointed out, the patrician, or in John Barrell's terms, the civic, represents one, and only one, language of value in a

¹ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 28-29, 59-66.

² David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson - The Landscape of Reaction* (London: Tate Gallery, 1982), pp. 58-64, 68-70.

competing network of discourses.¹ What I believe an analysis of Cooper will reveal is not his unequivocal affirmation of an unchanging aristocratic culture, but rather the position of his text as a point of intersection between conflicting modes of social and critical address.

The suggestion that Cooper might represent a more ambivalent position is I think consistent with the general tenor of mid-century culture. There was for Cooper, and for aspects of his culture as a whole, a problem about defining and approving taste. Unlike professional philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson, who were able to suggest qualities which produced a perception of the Beautiful (*Uniformity amidst Variety*) and so achieve a quantifiable calculus - the 'mathematical style' - Cooper opted instead for an unsupported doctrine of the internal senses, arguing that external beauty will make 'a responsive Harmony vibrate within'.² This would appear to be a fairly incontrovertible position, if only on its own terms; for if the beautiful and the grand are instantly affecting there should, theoretically, be no grounds for dispute. True taste ordained by God should appeal to all equally. This however is not the case, as Cooper is to spend much of his time dismissing the preferences of others; for in no sense does Cooper believe in the opened, democratic potential of the internal sense model. The question

¹ In a number of recent studies there has been a growing awareness of the variety of readings to which Shaftesbury's work was available. See David Solkin, 'ReWrighting Shaftesbury' in John Barrell ed. *Painting and the Politics of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 73-100; and Robert Markley, 'Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne and the Theatricality of Virtue' in Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown eds. *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics and English Literature*, (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 210-30.

² John Gilbert Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1755), pp. 7-8.

therefore one of deciding who can perceive or define what is tasteful, and from what position social or analytical they may presume to speak. As a result *Letters Concerning Taste* generates a number of questions concerning personality and the definition of culture.

It is worth noting now the nature of Cooper's terms themselves, and in particular the main object of his criticism, which is the 'false taste' generated by luxury. Luxury, as John Sekora has demonstrated, occupied a pivotal position in the texts and languages which articulated culture in the eighteenth century.¹ In many respects luxury (conceived of by Sekora as a Foucauldian discourse) provided a way of surveying and castigating the modern, one which permitted a surveillance of power, riches and commerce. At the heart of this 'lost system of discourse' was the aristotelian belief in the necessity of hierarchy and the proper separation of social classes.² The blurring of these divisions, occasioned by the huge expansion in commerce and overseas-trade, brought the disdain of traditional intellectuals to a fevered pitch. It was this feeling which prompted Samuel Fawconer to claim, somewhat furiously, that:

Generally speaking, the consequence of extensive commerce is exorbitant wealth: and exorbitant wealth naturally produces an attention to pleasurable enjoyments. For they, who have the means of luxury in their hands, seldom deny themselves any gratification, which their circumstances give them the opportunity of indulging....But here lies the danger: luxury is of that assimilating insinuating nature, that its infection, like a pestilence, runs thro' every order of the country...[and], whether tempted by inborn pride, or seduced by the power of all prevailing fashion, every impertinent inferior

¹ John Sekora, *Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought from Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 7-11, 62-131.

² Sekora, *Luxury*, pp. 4, 25-26.

treads on the heels of his betters.¹

Fawconer is concerned that as monied wealth rises in importance relative to landed wealth it enables new actors to emerge on the social and cultural stage. This change in turn causes a corresponding decline in the 'real' values of the landed interest, the state and the church.² He appears painfully conscious that the liquid wealth of the merchant classes unseats the traditional orders of certainty and privilege, for with these *guardians* removed only a chaos of selfishness and interest is imaginable. This is a prospect which for Fawconer marks the end of England as civilised, and civic, society.³

In the uncertain climate of the 1750s the charge of luxury and luxuriance was an attractive ideological weapon endorsed by critics as diverse as Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith and John Brown.⁴ Brown's *Estimate of the Manners and Opinions of Our Times* provides a particularly acerbic instance of this form of critique. Occupying a prominent place in Brown's polemic is the spread of luxuriant effeminacy, a contagion which Brown sees as injurious to the 'National capacity'. It is a malaise which weakens, invariably, though not irrecoverably, the ability of the nation to defend itself. In common

¹ Samuel Fawconer, *An Essay on Modern Luxury: or, an Attempt to Delineate its Nature, Causes and Effects*, (London: James Fletcher, 1765), pp. 4-5.

² For a more general account of this ideological position in eighteenth-century culture, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Republican Thought and the Atlantic Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 423-61, 462-505.

³ Fawconer, *Modern Luxury*, pp. 38, 44-45, 55-56.

⁴ For a discussion of the diversity of texts written against luxury in the mid-century see, Sekora, *Luxury*, pp. 63-109.

with Mark Akenside,¹ Brown argues that the twin follies of fashion and commercial (monetary) acquisition combine to ensure the existence of only the most enervating and enervated of cultures. Brown argues that:

the character of the Manners of our Times:...on a fair examination will probably appear to be that of a "vain, luxurious, and selfish Effeminacy."²

Brown goes on to claim that modern luxury has robbed the nation of its moral fibre; martial and public values have in his opinion been forsaken for the giddy pleasures of the moment. Traditional English values have consequently been lost and along with them the masculine resolve which made the national defence, religious observance, and sound reasoning possible. Brown can be specific in his isolation of a whole repertoire of contemporary evils, citing effeminacy of dress; the excessive use of carriages and chairs; the enervating impact of warm, carpeted homes; and idle, shallow talk, all of which culminate in a sickening 'vanity' and 'unmanly delicacy'.³ This liturgy is consistent with a recognizably traditionalist polemic. Fawconer composes a comparable list of social ills.⁴ What is important about the *Estimate*, at least for what I want to say about Cooper, is that Brown takes these depravities as evidence of a public body in decline.⁵ Luxury, according to Brown (and less specifically to Fawconer), because it

¹ Akenside argued that the corruption of the times was such that the gentry could no longer be relied upon to defend the nation. See his *An Ode to the Country Gentleman of England* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1758).

² John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Opinions of Our Times* (London: L. Davis & C. Reymers, 1757), p. 29.

³ Brown, *Estimate*, pp. 36-38.

⁴ Fawconer, *Modern Luxury*, pp. 11-13.

⁵ Brown, *Estimate*, p. 62.

dissolves the ties which form the social fabric abolishes the idea of a reputable political public. In consequence, being 'public' - a situation represented through the activities of prostitutes and the antics of 'pretty fellows' - becomes merely a show of lewdness, or at best a vain search for the 'Applause of Men'.¹ The transformation of the public into a realm of commerce, of interest, and most of all of pleasure ensures that political corruption follows.²

Consequently, as both Brown and Fawconer make clear, luxury, the baleful fruit of commercial excess, marks a profound loss of both national identity and cultural certainty. It is in response to this sense of uncertainty that Cooper's argument begins with an attempt to provide a system for accepting traditional values, and it is over the issue of security of judgement (in this case judgement of taste) that the opening dispute of the text originates. Cooper is writing to rebuke a correspondent who has suggested that taste is merely an individual or momentary affection:

Whence comes it, EUPHEMIUS, that you, who are so *feelingly* alive to each fine Sensation that Beauty and Harmony gives the Soul, should so often assent, contrary to what you daily experience, *that TASTE is govern'd by caprice, and that BEAUTY is reducible to no Criterion?*³

This quotation, from the first letter in the series which comprise *Letters Concerning Taste*, establishes Euphemius as an philosophically engaged correspondent, one who contrary to the 'Example you afford us' is mistaken in his separation of truth and beauty. Cooper replies to the dummy-argument provided by his addressee by asserting

¹ Brown, *Estimate*, pp. 45, 73, 58.

² Brown, *Estimate*, pp. 112-19.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 1.

the necessity and pleasure of good taste; a gratification resulting from, he claims, a 'chain of truths' leading back to God. The first nine letters, all addressed to Euphemius, constitute the most developed thesis of the text. Starting with a rehearsal of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Addison, Cooper moves through the categories of taste to define imagination and sense. Taken together the letters to Euphemius attempt to fashion a coherent advocacy of the beautiful, and of proper taste for a correct conduct in all aspects of life.

The interest of the text lies in its success, or otherwise, in trying to establish this agenda. In this respect the importance of ideas of taste, luxury and femininity cannot be overstated, though they are ambivalent ideological counters. The extent to which the use of these ideas to resolve ideological tensions - those generated by Cooper's dismay at, and yet partial acceptance of modern culture - and the distinct possibility that they may add to those tensions is at the core of the analysis undertaken here. In essence it is possible to assert that taste, as a strategy of containment, is finally overpowered by the excesses which the use of images of feeling and femininity generate. Indeed of the use of the two latter categories as the mainstay of Cooper's argument occurs in ways which I take to be distinctly ambiguous. It is this which makes him modern, for while Cooper consistently advocates the necessity of a private, aristocratic retreat - much in the manner of Shaftesbury - he frames it in language which can be taken as relatively new: the language of sympathy in which the expression of sensibility is a prized commodity.¹

¹ For a discussion of the relation of sensibility to commercial culture see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992) and John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Feeling has become a means of private gratification, rather than the means through which the universal good is apprehended.

The epistolary form of Cooper's text, and the structure of address which that form engenders (in both senses of the word), provides a way into these rather complicated cross currents. The epistolary form is ideally suited to Cooper's overall project as it indicates all the associations of privacy, domesticity and leisured philosophical speculation which he wishes to convey. The letters, in Cooper's hands, represent an easy, almost complacent, certainly part-confessional medium, in which the anonymous author may ponder the intricacies and the ecstasies of a tasteful life in a relatively uninhibited way. The twenty letters which complete the text are arranged so as to appear as a collection written to a 'small circle of Friends, here concealed under fictitious Names'.¹ The friends rejoice in the wonderfully contrived names of Euphemius, Leonora, Philemon, Critophilus, Eugenio and Aristos, a list to which may be added the few characters to whom the letters attribute either praise or blame. The effect is to suggest a closed community which shares a common social, philosophic and class-based agenda. This is crucial; Cooper's text, unlike Shaftesbury's or Hutcheson's, has little to offer directly to the public sphere. Though not ignored - indeed the text is frequently ambiguous on the point - public life is placed at a distance so as to ensure the primacy of certain forms of privacy, and even seclusion. However, the isolation of a small community away from the rigors of life in civil society supports a distinct view of aristocratic life and sensibility, one which wishes to remain actively hegemonic despite its seclusion. Cooper seeks to produce subjects suitable for public life (and taste) even

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. iii.

if they do not actually pursue a career in the senate. So that the text is situated in a rather curious, if not uncommon, double bind which suggests that public values can only be upheld through non-participation in the very culture for which they are designed. The possible ideological implications of these secluded epistles will emerge as a major indicator of the final address and addressee of the *Letters Concerning Taste*. The author of these letters is at pains to reassure his readers that he loves the 'Comforts of domestic Life and the Charms of Contemplation in retirement'.¹ He does not wish, it appears, to be seen to offer himself to the corrupting influences of publicity or even publication. Cautious but noble seclusion is therefore made the order of the day.² A similar strategy is adopted in James Thomson's *The Seasons*, where Lyttleton is represented as a man capable of public virtue largely because he has the sense to remain aloof from the degradation of party and city.³

Writing the text in the form of letters to friends establishes this agenda very successfully and succinctly. Unlike the full-blown treatise, of the kind produced by Burke or Hutcheson, *Letters Concerning Taste* is able to introduce instances of highly personal taste and experience into its argument. By appearing to be the product of private, relatively unguarded utterance the text claims the authenticity which came in the

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 16. Cooper's commitment to the ideal of a rural retreat can also be seen in his *Epistles to the Great from Aristippus in Retirement* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1758).

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 50, 52.

³ For a discussion of this theme in *The Seasons*, see John Barrell, *English Literature, 1730-80: An Equal Wide, Survey*, (London: Hutchinson, 1983), pp. 59-63. Compare Terry Eagleton's point that the best way to support a public culture is to privatise it - *The Function of Criticism: The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1986), see especially, pp. 69-84.

mid-century to be associated with a spontaneous declaration of feeling. The testimony of the *Letters Concerning Taste* is written so as to appear unmediated by the hand of either philosopher or editor. The epistolary form makes possible certain modes of authority and textual practice, which Cooper uses to inscribe a position of command, making sure it is his judgements which finally count. Foremost amongst these moves is the emphasis on immediacy, that is to say the assumption that feelings can be communicated directly by objects, words or views. Experience becomes an instantaneous flow of feelings accurately re-presented through the letter form. It is something which is incontrovertible, coming as it does from the writer's very 'Soul'.¹ This direct reporting of these feelings or sensations enables the claims made elsewhere in the text to seem admirably supported as the true declarations of a tasteful heart.

It is in this frame that the author assures Philemon that, 'my Heart always flows from my Tongue and Pen', a statement which implies a firm belief in the ability of the letter to carry emotional sentiment from one individual to another without loss or excess.² The addresses to Philemon, and in particular those directed to Euphemius, also serve to suggest a sphere in which private acquaintances and values have a high premium. The letters tease, cajole and praise their supposed readers, gently admonishing them, or offering the warmest praises. The effusive nature of the letters is not without its camp appeal, as the revelation of yet more exhilarating passion brought on at the sight of beautiful prospects perhaps does more to suggest a humorously timorous, yet

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 16-17, 86.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 87. For an account of the 'ideological' impact of writing-to-the-moment, see Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 23-26.

exultant, aesthete, than a rigorous philosopher. For the writer of these letters, the prospect of a rural seat was sufficient for him to recollect that: 'I could not refrain from bursting forth, in a kind of poetical Ecstasy'.¹ Personal feelings, the sensations of the tender heart are installed as a major counter in Cooper's polemic. The cloying obviousness of the prose, its repeated exultations and encomiums on sensate life, make this clear.

Cooper, re-reading Shaftesbury, sees truth and beauty as coincident. Broadly speaking Cooper's position is that Truth is, through divine ordination, the principle upon which Beauty is founded, and that any deviation from Beauty must therefore be an unsightly falsehood. Within this scheme the approval of any given object rests upon an internal sense which, following the plan of the 'ALMIGHTY', ensures that 'all beauty without should make a responsive Harmony vibrate within'. At this level all terms are securely located within a coherent discourse, if only as a consequence of what Peter Kivy describes as the 'Deist dodge' of yielding to God responsibility for final causes.² Ostensibly Cooper is merely extending and justifying the doctrine advanced by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that whatever is beautiful, or true, will immediately strike the spectator with immediate and irrecoverable effect. He writes accordingly that:

A *good* TASTE is that instantaneous Glow of Pleasure which thrills thro' our whole Frame, and seizes upon the Applause of the Heart, before the intellectual Power, Reason, can descend from the Throne of the Mind to ratify its Approbation.³

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 17.

² Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, p. 222.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 3.

Significantly Shaftesbury does not dispense with the function of reason as quickly and as carelessly as Cooper has done here. In this account the role of reason is reduced to that of a rubber-stamp; on the throne it may be, but its office is restricted to the ratification of decisions taken by the more clamorous senses.

Throughout Cooper's argument, however, there remains an uneasy juxtaposing of feeling and reason. A rural seat and the prospect of the lands around provide an example of this latter form of approval. The view he writes:

upon the very first Glance yields a grateful Emotion in the Breast when in a variety of Scenes there arise from the whole ONE Order, whose different parts will be found, by the critical Eye of Contemplation, to relate naturally to one another, and each examin'd apart, to be productive of the Necessaries, the Conveniences, and the Emoluments of Life.¹

The idea of the critically engaged 'eye of Contemplation' indicates that, here at least, reason has been retained as a guide to judgement. Despite the naturalistic tropes of yielding and arising, 'examin'd apart' must refer to some action of the mind. Reason, however, even in the consideration of landscape, is not always produced by Cooper's text:

Nor was it long before it came in my turn to be not *touch'd* but *rapt*, and to *feel* the aetherial Glow of Admiration at the sight of a neighbouring Villa to SCARBOROUGH.²

The viewing subject is placed once more in a position of pleased ease; the tasteful proportion of the house - reminding him of Tempe - suggests an appropriateness of design which is indicative of the right manner of living as much as the right style in architecture. It is significant, however, that although the account offers what may be

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 3-4.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 16.

taken as the occasion of the pleasure received, there is no sense of the critical eye having found these out prior to the receipt of gratification.

That tasteful proportion may convey an idea of a proper way to live is central to Cooper's whole project. Frequently an ideal independence and domestic security forms an integral part in his index of value, privileging those scenes which offer resistance to the corrupting influences of city and commerce. Agathocles's castle is a case in point, which 'like the Queen of the country overlooks the subject vales around it', a description which foregrounds the way in which this idea of taste relies in part upon the presumption of aristocratic hegemony.¹ The *Letters Concerning Taste* reflect upon the author's privileged and domesticated seclusion. He is unhurried and unsullied by the outside world. The 'beautiful Proportion' which underlies the 'science of living well' demands a healthy disregard for the corruption of public life.² The place of public diversion is filled by a cultivated sympathy for the 'PENSIVE PLEASURES' of a secluded life.³

In contrast to this well-ordered life modern luxury leads to a deviation from natural and moral truths. Luxury is consistently presented as something which the man of taste must guard against. Luxuriance is a malign force which Cooper sees as degrading the arts by promoting styles and designs at variance with nature.⁴ Luxury leads to depravity and corruption according to Cooper's account, leaving nothing but

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 119-21.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 6, 68-69.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 51.

⁴ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 59, 71-79, 80-84.

trashy exuberance. The architecture of modern buildings displays only a 'splendid impertinence'. It is brash and gross in its extravagance and ornamentation. The convenient unity and variety of the rural seat is lost in a gaudy show of excessive irregularity:

But in all these notable Distortions of Art, I perceived the poor prostituted Word TASTE, was constantly made use of to express the abortive Conceptions of distempered *Fancy*, you would be led to think, that the new Gentry of the City, and their Leaders the well-dressed Mob about *St James's*, were seiz'd the moment they left the Town-Air with a *Chinese* Madness, and imagined a Deviation from *Truth* and *Nature* was an infallible Criterion of TASTE.¹

The implications of 'well-dressed' are clear enough; the 'new Gentry' is merely wearing the trappings of refined society and does not possess the substance of true breeding or taste. The specific isolation of preferences for the chinese also indicates a traditionalist's fear of the new found wealth of imperialism.² For it represents an importation which is taken to be an unpleasant introduction of the exotic, a force injurious to the nation, as well as a distasteful and unpleasant fashion. Moreover, a chinese taste was generally perceived to lack coherence or uniformity; they were indeed a mere profusion of ornament. Cooper sees such tastes as depraved and as corrupted as the men who offer them, weighted down as they are by false extravagance and wealth. Cooper's proposition is clear: social and ethical irregularity, if not overt vice, emerge concurrently with poor taste. Luxury, the wealth produced by commerce in producing a impoverished taste,

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 62.

² Disapprobation of a taste for chinoiserie was in the 1750s and 1760s a crucial mark of traditional tastes. See Robert Donald Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion During the Seven Years' War*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 241-368.

represents a 'Deviation from *Truth and Nature*'.

However if Cooper is to establish his central point - that there are real criteria defining the beautiful - then he has to do more than merely state instances of depraved taste. He has to find some way of describing the divergence he describes in a way which maintains his stated aim that truth, value and beauty are coincident. At one level Cooper can, as Hutcheson had done, reflect that this disagreement is nothing more than the consequence of luxury and mis-education.¹ This might make the doctrine of the internal sense look almost worthless, and certainly makes the version of it Cooper offers Euphemius look vulnerable. For if it is to make any impact at all the internal sense model must maintain the primacy of that singular and irrecoverable impulse which is at its philosophical centre.

What Euphemius had suggested in his letter was that '*additional Charms*' may be granted to the 'human Form...from Education'. To an extent Cooper accepts the potential for association (rejected by Hutcheson) which his correspondent offers. As a result he accepts the prospect of legitimately '*acquir'd Charms*' as a way of thinking through the problem of disparate tastes.² These charms, he suggests, form a 'superaddition' which, while it maintains an address to truth as the sole point of origin for beauty, combines it with a 'look' and a 'disposition' so as to suggest that the existence of feelings of amiability and love sanction a diversity of tastes. The figure of wise and ancient 'ETHOGRAPHI' is introduced at this point in the argument to describe the relation between harmony and love in a way which renders '*acquired charms*' consistent with

¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 87-91.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 10.

divine truth:

our Souls are attun'd to one another, like the Strings of musical Instruments, and the Chord of one being struck, the *Unison* of another, tho' untouch'd will vibrate to it. The Passions therefore of the human Heart, express'd either in the living Countenance or the Mimetic Strokes of Art, will affect the Soul of the Beholder with a familiar and responsive Disposition. What wonder then that Beauty, borrowing thus the Look of Softening Love, whose Power can lull the most watchful of the Senses, should cause that Sweet *Nepenthe* upon our heart, and enchant or corresponding Thoughts to rest in the Embraces of Desires?¹

Beauty by borrowing the 'Look of softening Love' has begun to be figured as a benign seduction. So that while some charms are not given through real criteria, and are merely associated (another example is the majesty given to a castle if a famous battle took place there) they strike the viewer as strongly as if they were real. Beauty becomes on this reading something which may 'steal more subtly on the Soul of the Beholder', tempting him to approval and acceptance. Cooper continues:

Sure then I am, that you will always allow Love to be the Source and End of our Being, and consequently consistent with Truth. It is the Superaddition of such Charms to Proportion, which is called the *Tasteful* in Music, Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Gardening and Architecture. By which is generally meant that happy Assemblage which excites in our Minds, by Analogy, some pleasurable image.²

Love is internalised as an addition to, or even primary part of taste. Cooper is mixing, rather unwisely, what Addison, and later Burke tried - ultimately without success - to keep apart: desire and appreciation.

This idea of approval through desire gives rise to an image of the 'chords' or strings of the heart. The heart, the synecdoche for love and desire now appears as

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 11-12.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 12.

commensurate with the internal sense. For this analysis to succeed beauty must only be registered when there already exists a harmony within.¹ While this sensation may be supposed to rely on a conception of the Man of Polite Imagination (fittingly, Addison himself is the example), this image of inner-chord changes leads to what Walter Jackson Bate terms a 'luxury of feeling'.² An unrestricted outpouring which relies only on the movements and vibrations of the heart to control or direct it. As a description of aesthetic sensibility this goes some way beyond even Shaftesbury's rhapsodic invocations and might, as Kivy suggests, push the text tentatively towards a 'dynamic relationship' of the reasoning faculties and senses which could then 'constitute... "a sense of beauty"'.³ The text though is unclear and a little hesitant about whether the account it offers is a move away from Shaftesbury or merely a re-statement, in slightly different terms, of his position.

Cooper has to be clear when writing to Euphemius about the extent to which it is possible to create a 'happy assemblage' of charms and graces around one beautiful image. This process, owing to its origin in the contemplation of the (implicitly female) human form has become necessarily an issue of gender and desire. Significantly, Cooper connects the pursuit of luxury with an effeminate character. For example, when Cooper is censoring the Italian poets, as he does in 'Letter XI', he accuses them of writing an overly forced and vainly pretty form of verse. Italian poets are, he claims, averse to the

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste* pp. 30-31.

² Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises in Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 54.

³ Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, p. 223.

'Dignity of the *Heroic*' and the 'Simplicity of *Pastoral* poesy'.¹ However, with feeling (a more properly feminine attribute) installed as the analytic of taste there is a need for a candid confession of his own potential for confusion: 'it may be easily conceiv'd how a luxuriant Fancy may in the heat of poetic Rapture glow up into a Nonsense'.² A problem made worse by the author's decision to give vent to his '*flow of soul*' when writing to Philimon.³ It is difficult to see how the propriety of being 'not *touch'd* but *rapt*' is significantly different from the immoral seizure which afflicts the mob of St James's. The cause of this instability may be conceived of as the absence of any discourse which might limit the definition of the beautiful outside of the pleasures and feelings of the perceiving subject's mind. Addison and Hutcheson encountered this same problem, and Addison in particular is ambiguous in his response. However, Addison and Hutcheson ultimately deal with the potential for conflicting opinion by attributing it to error, false association and the like. Cooper on the other hand has sought to demonstrate how this diversity may occur in terms of the seductiveness of the objects themselves, alongside the procedure of the inquiring mind. The situation described in these terms demands requires some 'Management', if order is to be maintained:

You will observe from hence that a true relish for Life as well as for natural Beauty depends upon a right Management of our Fancies; for if Fancy presents Objects in false Appearances to these *Spirits of Sense*, the *Affections* will embrace Vice and deformity with their caresses, which naturally belong to Virtue and Beauty.⁴

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 71-72.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 74.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 86.

⁴ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste* p. 67.

Fancy is an idea close to luxury within the discursive position from which Cooper writes, which is, at times, that of a supporter of traditional, or aristocratic, civic humanism. Traditional humanist thinking reproaches the fanciful as the unsubstantiated outpouring of a single mind. Viewed from the civic position fancy is a property which is corrupting and capricious, perhaps even antithetical to good taste and the public good. So that when Cooper speaks of fancy he is thinking of the affections which vicious luxury - like that enjoyed by the mob of St. James's - might suggest to the unsuspecting, or to the already corrupted. The term however has a more complex and ambiguous role than a single analysis permits. When Addison uses the term, as he puts it 'promiscuously', he allows it to be identical with imagination. In Cooper's case however, the term is separated from the creative and logical capacities of the mind which was seen as a legitimate part of the tripartite structure of 'TASTE'.¹ Fancy is also one of Akenside's muses, and the term's derivation prior to Cooper, is therefore doubled, and occupies a position half in the fickle world of caprice, and half in the reasoning associations of Akenside's 'piece of Machinery'.² Freed from association with reason in Cooper's text, fancy becomes something without substance, it is fickle and seductive, able to corrupt taste and fine feeling.

The management of the fancies and the excesses of luxury all point to a view of the feminine which sees it as something requiring careful control. Though at times offering a gentle embrace to the senses, the rhetoric of feminisation implied in the *Letters* seems to offer a view in which femininity is something which the masculine,

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 30.

² Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 'Argument', p. 6.

public subject must guard against. Cooper's overall address to femininity and desire is however, more vexed and uneven. He allows great prominence to women to instruct and socialise men. When describing Euphemius's excellences, the author attributes the sweetness and volubility of his friend's discourse to that 'grace' which conversation with 'these fair preceptors' gives to men. In closing the letter, addressed to Eugenio, he recommends himself to the 'Ladies' of that household and wishes (as ever) to reside 'where they *reign* with such unlimited Power'.¹ His letters are furthermore replete with marital advice urging Leonora not only to comfort and sooth her husband, but also to '*Never lose the Mistress in the Wife*'.² His own ambiguous remarks about 'AMELIA' (a woman he seeks to court), and his desire for her approval, suggests a network of desire potentially at odds with a strictly male or civic virtue.³ Indeed in thinking about the success and refinement of Raphael, whom Cooper takes to be a man of the most exquisite taste and genius, he writes that:

I cannot help observing in this place, and I hope it is not foreign to the Subject, that frequent Conversation with Women harmonizes the Souls of Men, and gives them that enchanting Grace, which has so delighted us both in the Address of several of our Acquaintance, not very eminent for their Virtues or Understanding. I am of the Opinion, it is this constant Idea of Delicacy and Softness, collected, from a habitual Intercourse with these fair Polishers of our Sex, and united into one complicated Form of Beauty, which, playing perpetually into the Soul of RAPHAEL, diffus'd itself thro' his look, Deportment, and Tongue, over all his words and Actions.⁴

Two points strike me here: the notion of an 'enchanting Grace' which those without

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 115-18.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 90.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 28, 60, 89-99.

⁴ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 27-28.

genius may possess, and the more beguiling idea of 'one complicated Form of Beauty'. The first idea is perhaps indicative of those qualities found in Agathocles and Euphemius, which alongside their many talents makes them social. In describing Euphemius, Cooper instances his gracious refinement and taste as a particularly appealing (hence beautiful) moment of culture. It is the polish which he has gained from discourse with women that makes him truly cultured and polite. This acquisition of social grace also appears to be the cause of Beauty's complication. It is difficult to say whether the form of beauty (that which Raphael painted) *is* woman - about whom Cooper has a number of high flown and rather patronising ideas - or some notion of socialised taste, one which is itself a cohesion of subject and object.¹

Upon the latter reading it is however feminine beauties and graces which would make Raphael truly cultured in the broadest sense. It is only by having associated with women that Raphael acquired sufficient taste to enable him to express civic values of the highest order. It is also this 'Beauty' (the beauty of women) which defines and embodies that which Raphael will paint. Women, Cooper finally seems to be saying, in contradiction to effeminising luxury, provide the location (in their bodies and in their homes) for and the manner of true taste. The social function of women is also to provide that social sense which will enable the 'right Management of our Fancies' and so forestall the capriciousness of individual taste. Tragically, not least for Raphael, women are also corrupting; abandoning yourself to their charms leads to disease, and then to death.² The relation of beauty to the social becomes complex and unstable as Beauty

¹ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 28, 29-31.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, p. 26.

appears as both that which will seduce the gentleman into a luxuriant effeminacy and the premise upon which any form of social life may emerge. Cooper's account unites together the idea of *being* beautiful with the ability to *see* beauty. It is by endowing the viewer, in the this instance Raphael, with the attributes of beauty - grace, elevation, morals - that the beautiful is itself defined. This may begin to sound like some half-baked neo-Platonism, with love emerging from desire as the final fruition of beauty, However, it is more pertinently, testimony of the growing separation in the mid-century between the discourses which articulated public morality and those which described polite taste. The pleasures of the individual subject have superseded the central act of deferred or declined gratification which forms the heart of civic humanism. It is an ideology of taste based on consuming, and perhaps on being consumed.

This reappraisal of judgement is undoubtedly an innovation and a departure from earlier critical models. For Shaftesbury the physical form of beauty was thought to disrupt the pristine disavowals upon which civic humanism rested its account of masculinity. The attractiveness of beautiful women for them bespoke a dangerously sensual and effeminate presence to be repudiated with stern and unequivocal virtue. This is not quite the issue here; and while the situation is clearly one which demands policing to censure the immoral and to license the pleasurable there is little sense of a form of masculinity which requires men to forgo the social (and sexual) pleasures of the fair sex. By the mid-century, however, feeling and pleasure have become the foundations of judgement. Cooper's position might be contrasted with that of Turnbull, who writes of Feeling that

the Unlearned are seldom wrong in their judgement about what is good or bad in any of the Arts...the chief difference between the Learned and the

Vulgar consists in this, that the latter are not able to apply Rules and Maxims, but judge merely from what they feel; whereas the former can reason about their feelings from the Principles of Science and Art.¹

Prior to the 1740s feeling tended to be thought of as either a preliminary stage, that which the man of taste went beyond, or something that was *merely sexual*. And because it was considered in this aspect there was a marked tendency within civic criticism to disparage it as little more than a necessarily instinctual response, one which was likely moreover to degenerate rapidly into vice. Cooper, like Hutcheson, however, regarded feeling as the foundation of taste. He did so because he was able to argue that as an instantaneous, almost instinctual response, feeling was free from the taints of custom and prejudice. His commitment to this ideal, meant that he was prepared, in certain circumstances, to allow feelings that were sensual to be virtuous.

This change is occurred because subjects addressed by Cooper are not being prepared, by and large, for the public and political forums envisaged by Shaftesbury. The tribulations of an over-polished Cicero do not therefore present themselves to Cooper as they had done to Shaftesbury.² Cooper in fact counselled Eugenio against participation in a public environment: 'if *fancy* has dress'd up *domestic HAPPINESS* in the Robes of Office, believe me she plays the *Spirits of the Sense* very false'.³ He later admits however, that with the death of his own wife, 'EUDOCIA', he is more

¹ George Turnbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting, containing Observations on the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Art Amongst the Greeks and Romans*, (London: for the Author, 1740), p. 45.

² For an account of Shaftesbury's concerns, see John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 63-64.

³ Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 68-69.

inclined to the pursuit of 'wealth and fortune'. Public life is then only preferable in the absence of the more comforting and refined company of women. Discussion of the importance of women to descriptions taste is therefore 'not foreign' but central to the discourse on beauty which Cooper has offered.

Cooper's position was, I think, one of some complexity. But it was also about complexity, and in particular the elaborate connections which formed social being. For Bishop Berkeley, writing in the wake of the South Sea Bubble, 'frugality of manners is the nourishment and strength of bodies politic'.¹ His vision of society and of morality was therefore one in which simplicity - of manners, dress, and social organisation - was advanced as both the virtue and the guardian of the state and the individual. By the 1750s Berkeley's sense of the need for 'plainness and good sense' no longer seemed a plausible or attractive model of the social.² It was not, as Cooper's remarks on the tastes of the 'Mob of St James' illustrate, that the relationship between virtue and vice (represented by luxuriant commerce) were disregarded or downgraded as mode of effective critique, as on the contrary, John Brown and others were to continue to insist of the categories of civic polemic well into the 1780s. Rather it was that 'frugality' and 'simplicity' were no longer regarded as necessary. Austerity and abstinence did not, as Hogarth or Cooper might have suggested, guarantee virtue, only going without.

Cooper and his contemporaries imagine not, as Berkeley would have wished, a state of simple and restricted manners, but a polite world of complicated and

¹ George Berkeley, 'An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain' in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop, 9 vols (London: Thomas Nelson, 1953), vol. VI, p. 74.

² Berkeley, 'Ruin of Great Britain', p. 76.

complicating social forms. Much of this intricacy, to use Hogarth's word, stems from the introduction of the sensual into the practices of judgement and from the acceptance, even encouragement of women as part of the audience for that debate. Masculinity no longer existed solely in opposition to the degradations of the effeminate, but negotiated instead a relationship with the feminine. Crucially femininity while never coincident with male identity could not be repudiated as an unpleasant other because it had become an important part of the social fabric in which maleness sought to constitute itself.¹ Women were, if only to a degree, to be consulted on certain matters, of which the question of Beauty was one. This is an important change in the nature of debates about taste in the eighteenth century. One which both enshrines and vilifies the place of woman, and of the feminine. Femininity was the object in discourses attacking commerce, and yet it was also frequently the subject with which the commercial community seeks to justify itself. This is a theme which will be of central importance in the chapters which follow; and it is the process through which taste, desire and judgement are reformulated around women that will be the issue throughout.

¹ For a further discussion of the 'Reformation of Male Manners', see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 37-103.

CHAPTER TWO

**'THE ART OF BEING PRETTY':
POLITE TASTE AND THE JUDGEMENT OF WOMEN.**

'Now I know what love is': Advice from the Adventurer.

Eighteenth-century periodicals rarely felt inhibited when it came to giving advice, and the eighty-second issue of Hawkesworth's *Adventurer*, first published in August, 1753, was no exception. The writer, beginning what is unquestionably an address to a middle-class readership assumed to contain a high proportion of women, soon warms to his task and announces his intention of teaching all the ladies 'the art of being PRETTY'.¹ The elegantly fashioned and gently admonishing argument strolls through a familiar terrain of condemnation and praise. The writer by turns decries folly, expresses pleasure in the dimples of a smiling girl and questions the ineffable nature of love, before settling on the premise that beauty resides more in the passions than in a 'smear of paint'.² Beauty, because it 'depends principally on the mind', that is to say not on looks but on 'SENTIMENTS and MANNERS', may be considered a moral good. The *Adventurer's* intention is to counter the idea that sight of beauty leads always to vice. Accordingly it is asserted that:

NEITHER does beauty which depends upon temper equally endanger the possessor; "it is", to use an eastern metaphor "like the towers of a city, not only an ornament but a defense": if it excites desire, it at once controuls and refines it; it represses with awe, it softens with delicacy, and it wins to imitation. The love of reason and virtue is mingled with the love of beauty; because this beauty is little more than the emanation of intellectual excellence, which is not an object of corporeal appetite. As it excites a purer passion, it also more forcibly engages to fidelity: everyman finds himself more powerfully restrained from giving pain to goodness, than to beauty; and every look of a countenance in which they are blended, in which beauty is the expression of goodness, is a silent reproach of the irregular wish; and the purpose immediately appears to be disingenuous and cruel, by which the tender hope of ineffable affection would be disappointed, the placid confidence of unsuspecting simplicity abused, and the peace even of virtue

¹ John Hawkesworth, *The Adventurer*, no. 82 (18th August, 1753), *The Adventurer*, 3rd ed., 4 vols, (London: C. Hitch and L. Hawes, J. Payne, 1756), vol. III, p. 105.

² Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, vol. III, p. 109.

endangered by the most sordid infidelity, and breach of the strongest obligations.¹

Beauty is presented here as a figure of constancy and virtue. True beauty speaks the virtuous form of woman; a vision which 'excites the purer passion'. It is a presence which charms without dissembling, and provides a spectacle while remaining chaste and modest.

With this image in place, the writer finds it comparatively easy to assert that, 'those who wish to be LOVELY, must learn early to be GOOD'.² Despite earlier assurances that Beauty could and would be defended, what is occurring in this passage is a subtle changing of the terms of the argument. Throughout the essay, the beauty of women is kept as an essentially questionable property unless it is allied with proper moral sentiments; with a propriety which chastens the desires beauty might otherwise be thought to evoke. Certainly the 'Beauties' to which the article refers are taken to be less than virtuous, and represent merely the vain appearance of good looks combined with tasteless coquetry. Their appearance is described as a 'wretched...substitute for the expression of sentiment'.³ That 'Beauty' and prettiness appear to be distinguished by this rhetoric represents a telling alteration in the way in which the debate on the Beautiful is articulated. Texts written in this period repeatedly effect the transposition of the Beautiful into the polite or familiar discourse which marks the *Adventurer's* advice. Once moved, the term becomes (necessarily) a prescriptive, as well as a descriptive appraisal of women. It is here that the *Adventurer* hopes both to frustrate the power-play of the 'factitious beauty' and to teach his audience, 'an art by which their

¹ Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, vol. III, p. 110.

² Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, vol. III, p. 111.

³ Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, vol. III, p. 109.

predominant passion may be gratified, and their conquests not only extended, but secured'.¹

The persuasive rhetoric of the *Adventurer* is a cogent reminder that the eighteenth century was both a period in which the forms of aesthetic judgement were revolutionized, and a period in which the cultural role of women was radically altered. Women, as is frequently averred by a variety of eighteenth-century writers, are absolutely necessary to the formation of a truly polite and civilized culture. This is a compelling conjunction, and one which is inscribed into the texts themselves; Burke's *Enquiry* is only the most notorious example of how the Beautiful and Feminine come to be seen as identical. In describing these connections the discourse on beauty adopts new and specific functions. I want to argue that the concept of Beauty is not restricted to a discourse on connoisseurship, but is instead the organizing term for a variety of discourses and social practices. Although consideration of the objects of taste, and how judgements are formed and evaluated, never ceases to be of importance, the place of the beautiful emerges in the 1740s and 50s as connected to, or actually inhabiting, a discourse concerned with social codes, and in particular the conduct of polite society. Accordingly the Beautiful is transformed into a vocabulary for marking out the proper or the obscene nature of feminine display.²

It is clearly this form of inquiry that the *Adventurer* has in mind when he speaks of the 'expression of goodness' and a 'reproach to the irregular wish'. To represent the

¹ Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, vol. III, pp. 110, 105.

² Throughout the eighteenth century the notion that a woman's social conduct should be both pleasing and yet chaste suggested an appeal to the terms 'beauty' and 'beautiful'. For an example of the kind of text I have in mind see, Robert Dodsley, *Beauty; or, The Art of Charming*, (London: Lawton Gilliver, 1735) and Thomas Marriot, *Female Conduct: Being an Essay on the Art of Pleasing, to be practised by the fair sex before and after Marriage*, (London: W. Owen, 1759).

discussion of beauty in this way is not only to transform its meaning, but also to alter its location in social space. There is no longer a concern with Beauty (or with women) in a social body conceived of as a political republic, but rather a consideration of how women are represented both in the private sphere of the drawing-room, and in the public world of ballrooms and society assemblies. The discourse which emerges from these discussions is one that represents Beauty as the moment of a woman's public visibility; one which declares her moral and sexual, as well as visual, presence. This shift represents an important change in the language in which the Beautiful was articulated. It was a change which resulted in a new discourse, specifically addressed to a more private moral endeavour. Beginning with Sir Harry Beaumont's *Crito; or a Dialogue on Beauty*, first published in 1752, I want to examine how notions of the beautiful determine how women ought, or are expected, to behave.¹

The extent to which the discussion of beauty becomes a means of thinking about women will I hope emerge as my account proceeds. What is, however, equally important, is how that change of object, and of address, is indicative of an alteration in the site of the discussion of the beautiful; and how in turn this transformation, or translation, effects what is written about beauty from about the mid-century onwards. It is a change perhaps best exemplified in the kind of text that is produced on the Beautiful, and the type of audience which that text is thought to address. This is a consideration which will be explored throughout this chapter. I want to begin by making plain why it is necessary to explore the nature of discursive space when appraising the work of Beaumont, and of his contemporaries. For it is the form of these discussions which most clearly demonstrates their point of departure from the tradition of republican

¹ Sir Harry Beaumont, *Crito; or, A Dialogue on Beauty*, (London: R. Dodsley, 1752).

and civic taste identified with Mark Akenside, Joseph Spence and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

I think it is necessary in this context, to analyze what Fredric Jameson has described as the 'content of the form'; and to consider the nature of each text's formal arrangement as a space which is peculiarly productive in arranging its concerns.¹ It is also apposite to remember at this point Foucault's assertion of the changes that necessarily attend a discourse when it is transposed from its location and function in one institution to a habitation in another.² It is important to note that although Beaumont inherits and exploits a large part of the tradition of humanist aesthetic thinking, it is not the ideas themselves, but what he does with that tradition, and the space chosen to deploy it which is at issue here. What distinguishes Beaumont from previous theorists is the combination of a general investigation into the nature of Beauty with a discourse that is peculiarly attentive to conduct, principally that of women which it takes as its rhetorical centre. This is a debate Beaumont represents as conducted in private, and as a matter for polite conversation, rather than public declaration. It is in this shift, from public debate to private judgement, that it is possible to read the forms of translation which are described by Foucault. As a result the occasion of the inquiry becomes less the civic space of Shaftesbury (at least in his more high minded moments), and more the intimate sphere of the genteel classes. The address of the text is familiar and easy, rather than declamatory, most writers preferring the style of conversation, as opposed to that of the public lecture or moral treatise.

¹ Jameson has been a consistently ingenious critic, his ability to reconcile the claims of form and structure with those of history and content has been particularly valuable in the field of cultural studies. See his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Art* (London: Methuen, 1981) for a fuller consideration of this theme in marxist thought.

² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1972), pp. 102-104.

This emphasis on conversation indicates that the reception of ideas of politeness and refinement is a characteristic of middle-class theories of the beautiful. As Lawrence Klein has argued, the emergence of politeness was one of the foremost changes to occur in English society in the eighteenth-century: 'it became a key word, a point of verbal intersection among different areas of human experience, providing a unifying rubric for greatly diverse activities'.¹ As I have already argued, the protocols of polite culture emerge from an uneasy relationship to commerce in the eighteenth century, and in particular from an attempt to align new social forms to virtue: Addisonian virtuous sociability was the result. Conversational styles and manners were the most available form in which to represent this change. While Shaftesbury utilized a dialogue form, he did so largely in imitation of the *public* spaces of Athens. Beaumont's text in comparison takes the form of a private conversation, and is the product of a comparatively discreet and almost entirely private space. A scene which connects to the political public only distantly. The acceptance of this change of scene within texts concerned with judgement and the appreciation of beauty, announces a particular staging of discourses around the Beautiful, and unites a problematic group of ideas - namely, civility, genre and gender - within the newly defined space of polite discourse. It is the contiguity which exists between these terms, and the forms of beauty and judgement which that relationship produces which is the focus of my argument.

In this context it is significant that 'Sir Harry Beaumont' was a pseudonym used by Joseph Spence when writing texts less obviously scholarly than his accounts of the grand tour or indeed his conversations with Pope. When writing as Beaumont, Spence was concerned only with polite accomplishments and the conduct of virtuous sociability.

¹ Lawrence Klein, 'The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1984-85), pp. 186-214.

In common with *Crito*, the other title published under this name - *Moralities; or, Essays, Letters, and Fables and Translations* - laid stress on the pleasures of sensibility alongside a cautious social polemic.¹ In both texts the beauties of women and the pleasures of their society are commented on and indulged. To a degree the use of the pseudonym indicates a move from the reasoned appraisal found in *Polymetis*, to the passionate opinion found throughout the *Crito* and *Moralities*. This is an important point, for while Spence's *Polymetis* is playful in its address to sexuality and to the issue of gender in general, women are not given the space or the centrality which they receive in the text reputedly by Beaumont. Accordingly, although the *Venus di Medici* is discussed by Polymetis and his companions it is in no sense the principal object of inquiry.² The task set in *Polymetis* is, after all, the grand historical appraisal of classical art; *An Enquiry concerning the Agreement Between Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*. It is a study from which Spence hoped to draw essentially public lessons.

This is an important distinction. Throughout my discussion I want to make clear how the mid-century description of taste moved into the self-consciously private sphere of the middle-classes. This shift changed how taste was thought of in the period, and in particular in relation to the relative importance attributed to women. I have already described how Spence located a conflict between moments of true taste and fashion in his representation of the 'English Lady at Florence'. In that instance the woman was

¹ Joseph Spence, *Moralities; Or, Essays, Letters, and Fables and Translations*, (London: R. Dodsley, 1753). For a fuller biographical treatment of Spence's career, see, Austin Wright, *Joseph Spence: A Critical Biography*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950, esp. pp. 126, 129-35, 140-44.

² Joseph Spence, *Polymetis; or an Enquiry concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1747), pp. 66-68.

assumed to be so restricted in her capacity to judge the *Venus di Medici*, as to be only able to do so with reference to either fashion or narcissistic self-congratulation. She was as a result almost entirely subsumed within Spence's male, connoisseurial gaze. The texts I will now discuss alter this situation, and grant women a quasi-subject position within tasteful discourse. What this amounts to - as my discussion of Daniel Webb will make clear - is an argument which either described Taste and Beauty in relation to how women appear, and how women act, or described the apprehension of that which is beautiful in terms which require the male viewer to respond as if he were looking at a woman. Significantly, the two options were far from being exclusive. In the most extreme cases, when women were heralded as the most sensitive of connoisseurs, this could amount to a request that the male connoisseur should respond as if he were in fact a woman; sensitive, impressionable, and yet quietly discerning. I start this discussion by looking at *Crito* in more detail, before going on to consider James Usher's *Clio; or a Discourse on Beauty Addressed to a Young Lady*, first published in 1767, a text which takes up a comparable position on the nature of beauty and the conduct of women.¹ With this connection in mind, I will explore the terms of this debate in relation to a consideration of social space, and the evolution of contemporary art criticism.

'That Magdalen Look': Real Personal Beauty and the appraisal of women

The nature of this new environment can be explained by considering the kind of scene in which *Crito* is supposed to take place. Beaumont opens his text by imaging the quiet of a rural retreat:

It was one of the most pleasing Mornings in the last Summer, that CRITO stole from the Noise and Bustle of the Town to enjoy an agreeable Day or

¹ James Usher, *Clio; or a Discourse on Beauty Addressed to a Young Lady*, (London: T. Davis, 1767).

Two with his Friend TIMANTHES in the Country.¹

The seclusion of his friend's villa provides for Crito the perfect antidote to the unpleasant activity of the town. The ambience of house and gardens is convivial and gentlemanly, imaging a space in which the leisure hours of distinguished men be easily and profitably spent. It is, above all, a private space - a place for conversation, not oratory; a spot where gentlemen can gather to discourse on the nature of beauty, and upon the attractions of the fair sex. When Crito arrives he will inaugurate a conversation which deals specifically with the appraisal of feminine beauty.²

The centrality of ideas of femininity, and of discourses about women, to the analysis of taste is made evident by a consideration of how *Crito* begins, and by an examination of the occasion of the debate. The point of origin, the place from which the text is written is, for nearly all the texts under discussion here, feminine. The figure of woman emerges as the major trope of the narrative, and perhaps more pertinently as the enigma the text seeks to resolve. Asked by Timanthes as to the cause of his melancholy, Crito replies by describing a scene of particularly affecting distress. The story he tells concerns Mrs B***, a beautiful woman of the neighbourhood, who has the double misfortune of being possessed of a 'brute' of a husband, and grieving the loss of her only son. On this particular day, for the action of *Crito* is encompassed within a single afternoon, Crito disturbs Mrs B*** weeping over the lost boy, whose birthday it would have been. Crito has stolen in upon her, and finds her reclining effortlessly in the full flow of her grief:

as my near Relation to her gave me the Liberty of going on without sending in my Name, I walked toward the Room; and found the Door only just open enough, to let me see her leaning on a Couch, with her Head rested

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 1.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 5.

negligently on the one Hand, whilst with the other she was wiping away a Tear, that stole silently down her Cheek. The Distress in her Countenance, and the little Confusion that appeared about her Eyes, on her first discovering me (just as I was doubting whether I should retire or not), added so much to the other Beauties of her Face, that I think I never saw her look so charming in my Life.¹

Her easy pose, her worthy maternal emotions and the beauty of her features give her an irresistible charm. Crito, a man of feeling, is instantly struck both by her virtue and by her visible, physical beauty. For Crito her tears have lent her what he will later describe as the particular and principal beauty of weeping women: 'that Magdalen look'.²

With the occasion of his disquiet now revealed, and disapprobation of the husband and encomiums on the wife made general, Crito is subjected to a closer form of questioning, which will form the basis of the conversation. Immediately Milesius asks:

but, pray, how come you to think, that her Sufferings should add to her charms? Or that a Distress, like her's, could ever be pleasing to the Eye?³

In response to Milesius's sceptical enquiries Crito announces his long and grave studies into the principals of beauty. He then launches into a rambling exegesis on the nature of the beautiful and taste more generally. Analysis of what Crito has to say will form the basis of this section. However, I want first to pause to consider the role of the silent, weeping Mrs B***. She will only make two further 'appearances' in the whole of the text, when she scores top marks with 73 points in Crito's grotesque revision of du Piles's critical method, and when she is relocated in a modern choice of Hercules.⁴ What is important about her is not the extent of her attractiveness, though this is impressive (she only loses to the *Venus di Medici* by a handful of points), but the fact

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 3-4.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 12.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 4-5.

⁴ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 44-45, 32-33.

of her beauty as the occasion of a particular discourse on beauty, which is focused on the bodies of women.

Mrs B***'s beauty, as with her virtue in distress, is the cause of Crito's disquiet, of the languor which Timanthes hopes that he, his gardens and his rather dull friend Milesius will disperse. Furthermore it is the fountainhead of his argument; without the beautiful Mrs B*** there would be no enigma to resolve, no dialogue needed. The tableau of her charms - the agony of the object mixing with the ecstasy of the subject - provides the material which Crito, prompted by Milesius and Timanthes, will try and explain. In this sense the narrative focuses on an image of womanhood, an ideal of femininity which it takes as exemplary. The role which may be ascribed to women within the field of aesthetic evaluation has already been instanced in the case of Cooper's *Letters Concerning Taste*. In this instance the inflection is different; women do not as much represent an authority to which it is possible to defer as a problem to be solved. The question being asked might be put like this: why are women more or less attractive to men, and what motivates and guides that attraction? Is there some physical or moral quality that guarantees the worth of a particular body, or person? Ultimately, how is it possible to account for women's place both as objects within the field of male vision, and as moral subjects active in society? All of these questions have a peculiar relation to social and public morality, one which I will explore throughout this chapter.

The efficacy, and the impact, of the feminine will emerge repeatedly in the course of *Crito*, for it determines the objects chosen for analysis and the terms which constitute the framework of that approach; Crito's central object of study, what he terms 'Real Personal Beauty' is a case in point. Crito must, like anyone else seeking to explain the Beautiful, define the object of his study. Given the ambiguous nature of his inquiry this requires a judicious confession of the immensity of the task, and a due attempt to reduce

the object field:

Every Object that is pleasing to the Eye when looked upon, or delightful to the Mind in Recollection, may be called beautiful; so that Beauty, in general, may stretch as wide as visible Creation, or even as far as the Imagination can go; which is a sort of new or Secondary Creation. Thus we speak not only of the Beauties of an engaging Prospect, of the rising or setting Sun, or of a fine starry Heaven; but of those of a Picture, Statue, or Building; and even of the Actions, Characters, or Thoughts of Men. In the greater Part of these, there may be almost as many false Beauties as there are real; according to the different Tastes of Nations, and Men; so that if any one was to consider Beauty in its fullest Extent, it could not be done without the greatest Confusion. I shall therefore confine my Subject to visible Beauty; and of that, to such only as may be called personal, or human Beauty; and that, again, to such as is natural or real, and not such as is only national or customary; for I would not have you imagine, that I would have anything to do with the beautiful thick Lips of the good People of *Bantam*, or the excessive small feet of the Ladies of Quality in *China*.¹

Crito first of all delimits a 'Beauty, in general' which is formed on the basis of a pleasingness to the eye, or to the imagination. The prospect of this definition stretches far and wide; it is too large and wholly unworkable, and moreover largely 'false'. Crito then tries to purge his account of these specious beauties. He does so in a manner which would be familiar to Reynolds, and fairly consistent with civic demands upon criticism. Only that which is 'natural and real' may be included, for the rest is merely 'national or customary'. The decision to exclude the 'beautiful thick Lips of the good People of *Bantam*' may be profitably compared with many of Reynolds's injunctions to the readers of the *Idler*, wherein he extorted artists to expel from their work all that was accidental, customary or motivated by habit alone.² The moment of the painter's art, and of Reynolds's critique, is located in the extraction from varied and unruly 'second nature' of the 'ideal nature' which lies beneath the surface.

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 6-7.

² Joshua Reynolds, *The Idler*, no. 82 (November 10th, 1759) in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Knight; Late President of the Royal Academy*, 3 vols, (London: T. Cadell, jnr. and W. Davies, 1801), vol. II, pp. 235-243.

All this ought to suggest that there are a number of different definitions of the beautiful in circulation within Beaumont's text. First there is the general beauty of everything which pleases, a conception which is rapidly disregarded - officially at least. Secondly, there is a beauty of a more rarefied and restricted nature; in short *real* beauty untainted by custom or national taste. Finally there is Crito's chosen object, 'Real Personal Beauty', which claims similar differentiation from custom and habit, but ultimately takes the passions as its justification and not the mind. It is a conception of Beauty which, because it excludes the customary - the forms of the Bantam and Chinese Beauties - is consistent with the high ideals of civic art as outlined by Reynolds. However, it is distinctive in the calculated centrality of the 'personal', and the role which is ascribed to that figure. It is hard to reconcile the avowed *personality* of the beauties under discussion here - be it in the first instance Mrs B*** or any other fair creature - with the generalising and universalising impulse of civic humanism which seeks not the person, but the grand historical expression.¹

The concentration on the 'personal' nature of Beauty ensures that 'Real Personal Beauty' is located at some distance from straightforwardly civic conceptions. Significantly, the emphasis on the beauty of a woman prevents the easy exclusion of the passions which Reynolds makes in his *Idler* article of 1759:

It is absurd to say, that beauty is possessed of attractive powers, which irresistibly seize the corresponding mind with love and admiration, since that argument is conclusive in favour of the white and black philosophies.²

In this early essay Reynolds's sense of the absurd comes from a perceived failure to

¹ For an example of the application of civic humanist principles to the criticism of painting, see Joshua Reynolds, 'Discourse III' (14th December, 1770) and 'Discourse IV' (10th December, 1771), in *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), esp. pp. 39-53, 55-73.

² Reynolds, *Works*, p. 240.

discriminate. Defining beauty by saying it pleases signifies for Reynolds an inability to come to terms with the impact of custom in forming taste. More strikingly, the notion of 'attractive powers' suggests more the action of the passions than the calculus of virtue. The discourse of ideal beauty is, then, only partially unfolded by Crito, and around its margins there is the gathering of an index of values which depend less on real discernment, than on the inclinations of the passions. Desire, in the shape of the passions, and not custom, as in the case of Reynolds, becomes the central concern.¹ This is a point which arises again in the discussion of 'false byas' which occurs towards the end of the text.²

Crito begins his theory by announcing that he will examine beauty under what he terms its 'four heads': 'Color, Form, Expression, and Grace. The Two Former of which I should look upon as the Body, and the two Latter as the Soul Of Beauty'.³ The speculations offered on colour offered are far from remarkable. They are inherited, by and large, from the tradition of humanist criticism handed down from at least the fifteenth century.⁴ Crito's thoughts are occupied with pointing out the value of variety and liveliness (here representing good health as much as vivacity). Though he does offer his preference for a 'complete brown beauty' (which is how he chooses to describe women, though it sounds as if he's talking about horses), he confesses that it is the lowest species of beauty.⁵ The lowly position of colour derives from the fact that it is

¹ For a discussion of Reynolds's attitude to the customary see John Barrell's 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art' in H.K. Bhabha ed. *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 154-76.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 45.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 7.

⁴ For an account of this tradition of critical writing see, R.W. Lee, *Ut Pictora Poesis: The Humanist Theory of Painting*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

⁵ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 9-11.

the form of beauty most readily apprehended by the vulgar and consequently of little interest to the sophisticated eye.¹ Despite this disclaimer, it is worth noting that Crito is not concerned to distance himself from the sensual appeal of colour, as Reynolds was to during his *Discourses*.

Form is next on Crito's agenda, and is treated more fully owing to its higher status. In essence the case put forward is that the 'general Cause of Beauty in the Form or Shape is a Proportion, or an Union and Harmony, in all Parts of the Body'.² There are different bodily forms appropriate to each sex. The excellences he seeks in the bodies of women fulfil a familiar agenda, which aims to provide simple and irrecoverable sexual differentiation represented through the bodies of women. He seeks delicacy, softness, smallness and whiteness of skin; in short the signs of a body which has abstained from labour.³ In contradistinction the bodies of men ought to exhibit 'apparent Strength or Agility'. As he is making these pronouncements Crito is forced to confess that his account is based largely on the representations of the body found in statuary and painting. This, he assures his audience, is because:

in Life we commonly see but a small Part of the human Body; most of it being either disguised, or altered, by what we call Dress.
I was acquainted, for some Years, with a Lady who has as pretty a made Head and Neck as can be conceived; and never knew anything of the Matter, till I happened one Morning to catch her at her toilet, before she had deformed herself by putting on her Headclothes.⁴

We might begin to wonder at this stage how Crito has acquired this knack for stealing in upon unprotected females. But leaving his apparent tendency for loitering aside, Crito

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 7.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 12.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 14-15.

⁴ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 17.

seems assured of the virtues of unintended 'natural' beauty. James Usher also shares this preference for the display of uncovered beauty, preferring to see the undisguised motion and form of the human body.¹ This desire to see bodies move freely and unmolested by the milliner's or staymaker's art is perhaps a resurgence of civic humanism. It takes as its censored object, not the customs and habits of an age, but the particular fashions of women's under-garments.²

Having dealt with the beauties of the body, Crito moves on to those of the soul. The discussion of 'Expression' is primarily concerned with the due representation, in the face and body of the emotions. That is to say the 'Expression of the Passions; the Turns and Changes of the Mind, so far as they are visible to the Eye, by our Looks or Gestures'.³ Pleasing passions moreover add something to the appearance, and to the face in particular. Significantly, the forms of expression appropriate for the face are explicitly gendered:

The finest Union of Passions, that I have ever observed in any Face, constituted a just Mixture of Modesty, Sensibility and Sweetness; each of which when taken singly, is very pleasing; but when they are all blended together, in such a manner as either to enliven or correct each other, they give almost as much Attraction, as the passions are capable of adding to a very pretty Face.⁴

These are exemplary feminine virtues, attributes of a largely passive and confined

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 33.

² A distaste for women's underwear was in fact something of a shared obsession for civic humanists. Shaftesbury writing on the impediments to the revival of the arts, suggests the following list of obstacles to be overcome: 'distortions by dress, unnatural bandages, ligatures: as cravats, garterings, women's bodices and contraction of waist, pressure of hips, swellings, and unnatural disfigurations of necks, breasts, paps', *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper], Second Characters; or, the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 117.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 19.

⁴ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 23.

identity. Burke, of course, similarly proposes compliant and retiring charms as the basis of certain kinds of feminine beauty and proper passions.¹ Through such charms beauty increases, as does the pleasure offered to the observer:

It is owing to the great Force of Pleasingness which attends all the kinder Passions; "That Lovers do not only seem, but are really more beautiful to each other, than they are to the rest of the World;" because, when they are together, the most pleasing Passions are more frequently exerted in each of their Faces, than they are in either before the rest of the World.²

It is the latter term, pleasure, that should detain us here. For it is the relationship between beauty and pleasure, variously conceived, which seems to confuse *Crito* as a text.

As the account proceeds it is possible to notice an increased tendency for *Crito* to substitute 'pleasingness' for beauty as a way of describing the effect of particular forms and expressions. So Beaumont writes:

That a Face without any good Feature in it, and with a very indifferent Complexion, shall have a very taking Air; from the Sensibility of the Eyes, the general good-humoured Turn of the Look, and perhaps a little agreeable Smile about the Mouth. And these Three Things, I believe, would go a great way toward accounting for the *je ne scai quoi* or that inexpressible Pleasingness of the Face (as they chuse to call it), which is often talked of, and so little understood; as the greater Part, and perhaps all the rest of it, would fall under the last Article, that of Grace.³

Here pleasure occupies the space left by the absence of any real (in the sense of tangible) qualities. A movement away from visible qualities - form and colour - is being made throughout the passage, and even grace is constructed largely in terms of the pleasure it gives. The consequences of this shift need to be considered in some detail. On the one hand, the new term could merely signify an attempt to describe, within an

¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J.T. Boulton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 91-92.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 24.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 25-26.

emotional register, the effects of real personal beauty on the discerning observer. Conversely the term could herald a further shift away from a scheme seeking to solicit the true, natural and 'real' causes of the beautiful to an analytic resting solely upon individual approbation.

Nowhere is this change more apparent than in the discussion of the last of Crito's 'four heads' of beauty; Grace. It is he announces the most stunning element, and the 'chief of all the constituent parts' of beauty; 'pretty women', Crito claims, are always capable of grace.¹ Grace is furthermore rare and always pleasing, representing something which rises 'above' the taste for blonde or brown hair. Curiously, Crito announces that Grace can manifest itself as a 'certain Deliciousness that almost lies about the mouth' indicating, perhaps, an 'Approach towards a smile'.² There is something faintly lascivious about this flickering image which seems to make the graceful look more like a specious bashfulness than a genuine moral quality. Indeed as Crito himself acknowledges 'Grace is pleasingness itself':

there seems to be something else, what I cannot explain, and what I do not know that ever anybody has explained, that goes to the Composition; and which possibly may give it its Force and Pleasingness.³

The questions which seem most pressing at this point concern defining what constitutes 'pleasing' for Crito. The issue cannot convincingly be resolved by either Crito or his interlocutors, as it is too ineffable and too personal. In a brief pause in Crito's disquisition, the friends offer nothing more telling than the fact that pleasure and true taste are coincident, a point attested to, so they claim, by the gratification of eating fresh fruit. Pursuing the debate further, they agree that a pineapple has its various seasons and

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 38, 30-31.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 29-30.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 37.

perfections, each improving or ruinous to its taste. It is a cycle of rising and falling excellence which is also detectable, at least so they claim, in the bodies of women. By allowing the word 'taste' to shift its meaning from food to women, and finally to 'Taste' in general Crito and company hope to endow appreciation with a physical quality which would make it readily apprehensible: excellence in philosophy would become like 'ripeness' in food, and in women.

Following this far from convincing attempt to postulate efficient causes for the beautiful, Crito and company engage in what can be described as an attempt to fashion their own 'mathematical style'. This 'calculation', borrowed from du Piles, involves the awarding of a score (maximum points are ten for colour, 20 for form, 30 for expression and 40 for grace) to various women of their acquaintance. The enterprise is warmly entered into and scores are posted ranging from Mrs B****'s 73 to poor Mrs P****'s - 45.¹ Mrs B****'s success at the polls is not reliant upon the extent of her physical beauty, as in terms of colour she is eclipsed by both Lady R**** and Lady S****. Mrs B**** wins her laurels instead on the unconquerable status of her grace, gaining an impressive 30 from the munificent Crito.

Despite the unabashed ease with which this task has been completed, the judging of 'proportional excellence' is, as Crito concedes, open to the intrusion of 'false bias'. The cause of such failures of taste are numerous and include custom, occupation and habit; Crito, however, candidly vouchsafes the superlative excellence of the English beauty.² Rather splendidly, he claims this to be a most fortunate occurrence, as without diversity of tastes the competition amongst men for the few women agreed to be universally beautiful would invariably cause a 'Scene of Blood and Misery'!

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 44-45.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 46-50.

But now that Fancy has perhaps more to do with Beauty than Judgement, there is an Infinity of Tastes, and consequently an Infinity of Beauty; for, to the Mind of the Lover, supposed Beauty is as full good as real.¹

The statement that 'supposed Beauty is as full good as real' marks something of a climb down for Crito. For he appears no longer to be holding out for the reality of beauty with which he began his inquiry. Instead the role of fancy secures the fact that different beauties will appeal to different classes of men, so that 'everybody may be beautiful in the imagination of some one or other'; which is convenient if nothing else. There is then a variety of beauties which may be pleasing, particularly where form and colour are concerned, so that 'false grace has all the effects of the true'.² The difference between true Grace and particular pleasingness would therefore appear to be abstract or merely theoretical, and not the immediate sensual, and practical experience which is the function of the Fancy, and of the lover. Men, according to this account, cannot differentiate between 'supposed beauty' and the real thing, and there seems little reason why they should. In saying so Crito effectively abolishes the proposition with which he began, namely that there is a quantifiable method for judging beauty.

This theoretical problem, the inability to define beauty outside of personal inclination, seems to determine the move ultimately made in the text to invoke 'Virtue' as the chief cause of beauty. Indeed, Crito claims that, 'the Beauty of Virtue or Goodness exceeds all other Beauty, as much as the Soul does the Body'.³ With this in mind he concludes his harangue by extolling the fact that:

There is a mighty easy Consequence to be drawn from all this, which well deserves to be more generally observed. If Virtue be the chief Beauty, People, to be beautiful, should endeavour to be virtuous; and should avoid

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 53.

² Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 54-55.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 58

Vice, and all the worst Sort of Passions, as they would shy Deformity. I wish the more beautiful Half of the human Creation, in particular, were thoroughly sensible of this great Truth; "That the readiest way to be beautiful, is to be good;" and such of them as are more solicitous about choosing and adjusting what they wear, and how they appear, than about forming their Minds, and regulating their disagreeable Passions, will really fall under the Censure I mentioned before, from one of the *Latin* Poets; and show too plainly to all the World, that they, in their own Hearts, consider their dress as the better part of themselves.¹

The excesses of an over-dressed femininity are once again raised by this conclusion, as they entail an unwillingness to act in accordance with prudence and propriety. The point, though, is not visual disappointment, but rather moral condemnation. Too great a consideration of appearances indicates a vice which can only leave the individual (and those who look at her) deformed and unsightly.

What both *Crito*, and the *Adventurer* essay with which I began seek is a survey of female manners. Unlike Pope in his *Epistle to a Lady* they seek to accomplish this by stressing the femininity of women.² Whereas Pope offers the masculinized hybridity of the 'softer Man' as the ideal to which Martha Blount may successfully aim, it is an idea of pleasing feminine prettiness which prompts Timanthes to close *Crito* by urging his friend to publish his reflections (which of course he has) 'for the benefit of the fair sex in general'.³ By this point, however, *Crito* has admitted more or less every form of beauty which he had originally sought to exclude: the fanciful, the merely pleasing and the national. It would seem furthermore that it is the very *personality* of his theory that has made this inevitable as the emphasis on the individual body form, and the singular moment of approbation excludes any stability of judgement. The fact that he later has

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 59-60.

² Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, one volume Twickenham edition, edited by John Butt, (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 569.

³ Beaumont, *Crito*, pp. 60-61.

to change discourses from that which first articulated real personal beauty - we might call this the discourse of domestic beauty - to a discourse which is more fully a moral philosophy is indicative of this change. This is the sense finally of Mrs B***; a critical moment which encompasses the imposition of moral requirements upon a supposedly philosophic discourse. However, perhaps the most important thing to say about Beaumont is that he establishes that Beauty can be argued for, not in terms of a description of women, as is the case in, say, Burke's *Enquiry*, but by analogy with a desire *for women*. Beauty, as an object of desire, is legitimated by Beaumont - as it was by the *Adventurer* - because he is able to make it not solely a figure of sexuality, but instead a means of social address. The manner by which the discourse on taste is established in a position away from the demands of aristocratic politics is therefore exactly in proportion the degree to which it is transformed into a means of evaluating women.

In the context of Beaumont's reformulation of the 'beautiful' it is significant that *Crito* acquired, if not a degree of influence, then at least a measure of currency in debates on taste throughout the mid-century. Allan Ramsay, for example, takes Sir Harry seriously enough for his theories to be the subject of debate between his own creations, Colonel Freeman and Lord Modish.¹ Robert Wark has suggested that the book may have been a source for Reynolds in the preparation of his *Discourses*; though this remains speculation.² Perhaps more impressive is the fact that when Daniel Webb dedicated his book, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting*, to Spence, he announced that, 'It was natural for me,...to addresses my observations on Painting to the author of

¹ Allan Ramsay, the younger, *A Dialogue on Taste*, 2nd ed., in *The Investigator*, 4 vols, (London: For the Author, 1762), vol. II, pp. 29-31.

² Robert Wark, 'Principal Books Reynolds read or may have read in preparation for writing the *Discourses*', in Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, p. 338.

CRITO'.¹ The dedication to Spence is perhaps not surprising (Webb subscribed to the first edition of *Polymetis*), but that it is to him as the author of *Crito*, and not of *Polymetis*, is more intriguing. I want to explore, in the next section, why Webb chose *Crito* as the sign of his affiliation to Spence's scholarly example. Importantly *Crito*, and not *Polymetis*, is a text (as I have been arguing) which deals with the appraisal of women, and which avows the possibility of virtuous desire; making the aesthetic an issue of morality, and not, as in Spence, virility: two points which I feel have tremendous influence on Webb's thinking. *Polymetis* is more cautious, and retains a relationship (albeit a new one) with civic discourse, through which Spence is able to retain much that he finds attractive in the Shaftesburian position. It is far harder to imagine the relationship pertaining between old Sir Harry and the priorities of civic humanism, particularly as his harangue was more distinguished for the 'figure it has given him with the misses' than for any affiliation to the *polis*.²

'Certain Pleasing Sensations': A Dialogue on Painting.

Beaumont's text located the appreciation of the Beautiful between moral philosophy and the realm of what *Crito* terms 'domestic beauties'. Webb's text, as if in contradistinction, begins with the more ambitious aim of correcting taste in the high art of painting. He writes for those of a high social station:

The persons for whom I write, are our young travellers, who set out with much eagerness, and little preparation; and who, for want of some governing objects to determine their course, must continually wander, misled by

¹ Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting, and into the Merits of the Most Celebrated Painters Ancient and Modern*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1760), p. iii.

² Ramsay, *Dialogue on Taste*, p. 30.

ignorant guides, or bewildered by a multiplicity of directions.¹

To conduct this instruction he tells his readers that, necessarily, 'almost every step we take, will be on classic ground'.² More specifically, Webb, through his didactic mouthpiece, known only as [A], wishes to wrest criticism of the Arts away from the inaccuracies and importunities of the 'picture-Merchant'. Importantly he does not regard this as the arduous task it might appear, as he is confident that painting, as a form of art is, 'the most easily understood....the most natural in its means and effects'.³ It is this sense that the art of painting, and its particular 'beauties', are easily understood, and naturally so, which marks the point at which Webb may owe a debt to *Crito*. I want to explore this connection and to point out the difference between this position and that outlined by Reynolds later in the century.

With his aim of assessing, correcting and improving taste Webb begins by outlining what he takes to be the appropriate '*Capacity to Judge of Painting*'. The important factor in this will be the proposition of a 'science' of criticism, of which he writes that:

I should say, that taste was a faculty in the mind to be moved by what is excellent in an art; it is a feeling of the truth. But, science is to be informed of that truth, and of the means by which its effects are produced.⁴

The difference between a 'feeling for the truth' and the fore-knowledge of the 'means by which its effects are produced' is perhaps an uncertain one, particularly as the difference cannot be attributed to a knowledge of the mechanic parts of painting. Indeed, Webb believes that those who would have such a knowledge, namely painters

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. vi.

² Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 7.

³ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. viii-ix.

⁴ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 8-9.

themselves, rarely 'rise to an unprejudiced and liberal contemplation of true beauty'.¹ A long note is inserted into the text to try to clarify the issue, in which Webb postulates that the 'source of taste is feeling, so is it of judgement, which is nothing more than this same sensibility improved by the study of proper objects, and brought to a just point of certainty and correctness'.² Described in these terms, judgement comes to rest on an innate feeling, while science is figured as a sophisticated knowledge of the process by which that sensation is produced. It is by making feeling so central to his account that Webb moves into the territory sketched out by Crito; in short he regards the pleasure of painting as itself a 'passion, founded on the love of what is beautiful'.³ The statement implies, as does his account of the excitement of 'proper objects', a sense of the 'pleasingness' of beauty that is comparable with the account provided in *Crito*.

Beaumont's text becomes ultimately a text with a social purpose, and *Beauties of Painting* also aims for a greater range of address. For, according to Webb, painting is a necessary art, because 'it is certain, that the love of this art has been considered in every civilised nation, not only as proof of politeness, but even as the test of their humanity'.⁴ This is the site, and the source of painting's refining influence:

To effect this, the softer passions, and even elegant habitudes are to be employed: These only can harmonize the mind, and temper it in a sensibility of the slightest impressions, and most exquisite feelings. Hence spring attention, civility, the finest disguises of our own passions, and insinuating addresses to those of others; these fashion themselves into a system of politeness; society becomes amiable, as well as good, and we have at last, the best incitements to the practice of virtue in the agreeableness of its objects.⁵

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 18.

² Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 8n.

³ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 37.

⁴ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 36.

⁵ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 29.

Though Webb is talking about the modes of 'Athenian politeness' it is clear that he intends these forms equally to attend the successful fruition of modern society. Importantly, it is the delights of the Graces, and of grace in general, which are taken to be the chief pleasure. Commenting on the wisdom of the Greek myths, it is noted that the Graces:

were made to preside over courtly, and outward charms: The assigning them this double province was happily imagined; for civility, or the desire to please, naturally produces a gracefulness of action; and spreads over the person that *venustas*, which is the contemplation of exterior beauty.¹

Grace, as *Crito* suggests, became in the eighteenth-century the primary means of representing appropriate social conduct, and more particularly the correct conduct of women; it is, after all, because of her grace, that Mrs B*** pleases. That the value of painting as an art is located in these terms threatens to destabilize the whole project. The attention to the attractions of the 'person' renders the relation of criticism's 'chaste eye' and the 'certain pleasing sensations' of the Beautiful ambivalent by making judgement so reliant on feeling.² A point that is underlined by [B]'s suggestion that the evolution of society, and of sociability, may be summarised in terms of the gracious softening effected by the polite arts:

Thus the first motives may be said to act like the pressure of the heart or current of the blood; their operations are evident: But the latter, of a more refined nature, like the animal spirits, though they work unperceived, give life and movement to well ordered societies.³

The difference between an immediate near somatic response and the proprieties of a sociable gaze is a fine one. Importantly it is a separation which not everyone can make, and many 'continue, to the last, under the influence of the same boyish and wanton

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 29n.

² Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 12, 134.

³ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 30-31.

imagination'.¹ Burke is similarly ambivalent when discussing the extent to which he will attribute the perception of beauty to reasoned perception or will claim it to be an immediate felt, and hence non-cognitive, perception.² That painting, and by extension other forms of beauty, offer an exciting, but socializing pleasure is a view endorsed by the more learned [A]. However, [A] is unable to proceed beyond his contention that painting produces a felt sensation: 'I should say something of the pleasure we receive from it: But as this is itself a passion, founded on the love of what is beautiful, and the delight we see in having our passion moved, it is easier to affirm its existence, than explain its nature'.³ Resistant to analysis, save as a vague identification as a 'passion' the sensations which both enliven and soften appear curiously undefined throughout Webb's text.

I want to pursue the connection between feeling and judgement by examining Webb's discussion of Correggio, before focusing on its specifically gendered implications. Correggio's work is frequently commented upon, and at times praised highly for its painterly beauty and grace.⁴ Talking specifically of Correggio's success in the practice of the 'clear obscure', he announces that:

It is easy to conceive, what advantages, an uncommon genius, and elegant imagination, must draw from such resources as these; hence springs that warmth, that variety, that magic, which enchants the eye, and prepossesses the understanding....This seduction is no small merit in a painter; it is an union of the mechanic and the ideal; it is the power of realizing his conceptions; from which, however, we should receive little pleasure, were not those conceptions in themselves pleasing.⁵

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 15.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 108.

³ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 31.

⁴ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 66-68.

⁵ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 123-25.

The final clause marks a retrenchment around scholarly judgement. Certainly it does not fit in with the notion of the eye being enchanted or the mind prepossessed; two points which combine to ensure that 'we do not judge of Correggio as of other painters'. The difference is because Correggio is, perhaps, too pleasing, 'we view his work with a predilection, which doubles his beauties and blind us to his errors'.

Correggio's grace - his ability to please - is also his great failing. While he has striven to please he has neglected the true object of art, which is great beauty. These reflections are in many respects similar to those offered by Reynolds in his fourth Discourse, first delivered to the Royal Academy in December 1771. Correggio, Reynolds claims, is 'foremost' amongst those who have attempted the 'composite style'

His style is founded upon modern grace and elegance, to which is super-added something of the simplicity of the grand style. A breadth of light and colour, the general ideas of the drapery, an uninterrupted flow of outline, all conspire to this effect. Next to him (perhaps equal to him) Parmegiano has dignified the genteelness of modern effeminacy, by uniting it with the simplicity of the ancients. It must be confessed, however, that these two extraordinary men, by endeavouring to give the utmost degree of grace, have exceeded its boundaries, and have fallen into the most hateful of all hateful qualities, affectation.¹

The twice hateful affectation, the debility of the modern, is located for Reynolds in the figure of the feminine. It is, he says, quoting Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*, 'the brink of all we hate'. Reynolds's position is thus quite clear: he can tolerate a measure of grace and elegance, but too much, however, is 'the very verge of ridicule'. Webb, I think is more ambivalent, and although he, like Reynolds rehearses the superlative excellence of ancient art's 'one great expression', the great force of a single, beautiful idea resolutely expressed, he opposes this to the winning delicacy and refinement of the moderns.²

However the problem of distinguishing between the delicate refinement of

¹ Reynolds, 'Discourse IV', in *Discourses on Art*, p. 72.

² Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 194-96, 185-87.

modernity and a more unseemly 'modern effeminacy' remains. This is a point which seems underlined in Webb's text when it is asked whether:

Though what you have offered, be applied only to painting, may we not extend it into common life; and account, from hence, for the differences of our opinions, concerning the beauty of women; each man esteeming her most beautiful, who most readily excites in his those sensations, which are the ENDS OF BEAUTY?¹

It is difficult to see how the analogy could function if the paintings to which the text refers are thought of as history paintings, or indeed any genre with a narrative structure. The appreciation of women, as *Crito* would suggest, and Burke agrees is a private matter; an issue of *personal* and never *civic* ideas. One cannot grasp the meaning of the *Judgement of Hercules* as if one were appreciating women at Vauxhall gardens, or the viewer would have failed to grasp the public and general terms which the image was designed to convey. The argument can only make sense about objects from the lower genres of the arts, the kind of things Webb ought to be steering young tourists away from. It is for this reason that Shaftesbury, though he makes the appreciation of beautiful women *like* pleasure in more elevated kinds of beauty, is repeatedly strict in his insistence that to be manly it is necessary to move on from these idle gallantries.²

Reading Webb becomes difficult at this point because it becomes necessary to decide exactly how to read a dialogue. While [A] appears in the most authoritative position, and certainly holds forth on the virtue of classical art, the reflections proposed by his companion are not represented as wholly vicious, or even unreasonable. Indeed there is much to be said in defense of the modern taste avowed by [B], when he compares ancient and modern art:

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 134-35.

² The Third Earl of Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper], *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times etc.*, 2 vols, ed. and intro. John M. Robertson, (Gloucester Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), vol. I, pp. 89-99.

the former drew the passions to a point, collecting the powers of painting to one single and favourable expression; whilst the genius of Raphael, more placid and diffused, illumines and is reflected by numberless objects.¹

For [B], although modern painting is weakened by the lack of the sublime sources and models, which benefited ancient art (as [A] has argued) it can gain by adopting the delicacy and manner of the mixed composition.² After quoting an appropriate passage from *Paradise Lost*, this is something to which [A] has himself appealed.³ The ambivalence of this position is perhaps reflected in the uncertain way in which [A] seeks to dispense with the objection:

This progress is just inverted in painting; the whole production is at once more on us; our attention is immediately fixed on the most interesting expression; when we have studied and felt the powers of this, we then, and not till then, descend to the examination of inferior movements.⁴

All would appear to be stable at this point, as effeminacy and any undue effect on the passions are excluded. However [A] continues his refutation, and moving into an extended analogy:

Thus when we enter into the assembly of women, should there be one amongst them of distinguished beauty, the eye dwells with constancy on her; and having taken in all her advantages, passes to a careless observation of the rest. It is evident, in both these cases, that the superior acts with intrinsic, and not relative force.⁵

Painting (and women) therefore possess an intrinsic force by which the viewer is automatically 'seized' by the 'impression of the instant'.⁶

The difference which [A] proposes between ancient and modern composition is

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 181-82.

² Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 186-87, 144-46.

³ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 128-29.

⁴ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 188-89.

⁵ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 189.

⁶ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, p. 191.

informed by this paradigmatic attention to the nature of the feeling produced by works of art. The ancients, he argues, brought their compositions to one singular point of great beauty or moral truthfulness. Accordingly, their achievement was unique, one which was elevated above the natural order. Modern painters, and Raphael is the example, have produced more placid and diffuse, and hence pleasing images.¹ Webb is, therefore, producing an account of painting which relies upon the assumption that the effect of painting is a beneficial relaxing of, if not the sinews, then at least the sterner forms of republican identity. As Lord Kames's writes in praise of distressed beauty:

Pity interests us in this object, and recommends all its virtuous qualities. For this reason, female beauty shows best in distress, and is more apt to inspire love, than upon ordinary occasions.²

Pity warms and melts the spectator, thus preparing him 'for the reception of other tender affections'. Mrs B*** might also be described as a spectacle wherein 'admiration concurred with pity to produce love'.³ David Solkin has argued that Kames's account provided the eighteenth-century art world with the vocabulary with which to engage with the nature of modern taste in a manner consistent with civic virtue.⁴ It is also, however, a means of formulating a response to the social presence of women. Solkin's argument serves as a useful reminder of the changed space in which such arguments were being deployed, and it is to this issue that I now wish to turn. I will also begin to discuss James Usher's *Clio* of 1767, a text which even more than *Crito* addresses a mixed and polite society.

¹ Webb, *Beauties of Painting*, pp. 181-82.

² Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3 vols, (London & Edinburgh: A. Millar, and A. Kincaid & J. Bell, 1762), vol. I, p. 93.

³ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 95.

⁴ David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 188.

Philosophical Conversations: The Discourse of Polite Space

While Spence's varied works were located in closed male social gatherings, James Usher's *Clio* is somewhat different; it is directed, not to the male space of the pavilion, but to the mixed society of the drawing room:

MADAM, When I had the pleasure of drinking tea with you a few days ago, and occasionally read to you Rollin's General Reflections upon what is called Good Taste, some observations you made brought on a lively and pleasing conversation, in which you opened so many new prospects to me upon our subject, that I had thoughts of reducing my ideas to writing while they continued fresh in my memory, and you were pleased to approve my design.¹

The author acknowledges that it is the familiar and complacent conversation of the 'lady' that has rendered his enterprise possible. The text which follows is the product of conversation, as the texts by Spence (whether writing as Beaumont or as himself) sought to dramatise or reproduce that style. There is a difference, however, between this form of representation and that found in Shaftesbury's more elevated dialogues. It is possible to see, in all these texts, the translation of critical debate from treatise to the form of a mock-socratic dialogue, a move which represents the accommodation of philosophic discussion to the pleasantries of English life. These formal and discursive shifts need to be considered broadly. They are above all, I would suggest, a process of familiarisation in which the texts involved take the terms of an aesthetic inquiry into the topos of domestic manners. This had of course happened earlier in the century when Addison has expressed the hope that he had 'brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries' to reside at 'Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses', and it is possible to see the works under discussion here as drawing on his example.² Of more general significance

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 1.

² Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12th March, 1711), in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. I, p. 44.

is the fact that these philosophical conversations refer to an 'audience' - as had Usher - which its actual readership can seek to identify with, or desire to be.

It is in these terms that *Clio* proposes an account of femininity as central to any analysis of taste and morals. The text's full title gives a strong indication of its final orientation: for in *Clio; Or, a Dialogue on Taste addressed to a Young Lady* the general addressee is merged with the more specific identity, that of a 'Young Lady', to produce an account of beauty which appropriates the sign of *Clio* (the muse of epic poetry) as an organising metaphor for the relation between polite society and refined taste. She is a woman, moreover, who, along with Sir Harry Beaumont, is the 'bright original' who inspired and instructed the writer.¹ For according to Usher, it is the elegant conversation of his fair friend which has made the text and its manner possible. Recollecting a point in their discourse where they debated the proposition that the 'graceful and the becoming are never found separated from nature and propriety', Usher reminds his lady that:

you made an objection, that obliged me in order to answer it, to make some reflections, which lead me to approach nearer the origin of elegance than I expected. Your objection madam, was this: "if elegance be inseparable from propriety and nature, why are not the common people, who are without education, just as nature made them, the most graceful? and why does elegance reside only amongst those who are formed by art?" I could not pass over this ingenious question without an answer, and it led me to the following observations.²

Usher responds to his fair interlocutor by claiming that because 'labour requires harsh, forced, and violent motions' it produces (necessarily) a 'ungenerosity of disposition', in effect a subject incapable of tasteful speculation.³ Moreover, the lady's ingenuity, her engaging sallies, have pricked the pedantic aesthete into action, as he confesses earlier

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 91

² Usher, *Clio*, pp. 17-18.

³ Usher, *Clio*, pp. 18-19, 20.

in the text, remembering that, 'you stopped me with a very subtle and confounding objection, which became stronger by your sprightly manner of supporting it'.¹

It is in this manner that the form and function of her bright originality is made central to the development of the text. It provides 'that picture from which I borrowed my ideas of elegance'.² The 'Lady', though, is more than the docile recipient of the narrator's advice and pedagogic flirtatiousness. She is in fact his inspiration, a figure who supplies the place of his muse. It is to the lady he owes the realisation of the possibility of a 'transition' from the 'beauties of writing to the elegance and propriety displayed in polished life'. This is a realisation entirely owing to her 'simple original principals of taste'.³ The moment, however, is not without an insistent level of condescension: 'I have dwelt on personal elegance, because the ideas and principals in this part of good taste are more familiar to you'.⁴ Usher has kept on the subject of personal elegance - the morality of polite behaviour and social grace - because *this is* what he feels women understand best. Discussion of these topics is held to be the best way to introduce the more complicated areas of thought to ladies. By 'fair sexing' it in this way, deferring always to the authority of women, Usher's text might be seen as productive of a domesticated landscape familiar to readers of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* earlier in the century.⁵ But it is the 'Lady' as motivator, or metaphor, of moments of cultural transmission that is most striking. It is women, or more broadly

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 4.

² Usher, *Clio*, p. 91.

³ Usher, *Clio*, p. 2.

⁴ Usher, *Clio*, p. 37.

⁵ For an account of the significance of women in the rhetoric of the early periodicals see Kathryn Shevelow. *Women and Print Culture: the construction of femininity in the early periodical*, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 33-34.

conceived notions of femininity, which in Beaumont and Usher provide the means of moving between discourses which describe society, polite culture and the conventions of taste. They do so by encoding the address and form of the debate within a particular setting and tone; that of private domesticity and social familiarity, thereby uniting a diverse discursive network rapidly around a central topos of feminine, personal beauty. The young lady's elegance and natural refinement represent the unity of both genteel social living and complaisant good taste. It is a movement between public and private which is, as in Beaumont and Webb, undertaken with reference to the presence of a woman, Usher's 'young lady', who is conceived of in terms of the production of a range of socialised pleasures. This is a gratification which is established, and significantly so, within distinctly masculine codes of taste and 'pleasingness'; and in this respect neither Beaumont or Usher are markedly different from the patrician *Polymetis*.

The manipulation of the audience that I have described is an important rhetorical move within the ideological structure of these texts, and is comparable to the strategies employed by the periodicals published in the same period. In her analysis of early eighteenth-century periodical literature Kathryn Shevelow has written of the 'programmatically representation of reader complicity' and of an 'appearance of dialogue' in the style and form of journals such as the *Athenian Mercury* and the *Spectator*.¹ These devices, which Shevelow sees as operating within a 'dialectic' between society and genre, manipulate and position the reader and his or her desires. The audience's composition, and in particular its idea of itself, becomes a *textual* product, and one which is created by the journal itself so that the composition of the readership 'cannot be understood by statistical or descriptive investigation alone'.² Shevelow writes that:

¹ Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, pp. 43-44, 45.

² Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 32.

The community of the text, a construction of writing, was a figure imposed by the periodical distinct from, though engaged in interaction with, the forms of social organisation actually lived by its audience.¹

To read periodical literature becomes, on this account, a realisation not only that it is possible to write such a discourse, but that it is necessary for a polite subject to be able to do so. It is conceivable that the ambiguous addresses of *Clio* and Cooper's *Letters Concerning Taste* offer something comparable. Not that such an opportunity is not desired, indeed quite the contrary. By offering the reader the possibility of intervention, the text becomes part of the 'vicarious leisure' offered by polite literature, the audience for which would have included a high proportion of women.

The presence of a woman as such a crucial force in the text is far from contingent or coincidental. It indicates the nature of conversation in eighteenth-century England, and consequently informs the texts under discussion here.² It is therefore necessary to consider the heterosocial nature of the debate on the beautiful as it is represented in such text as *Crito* and *Clio*, and to consider the forms of social organisation which they envisage. I can give an indication of what I intend by giving an account of an essay written by Hume in 1742. Hume begins his short article 'Of Essay Writing' by proposing a split in the 'elegant part of mankind' between the *learned* and the *conversible*.³ These two groupings are taken to represent, on the one hand, the solitary

¹ Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 47.

² For an account of the ways in which the practices of conversation were gendered see, Lawrence Klein, 'Gender, conversation and the public sphere in early eighteenth-century England', in Judith Still and Michael Worton eds., *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading theories and practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 100-112.

³ David Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller, (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), p. 535. The essay from which I quote appeared only in *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, 1742) before being withdrawn.

and intellectual domain of the philosopher, and on the other hand the social world, which includes the talk and gossip of polite life. As Hume elaborates his position it becomes clear, for Hume is playful in his advertisement of this position, that this is a clearly wrought model of gender and social difference. It is at the point where Hume denotes the *conversible* realm as the province of the 'Fair Sex', noting that women are the 'sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation', that this becomes explicit. It is the relationship between these two areas of learned and polite society on which Hume's essay focuses.¹

Hume shows no reserve in claiming for himself a position of pre-eminence in this scheme and soon installs himself as 'Ambassador from the Dominions of learning to those of Conversation'. Perhaps, he suggests somewhat flirtatiously, if he had it in his power to yield his country to the fair sovereigns of the conversible world he would do so, or perhaps not. All that is in his power is to ask for a 'league' to be established; a kind of special relationship, or possibly a common defense initiative against the 'enemies of beauty and reason'. Of this alliance there need be no fear as, Hume tells us:

The Balance of Trade we need not be jealous of, nor will there be any Difficulty to preserve it on both Sides. The Materials of this Commerce must chiefly be furnish'd by Conversation and common Life: The manufacturing of them alone belongs to Learning.²

While this implies a notional equity, there is something more subtle a work here. The conversible realm merely produces the 'Materials' or this trade, providing only the raw goods from which the learned fashion will derive more refined products. However, although the production of the objects of discourse is wholly within the domain of

¹ Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', pp. 533-34. Hume recognised that such a mixing of the sexes rested upon the new social and commodified spaces of commercial society. See 'Of the Refinement of the Arts', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 268-80.

² Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', p. 535.

learning, the valuation of the product lies beyond the learned, who are its producers. Consequently, while the philosophers may produce learned treatise and discourses upon whatever subject, they cannot, within their own world, evaluate or legitimate the position of philosophy. They must leave their state of mopey reclusiveness - a kind of dull impotence - to seek approval in the outside world, which turns out to mean the approval of women:

I am of the Opinion, that Women, that is Women of Sense and Education (for to such alone do I address myself) are much better Judges of all polite Writing than Men of the same Degree of Understanding.¹

Hume is not very clear on why women are more suited to the judging of philosophy than men. One possible reason may be the assumption, common in the eighteenth century, of women's presumed disinterested gentility, which Hume seems to share. Though Hume may also be anxious that philosophy should appear as a properly polite activity, and hence not inimical to women.²

The issue which then confronts Hume is that of deciding upon what grounds this approval is to be granted. Despite reservations over the susceptibility of women to the showy excesses of gallantry and religious enthusiasm Hume seems confident that the 'Fair Sex' will give praise and award merit where ever it is due:

Let them accustom themselves a little more to Books of all Kinds: Let them give Encouragement to Men of Sense and Knowledge to frequent their Company: And finally, let them heartily concur in that Union I have projected betwixt the learned and the conversible Worlds. They may perhaps, meet with more Complaisance from their usual Followers than from Men of Learning; but they cannot reasonably expect so sincere an Affection: And, I hope, they will never be guilty of so wrong a Choice, as to sacrifice the

¹ Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', p. 536.

² For an account of Hume's anxiety about the relation of society to philosophy see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Society: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), intro. and ch. 1.

Substance to the Shadow.¹

A reformation of female manners and education would then secure the process, improving both the genteel and philosophical worlds. The point Hume is making is that while women, as the foundations of the social, are the final arbiters of taste, it is an arbitration which needs careful scrutiny. Women emerge from Hume's essay both as signs of tasteful appreciation and as subjects of scrutiny, policed lest they mistake the 'substance for the shadow'. Women are therefore placed in an unpleasantly doubled position, in a role which forces them to act as both the surveyors and the surveyed. It is possible to see this dual position, of judging and being judged throughout James Usher's *Clio* to which I now turn.

"The Shape of Learning": The Judgement of Women and the Appraisal of Art. In common with Beaumont, James Usher writes his argument about beauty at one remove from discussions of taste which are ideal or general. The focus of his argument is close to Beaumont's, and concentrates on what Usher terms 'personal elegance', in particular the elegance of domesticated beauties. Usher's concerns, though, remain more broadly conceived than Beaumont's, and do provide a general discussion of taste. Taste is defined conventionally enough as:

a clear sense of the noble, the beautiful, and the affecting, through nature and art. It distinguishes and selects, with unerring Judgement, what is fine and graceful from the mean and disgusting.²

Taste is therefore separated from the whims of 'mode' and is moreover 'testified by the voice of nature'.³ Usher vouches the real, intrinsic value of objects as guarantors of the

¹ Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', p. 537.

² Usher, *Clio*, pp. 2-3.

³ Usher, *Clio*, p. 5.

possibility of a universal taste.¹ Despite these assurances, numerous problems recur throughout the text. It is all very well to postulate a given, universal beauty existing as a quality in objects, but unless it is possible to say which objects are so lauded, and why, the analysis counts for little. It is on precisely this point that Usher comes unstuck.

He continues:

The general opinion is, that this most conspicuous part of beauty, that is perceived and acknowledged by everybody, is yet utterly inexplicable, and retires from our search when we would discover what it is. Where shall I find the secret retreat of the graces, to explain to me the elegance they dictate, and to paint in visible colours the fugitive and varying enchantment that hovers round a graceful person, yet leaves us for ever in agreeable suspense and confusion? I need not seek for them, madam; the graces are but the emblems of the *human mind, in its loveliest appearances*; and while I write for you it is impossible not to feel their influence.²

This language of 'suspense and confusion' indicates the presence of something like sexual desire, with all the problems for a conception of masculinity it possessed in the work of Shaftesbury and Spence. Beauty is constructed as the hidden *je ne sais quoi* of an ambiguously philosophical discourse. It is regarded as inexplicable, retiring and fugitive in ways which render it forever indefinable. This is a much more coy rendition of pleasure and its indefinability than even Addison's secret pleasures. This moment is furthermore bound up in the flirtatious tone of the passage. It is personal and conversational, a passage apparently at ease with itself and its intended reader, which creates a situation which allows the object of analysis and the 'Lady'-reader to become one and the same thing. Beauty, transposed through the Graces, becomes the addressee of the discourse.

The fact remains, however, that beauty is essentially indefinable in objective empirical terms. Beauty, as Usher points out, a 'waving flame', ever insubstantial and

¹ Usher, *Clio*, pp. 13-14.

² Usher, *Clio*, p. 22.

in retreat. Despite this, it retains its status as an object of desire:

The curious eye with eagerness pursues the wandering beauty, which it sees with surprize at every turn, but is never able to overtake. It is a waving flame, that like the reflection of the sun from water never settles; it glances on you in every motion and disposition of the body; its different powers through attitude and motion seem to be collected in dancing, where it plays on the arms, the legs, the breast, the cheek, and in short the whole frame.¹

There is some confusion here, largely centred on the apparently mobile 'it' of the passage. Precisely what the pronoun of the passage refers to is unclear; beauty begins as an abstract principal, but appears to move through an objectified corporeality, perhaps even becoming a subject in its own right. The 'it glances' of the passage is perhaps particularly vague, as whether the figure is of reflection or sight is unclear. The vague nature of the prose leaves it uncertain as to whether the 'glances' is a figure for the eye of the spectator or of the object which is being described. The ambivalence is such that beauty fails to become a properly realised object. A similar point is made when he asserts that musical beauty is so 'shadowy' that while it may be 'sufficiently perceivable to fire the imagination', it is not 'clear enough to become an object of knowledge'.²

The unreachableness of Beauty and its efficient causes is overcome by turning women into the objects of analysis and debate. In the first instance Usher achieves this by changing his focus away from beauty and towards what he terms 'Personal Elegance'. This he tells his readers may be defined as

the image and reflection of the grandeur and beauty of the invisible soul. Grandeur and beauty in the soul itself, are not objects of sense; colours cannot paint them, but they diffuse inexpressible loveliness over the person.³

Interestingly, Beauty is mixed with grandeur as a means of gaining universal praise. As

¹ Usher, *Clio*, pp. 27-28.

² Usher, *Clio*, pp. 53-54.

³ Usher, *Clio*, p. 23.

Usher's account progresses he begins to talk of the 'secret joy' and 'suggestive lustre' of elegance, the appearance of which is associated with a 'pleasing delusion'. It would appear that personal elegance has a certain seductive quality. Usher is insistent, however, that the image entails, not desire, but the reformist empire of true beauty:

Elegance assumes to itself an empire equal to that of the soul; it rules and inspires every part of the body, and makes use of all the human powers; but it particularly takes the passions under its charge and direction, and turns them into a kind of Artillery, with which it does infinite execution.¹

As this extract makes clear, personal elegance inhabits the bodies of the virtuous, making them still more lovely by making them pure and chaste. It is an image of active refinement, once it has taken hold the whole body is reorganized under elegance's spreading empire. In common with the *Adventurer's* 'eastern metaphor' of the fortified city, it is a figure of propriety designed to improve its readers. Beauty, according to Usher, while it renders the elegant subject attractive it chastens and rebukes unwanted attentions with an artillery of virtuous passions.

Given this profoundly regulatory position, it is no surprise that elegance is made to represent a perfect and internalised taste. Usher writes that:

Good taste, like the moving beam, paints in their different colours all the objects of our view, and informs us of what is beautiful and engaging. It is the inward light of universal beauty.²

This is less straightforward than it might first appear: the phrase 'inward light' has two possible interpretations. The phrase could entail a stream of worth entering the soul at the sight of a beautiful object, alternatively it could be a description of rays given off by the woman of taste, who is herself 'universal beauty'. On this reading beauty, taste

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 28.

² Usher, *Clio*, pp. 15-16. The most obvious significance of 'inward light' here is as an allusion to the Protestant, perhaps specifically Quaker, notions of the converted or redeemed soul.

and elegance coalesce within the space of the refined subject. It is a move which short-circuits much of Usher's original dilemma. The relationship between taste and the subject - and of these ideas to beauty or elegance - is therefore decisive. Importantly, elegance is not beauty but, 'the effect of a delicate and awakened taste'.¹ Conventionally it might be assumed that the beautiful was the object apprehended by the tasteful gaze, in this sense beauty is exterior to the viewing subject and objectified by their gaze. To an extent Usher seems to depart from this practice, effectively getting round the indefinable nature of beauty, by placing it not outside but within the subject. This, however, is achieved at the 'cost' of making his text into a conduct book in which taste is closely allied to etiquette. As I have already argued this realignment is centred upon women and their capacity for judging and for facilitating judgement. In this context the manipulation of terms, in particular the confusion of the relationship between subjects and objects, that is effected by Usher's text, has a broader and more complex referent than mere philosophic waywardness. It was the part of the general impetus of mid-century accounts of taste to produce an account of the perceiving subject which described that agent as being as pleasing as the objects upon which they gazed. In this women had a particularly pivotal, if uncertain position.²

I want now to examine Usher's treatment of female taste in more detail, as it is particularly to women's achievements and values that he directs his inquiry. The superlative excellence of women is further attested to when Usher announces that:

When you except a few men of distinguished talents, ladies both write and speak better than scholars. If you ask me the reason for this, I must inform

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 31.

² For a further example of the mode of critique I have in mind see, Alexander Gererd, *An Essay on Taste with Dissertations on the Same Subject by de Voltaire, D'Albert and de Montiesque*, (London and Edinburgh: A. Millar and Kincaid & Bell, 1759), pp. 14, 126, 164, 200.

you, that the easy and natural excursions of the imagination are seldom checked in ladies.¹

This, Usher believes, is owing to the 'nauseous draft of learning' which is foisted on young men during their education. The 'unaffected grace' and 'easy spirit of...words' which forms the style of women's letter writing therefore excels over the schooled drudgery of male discourse. While taste is universal, it is, Usher confesses, 'communicated to different persons with such different degrees of light and clearness' such that some remain laboriously ignorant while others see beauty with an easy and instant 'warmth'.² There are then different degrees and classes of taste, a fact which for Usher devolves a particular responsibility to those who are tasteful. It requires them to preserve and extend the influence of good taste throughout society. This would seem to be the role of women in Usher's view of polite culture. However, this is far from being emancipatory. Usher believes that learning 'fits' as awkwardly on a woman as would 'her grandfather's large spectacles'. The image of bodily incongruity provides him with a means of restricting women's involvement in the very sphere in which they are the supposed exemplars, and thus he writes of a woman's education:

She should have an acquaintance with the fine arts, because they enrich and beautify the imagination; but she should carefully keep them out of view in the shape of learning, and let them run through the easy happy vein of unpremeditated thought: for this reason she should never use nor even understand the terms of art: the gentleman will occasionally explain them to her.³

The 'shape of learning' is an ambiguous figure here. In the context of an account which moves between abstractions and an account of women's bodies such an image can, and I think does, have a complex referent. It refers partly to the body of the woman, a talent,

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 38-39.

² Usher, *Clio*, pp. 79, 80.

³ Usher, *Clio*, p. 44.

which like her flesh ought to be gracefully disguised beneath the eloquence and adornment of imagination and politeness. There is a sense of having come full circle. Beauty is not an object of knowledge, therefore it is feminine, and to be feminine is henceforward never to display the ownership of any studied knowledge. Women can facilitate culture, provide the gentility necessary for its development, but they cannot for Usher intervene in its production without sacrificing the very quality - femininity - which has permitted their inclusion.

There is nothing particularly unusual in the kinds of assumption Usher is making. Comparable attitudes to the intellectual capacity of women can be found, for example, in *The Polite Arts. Dedicated to the Ladies*, by 'Cosmetti'. The prose of this particular piece is commonsensical enough: 'the bigness of a column implies the measure of its diameter'.¹ Such simple prose is central to Cosmetti's aim, indeed he makes clear his 'intention to avoid prolixity by descending to particulars'.² The choice of style conveys more than a caution against being verbose, as it marks an assumption underlying the book that anything but the most empirically obvious will be either too dull, or too complex for his readers. This accounts for Cosmetti's decision to describe the art of painting almost entirely in relation to the mimetic capacities of landscape and portraiture. History painting is scarcely mentioned. Cosmetti does not, however, restrict himself to the higher arts alone; his text is broad-ranging in this respect and includes references to copper-plate engraving as well as to mosaic and the plastic arts.³ There is in this emphasis more than a suggestion that the audience to whom the book is directed is made up of those who seek to furnish their home politely (there is advice on

¹ Cosmetti, *The Polite Arts, Dedicated to the Ladies*, (London: Roach, 1767), p. 8.

² [Cosmetti], *Polite Arts*, p. 9.

³ [Cosmetti]. *Polite Arts*, pp. 26, 23-24.

how to hang pictures, for example), and to be easy in conversation.¹ It is an estimation of female education entirely in line with the restriction proposed by Usher throughout *Clio*, a point underlined by the largely feminised vocabulary of the text, with words such as 'charming', 'affection', 'lovely' used to describe the arts under discussion. Cosmetti's audience, unlike Webb's, is one which is concerned with the enclosed space of genteel consumption in which women are required to arrange tastefully acquired commodities rather than to appraise history painting. This is consistent, and importantly so, with the form of beauty employed throughout *Crito* and *Clio*.

It is important now to be clear about the implications of 'beauty' in the texts which have fallen under discussion in this chapter. Certainly Beaumont and Usher use the word frequently and offer the usual repertoire of terms and phrases necessary for discussions of taste and pleasure. But while they describe the effects of the beautiful, the qualities which they ascribe to it (modesty, pleasingness, grace), and the place where they locate it in the physical world (the bodies, by and large of women) suggests a different agenda. Usher and Beaumont have in mind not the grand ideal of beauty then being envisaged by Reynolds, but rather something which is closer to the pretty and the agreeable. In defining personal elegance, Usher writes that it emanates from a 'lofty consciousness of worth or virtue' so that 'when they unite, they appear like a reserved and virgin kindness'.² This idea is taken once again to endow the elegant with a certain elevation and dignity. Briefly, Usher allows a kind of raw virtue to become the 'natural soil of elegance', so that whatever is virtuous becomes necessarily pleasing.³ This more masculine rendering of the problem is soon abandoned, and the elegant is returned to

¹ [Cosmetti], *Polite Arts*, p. 22.

² Usher, *Clio*, p. 61.

³ Usher, *Clio*, p. 65.

the domain of the pleasing and the amiable:

In short, complaisance gives an agreeableness to the whole person, and creates a beauty, that nature gave not to the features; it submits, it promises, it applauds in the countenance; the heart lays itself in smiles at your feet, and a voice which is indulgent and tender, is always heard with pleasure.¹

Elegance submits, it acquiesces; at once docile and yet beguiling, elegance pleases in a way which seems calculated to be feminine. It is, moreover, wholly domesticated; this is a vision of daughterly or wifely obedience, in which the sexually ambiguous language of 'suspense and confusion' is subsumed to an moment of almost dog-like obedience.

While there is towards the end of *Clio* an expansion of the discussion of taste, where Usher discourses on beauty and grandeur in a much more lofty sense, it is only after he has undertaken the long and familiarising excursion through the personally elegant. In common with Beaumont's discussion of 'Real Personal Beauty', Usher's conception of personal elegance seems to fulfil two functions; it helps first to define an otherwise impenetrable object field, beauty; and secondly to install a reformist discourse on female manners. It is possible to recognise in both *Crito* and *Clio* some of the strategies already present in Addison's 'Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination'. With beauty as indefinable save as 'several Modifications of Matter', Addison's account would be left circling an ill-conceived and poorly defined object. However, the 'Man of Polite Imagination' with his easy gaze and generality of knowledge is able to step into the breach. His position as the subject of the discourse is crucial; without him the discussion of beauty might flounder on its own diaphanous insubstantiality. The subject-addressee of Addison's work is unquestionably a gentlemanly figure.² That position is

¹ Usher, *Clio*, p. 68.

² For an account of the importance of the figure of the gentleman see, John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), pp. 17-51.

untenable here, these texts being closer constitutively to what Addison termed, 'the female world'.¹

Responding to this changed situation, Beaumont and Usher tend to internalise taste or beauty as a personal feature and more particularly as quality possessed distinctly by women. In this sense the discursive moves which the analysis of beauty occasions run counter to those which have been recently proposed for the sublime. Peter de Bolla has proposed that the excesses of the discourse on the sublime necessarily produces the subject and object which form the discourse *of* the sublime. To simplify his account somewhat, de Bolla describes how the process of describing the appearance or the experience of a particular form of the sublime (his examples include mountains, cathedrals, rhetoric and debt) is unable to cope with the nature of the task it addresses. What he terms an 'overplus' occurs in the texts describing sublimity, an excess which causes them to refer to a discourse, not on a specific type of the sublime, but one *of* the Sublime. This second textual level brings with it an account of the subject and as such can legislate for the 'excess' of each individual discourse. In the case of Beauty, on the contrary, it is possible to detect an attenuation of the discourse *of* Beauty back into a discourse on beauty.² Or rather, a discourse on the beauty of women, their propriety and prettiness, begins to fill the place of the elided object of universal taste, which is beauty in general. In short there is no discourse *of* Beauty at all, rather there is a series of more discrete enterprises; discourses *on* particular forms of beauty, which may seek, but ultimately fail to find any greater horizon for their endeavours. The process would seem to be in line with that described by Paul de Man when he writes that 'if the condition

¹ Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12th March, 1711), in Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. I, p. 46.

² Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History Aesthetics, and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 8-12, 27-102.

of the existence of an entity is itself pragmatically critical, then the theory of this entity is bound to fall back into the pragmatic'.¹ The practice in this instance is the control of feminine propriety and display within polite society.

This process of change reveals the gender politics which underlie the polite discourse on taste. Those who are, in Usher's phrase, 'formed by Art' achieve perfection by participating in a social space other than the public arenas described by Shaftesbury, or later by Reynolds. What is presented instead is the discourse of beauty made available for the assemblies, publications (novels and journals) and the pleasure grounds of classes as yet without political power, but of considerable cultural influence; the lower gentry, the commercial classes: the middling sort. The beauty which elicits this response is fundamentally different from that calling forth the grand public gesture in either Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* or Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*. It is a form of beauty which is concerned with the social conduct of the individual - viewed as a private citizen lacking in public capacities and expectations - and not the public body as a whole.

In order for the discourse to function women have to be thought of most carefully and their conduct viewed insistently. The *Spectator* and the *Tatler* have suggested a similar strategy already, and in many respects the philosophical conversations envisaged within the texts I have been describing are closer in nature to the discourses articulating literary criticism than to the visibly political discourses of civic humanism.² Femininity does not represent a threat to polite discourse, rather a quality to be moulded and remade. This explains the significance of the modern choice of Hercules offered by

¹ Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986), p. 5.

² For a fuller discussion of this important theme see, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Beaumont, in which the division between virtue and pleasure is transformed into a choice between 'Majestic' and 'Familiar' graces:

The former belongs chiefly to the very fine Women; and the latter to the very pretty ones; that is the commanding, and this is the more delightful and engaging.¹

It is possible to detect a consideration of class in this account; 'fine' women - the examples turn out to be Lady S*** and Lady R*** - are explicitly represented as aristocratic. That 'there can be no Grace with impropriety' finally comes to mean that the beauty of a woman ought to be reflective of, or suited to, her social station. This is a very acute articulation of class division, and there can be little surprise that it is Mrs B*** (along with Eve) who successfully embodies both the majestic and the familiar. The account of beauty offered therefore appears to be equally concerned with participation in class culture and formation as about philosophic debate. So that when Crito describes the two forms of grace class aspiration is represented in all its gaudy trappings:

There are two very distinct (and as it were opposite) Sorts of Grace; the Majestic, and the Familiar; I should have called the latter by the Name of Pleasing, had I not been afraid of Tautology; for Grace is Pleasingness itself.

Crito is being coy and attributing his hesitancy to a fear for linguistic nicety; however, we need not be so timid. With the tautology disentangled, the familiar (now pleasingness) and clearly the lower (socially speaking) form of beauty is 'pleasingness itself', the one quality Crito *et al* are constantly avowing as the cause of beauty. So that the 'Art of Being PRETTY' is the 'Art' of being middle class, of being moral and private. The fact that it appears to be both is most revealing, for it is the art, not only of remaining private, but a knowledge of one's place and the possession of sufficient

¹ Beaumont, *Crito*, p. 32.

good grace to stay in it.

It is an articulation of both gender and class roles which is productive of a new form of sociability, which though it originates in the 'talk' of bourgeois men, takes as its primary symbol the spectacle of a virtuous woman. It is a move which structures and makes ambiguous this passage from *The Connoisseur*:

Some persons are (according to the strict import of the phrase itself) born Good Natured. These fortunate people are easy in themselves, and agreeable to all about them. They are, as it were, constitutionally pleasing; and can no more fail of being affable and engaging in conversation than an *Hamilton* or a *Coventry* can be beautiful or charming.¹

Being 'Good Natured' was, along with charity and politeness, one of the qualities middle-class theorists sought to elevate to the status of morality. Addison comments that, 'Good-Nature is more agreeable in Conversation than Wit, gives a certain Air to the Countenance which is more aimiable than Beauty'.² Accordingly, the positive valuation put on being 'affable and charming' is plain enough, and represents an ability to live justly and in concord with those with whom ones lives or does business. However, what this entails for the quality of being 'beautiful and charming' is less clear. It threatens in both Addison's text, and that of the *Connoisseur*, to become, not the representation of virtue, but its antithesis. That the terms remain somewhat unstable will be brought into close focus in the next chapter, which, in examining the fortune and the presentation of Elizabeth Gunning, the Duchess of Hamilton, one of the *Connoisseur*'s chosen beauties, will reveal the ambiguities of that existence. Her presence - like that of other beautiful, often aristocratic women - will profoundly trouble the complacent plenitudes issued by

¹ George Coleman, et al., *Connoisseur*, no. LXXV (3rd July, 1755) in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General*, 4th edn., 4 vols, (London: R. Baldwin, 1961), vol. III, p. 30.

² Addison, *Spectator*, no. 177 (22nd September, 1711) Addison & Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. II, p. 195.

Beaumont, Usher and Webb. For Elizabeth and Maria Gunning raise the issue, not only of Beauty, but its relation to that which is vicious or effeminate.

CHAPTER THREE

A LADY, WHOLE LENGTH:

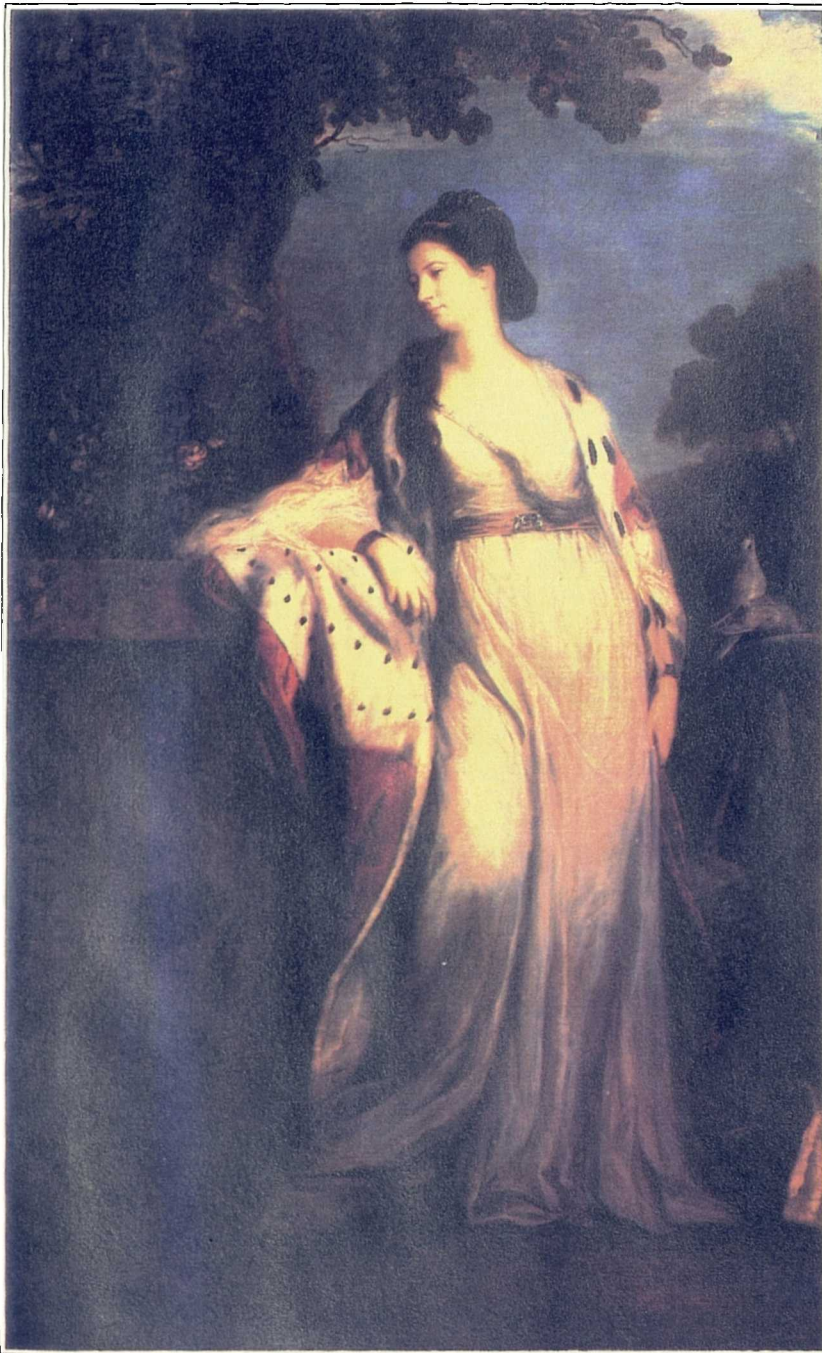
JOSHUA REYNOLDS AND THE PAINTING

OF BEAUTY

Paintings: Public and Theoretical.

Between January 1758 and the June of the following year, Elizabeth Gunning, the recently widowed Duchess of Hamilton and a former society beauty, sat to Joshua Reynolds. The commission would have been an important one for Reynolds, given the fame and status of the sitter, and this may account for some of the panache which accompanies its execution. The portrait which resulted from a series of protracted sittings was exhibited, along with three other works, at the Society for the *Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce* in April 1760 (*fig. 1*).¹ In a culture in which the evaluation of art was undertaken within a discourse that made explicit its appeal to the senses and social passions as a guarantee of taste, Reynolds's striking and rather elegant depiction of a beautiful woman would have made for an interesting spectacle. The painting's exhibition is made all the more intriguing because of the close relation in eighteenth-century thought between the discourses describing taste and those which defined the modes of acceptable social behaviour. In these terms, the prominent display of the painting will provide another instance of the ways in which an account of Beauty could be mobilised within a discourse which connected the appreciation of art with the judgement of women. In this chapter I want to explore how a consideration of this portrait would, in the 1760s, have had a complex social referent, as well as making an impact on contemporary appreciation of the nature and status of British art.

¹ The Painting is now commonly ascribed the title, *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* and is in the possession of the Lady Leverhulme Art Gallery, Merseyside.



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Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*, 1760, oil on canvas, 238.5 cm. x 147.5 cm., (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, National Museums on Merseyside).

It is significant in this context that Reynolds's portrait of Elizabeth Gunning has consistently been awarded a high place in the appreciation of Reynolds's art, and of British portraiture in general. This is in no small part due to the period of the painting's production, which comes a few years after Reynolds's equally powerful *Commodore Augustus Keppell* of 1753, and coincides almost perfectly with the publication, in *The Idler*, of Reynolds's first forays in the theory of Art. This timing has made the painting available to those who wish to propose, not only a linearity in the development of Reynolds's canon, but also a match between his theory and his practice which excludes the possibility of interpretation in a wider context. It is in this vein that Desmond Shawe-Taylor has claimed that, 'more than any of his previous works, this [painting] puts into practice Reynolds's theoretical system of aesthetics'.¹ Shawe-Taylor's account brings together an impressive array of eighteenth-century theoreticians, most notably Burke, Webb, and Jonathan Richardson, in order to represent the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* as the fruition of Beauty within the Grand Style. For Shawe-Taylor it is not the sitter's beauty which signifies, but the beauties of a fully realised aesthetic. His account, which sees the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* as a 'demonstration piece', places the painting in the frame provided both by Reynolds's public career and by his published pronouncements on art, and in particular his *Discourses*.

Certainly the portrait was a public one, and demands an appreciation of the nature of publicity (and of public meanings) if it is to be considered more broadly. As David Mannings has observed, the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* is, 'one of Reynolds's

¹ Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *The Georgians: Eighteenth-Century Portraiture and Society*, (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), p. 147.

earliest experiments with the full-blown exhibition picture'.¹ Mannings underlines this exceptional status when he comments that 'Reynolds would have been keen to paint this sensation of London Society because he knew it would attract attention at the exhibition'. An exhibition portrait is by its very nature an image which is presented for a level of judgement and appreciation beyond the private demands and expectations of its patron. Furthermore, the economy of consumption in which it participates is general and public. This is all perhaps true enough, but unless we are clear about what being 'public' meant for Reynolds, his sitter, her image and most of all the 'public' itself then the debate will remain rather narrow in its focus. There is a need therefore to look at the forms of discourse and reception which may be mobilised around this kind of portrait in the eighteenth century.

The issue is made more complex by the number of publics it is possible to consider as operating in eighteenth-century discourse. In the two previous chapters the notion of the 'public' to which Richardson, Webb and Usher referred was that of an aggregate of fashionable consumers enjoying polite contact and prudent consumption. As my discussion has illustrated the status of this idea of the public, while gaining credence in the mid-century, did not go unchallenged. I have described how it was opposed by the contributors to the Tory periodical press, by John Gilbert Cooper, and by those writers who employ the discourse of luxury to denigrate modern society - all of whom used civic humanist terminology to some extent, and shared that discourse's sense of that the public should be a site of political virtue. In any discussion of

¹ David Mannings, '*Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*' in *Reynolds*, ed. Nicholas Penny with contributions by Diana Donald et al., (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), pp. 197, 199.

Reynolds's relation to publicity the problem of deciding which definition of public is appropriate is particularly acute. Reynolds occupies an liminal position between the notion of the public conceived by the discourse of civic humanism and that produced by the day to day performance of life in commercial Britain: he is at once the greatest champion of republican views on art in the late-century, yet also a professional artist and a largely self-made man.

The conflicting contexts suggested for the painting by Shawe-Taylor and by David Mannings capture this hesitation well. When Shawe-Taylor writes of the painting being a 'demonstration piece' and a 'treatise on female beauty' he is seeking to establish the painting in a close relation to Reynolds's *Discourses*, a series of lectures that were avowedly civic in their conception of what it is to be public. Shawe-Taylor quotes from 'Discourse V', to illustrate his contention that what is being demonstrated by Reynolds is art in the Grand style.¹ Mannings conversely does not have this in mind when he describes the portrait as an 'exhibition picture' executed with the intention of drawing a big crowd. Crowds do not - as Reynolds and other artists were fearfully aware - necessarily form themselves into a public; they can become mobs. The organisers of the Society exhibitions of the early 1760s were wary of the crowds that were drawn to their galleries, and used a variety of prices and compulsory purchases to regulate their audience. Although the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce initially resisted an entrance fee, one was soon introduced to restrict the entrance of undesirable lower-class visitors from the exhibition. Reynolds's work would seem therefore to be explicable in terms of two competing accounts of the public, the

¹ Shawe-Taylor, *Georgians*, pp. 151, 147.

civic and the commercial, both of which attempt to find expression in the 'public exhibition'.

Once we have begun to consider this central problem of eighteenth-century discourse, to which the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* both contributes and is subject, then the kind of analysis which Shawe-Taylor offers begins to look a little foreclosed. For there is something constrictive about the form of such an inquiry despite the range of its references. It glides over very real difficulties in the relationship between the theory and practice of portraiture in the eighteenth century, and all too easily evokes Reynolds to explain or justify his own artistic production.¹ The use, common amongst art historians, of the *Discourses* to offer a commentary on Reynolds's own work requires some revision. For when he is speaking as the President of the Royal Academy, Reynolds is talking mainly, if not exclusively, about the theory of history painting. While he does offer some suggestive remarks about the practices suitable for a portrait painter these are outside his main concern, which remains with the higher branches of the art.² As Robert Wark reminds readers of the *Discourses*, 'if the lectures are to be read sympathetically and interpreted accurately today, the circumstances surrounding

¹ For an account of this problem see Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 1-9, 13-52.

² A useful account of Reynolds's function as a 'third person' spokesman for the cultured elite, rather than as a commentator on his own work is provided in David Mannings, *Studies in British Portrait Painting in the Eighteenth Century with special reference to the early career of Sir Joshua Reynolds* unpubl. Phd thesis, University of London, 1977.

their composition must be kept clearly in mind'.¹ John Barrell has argued that the primary context for, or motivation behind, Reynolds's thinking in these lectures, was the desire to cultivate a properly civic and republican theory of art; a theory, what is more, which was self-consciously political and unashamedly masculine.² The space which might be available within this framework for either the discussion, or the production, of images of beautiful or fashionable women is therefore restricted, and remote from, if not antithetical to, the main thrust of Reynolds's design.³

Those wishing to work on Reynolds's portraits - and particularly his portraits of women - are then faced with the pressing problem of trying to find a framework which can profitably begin to locate them. The problem was no less acute in the eighteenth century, as although civic humanism could, conceivably, provide a rationale for the portrayal of men, for whom representations of heroism and public office provided a justification for self-display, women lacked access to such elevated forms.⁴ They tend instead to be accommodated within the conversation piece and the marriage portrait. More importantly the action of looking at women could not be reconciled with the civic demand that public art should prompt worthy action; indeed it might all too easily

¹ Robert Wark, 'Introduction' to Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R Wark, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. xvi.

² John Barrell *The Political Theory of Art from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 63-72.

³ There are in fact only a handful of references to the portrayal of women in the whole of the *Discourses*. One of these praises the *Venus di Medici*, but it comes amidst a general commendation of the art of statuary.

⁴ An account of how portraiture could be reconciled with public virtue is provided in David Mannings, 'Shaftesbury, Reynolds and the Rediscovery of Portrait Painting in Eighteenth-Century England' in *Zeitschrift Fur Kunstgeschichte*, vol 48, (1984), pp. 319-28.

encourage desire. This problem makes a consideration of Elizabeth Gunning's beauty central to the appraisal of the portrait in terms of the effect it might be expected to have on the viewer.

Ellis Waterhouse's comments on the painting can be read to be suggestive for the kind of inquiry I wish to open up. Waterhouse is, typically, more than a little equivocal in his appraisal of Reynolds's 'classic style', and while he clearly understands both the success and the grandeur underlying the painting it is a respect tinged with regret:

It is sad to think that one of the most beautiful women of her age should have been the first victim of Reynolds' "Public Face" manner, for, if we compare this figure with the *Countess of Albermerle*, it is clear that they speak the language of different intention.

The 'intention' is in Waterhouse's terms so different as to make the paintings 'stand...in the same relation as a man's public morality stands to his private'.¹ The statement is perhaps questionable even on its own terms. However, I am more concerned with the construction of Elizabeth Gunning as the 'victim' of Reynolds's design. Clearly the Duchess's status as the wounded party is predicated upon her gender, and accentuated by her beauty. In these terms the masculinity of Reynolds's style appears as too much, *as something which both overawes and under-values her place*. The painting has perhaps in a double sense dragged her into the public sphere; Reynolds, having painted her, displays her image. Waterhouse's preferred image of the Countess of Albermerle is significantly of a woman represented in a more recognizably domestic environment, one which lacks the forms of pleasure (and denial) which I will argue provide the most fruitful context for the picture of Elizabeth Gunning. While both portraits are arguably

¹ Ellis K. Waterhouse, *Reynolds* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner, 1941), p. 11.

as public as each other Waterhouse chooses to see one painting as exclusively, and appropriately private. Here the agenda of Waterhouse's account begins to reveal itself, as it appears that the two paintings are only *like* the two forms of male morality in so far as the one transgresses the limits appropriate for 'feminine' portrayal; women, it seems, are more narrowly defined, and lack, or ought not to have, the forms of public morality available to men. As a result woman's beauty becomes a questionable proposition in relation to its potential for publicity. What Waterhouse suggests is that by making beauty public -through his "'Public face" manner' - Reynolds has effectively destroyed it. Beauty becomes crippled under the weight not only of Reynolds's style, but also under the increased visibility he demands from it through public display. The effect of the argument is to locate 'beauty' in the private sphere; for beauty which is properly a feminine and private characteristic is opposed to the publicity which is appropriate for men.

While the eighteenth-century viewer is unlikely to have seen the problem in precisely these terms Waterhouse's account is indicative of the kind of tension which may have surrounded Reynolds's portrait when it was exhibited in the eighteenth century. Put at its most simple, this problem would have manifested itself as a concern with the representation appropriate to the evidently beautiful sitter. If her portrait lacked beauty the result would be insipid and uninteresting, yet too much beauty would raise the dangerous promptings of desire. A delicate balance had then to be struck, one which allowed the display of a pleasing physical form without encouraging an improper response. Despite this problem, the status of Elizabeth Gunning's beauty within the frame of the painting, and within subsequent accounts of the image, is somewhat vague.

Certainly it is always referred to, catalogues noting Reynolds's success in its realisation, or commenting on his shrewdness in choosing to display such an image.¹ What is suggested in these accounts is a rather smart piece of marketing or self-promotion by Reynolds, as though he has used the Duchess's fame astutely, and she, once used, disappears behind the public facade of Reynolds's business practice. In this sense she really is being defaced, and her presence has no function other than that which is given to it by Reynolds.

This disregard is by no means uncommon; Shawe-Taylor is after all only talking about the 'theoretical' nature of beauty, and not its actual manifestation in the body of a woman. The beauty of the sitter becomes in this way merely an addendum in the historicist account surrounding the painting - similar to the way a portrait of Burke may be described in terms which make a passing reference to his literary career. This supposition will not however hold; beauty, in this case at least, is a vastly different entity to authorship. The Beautiful is both a baffling and rhetorically complex concept, *and* a part of a decisive matrix of values and judgements at the heart of polite discourse. In these terms to be beautiful is not only to possess an engaging physical presence, with all the complexities of recognition and evaluation that fact implies, but to be positioned in relation to a series of moral injunctions, which on the one hand raise and endorse women's public presence, while on the other damns the beautiful as the source of

¹ For a range of art historical responses to the painting see Algernon Graves & William Vine Cronin, *The History of the Works of Joshua Reynolds*, 4 vols, (London: 1899-1901), vol. II, pp. 421-22; Charles Robert Leslie & Tom Taylor, *The Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds, with notices of some of his contemporaries*, 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1865), vol. I, pp. 102, 181; R. Tatlock, *A Record Of the Collections in the Lady Lever Art Gallery*, 2 vols, (London: 1928) vol. I, pp. 60-62; and, Waterhouse, *Reynolds*, (1941), pp. 11-12.

enervating effeminacy. Beauty cannot be referred to casually by either Reynolds or those who examine his work. David Mannings both reveals and denies this when he refers to Reynolds's enthusiasm for painting the portrait in the first instance. For the painting to have been the crowd-puller it was expected to be (and accounts suggest that it was), the audience for it must have been able to recognize the person portrayed.¹ The painting's exhibition title, *A Lady, Whole Length*, would have given no clues in this respect.² However, it is unlikely that the exhibition audience would have seen the woman presented solely in terms of her being, in reality, as it were, the Duchess of Hamilton. The reviewer for the *Imperial Magazine* commented: 'A Lady, Whole Length, said to be the Dutchess [*sic*] of Hamilton, but rather the Queen of all Grace and Beauty'.³ The viewer may well have been constructed as a connoisseur sufficiently proficient to be capable of discerning not just the Duchess's likeness, but its relation to her looks and 'life', and to Reynolds's 'reading' of that history. It was, after all, a life of some public notoriety. One which, as we shall see, would make any accommodation of the sitter to civic art at best uncomfortable.

With this in mind I want to explore the means, and the problem, of a woman's

¹ Horace Walpole correctly identified the painting as 'Duchess of Hamilton. Elizabeth Gunning', see 'Notes by Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford, on the Exhibitions of the Society of Artists and Free Society of Artists, 1760-91' transcribed and edited by Hugh Gatty in *Walpole Society Notes*, vol XXVII, (1938-39), p. 76.

² The title is typically innocuous. Reynolds's exhibited a number of paintings under this title. Its effects are twofold: firstly it hides the sitter behind a publicly acceptable even anonymous facade. Secondly it places the painting in the category for which it is to be sold; a '*whole length*'.

³ Quoted in William T. Whitley, *Artists and their Friends in England, 1700-79*, 2 vols, (London: Medici Society, 1928), vol I, pp. 167-68.

public representation in relation to both civic and polite conceptions of the public. A careful reading of the discourses of civic humanism - and concomitant developments in polite culture - cannot but reveal a highly gendered social practice, one which is preoccupied with the impact of desire and sensuality on the public subject. Throughout the eighteenth century women had a complex and contested relationship with public culture. While it is women who are called upon both to humanize the machinations of the market, and to moderate the excesses of male social practice, it is also women who are represented as the occasion of society's disruption and its decline into lasciviousness and scandal. John Brown writing within a civic humanist discourse that was embittered against modern society, specifically identified the increased public visibility of women as one of the causes of the vanity and effeminacy which he saw as draining England's national resolve.¹ Elizabeth Gunning, who was frequently identified as a 'Beauty', would have represented a particular form of publically visible woman - close (or at least potentially so) to the figure of the actress or the prostitute. To be a 'Beauty' was, in the popular idiom of the period, not merely to be beautiful woman, but to be a figure whose existence was defined by their publicised (and it could be very public) attractiveness. To be sure, like any other woman, Elizabeth Gunning participates in the social round and in the economy of the marriage market. But it is her function as a public spectacle which is most striking. For it marks on the one hand her commodification and loss of privacy, while on the other it endows her with the dubious empowerment appropriate to a woman of her charms.

¹ John Brown, *Estimate of the Manners and Principals of the Times* (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1757), pp. 44-45.

As I have begun to argue, the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* images the figure of a woman in relation to a discourse on her publicity. However, we must not neglect, while exploring the discourse on gender and sexuality which the painting mobilizes, the other abiding obsession of the mid-century: commerce. Contemporary periodicals, such as *The Connoisseur*, were preoccupied with the subject of Britain's changing economic and social organisation, and in particular the expansion of trade. It is a transformation which the *Connoisseur's* authors saw as destroying the balance of, and proper distinction between, classes. Alongside these material changes (both social and economic) the *Connoisseur* details a decline of public virtue to leave only 'modest' politeness, seen as an attention to form lacking in the substance of good-breeding.¹ With mounting frequency this disassembling of class distinctions and proper manners was represented by a discourse on modernity which saw change as coincident with the decline in feminine virtue. *The Connoisseur* pursues a rather complicated argument (too involved to be fully worked through here) which regards both the decline of public manners and the loss of feminine modesty as in some way connected to trade. For the result of practising trade is a ubiquitous and all too explicit displaying of wares. For the *Connoisseur* the signs of this decay are plainly visible: society women parade in near nakedness; the Marriage Act only serves to ensure that 'acre marries acre'; and the distinction between a Fine Lady and a prostitute is merely a technical one, that of cash

¹ George Coleman *et al*, *The Connoisseur*, no. XXI (27th June, 1754) and no. LXXII (26th June, 1755), in *The Connoisseur. By Mr Town, Critic and Censor-General* 4th ed., 4 vols, (London: R. Baldwin, 1761), vol. I, pp. 172-78 and vol. III, pp. 21-28.

payment.¹ In this narrative the luxury of the times is represented by both sex and commerce, or rather the corruptions of trade can be measured by the extent to which the economic and the erotic are made conspicuous. For Brown this was the form of innuendo others; such as the *Connoisseur*, saw it in women's clothing, or the lack of it.² As a result the process of change, the move to a commercially based society, was one which women were thought particularly to represent.³ It is this crucial relationship between the commodity and the presentation of desire (and feminine desirability) which will, I believe, provide the most effective context for a discussion of Reynolds's portrait of Elizabeth Gunning.

The Fashionable Image and the Commercial Space.

The place to begin the inquiry is in the practice and location of the painting's first public display. As has already been noted *The Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* may owe some of its design to the necessity of making a highly visible impression on visitors to

¹ Coleman et al., *Connoisseur*, no. XXXVI (3rd October, 1754), no. XXXVIII (17th October, 1754) and no. XLIV (28th November, 1754), in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town*, vol. II, pp. 4-8, 19, 69-70.

² The suggestion that women were walking around naked as the consequence of following fashion was quite common in the 1750s. See for example, [Adam Eden], *Vindication of the Reformation, on foot, among the Ladies, to Abolish Modesty and Chastity, and Restore the Native Simplicity of going Naked. And an Attempt to reconcile all opposers to it, and make them join in a speedy Completion of this Glorious Design* (London: R Griffiths, 1755); and, *The World*, no. 21 (24th May, 1753) in *The World. By Adam Fitz-Adam. A New Edition*, 3 vols, (Edinburgh: A Donaldson, 1770) vol. I, pp. 110-11.

³ These connections have been made most cogently by Harriet Guest. See her "'A Double Lustre": Femininity and Sociable Commerce, 1730-60' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 23, no. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 479-501.

the exhibition held by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, which opened its doors on the 21st April, 1760.¹ Iain Pears has argued that these exhibitions served a variety of purposes, not least of which was the demonstration of saleable talent.² Artists who participated in such events, whether as organisers, exhibitors or both, were keen not only to cultivate a taste for the polite arts (over which they would then preside), but also to encourage the purchase of works of art. The two aims could, it was argued, support each other, as an increasingly cultivated aristocracy would, it was hoped, seek to buy more domestically produced art, the increased consumption and ownership of which would in turn raise taste for, and awareness of, British painting. Despite the assurances made by its proponents the argument remained open to critique on the basis of its own manifest contradictions. These concerned trade, and the artist's relation to what was always, and clearly their main objective, which was to sell their wares. An obvious desire for sales ran against the vigorous claims made by the profession's leading figures for it to be considered a liberal art. For unless painting could be shown to be above the requirements of trade its claim to a status above that of decorative-painting, metal-chasing, or indeed any other trade seeking to supply luxury goods to the aristocracy, would be vulnerable.

Reynolds's work is situated in precisely this context, it was a situation of which he was painfully aware. He would have been conscious that the kind of public to which

¹ For the purposes of this argument I am concerned exclusively with this particular moment of the painting's exhibition. Between 1764 and 1919 the painting hung at Hamilton Palace; the form of this display seems to me to be wholly different from the public visibility of either the exhibition or in Reynolds's studio.

² Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts, 1680-1768* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 133-56.

Shaftesbury had directed his polemic, a public of like-minded landowners, had become a largely unworkable ideal. As a result he has a tendency, particularly in his written work, to try and remodel a version of the classical public, one parallel with the republic of taste. This agenda is at the heart of the *Discourses*, which effect an unceasing, if ambiguous, negotiation with the idea of commerce. The possibility that his paintings, or his practice of exhibiting them, may be manifestly commercial has, however, until recently, received little attention amongst art historians.¹

The brief survey of portrait-painter's practices which Andre Rouquet included in his *The Present State of the Arts* provides a starting point which is both convenient and instructive. Rouquet, like Reynolds, is caught at a particularly awkward intersection of discourses and opinions. As a professional artist he wants to see an increase in the taste for the polite arts, however, the most prominent moral discourse in which this might be accomplished, that provided by civic humanism, complicates his account. It can justify his position, and that of the arts themselves, but only within certain circumstances. The spread of taste and learning must be a product of disinterested virtue, not commerce. This is not the situation in the England of the 1750s where, on the contrary, money, and not virtue, is the prime mover in the art market.² Aware of this problem, and largely critical of the 'present state of the arts', Rouquet's account circles around conceptions of gender and the marketplace. These he sees as irrecoverably linked, so that he begins

¹ The beginnings of such an inquiry can be found in David Mannings, 'At the Portrait Painters: How the Painters of the eighteenth-century conducted their studios and their sittings' in *History Today*, vol. XXVII, (1977), pp. 279-87; and Pointon *Hanging the Head*, pp. 36-52.

² Andre Rouquet, *The Present State of the Arts in England*, (London: no publisher credited, 1755), pp. 6-8, 11-16, 21-23.

his commentary 'Of Portraiture in Oils' by reflecting that:

Portraiture is the kind of painting the most encouraged, and consequently the most followed in England; it is the polite custom, even for men, to present one another with their pictures.¹

The clause 'even for men' marks the limits of acceptability in gendered terms. Clearly the participation of men is something Rouquet takes to be surprising. It represents a vanity and a desire for fashionable self-display not fully consistent with a properly realized civic manhood. Furthermore having one's portrait painted is, and Rouquet is not unusual in this, a significant national characteristic peculiar to the English, 'for this nation, especially the ladies, make it one of their chief amusements'.² This predilection for portraiture underpins what Rouquet terms the 'very extraordinary manner' in which a portrait painter obtains his fortune. It is a state of affairs which ensures that the artists's income is secured not by their merit but by a combination of the support of 'some woman of quality' and an ability to seize the current 'vogue'.³ It is therefore *fashion* - a context which is itself distinctly feminine - and not genius that is the prime mover in the market for portraiture; and while some may only reluctantly succumb to the desire to be painted, 'the women especially must have their pictures *exposed* for some time in the house of that painter who is most in fashion'.⁴ Rouquet's narrative succeeds in giving the impression of a market and a painterly practice which he sees as

¹ Rouquet, *Present State*, p. 33.

² Rouquet, *Present State* p. 36.

³ Rouquet, *Present State* pp. 38-39.

⁴ Rouquet, *Present State*, p. 46 (my emphasis); *The Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* remained in Reynolds's possession for four years after the exhibition, and would probably have hung in the suite of rooms which composed his studio and reception area.

highly commercialized but also feminine, as it is women who are both the objects for the art and the means of its transmission. His closing remarks make this point firmly, if rather curiously. After commenting on the winning delicacy and modesty of the English ladies he embarks on a critique of 'an art, which as yet is only in its infancy in England'. The art he has in mind is that of make-up, or more derisively 'red daub', a practice which he regards as an unprincipalled deviation from nature:

Lovely sex, is it to increase your charms, already too inticing, that you approve of an art which nature condemns? Is it to please our eyes still more, that you hang out the formidable vermilion? Surely you cannot please an organ by tormenting it: but I see it is impossible for you to shake off the tyranny of custom.¹

To follow a discussion of portrait practice with a discussion of make-up would suggest that in Rouquet's mind at least they were in closely connected. Both are clearly feminine arts subject to fashion and prejudice, though it is unclear whether Rouquet regards portrait painting as deceptive in the same way as make-up. I would argue, however, that the connection is offered by their juxtaposition in the text, so that portrait painting becomes, like make-up, 'too inticing': a form of self-display which seeks both to seduce and to deceive the viewer.

Given Rouquet's connection of the social and sexual pleasures of being 'painted' with the 'feminine' aspects of British culture, it is worth spelling out exactly the forms of beauty and portraiture that he saw these circumstances as favouring. After noting that each nation, from either habit or prejudice, has its own idea of beauty, he asserts that:

in England the picture of a beautiful women is this: she must have a fine white skin, a light complexion, a face rather oval than round, a nose somewhat longish, but of a fine turn, and like the antiques, her eyes large,

¹ Rouquet, *Present State*, p. 49.

and not so sparkling as melting; her mouth graceful, without a smile, but rather of a pouting turn, which gives it at once both grace and dignity; her hair clean and without powder, so as to shew, by its colour, the various effects for which nature designed it; her shape tall and erect, her neck long and easy, her shoulders square and flat, plump rising breasts, her hands generally rather too lean, and of such a make as I think would not be looked upon as handsome in any other country but England.¹

With some minor revisions this description of fashionable market-orientated beauty would provide a convincing account of the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*. Reynolds is, then, producing an image that caters to the 'feminine' desires of the market place as much as it does to the niceties of his 'theoretical system'. It is furthermore, a form of feminine representation which Rouquet regards as morally suspect.

It makes some sense therefore to examine the other paintings which Reynolds sent to the Society's exhibition, and to examine what, if anything, Reynolds did to palliate the problem of Elizabeth Gunning's desirability, and his own commercial inclinations. The catalogue for the exhibition records four entries under Reynolds's name (nos. 47-50); '*A Lady, Whole Length*', '*Ditto, Three-quarters*', '*A Gentleman, Ditto*' and '*Ditto, in Armour*'.² There are complex questions which are raised by the exhibiting, together, of these four canvases, and which can only be answered tentatively. We can begin though by thinking about what the possible significance of this group might have been. On a basic level there is a variety of image and composition on display here: two men,

¹ Rouquet, *Present State*, pp. 46-47.

² *Catalogue of the Pictures, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, Prints etc., Exhibited in the Great Room of Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce, 21st April, 1760*, (London: For the Society, 1760). The paintings have been identified and are as follows (47) *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*, (48) *Lady Elizabeth Keppell, later Marchioness of Tavistock*, (49) *General Kingsley* and (50) *Lord Charles [General] Vernon*. See Ellis K. Waterhouse, *Reynolds* (London: Phaidon, 1973), pp. 177-78.

two women; a mixture of full and three-quarter lengths; stylistically there is also some variety, (47) is classically attired, (48) displays a level of genteel fashion and (50), as Walpole, observed owes something to Van Dyck. The result is an impressive display of an artist's range: he can do not only both sexes but also whatever size or major 'style' you might care to dream up. The effect might have been similar to Hogarth's depiction of family servants of various ages which he used to display the flexibility of his talents. Is this then how the submission is expected to be read - as a kind of collective 'style-sheet'? The question, however, invariably leads to more: if the four paintings are to be read as a group, how are they to be read? Is it, as I have just suggested, as an illustration of Reynolds's range of style and composition? Or does the group function in such a way as to produce a level of judgement and discrimination within the contrasts represented by the four portraits?¹

Assuming that they were hung close enough together to be seen as a 'block' we can begin to open some intriguing lines of inquiry. The men portrayed are both army officers, and one at least is *represented in the character of a military gentleman, albeit of the previous century*. How these two figures may stand in relation to the women Reynolds has painted is an interesting proposition. Do they, for example, locate the images of the women, by providing a frame for the feminine which combines the public presence of men with their military function as defenders of the nation? Significantly, the women themselves offer rather different models of femininity. The sensual, and I

¹ I am thinking here of the kinds of choice and discrimination David Mannings has isolated in Reynolds's *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*. See his 'Reynolds, Garrick and the Choice of Hercules' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Spring, 1984), pp. 260-83.

think rather grand, depiction of Elizabeth Gunning, must have contrasted sharply with the more intimate representation of Lady Keppell. Reynolds's biographers Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor describe the latter painting in terms appropriate to its difference from the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*:

It is one of the painter's loveliest and best preserved female portraits. The dress is white, with a rose in the bosom, and the expression inimitably maidenly and gentle.¹

Leslie and Taylor imply a valuation close to Waterhouse's exclusive division of public and private morals. An examination of Reynolds's submissions to exhibitions throughout this period reveals a repetition of the scheme.² This occurs most noticeably in 1763 when the *Ladies Elizabeth and Henrietta Montagu* was hung beside a portrait of Nelly O'Brien, a prostitute whom Reynolds liked to call 'my Lady O'Brien'. What this assemblage may have implied about the status of the various sitters or their portraits is, I think, uncertain. There was also, in 1762, the exhibition of *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, a painting which is arguably about the judging of women. The *Garrick* was displayed with a later, more flamboyant image of Lady Keppell, and an imitate portrait of Lady Waldegrave and child. The result is a structure of display which holds in balance, but leaves available for comparison, two forms of femininity, one intimate, the other almost defiantly public. I want to argue that the repeated coincidence of public

¹ Charles Robert Leslie & Tom Taylor, *Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds: with notices of some of his contemporaries* 2 vols., (London: John Murray, 1865), vol I, p. 181 n. 2.

² Ronald Paulson has commented at some length on the Royal Academy submission of 1771, in terms of a comparison between the images of women on offer, see his *Breaking and Remaking: Aesthetic Practice in England, 1700-1820* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 277-96.

and private forms of femininity is indicative of an assumption - taken by Reynolds, the Society, and later by the Royal Academy - that some kind of reading would have taken place in the spaces between the canvases. What is not clear, however, is the means by which particular readings were promoted or encouraged.

It is possible to begin the process of examining the 'protocols of viewing' that the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* demands by making an excursion into the social and cultural history which surrounds the sitter.¹ I want to contend that Elizabeth Gunning's presence within the frame of the painting is far from parenthetical to its overall effect. She is not, as I hope to illustrate, a figure to whom it is possible to make only a passing reference, so enmeshed is she by discourses which seek to place her in relation to many of the abiding preoccupations of the mid-century. These concerns include not only the facts of her own beauty, but how that physical presence may be accommodated within the public and cultured space of the exhibition hall.

The Society Beauty

The Gunnings (father, mother and at least four children) had come over from Ireland in 1750, and although their mother was the daughter of a Viscount they were decidedly poor, so poor in fact that the two eldest daughters had thought of becoming actresses.² What they lacked in finances, however, they more than made up for in their

¹ The phrase is Lynda Nead's. See her *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992).

² A full biography of Elizabeth Gunning is provided by W. Horace Bleackly, *The Beautiful Duchess. Being an Account of the Life and Times of Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*, 2nd ed, (London: John Lane, 1927).

looks. As Elizabeth Montagu recalled:

The Huntingdon ball was more splendid than I expected. I danced with lord Sandwich. For beauties we had the two Miss Gunnings, who are indeed very handsome; *nonpareille*, for the sisters are just a like take them together, and there is nothing like them, they really are very fine girls.¹

The Gunning's incomparable good looks and naive Irish charms secured them great celebrity amongst the more excitable members of the ruling class. But there was as ever a catch; depending on where you stood on the *Pamela/Shamela* issue, the Gunnings's pretty faces and rustic manners stood less as signs of provincial innocence, and more as emblems of an avaricious intent.² Samuel Richardson himself wasted little time in objecting to the Gunnings, whom he saw as fishing for husbands. 'When women turn *seekers* it will not do' he told Miss Westcomb. His prophecy, however, that only 'gudgeons may bite' at such dangled wares was, as we shall see, far from the mark.³

The popularity, or the infamy, of the Gunnings was not confined to the 'Pretty' fellows to whom Miss Westcomb had initially objected. Horace Walpole, among many others, took considerable interest in the fortunes of the two sisters, and for a period in

¹ Elizabeth Montagu, quoted in Climensson, E.J. *Elizabeth Montagu - Queen of the Blue Stockings. Her Correspondence from 1720-61. By her Great-Great Niece*. 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1906), vol. I, p. 270.

² Their father's correspondence reveals that he and his brother, if no one else, knew exactly what business had been embarked upon by bringing his daughters to London. Indeed his letters make it explicit that he wanted nothing less than a good 'price' for his daughter's 'virtue'. A selection from Gunning's letters has been quoted in Ida Gantz, *The Pastel Portrait: The Gunnings of Castlecoote and the Howards of Hampstead* (London: The Cresset Press, 1962), pp. 30-31, 38-41.

³ Samuel Richardson, 'Letter to Miss Westcomb,' 6th August 1750 MS in the Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, filed as FM. XIV, 3, ff 53-4. The text is quoted in part in T.C. Duncan Eaves & Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 199.

the 1750s his letters to Horace Mann and to George Montagu are replete with 'Gunning stories'. For Walpole the antics of the sisters and their admirers seem to have made for a welcome diversion from the listless nature of politics in the last years of George II's reign. Writing to Mann in June 1751, he confesses that:

You who knew England in other times, will find it difficult to conceive what an indifference reigns with regard to ministers and their squabbles. The two Miss Gunnings, and a late extravagant dinner at White's, are twenty times more the subject of conversation than the two brothers [Newcastle and Pelham] and Lord Granville. These are two Irish girls, of no fortune, who are declared the handsomest women alive. I think there being two so handsome and both such perfect figures is their chief excellence, for singly I have seen much handsomer women than either; however, they can't walk in the park, or go to Vauxhall, but such mobs follow them that they are generally driven away. The dinner was a folly of seven young men, who bespoke it to the utmost expense: one article was a tart made of duke cherries from a hot-house; and another, that they tasted but one glass out of each bottle of champagne. The bill of fare is got into print, and with good people has produced the apprehension of another earthquake.¹

For Walpole the spectacle of the Gunnings and the 'luxurious heroes' marks out the limits and the extent of modern folly. All of them have deviated from the conduct appropriate to their sex. While women do have a proper function which is associated with display, and men have a role which is concerned with clubbable conviviality, both the Gunnings and the dinner guests overstep this capacity. The conjunction of the two forms (masculine and feminine) of public display and licentiousness are, however, held in balance against the present tawdriness of political 'squabbles'. It is a move which allows Walpole both to register his pleasure at such foolishness, as he clearly thinks here

¹ Horace Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann,' June 18th 1751, Letter 327, *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 9 vols, ed. P. Cunningham (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1906), vol. II, p. 259. The closing reference to an earthquake alludes to the tremors which struck London on 8th February and 8th March, 1750. The cause of the quake was put down to a mixture of masquerades, the royal fireworks and *Tom Jones*; in short the luxury of the times.

- as elsewhere - that such events have a certain comic aspect, and also to express a note of albeit ironic dismay.

It is possible to find the same mixing of good humour and the beginnings of a suspicious dislike in Walpole's account of the two Gunnings's subsequent marriages. It is a passage which is worth quoting at length because it provides a useful narrative of the events with which the Gunnings are most closely, and most personally associated. After commenting (again) on the dearth of real news he tells Mann:

The event that has made most noise...is the extempore wedding of the youngest of the two Gunnings, who have made so vehement a noise. Lord Coventry, a grave young lord, of the remains of the patriot breed, has long dangled after the eldest [Maria], virtuously with regard to her virtue, not very honourably with regard to his own credit. About six weeks ago [the] Duke [of] Hamilton, the very reverse of the Earl, hot debauched, extravagant, and equally damaged in his fortune and person, fell in love with the youngest at the Masquerade, and determined to marry her in the spring. About a fortnight since at an immense assembly...Hamilton made violent love at one end of the room, while he was playing at pharaoh at the other end; that is, he saw neither the bank nor his own cards, which were of three hundred pounds each: he soon lost a thousand....two nights afterwards, being left alone with her while her mother and sister were at Bedford House, he found himself so impatient, that he sent for a parson. The doctor refused to perform the ceremony without licence or ring: the Duke swore he would send for the Archbishop - at last they were married with the ring of the bed-curtain, at half an hour after twelve at night, at Mayfair chapel. The Scotch are enraged; the women mad that so much beauty has had its effect; and what is most silly, my Lord Coventry declares he will marry the other.¹

All the key elements for a representation of aristocratic folly and luxury are present in this tale, from card-playing through masquerading and on towards a lustful attention to women. Although Walpole can accept the stupidity of the Duke of Hamilton as something to be expected from such a disgraced character, Lord Coventry is a more

¹ Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann,' February 27th 1752, Letter 337, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 279.

serious matter. He has debased himself, sullyng the purity of his patriot ancestry and injuring his 'credit' with the world; the marriage can therefore be brusquely derided as 'most silly'. The discursive motivation behind Walpole's remarks would, in the 1750s, have been quite clear. From a strictly civic perspective (though I am not suggesting that Walpole can be defined solely in these terms) the kind of sensuality embodied by Hamilton is to be disavowed because it infects, and ruins, the political capacity of civic manhood. It reflects the loss of the ability to act with calm disinterest, and a descent into the lascivious. Consequently the Duke can no longer be expected to perform the public duties appropriate to his class.

A similar disavowal is also to be found in a poem published in the spring of 1751, the year before these whirlwind romances begin. The poem, entitled 'On a Late Incident. By a Lady', describes an unsuccessful attempt by Maria Gunning to persuade the Duke of Dorset, then newly appointed to the office of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to give her indigent mother a pension.

HAIL, *Hibernia*! favour'd isle!
Thee rising joys await,
Thy better genius bids thee smile,
While *Dorset* sways thy state.

Dorset, adorn'd with ev'ry grace,
Whom happy days attend,
Enlivens commerce, arts, and peace,
Is Liberty's best friend.

He when the Beaut'ous G--g su'd,
Was proof against the wile,
And begged the fair would not include
A pension in a smile.

The people of *Hibernia's* state
Are much his sov'reigns care,
Nor will he charge them with a weight,

Tho' G-----g's face be fair.

The nymph convinc'd by reason clear,
Her sov'reign's skill ador'd
Agreed her country was his care,
Since *Dorset* he made lord.¹

Dorset, unlike Coventry and Hamilton keeps his credit; and retains his patrician identity intact. The ideological contraction of the poem is breathtaking. It is achieved by making the ability to resist women coincident with the right to hold 'sway' as a colonial overlord. The refusal of the pension becomes therefore an act of imperial benevolence undertaken by a rightful, and right-thinking, lord. Excluding for a moment the colonial dimension, it is possible to read in these verses a comparable social concern with the excessive influence of women found in Walpole's letters. Neither Walpole, or the author of this lines, were alone in regarding the Gunnings as obtaining an unseemly preeminence, as, despite earlier enthusiasm, Montagu complains of the Gunnings's 'universal empire'. Indeed she writes that, 'I do not know why Gunning the Great should not sound as well as Alexander the Great'.²

Another poem published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1750 underlines much of this hostility, while complicating its imperial implications. The poem, which takes the form of an 'EPISTLE to a Gentleman of Ireland', provides an account of the two sisters's arrival in London.³ The poem has two principal movements, the first of

¹ [A.W.], 'On a Late Incident. By A Lady', in *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. XXI, (February, 1751), (London: E. Cave), p. 83.

² Elizabeth Montagu, quoted in Climensson, *Elizabeth Montagu*, vol. I, p. 287.

³ Anon. 'An Epistle to a Gentleman of Ireland. Written soon after the Arrival of the Miss G-----gs in London, *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. XX, (June, 1750), p. 277.

which is to place the Gunnings in the context of Ireland's colonial subjugation, while the second offers an analogy with the Roman invasion of Greece.

What tho' *Ierne* knows not thriving arts?
She knows the way to touch hard *English* hearts.
Like some lone isle in farthest regions plac'd;
We think no blessing has the desert grac'd:
But beauty, heav'n's best gift, still chears the land;
Subject to no fierce tyrant's mad command.
The gifts of trade or art may please awhile;
But heav'n alone can give the heart a smile.
Health, peace, and love, are gifts indeed divine;
Ierne's sons for no true blessings pine.
When *Greece* was vanquished by the *Roman* arms;
And the stern conquerors felt the captive's charms:
Such strange unwonted softness to excuse,
A finished model of those charms they chuse:
The *Grecian Venus*, sent to haughty *Rome*,
Pleads for the vet'ran slow returning home.
Thus from a thousand virgins, heav'nly fair,
You cull the *Venus* of the sex with care:
Hither *Ierne* bids her G_____g glide;
Bids her chain those, who would chain the world beside-

There is an ambiguity here within the patriotic discourse which seeks to inscribe the place of Elizabeth and Maria as redemptive, or in some way a compensation for the effects of colonization. The line in which *Ierne* 'Bids her chain those, who would chain the world beside' implies that the Gunnings can enslave the enslavers -making the 'Empire of Beauty' a retribution for national loss, with the luxuriant falling under Luxury's spell. It is however, the Irish and the Greeks who seem best able to accept, albeit passively, the delights of beautiful women. But their pleasure is predicated on their previous defeat and subsequent status as colonies. For the defeated nation beauty is a compensation (they are, after all, already in chains) while for the victors it is the beginning of an inexorable national collapse. The appreciation or enjoyment of beauty marks the onset of effeminacy and national decline.

The figure which most draws my attention, however, is that of the 'Grecian Venus' and her 'strange unwonted softness'. Unwonted can mean (and this is how it is generally taken) something which is rarely seen, an unfamiliar person or event. But it can also mean something which goes beyond the limits, something which is more than expected. The presence of a quality which is more striking than the merely unfamiliar is I think suggested by the conjunction of 'unwonted' with 'strange'. In whom such a quality is to be excused is I think uncertain; it seems to hover between the Romans and the Venus herself. Excuse, though, does not only mean to provide a plea in mitigation or in extenuation, it also means to indulge. To a degree this clarifies the issue; for it is the Romans who, in taking the Venus home, indulge themselves. They accept a softening of their rough, militaristic masculinity, becoming like the Greeks and the Irish supine, passively relishing the seduction of women. Seduction is, however, even in these colonial terms a dangerous business. As a state of mind it lacks both the self-possession and self-regard required to resist both corruption and defeat.

To a degree, this version of events is consistent with remarks made by Walpole and Richardson, and in particular with the former's sense that the Gunnings could be disruptive. However, Walpole never totally rejects the pleasure offered by the spectacle of the Gunnings. While his remarks on the Gunnings can be brutally snide, he never quite loses his begrudging affection for them, indeed there are times when he appears keen to have them around.¹ His strategy for dealing with this ambiguity is to deflect the problem of effeminacy onto the more stable terrain of class politics. To be able to do

¹ Walpole, 'To George Montagu, Esq,' June 2nd 1759, Letter 612, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 229.

this Walpole needed to provide some account of how spectators other than himself responded to the 'noise' generated by the Gunnings's presence. The idea of the 'noise' the Gunnings are said to make is an important one; the word is recurrent throughout Walpole's testimony. It sums up the clamour and gossip of London society in its eagerness to see the two beautiful sisters. More importantly 'noise' is associated with the presence of the 'mob', and with unruly behaviour more generally. The Gunnings are connected in particular with two forms of mobbish behaviour. First, there is the mob in the park, or at the theatre; unruly, vulgar and thoroughly plebian, it represents the tumult of the populace as it swarms around the two sisters. Walpole was to regret that the English squandered their liberty 'insulting pretty women'.¹ While the Gunnings, and in particular Maria, are normally held to be in some way responsible for these outrages, Walpole directs his criticism at those, who, unlike himself, lack the politesse necessary for a less exuberant, more genteel leer. The second mob manifests itself in the hallowed space of the Court. Giddy with the excitement of the Gunnings's 'extempore weddings', otherwise dignified members of the patrician elite sent themselves scrambling over tables and chairs in desperate attempts to catch sight of the fair sisters. These and other scenes constitutive of the 'noise' to which Walpole alludes suggest a mania for the Gunnings. The enthusiasm was such that a cobbler in Worcester was able to charge a penny-a-look to a crowd eager to see the shoes he was making for Maria Gunning.² It

¹ Walpole, 'To George Montagu, Esq,' June 23rd 1759, Letter 616, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 233.

² The total amount raised in this way was said to be two and a half guineas; see Ruth M. Bleackley, 'The Beautiful Miss Gunnings' in *The Connoisseur*, no. XII, (May-August, 1905), pp. 163-64.

would be worth noting these incidents merely because they provide an interesting interlude in the history of the fetish. However, their significance lies in the fact that they mark the coexistence of aristocratic and popular enthusiasm and the collapsing of the difference between polite and vulgar pleasures, a distinction Walpole was keen to preserve.

The precise extent of Reynolds's familiarity with these and other stories is unclear, and is likely to remain so. However, Reynolds's correspondent, Miss Weston, seems to have kept him informed of the comings and goings of the English capital throughout his stay in Rome during the early 1750s. Certainly a letter she posted to Reynolds sometime in early 1751 must have contained some information on this subject, as Reynolds thanks her for news of the Gunnings in his letter dated the 30th of April. What he feels about such events he does not say, but notes that the Gunnings's 'fame had reached here some time ago'.¹ The reference is enough for us to be sure of Reynolds's knowing something of the events unfolding back home, though precise details remain elusive. What is intriguing however, is *the extent to which such notoriety and beauty might be reworked within the frame of Reynolds's canvas.*

To be able to follow this process, which is in effect a speculative sociology of the painting's reception in the 1760s, requires a careful consideration of how the sitter's beauty operates within the overall economy of spectatorship which the image offers. In the context of the 1750s, looking at women like the Gunnings might be considered a somewhat dubious occupation. It was suggestive of a popular, vulgar excitement, so that

¹ Joshua Reynolds, 'To Miss Weston,' April 30 1751, Letter VII, *Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* collected and edited by F.W. Hilles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 10-11.

staring at Elizabeth Gunning's painted image, particularly at such a public location as the Society's exhibition, would be an activity to be thought about with some care. It also questions what a 'public' might be, the crowd looking a half-made shoes or a more cultured clientele eager, as Mannings suggests, to see a society portrait. Eighteenth-century portraiture was not, however, so bereft of iconography as to be unable to focus, or redirect, the viewer's gaze away from the licentious and towards a more restrained form of contemplation. It is the purpose of the next section to examine the ways in which the content and the design of the painting negotiated the problems of gender and desire.

A Lady, Whole Length.

In common with the '*Grecian Venus*', the body which Reynolds has chosen to represent is one which claims indulgence, and which seeks to indulge. Cleverly staged amidst a dramatic half-light the Duchess's body radiates a delicate though evident sensuousness. Wrapped in a loose, informal, and quite flimsy 'bed gown' of the kind which Reynolds used as a proxy for classical dress, her body is at once disclosed and framed.¹ With strong parallels forming the outline of her legs and chest, the composition is designed to exploit the volume and curvature of her body. Indeed the image reveals as much of her body as is strictly compatible with the requirements of polite good taste. As I have suggested, it was common knowledge when the painting

¹ For a discussion of the kinds of dress used in eighteenth-century portraiture see, Aileen Riberio, 'Some Evidence of the Influence of the Dress of the Seventeenth Century in Eighteenth-Century Female Portraiture' in *Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXIX (December, 1977), pp. 834-40.

was exhibited in 1760 that the sitter was a public figure, whose lot it was to be repeatedly stared at. What is striking about Reynolds's image is that it seems to provide, quite deliberately, an occasion for the exercise of that pleasure within the confines of the gallery space.

Unquestionably, what is being portrayed is not only a sexually mature woman, but also a woman who is taken to be highly desirable, a beauty no less. Or rather the painting may be seen to be about her desirability, and as a result seems to bathe in the luxury of that display. The painting moreover signals her sexual availability. While other images of Elizabeth Gunning have a sexual dimension they appear as more controlled, and more distanced than Reynolds's image. Gavin Hamilton's picture, for example, which similarly represents a scene of gathering dusk, offers a more restrained, less luxuriant rendering of her presence; the Van Dyck costume of grey silk combined with a flamboyant, if improbable, red shawl encases her body in the colours of the Hamilton family.¹ The dress together with a risibly phallic greyhound serve to deny the sense of winsome prettiness which might otherwise exceed the forms and claims of male dynasty. Her place in the landscape is similarly restrained, as the wooded valley in which she stands appears to place the young Duchess securely within the Hamilton family's iconography and within their acreage, the source of wealth which underpins their claims to nobility.

Reynolds's portrait is strikingly different, especially as the location of the sitter is much less certain. I do not wish to speculate 'where' Elizabeth Gunning is supposed to

¹ Gavin Hamilton, *Elizabeth Gunning Duchess of Hamilton, 1752-53*, The Hamilton Collection.

be in this picture - it is a deliberately generalised scene and rather beside the point. What is clear though is the sense in which she seems much less tied to any particular estate than in either the Hamilton piece, or in Francis Cotes's portrait of 1767, which, as Shawe-Taylor points out, identifies her as the bearer of the Argyll dynasty, into which she had married in early 1759.¹ The uncertainty of location and dynastic affiliation of Reynolds's portrait may have occurred because the painting's production coincided with a particularly ambiguous phase in the Duchess's life. Reynolds's sitter books indicate that an original sitting was to have taken place on January 16th, 1758. It was, however, cancelled, a testimony no doubt to the desperate condition of the Duke of Hamilton, who died anyway on the 18th.² With the Duke's death Elizabeth Gunning was detached from any particular station in the class hierarchies of the kingdom. It would have been an ambivalent moment, for whatever she may, or may not, have felt for the Duke, with his passing she gained the freedom of a widow together with the peculiar status of a woman elevated to the aristocracy at the behest of a now dead nobleman.

The equivocal status of the woman depicted provides for one of the most curious aspects of the portrait as a whole: an instability which is predicated on the ways in which Elizabeth Gunning does not fit into the high class aspirations of society

¹ Francis Cotes, *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*, Trustees of the 10th Duke of Argyll, Inverary Castle; Shawe-Taylor, *The Georgians*, pp. 152-53.

² Sittings commenced in January 1758 and continued sporadically through to the June of the following year. Elizabeth's Husband, John, sixth Duke of Hamilton died on January 18th 1758 in between the first (cancelled) and second appointments which occurred on the 16th and 20th of the same month. Her widowhood was, however, to be short lived as she married Col. John Campbell, later fifth Duke of Argyll on the 3rd of February 1759. There were perhaps four appointments between her first husband's death and her second marriage. A concluding sitting seems to have occurred on June 2nd, though the picture was to remain with Reynolds until April 1764.

portraiture.¹ She had, as contemporary viewers might have reminded themselves, once been poor, and yet she was later famously rich and the wife of two Dukes. The ducal ermine - the coronation robes appropriate for a peeress - seem to underscore this ambivalence. The gown does not appear to be an integral part of her dress, and is merely hanging, and only just, on her left shoulder in a manner which is both negligent and conspicuous.² The significance of the robes is unclear; they could be intended to represent the now dead husband, and in particular the continuation of his line. This would seem to be discounted, however, by the availability of Elizabeth Gunning to the gaze of the viewer, and to a new suitor. The ermine could on the other hand signify the difference the viewer was expected to read, and to understand, between the Duchess of Hamilton and other 'beauties' represented by Reynolds - most notoriously Kitty Fisher and Nelly O'Brien. The necessity of making such a visible separation might however be seen to underline the Duchess's instability in class terms.³ With this problem in mind

¹ It is an anxiety Elizabeth Gunning may well have shared. Indeed she was desirous of rectifying her status through the favours of George III. The endeavour was not though to receive universal acclaim, as Lady Mary Coke suggested: 'She [lady Betty] told me the Duchess of Hamilton was asking to be made a peeress in her own right, and remainder to her son. As Lord Lorn [2nd husband, later the Duke of Argyll] had just received that favour, I thought with her that the Duchess of Hamilton, considering her Birth, cou'd have the least pretensions to such a favour', 26th January 1767, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke* 4 Vols, (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), vol. I, p. 124

² Manifest symbols of aristocratic rank are not unusual in Reynolds's *oeuvre*, however, it would have been sufficiently striking to have attracted notice. Other examples would include *Rebecca, Countess Folkestone* (1761), *Maria, Countess Waldegrave Later Duchess of Gloucester* (1759) and *Mary Parton, Duchess of Ancaster* (1764).

³ A point emphasised by the fact that Reynolds's 1764 painting of Kitty Fisher has her both draped in an ermine, and accompanied by two doves. To an extent such symbols merely associate the sitter with Venus, however, the significance of ermine,

I want to focus on two other elements of the painting, the sitter's posture and the details of the relief on which she leans. This is appropriate because, more than any other aspect of the painting, it is the action of leaning upon an emblematic *bas-relief* which signifies the painting's participation in a complex play of meanings, and a duality of publics.

Much of the elegance of the body and its manifest sensuousness comes from the pose in which the Duchess is placed by Reynolds. While it is striking, there would have been little that was unfamiliar to the viewer in 1760. A little less than a year before the Scottish portrait painter Allan Ramsay had presented *Lady Louisa Connolly* in an almost identical posture.¹ In common with the Duchess of Hamilton, Lady Louisa reclines effortlessly upon the kind of plinth common to eighteenth-century gardens and the paintings which claim to represent them. Ramsay's biographer, Alastair Smart, has proposed Ramsay's work as a possible source for Reynolds's depiction of Elizabeth Gunning. The comparison Smart claims as 'instructive', though he seems, like many others, to use the juxtaposition as occasion for stating a preference: in this case, for the modernity and politeness of Ramsay over the weary classicism of Reynolds.²

However, as David Mannings has shown, the 'sources' for Reynolds's work stretch much further afield.³ The most immediate source for the pose would, of course, have been Kneller's work, and especially the *Hampton Court Beauties*. The painting of the

both as a symbol of chastity and nobility would appear to be rendered ironic by placing it upon a woman like Kitty Fisher.

¹ Allan Ramsay, *Lady Louisa Connolly*, 1759, Private Collection.

² Alastair Smart, *Allan Ramsay: Painter, Essayist and Man Of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 189-90.

³ Mannings, 'The Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll' p. 198.

Countess of Dorset in particular employs a recognizably similar pose.¹ Mannings is persuasive in his account of the influence which Baroque portraiture may have had on Reynolds's progress as a portrait painter, but he does not consider the rhetorical or social implications of such a reference in a society portrait in the mid-eighteenth century.² The Kneller *Beauties* have consistently been perceived as a contested form of feminine representation; both Henry Fuseli and William Hazlitt disliked and disapproved of the work, Hazlitt deriding them as little more than 'a set of kept mistresses, painted, tawdry'.³ J. Douglas Stewart's response to what he terms the 'moral problem' of the paintings is to explore the neo-platonic schemes which he sees underlying the formation of the series as a whole.⁴ For Stewart the accessories and motifs which accompany each portrait serve to direct and to harmonize desire transforming it into the noble passion of love. The potential excesses of the portraits are then channelled into a purer vessel by the platonism of which any genteel viewer would have had knowledge. During the 1750s characterizations of the Gunnings in more or less these terms were readily available within a variety of discourses. The following lines constitute the opening of *The Charms of Beauty*, perhaps the most famous of the many poems occasioned by the exploits of

¹ Sir Godfrey Kneller, *The Countess of Dorset*, 1690-91, Royal Collection, Hampton Court Palace.

² David Mannings, 'Reynolds and the Restoration Portrait' in *The Connoisseur*, no. CLXXXIII, (July 1973), pp. 186-93.

³ William Hazlitt, quoted in Oliver Millar, *The Tudor, Stuart and Early Georgian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, (London: Phaidon, 1963), p. 124.

⁴ J. Douglas Stewart, 'Pin-Ups or Virtues? The Concept of the "Beauties" in Late Stuart Portraiture' in *English Portraits of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 1974), pp. 3-27.

Elizabeth and Maria Gunning:

When *Beauty* spreads her Glories to the View,
Our wond'ring Eyes the radiant Blaze pursue;
Enraptur'd we behold the pleasing Sight,
And lose ourselves in *infinite Delight*.
Unruly Passions urge us to possess
The richest Treasure of a Mortals Bliss.
But when *strict Virtue* guards the charming Fair,
With *Prudence* arm'd, and *chastity* severe;
Aw'd and chastiz'd by such superior Pow'r
We stand at Distance, and almost adore.¹

The poem deploys the Gunnings to offer an admonitory tale directed at the ladies of England. It is, according to the poet, the beauty of the Gunnings's virtue which has attracted the admiration of the English lords; if the English ladies are to be equally successful then they must lay off their vanity and their paint. The poem, however, is somewhat atypical in its presentation of the Irish beauties, who are more frequently represented as inspiring folly and vice.²

The iconography included in eighteenth-century portraiture is much more unstable, and cannot be read as straightforwardly as Stewart's methodology suggests. Crucially, the category of a 'Beauty' is more ambiguous than the overly stark opposition between 'Pin-up' and 'Virtue' put forward by Stewart. There are other parts of the painting, and of this allusion to Kneller, which require elucidation, as an anecdote from Walpole reveals:

¹ Anon., *The Charms of Beauty; or, the Grand contest between the Fair Hibernians, and the English Toasts, A Poem. Occasioned by the Marriage of his Grace the Duke of Hamilton with Miss Elizabeth Gunning; and the expected marriage of her elder Sister with a certain noble Earl*, (London: J. Gifford, 1752), p. 1.

² See, for example, *Peeping Tom to the Countess of Coventry. An Epithalamium*, (London: S. Price & R. Wilson, 1752).

As you talk of our Beauties, I shall tell you a new story of the Gunnings, who make more noise than any of their predecessors since the days of Helen, though neither of them, nor anything about them, have as yet been *teterrima belli causa*. They went the other day to see Hampton Court; as they were going to the Beauty-room, another company arrived; the housekeeper said, "this way, ladies: here are the Beauties". The Gunnings flew into a passion, and asked what she meant; that they came to the palace, not to be shown as a sight themselves.¹

This gossipy account - not without its misogynistic overtones - associates Elizabeth Gunning with Kneller and the public face of her beauty in ways which are far from complimentary. Although Walpole is not claiming to be the author of the tale, he presents the story as one taken to be more generally known than merely his own immediate experience. It is used accordingly as further evidence of the Gunnings's folly and caprice - and is indeed part of a series of such stories, of which this is merely the latest. The form of consumption taking place in 1760, with Elizabeth Gunning presented in the guise of a royal beauty, was quite complex. It may have been possible, for instance, to think about the image more in terms of the Gunnings's conspicuous vanity (and lasciviousness), than in relation to a painterly compliment.

The form of consumption that this would imply is compatible with the discourse of civic humanism only in the extent to which it comments on the *vanitas* displayed by the sitter. Civic humanism is, after all, concerned almost exclusively with the public conduct of men, with their virtues and offices. Reynolds's painting, however, does offer to return the viewer's gaze to the sphere of civic responsibility through the design carved on the *bas-relief* located in the lower left of the canvas. The *bas-relief* in the Reynolds's work, unlike Ramsay's, contains the level of narrative with which, as David

¹ Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann,' August 31st 1751, Letter 330, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 265.

Solkin has argued, Reynolds hoped to raise the style and status of portraiture.¹ The image - which is very indistinct - shows Paris, a seated figure, leaning forward offering an apple to the victorious Venus. Interestingly Venus herself is not shown, save for the suggestion of arms on the far left of the canvas, and the two defeated goddesses can only be seen dimly in the shadows behind Paris. This would appear to suspend, or to curtail, the narrative process which the relief has inaugurated. This is, however, not the case, as, on the contrary, the narrative can be extended to encompass the whole painting. To complete the image the viewer must insert Elizabeth Gunning as the missing Venus. The process of this narrative completion is further underlined by the presence to the right of the painting of two doves, traditional symbols of the Goddess.

The suggestion that the image on the relief may provide a way into the complexities of the painting as a whole is enhanced by the status of the narrative to which it alludes. The story of the Paris's judgement is, along with the Judgement of Hercules, one of the primary texts of civic masculinity. It is certainly central to the ideology of eighteenth-century society, as it suggests the male right to choose, but also the necessity of the right choice. For Joseph Spence, commenting on the story in relation to the Judgement of Hercules, it is the consequences of an inability to discriminate which provide for the greatest drama:

The Choice, or (as it is more commonly called) the Judgement of Paris, seems to me to be the Asiatic way of telling the same story; and it is formed on a larger plan than any of the former. The goddess of Wisdom, the goddess of Pleasure and the goddess of Power, appear to Paris in his youth. They each make him their offers. He prefers pleasure, to whatever the others would give him: and the consequence of this bad choice of his was, the loss

¹ David Solkin, 'Great Men or Great Pictures: Male Portraiture and the Power of Art' in *Oxford Art Journal*, vol 9, no 2 (1986), pp. 42-49.

of his own life, the suffering of all his friends, and of his country; and finally the overturning of the Asiastic monarchy.¹

Spence's response, coming from within the discourse of civic humanism, is a familiar one.² For Spence, Paris has unquestionably made the wrong decision with predictable and dire consequences. Unlike Hercules, Paris has departed from the civic responsibilities which his status, as a prince, ought to have guaranteed. Moreover, Paris is punished, death and destruction following logically from his lasciviousness.

Spence's response does not, however, exhaust the discursive potential of the figure of Venus, or Paris's judgement. Two plays, written in 1731 and 1768, share the title of *The Judgement of Paris*.³ Both productions, which graced the stage of the Theatre Royal, suggest a rather different attitude towards Paris's choice and towards Venus herself. The plays are simple tales - certainly much more straightforward than the classical sources to which Spence refers - and tend to see Paris as acting in the main rather sensibly. While the 1731 text, which is perhaps more complicated than the 1768 version, does illustrate the rival claims of the goddesses, it is Venus to whom the most effective speech is given. Significantly, while Paris acknowledges that he has forfeited his capacity for self-command, it is not something about which he feels much remorse.

¹ Joseph Spence, *Polymetis: or, An Enquiry Concerning the Agreement between the Works of the Roman Poets, and the Remains of the Ancient Artists* (London: Dodsley, 1747), p. 143.

² See John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 63-88 and J.R. Hale, 'Art and Audience: The Medici Venus', in *Italian Studies*, vol. 31, (1976), pp. 37-58.

³ Anon., *The Judgement of Paris; or, the Triumph of Beauty. A Pastoral Ballad Opera in One Act* (London J Roberts, 1731) and Ralph Schonberg, *The Judgement of Paris. An English Burletta* (London: T. Beckett and P.A. de Hondt, 1768).

And indeed, why should he, as the rest of the characters soon flood onto the stage to congratulate him on the wisdom of his choice. In both productions there is some comment on the forms of destruction and luxury Paris's conduct might entail. But on the whole this seems a hollow rehearsal of a rather tired story; it is preferable, at least in these productions, to proclaim the virtues, assuming they are such, of love.

The attitude to the goddess could then be playful. Desire, while its dangers may be acknowledged, can even be celebrated. To be sure, the differences between the plays and Spence's treatise might be understood as a function of genre. To view the disjunction solely in these terms, however, would be to fail to recognize the ambiguity both of Reynolds's image and of the exhibition as a whole. The question is not only of genre, or indeed of time (James Beattie's poem, *The Judgement of Paris*, published in 1768, is more in agreement with Spence than the play of that year), rather it is a difference of space.¹ Unlike Polymetis's country retreat, the theatre is a site for excited, fashionable pleasure, and as such permits a greater indulgence of desire than would be imaginable in Polymetis's patrician seclusion. The exhibition hall lies between the two places, aspiring to the grandeur of the villa, but appealing to the tastes of the crowd. So that as it hangs on the walls of the exhibition, the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* is forced to mediate between the gentlemanly scholarship embodied within Polymetis's Villa, and the dalliance represented by the Drury lane productions. Furthermore the pleasures represented by the theatrical-Paris coincide with Montagu's invocation of the Gunnings as part of the spectacular repertoire of a society assembly which licences or

¹ James Beattie, *The Judgement of Paris*, in *The Poetical Works of Beattie, Blair and Falconer*, (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1854), pp. 52-71.

takes its animation from the energy of desire, almost acknowledging the slippage between the social and sexual forms of commerce. But it would also coincide with the forms of conventional social practice. Lady Sarah Bunbury, later to be painted by Reynolds herself, writes enthusiastically of the agreeable softening effected by Elizabeth Gunning on her brother:

Charles is in town, & is violently in love with the Duchess of Hamilton; think of his riding out to see her. You know how he hates it; he is all humbleness and respect and never leaves her. I am vastly glad to see him improve so much, he is now quite manly, & much liked, in the world; he is a sweet boy, & I hope will continue as aimiable as he is.¹

The admiration of fine women marks the emergence of a fully matured male sexual persona, alongside the possession of a valuable social grace. Montagu makes a similar point when she writes of Sir Thomas Robinson graciously escorting the Gunnings, 'after being master of ceremonies to the French ambassador, and our secretary of state, [he] proposes to be gallant to these fair dames'² Robinson therefore emerges as an exemplary figure, able to balance loyal service and polite entertainment.

The story of the Judgement of Paris may then have been unstable, or at least under revision, in ways of which Reynolds and his audience would have been aware. There were by 1760 at least two ways of reading the scene on the ancient hillside, and it is here more than anywhere else that the Duchess appears to be located. One version continues the civic humanist stress on disavowal and another captures a more recent

¹ Lady Sarah Bunbury, 'To Susan O' Brien', quoted in *The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox, 1745-1826* eds. The Countess of Ilchester and Lord Stavordale, 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1902), vol. I, p. 155.

² Elizabeth Montagu, *Letters of Elizabeth Montagu, with some notices of her contemporaries*, 3 vols, (London: T Cadell, 1813), vol. III, p. 166.

development in the social practices of polite culture. In this sense the painting constitutes a particularly sophisticated play of meanings, made all the more complex because of the way in which the painting seems to frustrate what remains of a civic agenda. By placing the Judgement of Paris within the space of the canvas Reynolds appears to be insisting on a considered appraisal, not only of his art, but also of his sitter. This would seem to imply that the viewer ought to recreate the famous judgement: he can, if he so desires, repeat Paris's judgement, or turn away with Herculean disdain (the possibility of a woman's judgement could not be expressed in these terms). However, the choice has in effect already been made, for the viewer only encounters the scene at the moment at which the prize is about to be awarded. The only purposeful action available would therefore be to stop looking, a rather unlikely, and distinctly foolish, act at an art exhibition. This would seem finally to mark the difference the painting has from a strictly civic morality, especially as in Spence's terms, 'there can be no virtue without choice'.¹ If Juno and Minerva were more effectively represented, then the viewer could elect to consider their virtues, and to repudiate Venus - this is broadly the import of Beattie's poem. However, with Juno and Minerva scarcely present, there is no higher virtue to which the spectator can appeal. The only recourse would therefore be to a more private narrative, one which is more firmly located in the presuppositions of polite social practice than in the art theory represented by Reynolds's *Idler* pieces.

One way of obtaining a reappraisal of the image would have been to compare the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* with *Lady Elizabeth Keppell*. This would reinscribe a

¹ Spence, *Polymetis*, p. 140.

choice into the act of consumption, and one contained moreover by the martial vigour of Vernon and Kingsley. That the action of looking, and of judging, would have been undertaken solely in these terms seems unsatisfactory. Although the process would correspond to Walpole's propensity for the evaluation of women, and to the practices outlined in the last chapter, it does little to dispel the desire which the painting has encouraged from its audience.¹ What could have occurred instead is a redirecting of that desire into the more permissible channel of sympathy. The exhibition of sympathetic affection, while it would not wholly deny the expression of sexuality would provide a means of condoning both feminine desirability, and male vulnerability to that spectacle.

The Figure of Sympathy.

So far my account of the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* has focused almost entirely on the painting as representing a problem for the male spectator. However, as recent theoretical work has demonstrated, the much vaunted 'male gaze' rarely acts upon the simple binary of voyeurism or disavowal alone.² Furthermore, paintings, like any other form of cultural production, do not exist in one context alone. As a recent essay by Stephen Daniels has shown, a more productive approach lies in the appreciation of

¹ Walpole was much given to inspecting beautiful women, on one particular occasion he took it upon himself to appraise the relative merits of Maria Gunning, Lady Kildare and Lady Pitt-Rivers. See his *Memoirs of the Reign of George the Third*, 4 vols, (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1984), vol. III, p. 131, n. 1.

² See, for example, Edward Snow, 'Theorising the Male Gaze: Some Problems' in *Representations*, vol. 25, (Winter, 1989), pp. 30-41.

series of contexts all of which produce different, potentially competing, readings.¹ Something very like this has already emerged in the differences between polite and civic reactions to publically active women. Consideration of the issue of sensibility - an increasingly popular cultural 'mode' from the 1740s onwards - provides another point of departure, and one which is concerned, at least in part, with the impact public displays of beauty and sexuality have on the sitter herself.

The grounds upon which the painting may be thought of as evoking a more sentimental response would, I think, have been quite clear in 1760. At its centre is an ambivalent working of grieving and loss, an economy of pathos which includes even death. The dramatization of death, and the deathly, ought not, however, to encourage a hasty identification of sexuality with death. For while such a coincidence is suggested by elements of the painting, it is, I feel, more profitable to pursue the specific processes of loss which the image generates. The circumstances of the Duke of Hamilton's recent death place the problem chronologically centre stage; certainly important aspects of the Duchess's appearance suggest mourning attire, most notably, the loose, unpowdered hair, and the absence (apparently) of stays indicate a funereal image inflecting contemporary fashion. This combines with her pose, which while it has a number of seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources, also derives from a sarcophagal carving from the second century A.D.² Significantly the tradition of painting Paris in a seated position also

¹ Stephen Daniels, 'Louthembourg's *Chemical Theatre*' in John Barrell ed., *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays in British Art, 1700-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 195-230.

² See Edgar Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Imagery*, ed. Jaynie Anderson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), plates 52-54.

derives (via Raphael) from a Roman sarcophagus of the same period. This conjunction of sources, typical of Reynolds's 'witty' allusions, recommends that the plinth is read more as a monument, than an ornament.¹

While these elements suggest that Elizabeth Gunning appears in the guise of a grieving widow, a number of other interpretive possibilities are equally apparent. First, throughout the production of Reynolds's portrait Maria Gunning was dying, and what is more Elizabeth was also thought to be in decline. Walpole, as ever, is on hand to tell the story.

The Charming Countess is dead at last; and as if the whole story of both sisters was to be extraordinary, the Duchess of Hamilton is in a consumption too, and going abroad directly. Perhaps you may see the remains of these prodigies, you will see but little remains; her features... [have] long been changed, though not yet I think above six-and-twenty.²

This was in the October of 1760, though her illness had begun its course long before, and by November Walpole was candid enough with Horace Mann to tell him that the Duchess of Hamilton would 'not answer your expectation'.³ The Earl of Chesterfield wrote in a similar vein reflecting, as early as 1752, that the beauties of the Gunnings would be short-lived.⁴ The brevity and impending extinction of beauty is a constant

¹ That such objects might represent funeral monuments, or at least signify death, has been suggested, perhaps not wholly convincingly by Alexander S. Gourlay and John E. Grant in their essay, 'The Melancholy Shepherdess in Prospect of Love and Death', in *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, vol. LXXXV, (1982), pp. 169-89.

² Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann,' Oct 5th 1760, Letter 686, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 345.

³ Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann,' November 1st 1760, Letter 693, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 358.

⁴ Lord Chesterfield, 'To Soloman Dayrolles,' 17th March 1752, Letter 1819, *Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield* ed. and intro by Bonamy Dobree, 6 Vols., (London: Eyre & Spittiswode, 1933), pp. 1852-53.

refrain in the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising to find the Gunnings used as the occasion for its rehearsal.¹ This connection is supported by Ronald Paulson, who has claimed that an appreciation of the beautiful inevitably constitutes an aesthetic of mourning. It presupposes, he argues, a sensibility based upon expected loss.² In this context portraiture occupies a uniquely privileged place. The genre is predicated upon the recovery and re-presentation of what is already absent, or about to be lost. Portraits, indeed, make present those who could not otherwise return to a gallery, or a salon: the dead. This was well-understood in the eighteenth century; one commentator writing later in the century noted that it was portraiture's specific responsibility to 'preserve the form which lies mouldering in the tomb'.³

In these terms the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* remains a tribute to beauty, but becomes one which proposes the vulnerability of beauty to both age and disease. With this in mind there is an obligation to reread the disposition of the sitter, and in particular the portrait's primary icon, the *bas-relief*. Strikingly, the sitter's pose, with its half-reclining posture, is redolent of contemporary funeral sculpture, and in particular the monuments in Westminster Abbey.⁴ Certainly there is something sculptural about the

¹ See for example, William Mason's 'On the Death of a Lady', written on the occasion of Maria Gunning's death, in *The British Poets including Translations*, 100 vols, (Chiswick: C. Whittingham, 1822), vol. 77, pp. 86-89. For a more general discussion of the relation of Beauty to the figure of Death, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 59-75, 110-40.

² Paulson, *Breaking and Remaking*, pp. 230-45.

³ John Evans, *Juvenile Pieces: Designed for the Youth of Both Sexes*, 3rd edn., (London: John Phillips, 1797), p. 71.

⁴ Mannings, 'Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll', p. 198.

way in which the Duchess is depicted, and it was perhaps to this which Waterhouse referred when he described the painting as looking, 'as nearly dead as a Reynolds of a very handsome sitter can be'.¹ The statuesque nature of the pose provides a curious framing presence in Reynolds's otherwise painterly scheme. The blanched white skin and the heavily incised parallels which construct her body extend the sculptural form outwards from the plinth and onto her whole body. The effect of this is to inter the living within the iconography of death. I have already traced a similar progression from the plinth onto the Duchess's body in the 'Judgement of Paris' narrative. In total what is transposed is not only the civic iconography necessary for understanding the painting, and its signified of desire and repression, but also a narrative concerning loss and mourning. Significantly Elizabeth Gunning continues to stare grimly at the plinth-sarcophagus upon which she leans; her gaze always returning the viewer to the relief.

How is this constant return to the encrypting relief to be read? By gazing at the sarcophagus in this way Elizabeth Gunning might appear to be vulnerable, even penitent. Arranged next to a tomb and posed for its contemplation the society beauty appears to be on the verge of confronting her own mortality. The very beauty which solicits the gaze therefore emerges as fragile, impermanent; it seems to exist only in relation to impending death. I am confident that this moment is not meant to be read as a statement simply about death or aging - though these may be the terms in which the discourse is conducted. Rather, the painting seems to be saying something about the effect beauty-as-publicity (and hence sexuality) has on the Duchess. When her sister died bewailing her

¹ Waterhouse, *Reynolds*, (1973) p. 22.

lost looks, Walpole reflected that it was 'hard upon a standard beauty' to be so afflicted.¹ Clearly Walpole meant to be sardonic, to point an easy moral at the expense of Maria Gunning's vanity, and to claim that a 'standard beauty' lacks the capacity for any further character or even identity; without her looks she is nothing. However, he seems, as elsewhere, to reflect upon the fact that to be publically beautiful is to lose something of oneself. While it is important to recognize the existence of Walpole's more misogynistic tendencies, he does appear to be saying that there is something pathetic (in the elevated sense) in the Gunning's situation. Their ability to seduce leaves them prey to desires not strictly their own: a seduction which, as Susan Staves has argued, was attended in the eighteenth century by the litigious grief of fathers, and the baleful death of young women.²

There is something of that sensation of pathos in this picture. This changes the viewers's attitude to the sitter considerably, altering her status and the nature of their desire. She is no longer merely the object of their anxious pleasure, instead she occupies a position which demands compassion, and a reappraisal of what it is to be a male viewer. Looking away Hercules-style is no longer the issue what is a concern, however, is the fact that the male spectator may occupy - as a man - two conflicting positions in relation to Elizabeth Gunning. He can seek to seduce her himself (or at least fantasize that triumph), or alternatively he can act as a surrogate father, grieving for her impending seduction and eventual decline. The difficulty - and the impropriety - of

¹ Walpole, 'To Sir Horace Mann', 1st November 1760, Letter 693, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 358.

² Susan Staves, 'British Seduced Maidens', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 14, no. 2 (Winter, 1980-81), pp. 109-34.

Reynolds's image is captured in part within this hesitant double bind. It is however only one of many occasioned by this portrait. There is, for example, a difficulty about distinguishing for whom it is the viewer is to mourn: the Duke, the Duchess, or indeed for himself. Most tellingly, there is a profound mixing of functions occurring in Reynolds's portrayal of the grieving Duchess of Hamilton. For while Elizabeth Gunning is represented in relation to the 'private story' of a recent death, this privacy is transformed by the public display of that condition.

The Value of the Exhibition.

The ambiguity of address and of audience refers most pertinently to the crisis of art production in the 1750s and 60s. As David Solkin has argued, during this period artists faced a substantial stumbling block when trying to formulate their address to the public.¹ Retaining a convincing address to the public sphere was increasingly difficult, prior to the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768 when Reynolds was able to put civic theory of a 'new footing'.² *The signs and practices of commerce were too* visible for an art representing only classical virtues to have any efficacy. The result was something more hybrid, an art form with two or more competing referents. As a result the distinction between the references I have been describing can best be seen in the coexistence of competing forms of value within the painting; the civic, the polite and

¹ David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 178-79.

² The phrase is Barrell's see *Birth of Pandora*, p. 67; for an account of the impact made by the foundation of the Royal Academy see Solkin *Painting for Money*, pp. 247-76.

the pathetic. Under the first denomination comes the sign of the Judgement of Paris as a call to civic disavowal, or at least a demand to think about the luxury represented by art, and by beautiful women, in those terms. The fact that it has to be included so visibly may signify its vulnerability and not its retrieval as an appropriate discourse for appreciating art. In the early part of the eighteenth century it was customary to produce epigrammatic narratives which regulated the act of looking at Venus.¹ To provide one in 1760 which stresses instead the dangers of looking indicates just how much times had changed, as it would seem to imply that the spectator needs reminding of his duty. The civic value of the *Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* is therefore located in the fact that the spectator can observe, without participation, in the display of beauty, and hear the call to its critique.

The installation of the public exhibition, and the establishment of a broader audience abolished the privileged position upon which civic scholarship, at least in its aristocratic form, had relied. This shifted the frame of reference away from art theory, and towards the discourse of social life. Reynolds's portrait cannot be understood without some appreciation of the sitter's life and social position. The 'magazine of common property' to which the painting refers is not therefore, as Malcolm Warner following Reynolds suggests, the realms of classical allusion, but rather it is common knowledge, gossip;² in Walpole's phrase, the 'new story of the Gunnings'. This reworks the classical reference in the painting, just as Walpole's story of events at Hampton

¹ Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*, pp. 80-81.

² Malcolm Warner, 'The Sources and Meaning of Reynolds' Lady Sarah Bunbury' in *The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, vol. 15, (1989), pp. 7-19.

Court reworked the reference to Kneller. It makes the problem of the painting less an economy of sexual distance - a choice between responsibility and luxuriance - and more the decision to be contemptuous, or to be sympathetic.

This was the new value system established by the exhibition; the evaluation of Elizabeth Gunning against Lady Keppell, and the weighing of beauty against the recurrence of death. This is not a response which sits easily with the body of art theory propounded by Reynolds later in the century. It is, however, fairly consistent with Solkin's reading of the work of Benjamin West whose success, even as a History painter, relied to no small degree on the depiction of sensuous and endangered feminine beauty.¹ This is perhaps the irony of exhibitions such as those held by the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and by the Royal Academy throughout the eighteenth century. For in order to succeed they needed to solicit an audience beyond the close confines of the patrician and masculine elites. The polite culture to which they necessarily turned, drawn from the same society which attended Vauxhall and routs at Ranelegh, would be less than impressed by austere injunctions to stoicism. To this end painterly styles were changed, and historical grandeur brought in line with popular taste.

In many respects this is the crucial change. For it is the innovation of the public exhibition, seen as a reorganization of the business of being an artist, to which Reynolds's work ultimately responds. In this connection it is the spectacle of publically displayed woman which most catches the eye. It is Elizabeth Gunning's body which provides the focus for the range of references which the painting introduces and then

¹ Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 180-90.

seeks, perhaps not successfully, to reconcile. By evoking and modifying the spectator's reaction to its principal object, the painting appears to be trying to ensure not only its own status, but also its desirability. The ambiguous place occupied by 'Beauty', and most tellingly by beautiful women in eighteenth-century society produced in this context an image which referred both to social and sexual mores, as well as to the status of commercial art. In particular the introduction of a sympathetic register indicates an attempted reconciliation of the higher branches of art to what Solkin aptly describes as the 'softer pleasures of the market place'.¹ And it is this 'strange unwonted softness', the softness of commercial art, which Reynolds most wants excused.

¹ Solkin, *Painting For Money*, p.181.

CHAPTER FOUR

**AFFECTIONATE ADDRESSES AND SOCIABLE SEDUCTIONS:
THE MORAL POLITICS OF BEAUTY IN THE WORK OF
CHARLOTTE LENNOX AND SARAH SCOTT**

The Politics of Appearance.

In the preceding chapter I argued that when Reynolds exhibited his portraits of high-born or beautiful women the paintings were positioned not merely with reference to conventional display techniques, but in relation to a variety of discourses which commented on, or attempted to proscribe the social place of woman within eighteenth-century culture. Such discourses, at least in the grand exhibitions put on by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, tended to provide these formulations in terms of a largely aristocratic version of social mores. However, away from the patrician concerns of public men, that address was revised into a discourse which sought to explore and give coherence to the social place of women. This transformation of discourse was enacted in a different social milieu, the location of which was not the grand villas and courtly estates of the aristocrats or anything like, but was instead the parlours and drawing rooms of the middle classes. The account of manners which middle-class writers produced, to be explored in this chapter in its novelistic form, was unconcerned with the notion of men unfit for public office (the middle-class were thought unacceptable for this role in any case) but retained the civic sense that women could corrupt as well as polish. The primary concern of such writing, however, was to focus on the conduct of women as agents of sociable interaction. The degree to which the physical presence of women was thought to accentuate or render problematic that new social role will occupy the argument I now wish to pursue.¹

¹ For contrasting accounts of the restriction of women's participation in polite culture see, G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. pp. 154-

The nature of this transformation may be encapsulated in what Terry Eagleton terms the 'bourgeois "feminization of discourse"', when he writes that 'in a contradictory movement, "feminine" values relegated by the division of labour to the private realm [return] to transvaluate the ruling ideologies themselves'. He argues that the 'feminization of discourse prolongs the fetishizing of women at the same time it lends them a more authoritative voice'.¹ The result of this can be, as Harriet Guest observes, a 'blurring of the ideological opposition between the private and the public or political in bourgeois discourse'. As Guest notes the ideological nature of this change was inscribed in the bourgeois account of feminine sexuality, and was centred on 'the anxieties and pleasures of sexual difference, and, more specifically to focus that ambivalence on the bodies of women'.² In particular the physical presence of beautiful women was often thought of as acting upon the mind of the perceiver as a sudden and overwhelming effect. As such the experience was conceived of as the sensation of an instantaneous excitement, a thrill to the senses which precluded the action of the reasoning faculties. This was, as I have argued, the position underlying Daniel Webb's assertion that the appearance of a 'distinguished beauty', like that of a great painting,

214; and Kathyne Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: Constructions of Femininity in the Early Periodical*, (London: Routledge, 1989), esp. pp. 12-16, 32-36, 51-56.

¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 13.

² Harriet Guest, 'The Wanton Muse: Politics and Gender in Gothic Theory After 1760' in Stephen Copley and John Whale eds., *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Text and Contexts, 1780-1832*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 135.

acted on the mind with an 'intrinsic, and not relative force'.¹ It is this sudden excitement, viewed in civic terms as a departure from appropriate masculine resolve which so troubled Spence in *Polymetis*. For him the allure of a woman's charms may reform a male viewer, as Webb was to suggest, but it could also corrode and undermine the key masculine attributes of independence and integrity.²

In the mid-century novel this paradoxical investment in and yet disavowal of women lead to what at first appears to have been a clear opposition of the ugly and the beautiful, with a corresponding investment in the plain as the sign of true worth and virtue. For the face of an ugly woman represented a physiognomy which, because it could not seize the attention of the viewer, could not render him supine.³ However, the tendency of middle-class discourse on society enacts a greater ambiguity around the presentation of women in mid-century novels than a simple opposition between beauty and ugliness allows. It is never merely a question of isolating where the good opposes the bad, or where the claims of the beautiful are contested by those of the plain. This caution is important because of what I take to be the very real difficulties of the mid-

¹ Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting, and into the Merits of the Most Celebrated Painters Ancient and Modern*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1760), p. 189.

² Joseph Spence, *Polymetis; or, An Enquiry Concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1747), pp. 73-76, 142-43

³ The most extensive treatment of ugliness on the mid-eighteenth century was William Hay's *Deformity. An Essay*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1754). See also William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. Written with a View to Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste*, (London: J. Reeve, 1753), pp. 123-34; and Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and intro. J.T. Boulton, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 119

century novel. Surveys of the literature of this period, such as that provided by Janet Todd, tend to see the women writers as largely unadventurous and depressingly conservative.¹ Accordingly the work of Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott (the novelists upon whom I concentrate in this chapter), along with their contemporaries Sarah Fielding and Frances Brooke, has been placed in an iniquitous middle-ground between the sexual excitement of Delariviere Manley and the early Eliza Heywood and the revolutionary furore of Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Inchbald. As an appraisal of the literature of the eighteenth century Todd's account is overly reliant on the radicalism of the 1790s, and on the forms of politics which it is possible to read in the fiction of that later period.

More specifically Todd has claimed that women novelists of this period were overcome by the need to appear morally respectable, and that 'a possible way of signalling moral purpose was to enact the replacement of the power-seeking woman with a new feminine one, to transform the coquettish into a sentimental sign...Charlotte Lennox did just this'. Despite a belated concession to the 'nasty complexity' of Lennox's plots Todd disregards the mobility of terms in the mid-century novel, and the more problematic staging of morality that Lennox's fiction represents. Consequently Lennox appears as a collusive figure whose fiction represents not 'self-knowledge', but rather, 'self-sacrifice and the understanding of constraint'.² Within this approach to

¹ Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800*, (London: Virago, 1989), see especially, pp. 125-45. Comparable views to Todd's have been expressed by Jane Spencer, see her, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 187-91.

² Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, pp. 146, 160.

women's literature individual writers, or even single works are occasionally nominated as more radical, or at least less 'malleable', than the work of their contemporaries. The work of Sarah Scott has been 'fortunate' in this process of valuation. In particular her novels *Millennium Hall* and *Agreeable Ugliness* have been singled out for praise. It is an esteem which relies on the assumption that these two works represent a challenge to the prevailing social order, and one critic has recently claimed that *Agreeable Ugliness* represents an attempt to condemn the categorization of women as either beautiful or ugly.¹

It is my view that the literature of the 1750s and 60s produces a more complex politics than Todd allows. This is a claim which demands an appraisal of the specific meaning of each term the novels bring into play, and an explanation of the kind of discourse in which it is situated. To assume that commonplace values can be attributed to terms like 'beautiful', 'ugly' or 'pretty' is to misunderstand the context in which they are employed. In one discourse Beauty can signify all that is good and all that is pure, viewed from another perspective it is an appellation used to describe the vicious coquet. As Homi Bhabha has argued, 'political positions are not simply identifiable as progressive or reactionary...outside the terms of their discursive address'.² This is a caution which is particularly appropriate to the discussion of the beautiful in the eighteenth century. My account prior to this chapter has focused on the variety of ways in which the beautiful is employed, and the different kinds of authority or censure to

¹ See Liz Bellamy, entry for Sarah Scott, in Janet Todd ed., *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, (London: Routledge, 1989).

² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 22.

which it is subjected. I want to argue that representations of beauty are, as Bhabha's comment suggests, never reducible to terms which either denigrate or empower women, and represent instead a more shifting terrain.

With these concerns in mind I want to situate my reading of these novels within an account of the general discursive change which takes place in the mid-century, described in Eagleton's phrase as the 'bourgeois feminization of discourse'. As I have argued in chapter two, it is this crucial shift in moral and social discourse which places women at the centre of attempts to fashion polite culture. However, this realignment exists in a profoundly ambivalent relationship to the practical politics of marriage. The specific discourse on marriage, structured around the relationship between obedience and desire (passion and propriety), witnesses an interest in surveillance and authority cast in opposition to the 'rise of romantic love', or indeed to any notion of 'companionable marriage'.¹ As Erica Harth has argued the '*ideological* climate of love and marriage' was particularly fraught in the 1750s and 60s.² The tension between the high estimation of women in sentimental narratives and the perceived need for paternal, political surveillance provides the context in which I wish to read mid-century literature by women, a context in which the claims of gender and class are strikingly interwoven. This tension was productive of a range of attempts to provide a representation of virtuous sexuality. Many of the novels from the mid-century, and in particular those by

¹ For contrasting accounts of eighteenth-century marriage, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800*, abr. and rev. ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men, Women and the English Middle-Class, 1780-1850*, (London: Hutchison, 1987).

² Erica Harth, 'The Virtue of Love: Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act', in *Cultural Critique*, (Spring, 1988), p. 123.

women, manifest an attempt to find an appropriate discourse, or at least one appropriate to the sexual longings of chaste and virtuous women. A discourse on the proprieties of physical appearance seems to have been one response. This was a response, though, which was profoundly ambivalent, increasing in uncertainty as the strain upon it mounted. This instability is, I want to argue, evident to precisely the extent to which the discourses which define etiquette or polite values are themselves reliant on an account of society which is itself only partially fulfilled. It is only partially fulfilled because it is based on an incomplete separation of the public and private spheres.

Town Beauties and Polite Ladies.

Midway through Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote* an exchange takes place that illuminates the status of Beauty for a culture whose conception of itself as social or public is in transition. The conversation, between the quixotic Arabella and her two lovers Mr. Glanville and Sir George Bellmour, is of interest because of the way in which it foregrounds the use of the word 'Beauty' as the term that provides the most obvious vocabulary for talking about a woman's social presence.¹ The implication of the term is colloquial and familiar; Sir George uses it casually, yet precisely, as he attempts to chide Arabella for her severity: '...you Beauties make very nice Distinctions in these cases; and think, if you do not directly command your Lovers to die, you are no-ways accountable for their Death'. The particular point of contention ostensibly

¹ The exchange I have in mind is that which occupies chapters ii and iii of Book IV; 'In which a very pleasing Conversation is left unfinished' and 'Definition of Love and Beauty - The necessary Qualities of an Hero and Heroine' respectively. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote; or, the Adventures of Arabella*, ed. Margaret Dalziel and intro. Margaret Anne Doody, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 144-53.

concerns the nature and the extent of the respect due to Beauty; and by logical extension, to women. Arabella in the height of her romantic folly claims for beauty the highest status imaginable, asserting that, along with love, it is at once the most delightful and the most sublime object of inquiry. Speaking of the various histories she has read she asserts that 'You will there find, that the greatest Conquerors, and Heroes of invincible valour, reason with the most exact and scrupulous Nicety upon Love and Beauty'.¹ The discussion of beauty in which these warriors engage is taken by Arabella to represent an acceptable public discourse on the physical and social appearance of women. The propriety of their pronouncements lies, however, in the assumption that they will never be uttered in front of, let alone to, a woman.

With this opinion determining her thoughts, Arabella asserts that if a woman is importuned by the solicitations of a lover she can, and should, banish him. According to Arabella, by sending her lover from her presence a woman not only secures her virtue, but also proclaims her sense of the outrage committed against her person by an impolitic declaration.² Listening to her harangue, Arabella's virtuous and ardent lover, Glanville, is disconcerted by both the obstinacy with which she clings to these high-minded ideals and the embarrassing consequences into which such nonsense must surely lead. While Glanville is undoubtedly upset by her ardency, he attempts to gain a crumb of comfort from his idol's austerity.

Though, replied Mr. *Glanville*, you are very severe in the Treatment you think it necessary our Sex should receive from yours; yet I wish some of our own Town Beauties were, if not altogether of your Opinion, yet sufficiently

¹ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 149-50.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 146-47.

so, as to make it not a Slavery for a Man to be in their Company; for unless one talks of Love to these fair Coquets the whole time one is with them, they are quite displeas'd, and look upon a Man who can think any thing, but themselves, worthy of his Thoughts or Observation, with an utmost Contempt.¹

In these terms banishment becomes a kind of freedom - though Glanville hardly thought so when he was cast out by Arabella.² The apparent illogic of Glanville's response arises because he and Arabella are describing different places, and, it might be added, different times. Largely blasé about, if not actually unconcerned with, Arabella's romantic ideals Glanville's thoughts are more recognizably modern. Continuing his argument against the servitude of contemporary manners, he remarks:

How often have you and I, Sir *George*,...pitied the Condition of the few Men of Sense, who are sometimes among the Croud of Beaux, who attend the Two celebrated Beauties to all Places of polite Diversion in Town? For those Ladies think it a mortal Injury done to their Charms, if the Men about them have Eyes or Ears for any object but their Faces, or any Sound but that of their voices.

That early editions referred to these two women as 'the Two Sister Beauties' makes it clear that Glanville is objecting to the Gunnings.³ The problem for him is then very different, and occupies a recognizably different space from the debates which delights Arabella.

Unlike Arabella Glanville is not concerned with the intrusion of women upon a 'public' stage where that activity is thought of in terms of an historic or political intervention. His is the world of polite codes and sublimated sexualities, the kind of

¹ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 148.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 26-30.

³ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 148. See also notes, p. 400. All textual variants are given on pages 385-87 of this edition.

public which is formed by admission into theatres, galleries and to the 'public' assemblies for pleasure. Glanville envisions a public that is based on commercialized leisure and enjoyed by individualized family groups; the kind of society, in short, into which Evelina and the Mirvans hurry themselves on their arrival in London in Fanny Burney's novel.¹ It is a world of reciprocal gazes in which each participant desires eminence in the field of social and sexual display, and as such a realm wholly removed from the ambitious publicity sought by the *Female Quixote's* deluded heroine. For while Arabella dreams of a world in which everyone looks at her, Glanville thinks only of a place in which everyone one looks at everyone else. Glanville's vision of society is therefore both modern and conventional, and is based, for the most part, on accepted codes of polite conduct. Most noticeably Glanville believes that the social sphere is the place in which gallant flirtation is not only the accepted norm, but the sole interest of women's lives:

Custom, Lady *Bella*, said *Glanville*, smiling, is wholly on my Side; for the Ladies are so far from being displeas'd at the Addresses of their Lovers, that their chieftest Care is to gain them, and their greatest Triumph to hear them talk of their Passion; So, Madam, I hope you'll allow that Argument has no Force.²

Arabella conversely believes, that women can and ought to have serious public roles, and this is the foundation of her quixoticism. Women should, according to Arabella, act to support dignified public characters: as warriors, princesses, queens, and as distant, but adored beauties. It is an ideal with which Glanville's idle flirtations can have little in

¹ Fanny Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Woman's Entrance into the World*, ed. and intro. by Edward A. Bloom, with the assist. of Lillian D. Bloom, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 25-29.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 44.

common.

Notwithstanding the principled solicitations of the Countess who mediates between the worlds of Arabella and Glanville, Arabella continues to maintain until the very last moment, that it is absolutely necessary that she should make a great 'Noise and Bustle', a commotion in the world that is concerned not with gaining lovers and estates - the probable extent of the Gunnings's ambition - but with gaining dominion in the 'Empire of Love'.¹ Her sense of how important it might be for women to have active lives is made clear when she states, quite unequivocally, that:

I believe there are few young Ladies in the World, who have any pretensions to Beauty, that have not given rise to a great many Adventures; and some of them haply very fatal.²

Arabella may bewail the depredations wrought by her looks, yet she cannot conceive of a worthwhile existence without attention to her 'Glory'.³ Furthermore she is upset, not to say furious, when she finds her maid Lucy is unable to furnish her with an exciting history.⁴ Catherine A. Craft, reflecting on Arabella's repeated assertion of women's historical involvement, comments that her 'retellings of historical events put women at the centre and offer them more important roles than they actually had....they are active,

¹ For an account of the significance of this, and other assertions, see Laurie Langbauer, 'Romance Revised: Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*' in *Novel*, vol. 18, (1984), pp. 44-47.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 128.

³ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 47, 175.

⁴ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 304-306, cf. pp. 121-24.

they have adventures'.¹ Arabella's aim throughout the novel is to replicate that heroism, and to possess or to inhabit the discourse which most befits her exalted status; that of Romance. This is an opinion which, as the Countess makes clear, is located, at best, in a partial view of past societies.

The Word Adventures carries in it so free and licentious a Sound in the Apprehensions of People at this period of Time, that it can hardly with Propriety be apply'd to those few and natural Incidents which compose the History of a Woman of Honour....Custom, said the Countess smiling, changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now.²

In former ages there may indeed have been the expectation or requirement for Adventures, but today a woman's adventurous history implies an 'Imputation on her Chastity'. Arabella, however, persists in the belief that women of consequence have adventures. It is for this reason that she is so easily imposed upon by the 'Princess of Gaul', a woman for whom she affects the highest admiration. Her estimation is based, not only upon the 'quality' of her person and rank, but upon the princess's conformity to the rigors of romance heroics.³

Whatever its faults, romance fiction provides Arabella with an effective discourse in which to articulate her 'Entrance into the World', as well as her subsequent conduct. Unlike the hesitant, blushing Evelina, who is forced to appeal for a conduct book which will tell her how to behave, Arabella is both confident of her own conduct and

¹ Catherine A. Craft, 'Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's *Fair Vow-Breaker*, Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*, and Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*' in *Modern Literary Review*, vol. 86, (1991), p. 833.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 327-28.

³ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 343-49.

dismissive of the real follies of others.¹ Arabella's reading, though misguided, turns out, ironically, to have been a much better education for the social world than the moral strictures handed down to Evelina by Mr. Villars. This fact is the source of the ambiguity of the novel, for while Arabella is clearly deluded, she is neither vicious nor shallow, and her errors are those of naivete and ignorance, never affectation or vice. This is an appraisal not readily given to those around her in either Bath or London; witness the immoral Miss Groves and the witless Mr. Tinsel. It is also a fact she will later use to defend her favourite reading, claiming that romances, 'give us an Idea of a better Race of Beings than now inhabit the World'.² The separation between modern depravity and Arabella's quixotic virtue is also present in Glanville's critique of the fickle 'Town Beauties', and is most readily and most repeatedly offered in the disparity between Arabella and Miss Glanville. Miss Glanville is the embodiment of polite modernity; easy in her addresses and coquettish in intention.³ Through both their discourse and their practice the two women are widely differentiated and easily distinguished. Arabella is a haughty beauty, not given to admitting favours and advances, while her cousin seeks the attention of all who would offer it. And yet each produces a species of modesty perhaps most remarkable for the forms of forwardness it introduces. In this instance, Miss Glanville is horrified by what she takes to be Arabella's insinuation that she employs a notion of 'virtue' in order to practice a more licentious lifestyle:

¹ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 83.

² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 380.

³ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 80.

Severely virtuous, Lady *Bella*! said Miss *Glanville*, reddening with Anger: Pray what do you mean by that? Have you any Reason to imagine, I would grant a favour to a Lover?

Why, if I did, Cousin, said *Arabella*, would it derogate so much from your Glory, think you, to bestow a Favour upon a Lover worthy of your Esteem, and from whom you had received a thousand Marks of a most pure and faithful Passion, and also a great Number of very singular Services?

The disagreement - or perhaps the difference - between the two women is entailed in what they take a 'Favour' to be. Miss *Glanville*, confused and angry at what she thinks *Arabella* is insinuating, cries out: 'Heaven knows, I never granted a Kiss without a great deal of Confusion'. A confession at which *Arabella* is 'excessively surprised'.¹ While Miss *Glanville* accepts kisses and makes private assignations, *Arabella* is prepared to meet men in their bedchambers, believing it her historic and public duty to do so. *Arabella* bases her claim to publicity on her sense of the preeminence of her beauty, a presence which in her terms ought to grant her: 'Empire over all [*Glanville*'s] actions'.² It is a form of command which, while its actions are publically admired, figured within the heroic discourse which pays homage to the virtue of a Beauty, can only be administered in the strictest privacy. For *Arabella* will only visit her lovers in their bedchambers. Miss *Glanville*'s social practice might also be private, but it is the intimacy of an assignation.³ Although *Arabella*'s absurdity stems from an inaccurate, or wrong, idea of the public space or behaviour, there is a persistently high valuation of what is being mocked. It is not only, as Laurie Langbauer suggests, that *Lennox* is more involved with, and appreciative of, romance fiction than she is prepared to concede, but

¹ *Lennox*, *Female Quixote*, pp. 88-89.

² *Lennox*, *Female Quixote*, p. 138.

³ *Lennox*, *Female Quixote*, pp. 90, 152.

that the image of female visibility and action which the novel represents remains attractive.¹ Beauty is retained as an important, though ambivalent, reference within discourses which describe moral or public actions undertaken by women. How each woman conducts herself, and the kinds of 'public' display they covet, is however the subject of both much attention and a great deal of uncertainty. In order to explore this hesitancy, I want to change the ground slightly and examine the issue in relation to what, for want of a better term, can be described as the moral, or sexual politics, of physical appearance in the mid-century novel.

Secret Charms and Private Attractions.

This inquiry is best served by introducing another novel by Lennox, *Sophia*, first published in 1762. Lennox's tale, a revised version of 'The History of Harriot and Sophia', which she published in the *Lady's Museum* in 1760,² and concerns the fortunes of Sophia Darnley, second daughter to an impoverished gentleman.³ Sophia's social position is vital because the issue of female display becomes more pressing when the woman in question, as in this case, lacks the forms of social distinction found in the *Female Quixote*, where Arabella is a Marquis's daughter, and Miss Glanville the child

¹ Langbauer, 'Romance Revised', pp. 31-32, 40-42; see also Lennox, *Female Quixote*, pp. 60-61.

² Lennox, *The Lady's Museum*, 2 vols, (London: Reeve, 1760-61). For an account of the text, and some speculation on its reception, see Judith Dorn, 'Reading Women Reading History: The Philosophy of the Periodical Form in Charlotte Lennox's *The Lady's Museum*' in *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historique*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1992), pp. 23-24.

³ *Sophia*, 2 vols, (London: James Fletcher, 1762), vol. I, pp. 1-2.

of a Baronet (one of Arabella's delusions is that the world is only populated with nobility and their entourage). There is something innately aristocratic in the insistence of Arabella's beauty, and the kinds of display envisaged for it. Arabella expects to be admired within a splendid public realm for which she is the focus. She does not want, still less expect, anyone else to impinge on her exalted and adored status as a queenly-Beauty. Arabella's predicament lies, of course, in her romantic world view, a curiously disarticulated discourse which reverses the conventional alignment of public and private. Her fantasy of virtuous, historic and undoubtedly public action, in its political and social sense, exists solely in an isolated private discourse; the language of the closet.¹ Arabella produces what amounts to nothing less than a private fantasy of the public. Hers is a quixotic vision wherein she is indeed the mistress of all she surveys, yet she sees almost nothing. It is the distinction between Arabella's desire for preeminence and the less conspicuous forms of display suggested by a reading of *Sophia* which establish the middle-class sensibilities I will explore in the remainder of this chapter.

At the beginning of Lennox's novel, it is the Darnley family's good fortune, though it rarely appears as such, to be visited by Sir Charles Stanley, a wealthy and fashionable young man. Sir Charles, in common with others of his age and status, 'lives in a constant dissimulation with one part of his species...subduing chastity and ensnaring innocence'.² It is wholly consistent with his character, therefore, that he should find

¹ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 147. For an account of the problematic status of women's discourse, see Leland E. Warren, 'Of the Conversation of Women: *The Female Quixote* and the Dream of Perfection' in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 11, (1982), pp. 367-80.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 20.

Sophia's beautiful older sister, Harriot, the ideal target for his scurrilous intentions. Harriot's situation is precarious, for while 'beauty soon procured her a great number of lovers; her poverty made their approaches easy'.¹ Harriot's predicament is not one which Sophia shares, and not only because she is the younger daughter. For physical appearance separates the two women more firmly than age or expectation: as Harriot is beautiful, so Sophia 'wanted in equal degree those personal attractions, which...constituted the whole of female perfection'. Quite whether this is entirely true becomes an increasingly pressing issue as the passage proceeds:

Mere common judges, however, allowed her person to be agreeable; people of discernment and taste pronounced her something more. There was diffused through the whole person of Sophia a certain secret charm, a natural grace which cannot be defined; she was not indeed as beautiful as her sister, but she was more attractive....Harriot's charms produced at the first sight all the effect they were capable of; a second look of Sophia was more dangerous than the first, for grace is seldomer found in the face than the manners; and, as our manners is formed every moment, a new surprise is perpetually creating. A woman can be beautiful but one way, she can be graceful a thousand.²

What structures the plot in *Sophia* is the increasing ensnarement of Sir Charles in these 'more dangerous' charms. There is, of course, many an obstacle between the emergence of desire and the successful realization of his passion, not least of which is the consideration of class difference and power, of which Sophia is to remain painfully aware.³ One of the most appealing attributes of the novel is the extent to which it dramatises the class-inflected nature of courtship. It is not only being beautiful, as the

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 19.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 2-4.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, pp. 12-13.

sign of the sexual, which makes women vulnerable to the solicitations of men like Sir Charles Stanley, but disparity of fortune.¹

The narrative or moral problem of *Sophia* rests on the difficulty of finding an effective means of representing the heroine so that her attractions can be considered virtuous: on how Sophia might function as a sexual subject. The opening pages makes it clear that Sophia exists for a particular kind of gaze, and a distinct form of pleasure, which is removed from the 'admiration' courted and received by Harriot. That Sophia's presence may be more insinuating, and hence more dangerous to men, is soon evinced when Sir Charles comes to court Harriot, but finds himself struck with the appearance of Sophia. His visual thrill leaves him awed by her reserve, a 'dignity which derived from innate virtue'. Disconcerted by the earnestness of his gaze, Sophia seeks to divert him by opening a conversation:

Then it was, that without designing it, she displayed her whole power of charming: that flow of wit which was natural to her, the elegant propriety of her language, the delicacy of her sentiments, the animated look which gave them new force, and sent them directly to the heart, and the moving grace of the most harmonious voice in the world, were attractions which, though generally lost on fools, seldom fail of the effect on the heart of a man of sense.²

With the tableau of these charms unfolded, 'Sir Charles was wrapt in wonder and delight'. Sophia is greatly embarrassed by the insistence of his gaze, and flees the room on 'pretence of business'.³ The incident appears to offer something close to a scene of seduction through sociability, and may be an instance of the ambiguous social space

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol I, pp. 65-67, 92-93.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 25-26.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 28.

defined by 'conversation' in its common eighteenth-century usage, where it might mean 'sex', as much as 'talk'. Sophia's talking, which combines her melodious voice and fine manners, delights and entrances Sir Charles. Sophia has what is later to be defined as a 'bewitching sweetness'.¹

Once again the opposition with a woman less clearly virtuous than herself, in this case Harriot, aids the process of moral identification, as chapter headings make clear: *Sophia continues to act Romantically, and Harriot like a Woman who knows the World.*² It is, however, in the scenes with Dolly Lawson, which occupy almost half the first volume, that this debate emerges most clearly. Dolly is the daughter of a country curate of slender means, and has, unlike the Darnley sisters, received a proper and sensible education. The schooling she received from her mother was at once intelligent, economic and polite, as a result it is entirely 'suitable to...humble fortunes'.³ Prudence of education cannot repress, however, the emergence of her sexuality; describing the first sight of her lover, William, Dolly recalls, 'I felt my face glow like fire'.⁴ As she recounts the scene her passion becomes evident:

"I dreaded meeting him, and trembled so when I came into church, that I was obliged to take hold of Fanny to keep me from falling. She soon discovered him, and pulled me in order to make me look up".⁵

The unaffected language provides Dolly with the guise of artless, if incautious,

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 138.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, p. 164.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 142.

⁴ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 160.

⁵ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 165-66.

innocence, and thus with a character which allows her to desire. Sophia, who is no 'Rural Beauty', but rather a modest and genteel urban lady, lacks access to such simple, unmeditated virtue. Hers is a more delicate constitution and her sense of propriety more rigid. She cannot, and will not, countenance a display of sexual feeling, even to herself, and this is a point which the narrator's moralising enforces: 'A young maid has passed over the first bounds of reservedness, who allows herself to think she in love'.¹ The position represents a recurrent dilemma about female conduct, as Harth notes perhaps too hastily: 'For woman at, least, there was something immoral about marrying for love. The conduct books advised them to learn to love their husbands once married'.² The situation was more ambivalent than Harth suggests, for it is not love *per se* that is disavowed, but rather certain forms of desire. Arabella's character in the *Female Quixote* articulated something not entirely dissimilar to Sophia's half-expressed, half-repressed desire; 'Our charming Heroine, ignorant till now of the true State of her Heart, was surpriz'd to find it assaulted at once by all the Passions which attend disappointed Love'.³ Arabella, though, is preoccupied by the nicety of romantic protocol, and attempts to frame her desire within the ponderous pronouncement that, 'she did not hate him', while Sophia's inability to figure her own longing is the most striking feature of her presentation.⁴

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, p. 35.

² Harth, 'The Virtue of Love', p. 124.

³ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 349.

⁴ For a contrast between Arabella's and Sophia's Characters, see Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 131-32; and *Female Quixote*, pp. 348-50.

Sophia's conduct could not be more dissimilar to Arabella's, and is structured in a crucial relation to Dolly, as well has to Harriot's behaviour. Patricia Meyer Spacks has observed that 'Many women novelists chose to dramatize the absolute separation of virtue and vice by evoking a pair of sisters, one, good in every respect; the other utterly reprehensible'.¹ However, it seems to me that Dolly provides an additional or 'third' term necessary to the ideological labour of the narrative. For much of their time together Sophia and Dolly engage in conversations on the nature of Dolly's passion:

Sophia, from the state of her own mind, was but too much disposed to sympathise with the love sick Dolly: these softening conversations were ill calculated to banish from her remembrance the first object of her innocent affections; and who, with all his faults she still loved.²

Although, as Spacks argues, Sophia reprimands Dolly for the ardour with which she speaks of William, the text of her '*Simple Story*' provides the ground upon which Sophia can exercise her more appropriate discourse, one which takes the form of a sympathetic call to reason.³ Dolly's story provides an example of how desire may be regulated rather than banished; and the claims of restraint and passion held in balance.⁴ Harriot's language and manner is too extreme for this to occur. Although she is important in providing Sophia with a vocabulary for defining if not experiencing the

¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Sisters' in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski eds., *Fetter'd or Free: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), p. 137.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol I, p. 180.

³ Spacks, 'Sisters', p. 142; Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 155-63.

⁴ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 179-82.

sexual, her role is to make plain what Sophia is not, and not what she is or wants.¹ Significantly Sophia's chaste discourse on the claims of obedience and love has an apparently levelling influence. The conversations between the two young women are taken to indicate that class distinctions - between poor rustic Dolly and genteel Sophia - can be held in abeyance when the subject between them is virtuous.² Their talk creates a space, because they are both moral and romantic, in which women can represent their desires at least to one another.

There is an important added dimension to Dolly's story, however: her desire for William, simple though it is, exists in a context of prohibition and denial. For reasons connected with the unwarranted aspirations of William's wealthy aunt, Mrs Gibbon, the pair are forbidden each other's company.³ Sophia, having already advised constraint, argues for obedience: "I would have you keep your passion subject to your reason, so as to make it not too difficult for you to obey".⁴ Fortunately Dolly's reason is not obliged to undergo too severe a test, because Sophia is able to persuade Mrs Gibbon that there is a wealth beyond riches.⁵ Sophia's own path to happiness is more convoluted, because her concern with her chastity, and her genteel poverty, makes it almost impossible for her to accept Sir Charles's addresses. Even when he has reformed, she needs chiding, almost commanding to abandon a virtue which is increasingly seen as

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 102-104.

² Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 152-4.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 211-15.

⁴ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 208-209.

⁵ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, pp. 60-63.

obstinately heroic. That her friends are forced to these expedients suggests that there are moments at which it is possible to be both virtuous and desiring.¹

At its close, *Sophia* has, I believe, established a means of representing virtuous desire. Indeed Spack's assertion that the text is heavily reliant on the narrative of Harriot's transgression and eventual fall is overly harsh and rather inaccurate.² The novel's moral agenda requires a corresponding change in the activities of Sir Charles. Questioned by the good Mr. Herbert (who serves as a father to Sophia) as to the nature of his passion, Sir Charles modestly replies that:

'You attribute to me a virtue, which in this case, I cannot be said to possess; and had my passion for Sophia been founded only on the charms of her person, I might probably ere now have become a mere fashionable husband; but her virtue and wit supply her with graces ever varied, and ever new. The steadiness of my affection for her', pursued he smiling, 'is but a constant inconstancy' which attaches me successively to one or other of those shining qualities of which her charming mind is an inexhaustible source'.³

His remark, which concludes the novel, signals the scale of his reformation. Sir Charles is no longer a rakish young man; whereas his gaze formerly sought the splendours of great beauty, he is now contented with the nice distinctions and pretty plays of Sophia's mobile features. The animation of such facial expressions, as the opening description had made clear, is owing to the pleasing function of good manners, themselves ever changing. Sir Charles seems to have fallen for manners over and above the matter of great beauty. His delight now is in the contemplation of a truly domestic virtue.⁴ The

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, pp. 30-31, 213-14, 220-21.

² Spacks, 'Sisters', pp. 141-43.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, pp. 236-37.

⁴ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, p. 205.

expression of pleasing, undeniably polite manners that at once engage the viewer and yet to do so with irreproachable chastity represent the forms of a middle class morality. So much so, that it must appear the Sophia has acquired the 'Art of being Pretty'.

It is important, however, to reiterate the fact that Sophia has acquired her charms through the strict maintenance of a private identity. Sophia's clarity of mind and conventional, if ardent, virtue prevented the kinds of confusion to which Arabella was prone. In particular, throughout *Sophia*, the heroine's rather unconventional beauty appeared more uniquely her own. Unlike Harriot's much admired face, Sophia's charms appear to be specifically located in her particular presence, rather than in the judgement of the dissipated multitude. Sophia's presence, determined by her domestic living and particular virtues is not caught in that play of glances which seems to exhaust the identity of her sister. Harriot, like Miss Glanville and all other 'town beauties', is obliged to restage herself on each and every public appearance. To change one's face and attire so frequently causes her to relinquish any claim to particular identity, or appearance. It is significant in this context that 'dissipation' is taken to be the primary characteristic of a Beauty; a view supported by Walpole's sense of the fate meted out to a 'standard beauty'. This discourse is comparable with Pope's in *Epistle to a Lady*; Beauties, if not all women, have no characters at all.¹ To find a woman novelist

¹ Account of the beautiful woman, or 'Beauty' which viewed her as a dissipated and luxuriant wastrel with no identity beyond that of fashion was a common one in the eighteenth century. See, for example, Anon, *Beauty and Proportion. A Poem* (London; T. Astley, 1735); Anon., *Female Taste: A Satire in Two Epistles inscribed to a modern polite lady*, (London: S. Crowder & H. Woodgate, 1755); Anon., 'Soliloquy of a Beauty in the Country' in *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands*, 6 vols, (London: J. Dodsley, 1770), vol. II, pp. 16-18; and, Richard Savage, 'The Employment of Beauty', in *The Poetical Works of Richard Savage. With a Life of the Author by Dr. Johnson*, Cooke's ed., (London: C. Cooke, 1801), pp. 186-88.

apparently rehearsing what is so evidently a misogynistic narrative is perhaps unpleasant, but ought not to come as a particular surprise. It represents instead the power of the discourse on women's beauty as a moralistic account of women's conduct. Any intervention into this context will always struggle to find any available counter-discourse. In its middle-class form this discourse laid particular stress on the propagation of a unique, and uniquely private identity. This is achieved in *Sophia* by making the heroine's conventional, if ardent virtue, the distinctive attribute of her reserved and domestic character.¹ This connection is an important indicator of the extent to which Lennox's fiction is appropriable to a bourgeois sense of the individual, in which great stress will be placed upon the observance of individual distinction.

I will explore this latter point towards the end of this chapter, but I want to concentrate for the moment, on the ambiguous nature of the opposition between public beauty and private plainness. For, there is, as Spacks observes, an 'ambivalence about physical appearance - beauty both does and does not matter, since "graces" matter more' and this reverberates throughout the text of *Sophia*.² Both grace and beauty exist visually - are indeed 'seen' by Sir Charles, Mr. Herbert and Mr. Lawson - an act of consumption that troubles the opposition between the retiring aspect of grace and the forward beauties of Harriot and Miss Glanville.³ This would seem to threaten the pious individuation staged by Sophia's self-characterisation. The admiring glance whether it seeks virtue or beauty realigns the person so viewed as an object of *public scrutiny* - this

¹ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. II, pp. 187-91, 206-208, 235-37.

² Spacks, 'Sisters', p. 138.

³ Lennox, *Sophia*, vol. I, pp. 38, 135, 138, 224, and Vol. II, pp. 28-30, 191.

is what after all happens in *Crito*. This is particularly unpleasant for Sophia as she invests so much of her virtue in preventing any public appearance. With virtue and privacy slipping so easily into beauty and publicity, the position of a moral woman is precarious.

In *Agreeable Ugliness*, first published in 1754, Sarah Scott focuses insistently upon this dilemma, intensifying the relationship further by making her narrator's ugliness an issue of physical resemblance to, and moral association with, her father (a figure only occasionally present in either *Female Quixote* or *Sophia*). The identity of the heroine is ambivalently formed as a result. The relation of her ugliness to the ordinary claims of nativity, and the displaced - and displacing - assertion of resemblance, complicates and destabilises the formation of identity in the processes of recognition, both social and sexual. The result is a species of mimicry, a debilitating play of being like, and not like; the same, but different.¹ I want to explore *Agreeable Ugliness* at some length, as it is a work which is highly problematic in its representation both of women and of morality. Explaining these ambivalent moments of social conduct will, I feel, reveal the complexities of moral codes on physical appearance in the 1750s.

The Physiognomy of Obedience.

Given the unfamiliarity of Scott's work it will be necessary to provide a brief account of the plot. The narrative of *Agreeable Ugliness*, told in the first person, details the life of the daughter of Monsieur de Villiers. The unnamed narrator - a curiously

¹ I take the term 'mimicry', and my sense of its complexity, from the work of Homi Bhabha, see his *The Location of Culture*, pp. 85-92.

blank space, given the nature of the novel - recounts the story of her life and loves from the time of her conception, to the final and peaceful reward offered to her virtue in the form of an amiable and companionable marriage. The tale begins with the courting and marriage of Monsieur and Madame de Villiers. Monsieur is an earnest worthy man, who lives in sober and virtuous retirement well within the confines of his modest income. Monsieur Villiers's class position is somewhat ambiguous; although of genteel stock he is clearly no aristocrat. This proximity, and yet distance from the nobility, seems to structure his behaviour throughout the novel; he is deferential to the aristocratic characters, and yet represents his own bourgeois version of morality.

His chosen mate conversely is a giddy, selfish and ambitious woman, but, and this is decisive, she is beautiful; a quality which causes the otherwise sober Villiers first to woo and then to marry her.¹ Her beauty gives her power, as it grants her and not her husband governance in the family. The hierarchy of the family is inverted, and beauty holds sway over and against paternal authority. This is most apparent when their first daughter is born. The child, known throughout the novel as the 'Fair Villiers', is considered a great beauty, an appearance which immediately claims her mother's love. Finding an ally in her beautiful daughter, Madam Villiers indulges her every whim, spoiling both herself and her daughter in the process. In time the Fair Villiers becomes, like her mother, vain, shallow and flirtatious.² In the period following the birth of the Fair Villiers, her mother's caprices induce a pervasive melancholy in the Villiers's

¹ Sarah Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness; or the Triumph of the Graces. Exemplified in the Real Life and Fortunes of a Young Lady of Distinction*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1754), pp. 7-9.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 15, 18-19.

house. It is during this period that the narrator is conceived:

I suppose it was in some Moment of Vexation, when Mr *de Villiers's* Mind was Prey to gloomy Disquiet, that he took it into his Head to beget me. I confess I never had the Air of a Child of Love, for tho' the Repetition is mortifying, I must once more own that a Year after the Birth of my elder Sister, I entered the World in native Ugliness.¹

That the loveless nature of the Villiers's marriage produces an apparently disfigured child is not perhaps unique; *Tristram Shandy* most obviously springs to mind as another example of a blighted conception.² While this is important, what is most striking is that the narrator's face is written of as something peculiar to her. It is indeed 'native' to her: it is the face with which she was born, and also the sign of the place in which she resides, her father's house. So while her face is distinctly her face, it is connected closely to the cast of her father's mind, and to his home.

The narrator's physical appearance is a good deal more elusive than her account of her 'ugly' resemblance to her father suggests, and from the infrequent descriptions she gives of herself, the impression is made more equivocal:

My Sister was fair, I was very brown. She was a Picture of my Mother with every Beauty heightened, I an ugly Resemblance of my Father. She had the Superiority in Beauty, I had the Advantage over her in Shape. Her Eyes were of a dark blue, large, and finely formed, but without Fire or Expression, in short they were fine Eyes without Meaning; mine were black, a little too much sunk, tolerably large of very uncommon Vivacity, and seemed to indicate more Sense than perhaps I really had.

The narrator continues in much the same vein throughout the passage noting that, while 'my Sister's Nose was well-shaped, but rather long; mine was the best feature in my

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 12-13

² The issue receives some coverage in Arthur H. Cash, 'The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr Burton' in Paul-Gabriel Bouce ed., *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 199-224.

Face'. The effect is to suggest a curious balance so that although 'my Sister's skin was as white as possible, it was neither so smooth or as soft as mine'.¹ As a description of an ugly woman this is rather flattering, particularly as she is being compared to her supposedly beautiful sister. The manner of the description is responsible for this effect. By isolating the features of her sister's face she effectively makes them ugly. Conventionally speaking a beautiful face is one which admits of no division, no break in its complacent unity. Here that perfection is consciously disassembled. Furthermore the Fair Villier's face, once broken down to its component parts of eyes, skin, nose and teeth lacks access to any other form of coherence. Her features though placid and well-proportioned are not animated by any higher excellence; for the Fair Villiers possesses neither a fine understanding nor her sister's rectitude. Beautiful though she is, the Fair Villiers is an implicitly shallow creature. Her charms are lifeless and unthinking, while the narrator is, by contrast, lively and intelligent. The consequences of such a difference of appearance are, however, less flattering, as without a beautiful face the narrator is debarred from all but a secluded life. The obvious moral separation undertaken in this passage is complicated by the working of resemblance and of similarity: the Fair Villiers is 'the picture of my Mother; while she is 'an ugly Resemblance of my Father'.

The strength of the investment in physiognomy is emphasized when the narrator, as she concludes the description of herself and her sister, states that she has 'In drawing my Sister's picture, and my own, without Design, given a sketch of the life I lived at Villiers'.² Physiognomy is therefore indicative of the life one might be expecting, or

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 19-20.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 21.

he was well qualified to give me; and while Madame *de Villiers* had no other Employment than the pursuit of Pleasure, he made it both his Pleasure, and his Duty, to instruct me in all the useful knowledge which he possessed.¹

By returning to the fact of her absent beauty, her father hopes to instil in her the impossibility of transgression; to suggest that even if she sought to act improperly, she lacks the wherewithal to do so. The place of her ugliness is central to the morality visited upon her by her father's calculated education. It is a remonstrance in the fullest sense of the word, keeping her always in the sphere of obedient ugliness. Villiers's moral sense relies on a profoundly bourgeois sense of the proper place of women, and the necessity of their domesticity. Though he accepts her as a consolatory presence Villiers never permits her to exist beyond his authority or without his private sphere.

Significantly the monstrosity of the narrator is the only thing the Villiers agree on; it is the name given to her by her mother, and an act of dismissal explicitly supported by her father's teaching. Secured by custom, and a shared nomenclature, the notion of her ugliness is crucial to the way in which narrator forms her self image, as a distinctive non-presence.² It is an identity that is only partially individuated, becoming almost a non-identity, a mere resemblance. The terms on which she lacks 'identity' - outside of the doubly marked face. - will emerge more fully as my account proceeds. However, I want to be clear about what I have in mind. When the narrator writes about being 'reduced to a kind of non-existence', as she does in the opening passages of the novel,

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 14.

² It is worth noting in this context the important etymological link that exists between 'monster' and 'display'. Prior to the eighteenth century the word monster, when used as a verb, meant to display, to make conspicuous; as in demonstration. See *OED* for further explication of this theme.

she is recording a societal disregard for women who do not function visually. A sense of this is articulated by Madame Villiers, who, when she looks upon her languishing daughter, reflects that: "'The Girl is in a Manner dead already; alas! Death will be a Blessing to her, what could that Thing do in the World!'"¹ Failing to signify in the World - that is to say, in the social and public world of assemblies and marriages - is, by Madame Villiers's account, to face extinction, so that bodily death comes to lack any meaning. Living privately on this version of things is not living at all. Her view however, does not go unchallenged. Unlike Lennox's Arabella, Scott's narrator is not keen to make a 'Noise' in the great world, which on the evidence of her mother's conduct she knows to be ruinously dissipated. The social world - the realm of beauty and the visual - is rejected in favour of companionable obscurity, the native place of the ugly. This is the moral topos of the novel: the opposition between ugly seclusion and publically gazed upon beauty.

In terms of the emerging discourse on female sexuality what seems to be at issue is the degree to which women, and particularly unmarried daughters, should have identities constructed beyond the confines of the paternal home. Any movement beyond the domestic sphere of the Villier's paternal and private authority can therefore only be undertaken with a great deal of anxiety. However, the two terrains - public and private - are increasingly unstable as the text develops and become visibly confused. As the plot evolves the narrator becomes engaged in a series of rearguard actions designed to preserve and restate her seclusion and ugliness. It marks a sense of herself which is placed under threat by the men in the novel who, because they form a social body,

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 25.

reconstitute her position in society. They look at her, either from attraction and admiration, and in so doing begin to give the impression that she is less than entirely ugly, propelling her towards the identity she seeks to resist: that of a beautiful woman.

The problem is already present in the comparison the narrator makes between herself and the Fair Villiers. However, the first 'public' appearance which the narrator makes is on her arrival at Beaumont Castle, as guest of the Marchioness. It is an event which she regards as significant:

After having lived almost unseen till I was more than fourteen Years old, here I am at last entered into the World, and in a Situation to make myself known.¹

At a stroke she begins a more public form of living, engaging upon a new stage of her life, one in which she can become 'known'. Initially the Marchioness had selected the Fair Villiers as the long-term guest at the castle, a situation which gave her an opportunity for social elevation, a status which both mother and daughter were keen to accept. However, as the narrator confirms, the elder sister had 'more Coquetry and Art than would have expected in so young a Girl'.² What follows is predictable enough; flattered by the caresses and applause of the castle's elevated society the Fair Villiers hatches plans marital and otherwise which contradict the previously laid designs of the Beaumonts and their aristocratic friends.³ Astonished by her conduct, the Beaumonts dispose of their now unwanted guest. In deference to the honourable Monsieur Villiers, however, they accept instead her ugly younger sister. True to form the narrator's conduct

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 54, 57.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 23.

³ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 31-50.

is exemplary, and she soon finds herself possessed of new talents:

I had a good Voice, of which I had made but little Use, not knowing that it was fine; it was only by the Praises which the Marchioness and her Daughter gave it, that I found it had naturally all the Graces of Manner, which are so difficult to acquire by Art and Care.¹

The deferential pattern of the narrator's prose is by now familiar. But there is also a balance struck between the narrator's cultural talents, her singing, taken together with her conversation, and the naturalness with which she possesses them. She acquires no new talents, and gains no more 'Art' by entering a broader social circle, but instead the society of the castle provides the occasion at which her innate gifts can be brought to the fore.

The moral difference between sisters is encapsulated in the distinction between beauty and singing. This is because throughout *Agreeable Ugliness* beauty cannot be represented outside of the deceptions of coquetry, and a shameless craving for power and publicity. Beauty implies not only the capricious fancies of young women, but also the disruptive potential of women when they refuse to conform to the authority of fathers and husbands. The Fair Villiers, along with her mother, in mobilizing her looks and her arts transgresses the proprieties of polite society, which in the version of them provided by *Agreeable Ugliness* are conceived around the proper union of finances and families, and, most problematically the accommodation of women outside the paternal home. In this debate the opinions and designs of fathers are paramount.² Capricious

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 57.

² The stricture applies, if not equally, to sons as well as to daughters: both the Marquis de Beaumont and the Count de St Furcy reprimand their respective sons for disobedience relating to marriage, pp. 44-45, 84-85, 239-41.

headstrong young women, eager to be seen and to succeed in their own curious schemes, represent a force to be disavowed as tricky and unwelcome.¹ The narrator's singing is different in almost every respect, especially since it is expressive without being demonstrative. It is an innate gift, freed from the taints of manufacture or design. This is consistent with the fact that by this point in the century there existed a sexual-sentimental discourse on music, which represented singing and musicianship as a polite accomplishment. This is an activity moreover which could render a young woman virtuously alluring.² Singing, in these terms, is an easy and natural expression of chaste passion. Beauty, conversely, requires artifice and a stock of the most superficial knowledge if it is to have its full effect.³

As if to emphasize the virtue of singing against the folly of beauty it is the narrator who acquires (not very willingly, it must be said) a husband during her stay at Beaumont castle, and it is through her singing that this alliance is accomplished. More importantly perhaps, it is the singing, as a display of pleasing femininity, which makes possible the subsequent developments of the plot. For while it is the device which brings the narrator to the notice of her future husbands, it is also the origin of the greatest conflict which the narrative represents; that between obedience and desire. It is when the narrator sings a particularly affecting *aria* that her first husband, Dorigny, is moved,

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 49-53.

² An example of this can be found in Scott's own work, for example, *A Description of Millennium Hall*, intro. Jane Spencer, (London: Virago, 1986; Virago Modern Classics, 214), pp. 10-11. For a fuller account of this development see Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 28-30.

³ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 18, 20-21.

like the rest of the company, to an emotional pitch which soon leads to desire. For Dorigny, the real beauties of singing are sufficient for him to seal a previously arranged contract with the narrator's father for marriage.¹ Significantly Dorigny is hardly the most eligible of bachelors. Though he is described as 'handsome', he is far from captivating. He is much older than her, and running to fat; he is, in short, no great beauty himself. Confiding her own thoughts to paper the narrator reveals her opinion of his person: 'I see it is impossible that I should like it'.² It is this apparent resurgence of physical evaluation which Elizabeth Bergen Brophy finds so curious.³ However, the narrator is keen to prove that obedience and moral rectitude will triumph over personal taste, and suggests that her "'Dislike which, tho' unjust, I fear, invincible, is all that I can oppose to your Will, if I was not determined to submit entirely to it'".⁴

Gratifyingly, the story rapidly becomes more complex. The act of singing in the opera does more than reduce the assembled company to tears. Most significantly, the performance awakens the desires of the narrator herself. The young Count de St Furcy, no less affected than Dorigny, is the object and cause of her longing. So much so that the narrator later confesses to a 'kind of Emotion...of which I had hitherto lived ignorant'.⁵ The love is reciprocated as the young Count is moved, along with Dorigny,

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 60, 69-70.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 62-63, 70.

³ Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women's Lives and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, (Tampa: South Florida University Press, 1991), p. 17.

⁴ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 70-71.

⁵ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 73-74.

to exclaim his pleasure.¹ It is not, however, a bliss-filled moment. The emergence of desire coincides with mounting pressure from her father to marry Dorigny. Despite reassuring her father that she will 'submit entirely' to his commands, the narrator soon discovers that 'I could not drive the young Count *de St Furcy* from my Thoughts, not withstanding my Endeavour, he was continually present to my Imagination, and appeared there with all the Charms, which Nature had lavished on him.' Confusion and self-reproach soon follow:

Nothing but a very strict Examination of myself could have prevented my feeling very strong Apprehensions from the State of my Heart. I called to mind the Plainness of my Person; I appropriated to myself all the Mortifications which generally attend it. I summoned to my Assistance both the Humility this should inspire and the Pride with which I was born.²

At once chiding herself for the audacity of her affection, and yet bleakly resigned to the fact that she can never be the 'Object of anyone's Love' or 'inspire the least tender emotion' the narrator reminds herself of her domestic 'place', and marks her resistance to the gaze that both socialises and sexualises.³ Significantly, the narrator has used a similar argument when trying to persuade her father that it is inconceivable that Dorigny could harbour a passion for her. She is not, she says, formed (either physically, or emotionally) for marriage.⁴ In this instance, as in others, the remonstrance constitutes an attempted return to proper monstrosity.

The point seems to contradict her earlier assertion concerning life at the castle, that

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 67-69.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 73.

³ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 73-75.

⁴ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 62-63, 67-68.

'if I was to add to these little Details which I thought necessary to make my Situation the better known that everyone seemed to have forgot I was ugly'.¹ Her appearance, even when singing - despite her prudence - transforms her status, a transformation which conflates the virtue of singing with the allure of beauty.² She has, even in Beaumont castle, become public, 'known', and hence beautiful. With the narrator exclaiming that at the castle, 'Fine Gentlemen paid me Court and endeavoured to please me', her marriage to Dorigny seems surprising.³ However, it marks an inclination to return to a more intimate form of living. The relative ugliness of the betrothed pair is significant, indeed it is the keynote of the narrator's marriage. True, the narrator marries Dorigny with what she describes as the 'Melancholy of a Victim'. Yet he is not wholly bereft of virtues or pleasing attributes, for he is both polite and gentle, and so that by the time of the marriage, 'I began to think I might be happy with him'.⁴ Even so, to foresee the possibility of being 'happy' on these terms is to envisage, not a life of fulfilled sexual desire, but a companionable form of living. This is precisely the point; the narrator's value, and that of her marriage relies upon this modesty of aim. Her life, as she states earlier, is not one destined for great pleasure or felicity:

As for Love, I am neither formed to give it, nor to render it lasting; and how, without Love; can a Husband have for me those Attentions, which when mutual, alone constitute the Happiness of a married Life.⁵

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 58-59.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 69-70.

³ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 59.

⁴ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 94, 64, 97.

⁵ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 62-63.

This is of course just where the youthful narrator is wrong. Indeed, her ever present father repeatedly counsels that it is disposition, and not beauty, which is the key to a happy union. It is not clear from the narrative whether Monsieur Villiers is entirely accurate, however. What seems more probable is that without a degree of ugliness a good character is highly unlikely, even impossible. This is because as far as his daughters and his wife are concerned to be beautiful is to deny the possibility of ever being virtuous; being beautiful is being not *like* one's father.

In the context of her marriage the image of ugliness again emerges as a consolation, though, with a cast beyond the largely domestic setting represented by the father's instruction. It is because she is not beautiful that she can expect a comfortable marriage. This emphatic faith in the virtue of not being beautiful is first made within the opening passages of the novel. The narrator stakes a claim to a pre-eminence in honesty when she asserts that, 'when a woman confesses her own ugliness, we may believe her sincere'. The conjunction of being truthful with being ugly is striking, particularly when the duplicity of the mother and sister is considered. Yet it is beauty which is most likely to arouse 'public curiosity', and this is because a 'Handsome Woman is, by her Beauty, placed in a position more distinguished, and in a more conspicuous Light in the world than a Dutchess'. In comparison to be ugly, as I have said, is to be 'reduced to a kind of Non-existence'.¹ It is statements such as the last which have no doubt aided the process whereby *Agreeable Ugliness* might appear to be an attack on the judgement of women's physical form. Despite this lack of visual significance, or rather because of it, ugliness is consolatory because it is sociable. Ugliness, because it has no pretence to

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 5, 1, 3, 6.

authority, produces a temper at once mild and aimiable; and these are virtues 'wherein Beauty is often deficient'.¹ The misfortune of ugliness - that it fails to signify - is then balanced, by the fact that it appears ideal for mixed sex gatherings, and this is why it is consoling.

Furthermore, while exciting 'public curiosity' may be enviable it is by no means virtuous. It is in fact scandalous. I have already described the effects of the Fair Villiers's brinkmanship at Beaumont Castle, I want now to focus on the later role of Madame Villiers. On her arrival in Paris mid-way through the novel, Madame readily enters into a fashionably dissipated life. She still enjoys a good romp at the shockingly inappropriate age of 43. More pertinently she has not given up the desire for 'Admiration'. Her presence at Parisian assemblies, together with the Fair Villiers, is sufficient to draw 'the Eyes of all present'. Appalled at such conduct the narrator is easily prevailed upon to forego any further public appearance with her mother and sister.² Their folly will not however be so easily stopped, and the pair, heedless of advice, continue to cavort across the ballrooms of the capital. Haughtily indifferent to the advice and command of husband and friends, they spurn every one of real value whom they meet and involve themselves in a series of scandals, which culminate in the Fair Villiers being brought before a Justice: arraigned in effect before the bar of middle-class morality.³ That she is accused of being a common and infected prostitute

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 5.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 110, 112.

³ For further example of Madame de Villiers vanity and folly, see Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 125-31, 145-51, 192-93.

highlights the confusion that their appearance, combined with their conduct generates. Beauty becomes a moral as well as physical property in a narrative concerned with sexual proprieties, as well as with class instability.

The two women are guilty of not knowing their proper place in society, and have assumed that a magnificence of appearance translates into a magnificence of social place. They have further presumed that the command and social preeminence granted to them by their appearance makes them exempt - as Queens and Courtiers might be exempt - from social obligations and polite decency. But they are mistaken because that connection between beauty and social elevation is rejected and devalued by the emerging culture of the commercial middle class which regarded obedience and chastity as more valuable than mere beauty. The novel clearly condemns the dangers of such indulgence, and rejects the notion that Beauty is connected to a dignified place in society. However, the error of conspicuousness in social situations is a depravity into which it is easy to fall. The issue of the narrator's singing has already made this clear. Indeed throughout the novel remaining wholly private (the only antidote the Beauty) proves to be a difficult task. For it is easy for a number of apparently private acts - such as singing - to acquire a more public significance, and have in consequence been increasingly associated with notions of sexual availability and desire.

A Proper Portrait.

Perhaps the moment when this tension or slippage between public and private identity is most apparent is the scene in which a portrait-painter is commissioned to paint the narrator. Occurring half-way through the novel, it is an event constructed

around the competing claims of feminine modesty and the need for self-display. The narrator's appraisal of events is indicative of this competition:

I do not know whether the relating of these trifling Circumstances about my Picture, will not lead my Readers to accuse me of some Self-conceit; but they will hereafter be sensible that it was necessary they should be acquainted with Part of them. I therefore enter a Caveat against every Jest that People may be inclined to make upon me, and I continue to tell the Truth, in frankly confessing, that I was very pleased to find that a Picture, which could not be drawn for a *Monster* was acknowledged by my Friends to resemble me.¹

There is in this short passage a complex working of what it is to be both private and feminine. The stakes are raised because of the way these ideas seem to pose, quite explicitly, a question of truthfulness. The problem arises because the narrator tries to maintain a clear distinction between what is public and private codes when, in the context presented by the novel, no such separation can be achieved. The 'trifling Circumstances' of the painting's production are, as the phrase suggests, a relatively intimate affair, comprising a private contract and an arrangement to sit at a friend's house. However, the demands of the novel require their publication. In a sense the narrator is caught in a trap of her own making: the publicising of events is 'necessary', otherwise the reader will lose the sense of what is being related, yet it requires a 'Caveat' and a further declaration of truth in order to make it properly acceptable. And here lies the rub: for by opening the events to a wider audience, the feared 'People', the narrator is exposed to the charges of imprudence and vanity, and accordingly only a confession will resolve the problem. By declaring her pleasure the narrator hopes to turn the unrealized distinction of public and private to her advantage. Because she

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 120.

acknowledges her private pleasure at the portrait - making it the subject of a public declaration - she dismisses the suggestion that she harbours these gratifications and the desires from which they spring in secret. She is therefore open and honest, and hence virtuous. Furthermore, the narrator has been careful to place the sensation of her pleasure, and the reader's awareness of it, at one remove from any immediate gratification arising from her own physical appearance. It is only because the resemblance between portrait and sitter is 'acknowledged by my Friends' that the narrator is satisfied. The rhetorical function of these friends is to mediate between that which is overtly public and the narrator's more immediate sphere. By making the recognition of the semblance, and the pleasure it gives, the act of a third party, the process of making it public has been reduced in danger, if not in significance.

The problems of portrayal remain, and recur throughout the novel. As Marcia Pointon has argued, having one's portrait painted was a serious business, one which necessarily involved the formation of an identity on the canvas, and its subsequent representation. Pointon goes on to argue that it is through the constructed image of the portrait that women enter the world. Pointon situates portraits of women in a further context, that of marital property and exchange between fathers and husbands.¹ The discussion of Elizabeth Gunning's portrait in the previous chapter has demonstrated how complex this process could be. The circumstances depicted by Scott operate within a comparable social and discursive environment, and they raise similar kinds of problems for the woman portrayed. In this context, it might be profitable to keep in mind Hazlitt's

¹ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 141-58.

enthusiastic appraisal of the pleasures of portrayal:

The fact is, that having one's picture painted is like the *creation of another self*; and that is an idea, of the repetition or reduplication of which no man has ever tired, to the thousandth reflection.¹

Hazlitt genders his account throughout; the 'man' in this passage neither aspires to, nor deserves, universality. For men there is pleasure, while for women the uncertainty of exposure. The production of 'another self' for women is a more anxious moment, marking an entrance in to a complex play of glances which construct the sitter as a sexual subject.

Throughout Scott's novel it is possible to see the problems the narrator was attempting to avoid with her caveats and confessions. The painter is only commissioned after he, like Dorigny, has been captivated by the sweetness of the narrator's disposition. Within the terms of the novel's ideological parameters he is set a difficult task, as he must blend the claims of modest ugliness with those of painterly portrayal. It is striking therefore that his promise to the narrator is to make her, or at least to represent her, as the 'handsomest woman in *Paris*'. He does not stop there, however, as he asserts that 'this Lady, has one of those countenances - of which I would be happy to draw an exact Likeness'. The perhaps unlikely combination of verisimilitude and pleasingness is seized on with some enthusiasm by Dorigny, who declares a wish to know whether the painter's 'Eyes are as good as mine'.² The painting once begun is rapidly completed, and Dorigny 'charmed' with the result. His pleasure, and those of other close friends,

¹ William Hazlitt, 'On Sitting for one's Portrait' in *The Plain Speaker*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1928; Everyman's Library, No. 814), p. 108, my emphasis.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 116, 118.

is such that they order a number of copies.

It is during this private act of praise and gallantry that St Furcy, the rival suitor, enters the room, an entrance which reanimates the novel's plot. The love that the narrator had denied herself, having confessed all to her father, has once more re-emerged. She later admits that she 'long concealed a passion which kept the Decency of my Situation at continual variance with my Heart'.¹ It is a telling moment:

in vain I endeavoured not to see him, [but] the Viscountess and my Husband obliged me to stay. The Count turned pale at the Sight of me, I red at the Sight of him, but after the first Compliments were over, Mr. *Dorigny* would have Monsieur *de St Furcy* consulted about my Picture, which put me quite out of countenance. The Count thought it exactly like.²

But what exactly does St Furcy mean when he says that the portrait is 'exactly like'? There are, I think, three interpretations available, all of which can be properly deduced from what little the young Count says. Most obviously he could mean merely to congratulate the painter on the veracity of his art, to say, in effect, 'yes, this is indeed how she looks, exactly like'. He could, however, like *Dorigny* and the painter, mean something more ambitious. He could be saying, without discounting to possibility of applause for mimesis, 'well done, this picture has captured what I know to be her true character and nature'. Thirdly, and most dangerously, he could mean, although he may not know it; 'truly this is a wonderful picture, it conforms to my desire of, and for this woman. This is what she is like, this is what I desire.'

The effect this connoisseurship has on the narrator is equally ambiguous. She is, by her own testimony 'quite out of countenance'; not of her own face, separated from

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 207.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 120-21.

herself. What she appears to mean is that the occasion of St Furcy's reappearance has taken her beyond the normal range of her emotions and morality, leaving her disconcerted, distracted. However, the sight of St Furcy, of his face turning pale - hers turning red, hence not being of itself - has not been the sole cause of this division. She is discomposed morally by the conjuncture of a former lover and a new portrait, and the result will later be 'a Breach between my Inclination and my Reason'.¹ It is not only the return of the Count, unexpected though it is, that has been the cause of this; rather it is the precise moment at which he has walked in that is vital. It is a moment of her utmost vulnerability and exposure. Hung up as a portrait she exists for the other, for St Furcy. She solicits, even if unwillingly, the gaze which will represent her as a sexual subject. It is a radical displacement (she is out of herself, between the portrait and her own body), and she is no longer an 'ugly resemblance' of her father - but looking like herself, or rather looking 'like' she does to St Furcy.

When St Furcy enters the room - not expecting to see her as he is visiting the Viscountess - Dorigny has just pledged himself to purchase a miniature of the portrait. A miniature, a small private version, a token of his love, is to be closeted away with his most intimate possessions. The portrait and its intended replica are private objects; the property of him to whom they rightly belong, the buyer-husband. The audience for them is as yet small and confined. When St Furcy appears this must change, and a new pattern of consumption emerge. The occasion is studied, ritualistic; an extension of the forms of politeness at which Dorigny and St Furcy have already shown themselves to

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 207.

be masters.¹ She says on his entrance 'I endeavoured not to see him', but she is 'obliged to stay'. It is this which puts her out of countenance on the first reading. But what really seems to be at issue is the portrait, which is 'acknowledged by my friends to resemble me' and yet 'cannot be taken for a *Monster*'. Everybody is pleased with it, and though they do not comment on whether or not it makes her appear as 'the handsomest woman in *Paris*', as the painter had intended, we know this to have been his intention. This is new territory for the narrator, for it takes her away from her 'native Ugliness'. She has been displayed before in singing at the castle, which occasion was to make her desirable to both Dorigny and St Furcy, it was with gifts innately given which required only an opportunity to make themselves 'known'. But now she is both desired and displayed, and not through her own devices, or desires, but through a painting. Indeed, in attempting to avoid having the painting done at all she had exclaimed, "I should be very sorry to have a Picture so much handsomer than myself".² And it is for this reason that she is 'quite out of countenance'.

Beauty could be improper for these very reasons, as in fact it is in the person of her sister. This is because beauty, as a form of wilful self-display, is, despite the common sense evidence to the contrary, not intrinsic to its possessor; it is artful, coquettish and public. The issue is one of propriety as it is throughout the novel. It is already in evidence in what the narrator has recorded: the obligation to 'see' St Furcy and the scrupulous attention to the protocols of polite and wifely behaviour - an observance of forms as fully hers as her husband's. What could conceivably be proper

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 113-14.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 117.

and improper in these terms is a complex question; one which seems allied to the question of who owns the face and its painted resemblance. Acting 'properly' is of huge importance to most of the characters in the novel, though they may mean different things by it; St Furcy significantly told Dorigny that it would be "'proper for both of us"' if they were never to meet again (referring to himself and the narrator).¹ The importance of propriety is ever present in *Agreeable Ugliness*, and the reason for this insistence lies I think, in the crucial intersection of class consciousness (the obsequious concerns of Monsieur Villiers) and the transgressive potential of beauty, which can break this stratification. In the realm of previously arranged aristocratic marriages which the characters inhabit the management of desire is particularly necessitous, and women who are seen to provoke unwanted sexual longings are scrupulously policed by both the narrator's remembrances and by other characters in the novel.²

In these terms the new portrait's status is unclear, as whether it is proper becomes ambiguous, because it pleases both husband and lover. For a portrait to be proper can entail many things. Likeness is the most obvious signification. It occurred to St Furcy, and what it might have meant to him seems important, though it is less than obvious. The word 'proper' is though more capacious in its meaning. It can also mean that which is proper to something, the distinctive presence or mark which is characteristic of, or special to, a particular person or thing; it is the form of a private sign. It is in short a question of the 'property' of something, or someone. This is, on one reading, the propriety of a portrait. That which is proper also entails that which is in conformity to

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 115.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 40, 62, 73, 239-42.

social codes, or with the requirements and forms of polite society. This is the problem which this portrait represents, and it is, I think, improper on both these counts. The narrative has been at pains to posit the verifiable ugliness of the narrator, her status as a '*shocking Monster*'. This is her 'native' quality, that which makes her different from her mother and sister physically and morally, and that which marks the location of her sincerity: in her person, and at home. The painting would seem to threaten that intimate connection:

Tho' one is not the best Judge of one's own Picture, I could not mistake mine. I saw in it some Beauties which I did not suspect in myself, and whose momentary Appearance in my Countenance there must have been great Art in seizing when I was gay and happy; and in short, when without knowing why or how, it endeavoured to render itself agreeable. This was what the Painter had so well expressed, that agreeing to the Resemblance the picture bore to me, I thought myself obliged to accuse him of having greatly flattered me.¹

It resembles her - it is in agreement with her face - but she cannot, or will not fully recognize it. This description of the painting is inlaid with what is either an attempt to evade the implications of the portrait or an inability to comprehend how such a production might represent herself. What the canvas depicts is therefore said to be something unsuspected, whose fleeting appearance is testimony to 'great Art' - in the sense of artifice - rather than to any great perspicuity on the painter's part.

To agree that the portrait represents, or still worse resembles her would be to concede that she is pleasing; and therefore more like her mother than her father. This is the dilemma of she faces. It is an ambiguity which is underscored by the syntax of the passage, as the second 'it' is uncertain in its reference and could refer (almost) to

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 119.

either her face or to the portrait. Such an ambiguity, while suggestive, is more likely to be the product of a questionable prose style than any intention on Scott's part. What remains striking, however, is the deep sense of alienation that the passage instils, the narrator appears wholly divorced from herself referring to her face, painted or physical, merely as an 'it'. It is that 'it' which, in the narrator's testimony, is assumed to have endeavoured to become agreeable and not herself. The narrator cannot deny, however, the force of the resemblance, and this leaves her to charge the portraitist with flattery. What the narrator seems most fully distanced from is the desire to be desired, the wish to be sought after. Or rather she wants to love, or to be loved, but cannot, or will not, find a place in which that wish can be fulfilled. She is denied it on several points, and on numerous occasions. There have always been her father's instructions, which are combined with her own deep sense that his teachings are correct. In his terms, to be desired is not to be esteemed.

In order to understand what is being done with desire, and with the constitution of social identity, a further scene requires explication. The one I have in mind is the moment of distraction and distress visited upon the narrator while she is still in Paris. The events occur after a fateful trip to the masquerade when the narrator, having fainted amidst the tumult of the revellers, awakes to find her life sorely changed.¹ During her absence her husband has fought a duel in defense of her sister, and now lies mortally wounded. As her father recounts these baleful incidents the narrator hears her husband's

¹ A trip to the masquerade would have been understood by an eighteenth-century readership to entail a visit to a realm of folly and vice. That this particular trip ends calamitously would not therefore have been a surprise. For a discussion of this theme see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilisation - The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, (London: Methuen, 1986).

agonized screams and subsides into 'Distraction'. Prior to this new loss of self, the narrator had told of her true and virtuous love for Dorigny, a speech applauded for both its candour and its undoubted moral worth.¹ In making this declaration the narrator places herself, and her story, firmly within the auspices of sentimental virtue, in that having followed her father's advice, or rather his commands, she now possesses a love which emerges from a combination of virtuous obedience and sociable commerce - a love therefore which is at once domestic and free from the taint of sexual desire. Dorigny's death abruptly brings to an end this moment of emotional (and sexual) security. Dorigny had been the means of escape which both she and her father had employed against the potential for scandal. With his death the narrator stands once more on the brink of desire.² For she is once again released from the security against beauty and publicity which Dorigny, like her father, had maintained. As a widow her significance - especially in relation to St Furcy - is once more negotiable.

It is undeniably strange that the methods used to return the distracted heroine to her senses should feature St Furcy as prominently as they do. Indeed the plan her friends conceive to retrieve her senses revolve round an unexpected confrontation between the two unrequited lovers:

The Count *de St Furcy* was brought into the Room, I knew him instantly; my Eyes, which had before been incessantly wandering, without Sense or Meaning, were now fixed on him; his were in an instant drowned in Tears; he was pale and trembling, and, by concern rendered speechless.

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 149-63.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 74; See also Caroline Gonda, 'Sarah Scott and the "Sweet Excess of Paternal Love"', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1800*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Summer, 1992), p. 514

As anticipated the shock of the encounter is sufficient to bring her out of her trance-like state.¹ The physician present soon announces her life has been saved. The subsequent return to her senses is greeted with the level of weeping and congratulation requisite to such a scene in such a novel. Although the events I have described are almost prototypically sentimental in conception, they raise questions about the nature of desire which differ, at least in degree, from the normal run of sentimental novels. For here, the cure for the loss of her husband is the previously unlooked for, and unwanted, sight of her lover. It appears at first glance that the shocking presence provided by St Furcy cancels out the misery represented by the loss of her husband, or at least returns it back to the sphere of commonplace grief.

It is unclear, however, what the reader is expected to read into the return to sanity of the narrator. This depends upon what it is the narrator is assumed to have 'seen' when she says 'I knew him instantly'. The exclamation should not to be read merely as a recognition of St Furcy as himself. Rather he is recognised as the embodiment, though pale and sickly, of desire. This is complex: the more so because St Furcy can be read as representing either a male desire for women (as threat, as unwanted intrusion), or women's desire, and in particular the desire to desire. However, in the period of her first marriage the narrator and her father concentrate on what St Furcy's attentions will do to the narrator, and not what they mean in themselves. Writing to report Dorigny's declaration of his passion, Villiers writes:

"It is true he suspects [St Furcy] of paying his addresses to you; but, my Dear, your Sister's Example, and the Disgrace and Mortification which her Conduct have drawn on her, and which I have not made a Secret to you,

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 163-64.

should put you on your Guard against the seducing Arts of Youth and Vanity. I know your Heart, your Virtue, and your good Sense; I have nothing more to say, I put therein an entire Confidence; consider, that if you see any Danger, *Dorigny* offers an honourable means of avoiding it."¹

The comparison with the Fair Villiers is enough to identify the "Danger" Villiers mentions as the danger of her responding to being desired, of wanting to be looked at. Both father and daughter seem to be in agreement that male gallantry represents nothing out of the ordinary; the issue then becomes women's response to that flattery.

What St Furcy's return here (as with his re-introduction at the portrait's unveiling), seems to emphasise is that for women to desire is to be disembodied. It is a form of display which entails becoming available, not only to a desiring male gaze, but a gaze at oneself; it is to consider oneself as sexual. In this context Caroline Gonda's comments on the connection between the representation of being beside oneself and the experience, or representation, of sexuality are illuminating: 'the physical language...is of the kind used to portray female orgasm; mental crisis reproduced as the sign of sexual climax'.² St Furcy's presence is not liberating; rather, it serves as a warning. In consequence his appearance has the effect of frightening her back, not only to sanity from madness, but also to her father. It is this which she knows instantly. Scott is only prepared to represent desire in an acute relationship to distraction, or disease; the sense in short of being 'quite out of countenance'. Indeed in this last incident it is the previously undesirable encounter with St Furcy which puts her back into her proper place. So much so in fact that she can soon learn of and relate the further developments of her sister's

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 69-70.

² Gonda, 'Sweet Excess', p. 515.

history. It is not until after this narrative of scandal and adventure that she acknowledges her own love, a desire now decently framed by a distinctly chastening narrative and an appropriate period of grieving.¹ That the couple do finally marry is testimony to the fact that the private, once it has been described in these oppressive, paternal terms, always threatens to implode into an incestuous intimacy. In the final scenes marrying St Furcy becomes something of a necessity, for without his hand, the narrator appears destined to be his father's bride.² The situation is thoroughly repellent as St Furcy senior is at once her father's friend, her lover's father, and her own god-father. It is not necessary to describe these scenes in detail, other than to register their general tenor, which is oppressive and claustrophobic. What they seem most clearly to reveal is Scott's commitment to obedience, a point underlined by the fact that in the final denouement of the plot the narrator is forced to offer St Furcy's father 'all the Obedience and Tenderness to which, as my Husband, you are going to have just claim'.³ On hearing this tender testimony old St Furcy exclaims, 'you are my Daughter', and finally permits her marriage to his son.⁴ There are limits therefore, even for Scott, in liking, or being like, your father. At its most optimistic this can be read as the confirmation of a discursive space in which obedience and desire coexist. More pessimistically it underwrites the enormous constraints placed upon women's lives in the mid eighteenth century.

¹ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 213.

² Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 239-44.

³ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, p. 252.

⁴ Scott, *Agreeable Ugliness*, pp. 254-55, 259.

No Oil Painting: The Status of Beauty

What the moral discourse embodied by *Agreeable Ugliness* suggests is that there is a violent disjunction between a woman's polite sociability and the deviance of a public life. It is arguable, however, whether any such binary can be effectively retained, and the novel, as a result, represents the impermanence of this structure as fully as it counsels its observance. Ugliness in both *Sophia* and *Agreeable Ugliness* becomes a more attractive quality than beauty. It is agreeable in quite precise terms; it means of course agreeable to the eye in the first instance, but more importantly it represents a level of obedience. That is to say, 'agreeable' is read, as a word and as a disposition, to mean malleable by, or conformable to, the command and requirements of the father, or husband. It means amenable and polite, in a variety of familial, social and contractual settings, but with particular reference to marriage. In this context Johnson's first definition of the word 'Agree' is instructive: to agree, he writes, means 'To be in concord; to live without contention; not to differ.' His definitions of 'Agreeable', 'Agreeableness' and 'Agreeably' are less explicit, but stress nonetheless the necessity of 'conforming'. Equally present is the sense of that which is 'Agreeable' as that which offers no disturbance, either socially or bodily.

Within Johnson's definition the moral authority of ugliness, as the native quality of sociable honesty, would seem to be assured. The ambiguity, or moral uncertainty of the discourse (at least in its novel form) lies, however, in the fact that even in its appointed terms a high degree of instability will remain. For the 'Agreeable' always brings with it, as Johnson's scholarship also makes clear, the idea of "pleasing". The significance of the word is double edged, for the 'to please' encapsulate both 'to delight,

and 'to obey'. Once the terms of the argument have shifted towards a conception of that which is 'pleasing', they have become located, at least in part, within a social register which places virtue as an alluring sign: the art of being pretty, for example.¹ The shift between the two positions - pleasingness as obedience, and as allure - is repeated throughout the *Agreeable Ugliness*, with the narrator seeking always, even if not successfully, to be both obedient and pleasing. As a result the narrator is engaged in an ongoing struggle to keep her ugliness. She has not lost beauty, as it was never hers; rather she fears its acquisition. She appears to gain beauty at several points: at the castle, in singing, and by being painted. Each instance turns on a level of exposure, of being made public. So that it becomes clear that to become 'known' is to accept, or display, beauty. Only that which is properly retired, and hence private, can avoid the imputation and scandal of the beautiful. To be agreeably ugly is to refuse the adult, and adulterating, leap into public life, and to remain both unseen and unlooked for.

Yet the Beautiful will not go away, not for the narrator, nor for Scott, remaining as important category in the analysis of women's conduct. It is evident, for example, in Scott's slightly later novel, *Millennium Hall*, that beauty is at once a habitual and oppressive factor in women's lives. The women who comprise the community which the novel describes, have all, to varying degrees been afflicted by, or persecuted because of, their personal beauty.² In the case of Miss Mancell, the suffering is particularly marked.

¹ It is significant in this context that Allan Ramsay defined 'Beauty' as that quality that was 'agreeable' to the observer. It was moreover a judgement that Ramsay took to be wholly personal. See his *A Dialogue on Taste*, 2nd ed., in *The Investigator*, 4 vols, (London: For the Author, 1762), vol. II, pp. 18-20.

² Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 31, 49, 143, 196-98. My treatment of Scott's complex work is necessarily brief given the space available. For a longer treatment of the novel

Miss Mancell could not, because of the way she looks, escape public notice, or the attentions of the less than virtuous.¹ Her beauty is something from which she wishes to escape, a sentiment more than echoed by Miss Trentham, another resident of the Hall. Miss Trentham's beauty, however, is terminated by small pox soon after the scenes of its most dazzling publicity in London. The disease, usually treated with the utmost fear, because it is brutally disfiguring, is almost welcomed by Miss Trentham. When she recovered, she 'perceived that the small pox had entirely destroyed her beauty'. The loss of her beauty however, is an 'accident' which she chooses to see as a form of liberation, as it saves her from a life of pointless dissipation.² More particularly the loss of her beauty extinguishes her own passion, and subdues those of her admirers. Like Miss Mancell she will no longer have to experience the 'struggle between affection and duty' into which her appearance drew her.³

There is a need therefore to examine why beauty is rejected by both Scott and Lennox. In Miss Mancell's case it is because while beauty excites desire it is also suggestive of a possible confusion of social classes. This occurred because Miss Mancell's beautiful presence gave her an eminence normally reserved for those of a much higher social station.⁴ In the case of Miss Trentham beauty disrupts her domestic

see, Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature: The Eighteenth-Century Novel in England and France*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

¹ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 47-49, 86-87, 97.

² Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 199-200.

³ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 90, 200-201.

⁴ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 85-86.

arrangements by making it impossible to live with her childhood friend Mr. Alworthy. Her charms made him desire her, and confused her own sense of her place and her virtue. Her sociable intentions are consequently destroyed by the fact of her own appearance.¹ Both Miss Mancell and Miss Trentham faced with an adulation they neither looked for nor enjoyed sought to retire, but could not owing to their beauty, which persisted - contrary to their desires - in attracting notice. What eventually allows Miss Mancell to leave society is the acquisition of considerable wealth, while in Miss Trentham case it is the loss of her beauty.² As an ugly woman Miss Trentham may retire into chaste obscurity, her virtue intact.

So circumstanced Miss Trentham and Miss Mancell enter Millennium Hall, a community of similarly anxious and virtuous women. Millennium Hall is a truly remarkable place of note, not merely for its idyllic setting, but also for the spectacular wealth and the peculiar ugliness of its domestic staff.³ The women comprising its society are also not conspicuous for their physical attractions. The Hall is, however, a place of great privacy and of still greater virtue. It establishes a scene where women's worth (and wealth) can operate, even conspicuously *so, without address to the necessity* of display.⁴ And yet the zeal of the women, and the prospect of their virtuous persons, forms an alluring spectacle precisely because they appear to resist the desire to be seen. This conjunction of virtue and displayed privacy must lead us to ask important questions

¹ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 194-95, 200.

² Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 101-108.

³ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 4-8, 12-13, 69-68, 205-207.

⁴ Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 6-8.

about the kind of publicity which Lennox and Scott are allocating to their heroines.¹

Clearly being beautiful has a more unpleasant, less certain significance in the eighteenth-century novel than might a first appear. It attracts unwanted attention, extinguishes personality, and troubles a woman's sense of her virtue. However, ugliness cannot really be seen as a redemptive or liberating presence; it is no counter-discourse, for it too is thoroughly implicated in the morality which causes beauty to be repudiated. In each of the four novels I have been describing a distinctly middle-class form of politics can be seen to emerge. One which, as in the discussion of Beaumont and Usher, concentrates on the physical and social circumstances of middle-class women who aspire to virtue. A consequence of this investment is that representation of the public - the world of vision and beauty - is rarely virtuous for women; Arabella's adventures offer a rare and uncertain moment of female power in this sphere. Typically, as in the case of Millennium Hall's inhabitants, what is proposed is a modest retreat.² I want to suggest, however, that this ideology remains uncertain in its account of virtue, and of public and private action, whatever its rhetorical force or cultural authority. I want to retain this image of discursive fragility as I explore, in my conclusion, the variety of 'publics' into which women were drawn in the eighteenth century.

¹ Some suggestive connections have been made in this area by Irene Q. Brown. See her 'Domesticity, Feminism and Friendship: Female Aristocratic Culture and Marriage', in *Journal of Family History*, vol. 7. no. 4. (1982), pp. 406-427.

² Scott, *Millennium Hall*, pp. 175-77.

CONCLUSION

THE GENDER OF THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

'The Accomplishment of Your Long and Ardent Wishes': The Eighteenth-Century Public.

Gentlemen,

An Academy, in which the Polite Arts may be regularly cultivated, is at last opened among us by Royal Munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the Artists, but to the whole nation.

It is indeed difficult to give any other reason, why an empire like that of BRITAIN, should so long have wanted an ornament so suited to its greatness, than that slow progression of things, which naturally makes elegance and refinement the last effects of opulence and power.

An Institution like this has often been recommended upon considerations merely mercantile; but an Academy, founded upon such principles, can never effect even its own narrow purposes. If it has an origin no higher, no taste can ever be formed in manufactures; but if the higher Arts of Design flourish, these inferior ends will be answered of course.

We are happy in having a PRINCE, who has conceived the design of such an Institution, according to its true dignity; and who promotes the Arts, as the head of a great, a learned, a polite, and a commercial nation; and I can now congratulate you, Gentlemen on the accomplishment of your long and ardent wishes.¹

When, with these words, Sir Joshua Reynolds began his inaugural address to the Royal Academy he spoke with a confidence and a flourish which had not been imaginable a decade or so earlier. The road to the fulfilment of the 'long and ardent wishes' had been a rocky and uncertain one, a path too daunting to many a modern Hercules. However, with the negotiations surrounding the Academy completed the preceding December, Reynolds and his fellow academicians could now look forward to an era of dignified prosperity.² In his assured style Reynolds argues that the inception of this new public

¹ Joshua Reynolds, 'Discourse I' (2nd January, 1769), in *Discourses on Art* ed. Robert R. Wark, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 13.

² Proposals for the Foundation of an Academy had been made with mounting seriousness from the late 1730s. For an example of the kinds of arguments used to urge such a development, see [John Gwynn], *The Plan of an Academy for the Better*

body ensures the high valuation due to the arts in a civilised and polite state. He is furthermore prepared to suggest that 'elegance and refinement' is the effect of 'opulence and power'. The new institution he claims is a product not only of 'Royal Munificence', but of the superior commercial and imperial fortunes of Britain.

Reynolds's apparent commendation of commerce is in marked contrast to the dour appraisal given to the nation's arts in 1755, when Andre Rouquet believed them beset by the calculations of a narrowly mercantile culture.¹ Rouquet's estimation of the English public, as I demonstrated earlier, was not high:

We cannot say that the public are really the dupes of all the puerilities...; no, they are only dupes to the fashion which they follow, even with reluctance: it is the fashion that carries them to a painter of whom they have no great opinion, to engage him out of vanity to draw their picture, which they have no occasion for, and which they will not like when finished. But the women especially must have their pictures exposed for some time in the house of that painter which is most in fashion.²

Commercial, vain, epitomised by the conspicuous consumption of society women, and, as he goes on to argue, riven by party interests the public described by Rouquet is no place for the 'Polite Arts' to flourish.³ Conducting his argument, as I have demonstrated, in highly gendered terms, Rouquet as much as, say, John Gilbert Cooper or John Brown has a capacious distaste for the effeminate, and at times for the feminine.

Cultivation, Improvement, and Encouragement of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and the Arts of Design General: The Abstract of a Royal Charter as Proposed for Establishing the Same; and a short Introduction, (London: 1755); and Anon., *An Essay in Two Parts on the Necessity and Form of a Royal Academy*, (London: 1755).

¹ Andre Rouquet, *The Present State of the Arts in England*, (London: no publisher credited, 1755), pp. 6-7, 11, 14.

² Rouquet, *Present State*, pp. 40-41.

³ Rouquet, *Present State*, pp. 41-42, 45.

It is a repugnance characteristic of all those who are wary both of women's admission into public culture, and of the visibly commercial nature of that environment. It is a position which Reynolds for all his measured encomiums on Britain as a 'great, a learned, a polite and a commercial nation' was not exempt.

Throughout his subsequent lectures, Reynolds's account of the modern, as of the particular, remained rooted in a vocabulary which stigmatized all that was not classically sanctioned as effeminate and corrupt. Consequently, his sense of the painter's masculinity resided in the 'long laborious comparison' of true genius.¹ Despite the rhetoric of his inaugural address Reynolds remained concerned about the capacity for commerce to introduce the sensuality and luxury which corrupt. This is evident in the ambiguity inherent in Reynolds's advocacy of painting as a '*dying art*'.² The statement represents a peculiarly civic humanist perception of the connection between refinement and corruption: that which flowers, is always on the verge of decay.³ His address to the new institution is of interest for the way in which it repeats earlier concerns about the dangers of effeminacy within a confidence about a new beginning. It is his rhetoric

¹ Reynolds, 'Discourse III' (14th December, 1770), in *Discourses on Art*, pp. 44-45, 47-48. In describing Reynolds's position in these terms I am referring only to the first nine of the *Discourses*, written between 1769-80. In the later lectures Reynolds refines and redirects his argument allowing himself a much greater flexibility in his treatment of commerce and commercial art. For a discussion of the evolution of Reynolds's critical position, see John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 69-162.

² Reynolds, 'Discourse I', in *Discourses on Art*, p. 21.

³ J.G.A. Pocock's essay on Edward Gibbon remains the most brilliant exposition of this view in the eighteenth century. See his 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Edward Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian' in G.W. Bowerstock & John Clive eds., *Edward Gibbon and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp 103-19.

which holds together the quasi-civic aspirations to learning and greatness with the practices of a polite and commercial culture. Throughout the *Discourses* modern, implicitly commercial tastes are represented as effete or excremental, and yet they remain strangely desirable. This is particularly true of Reynolds's treatment of Gothic style.¹

Reynolds's indomitably masculine aesthetic is evident throughout the *Discourses*, even if it is absent from his practice as a portrait-painter. That he does not reflect, as Rouquet does, on women's role in the arts is a reminder of the nature of the audience he addresses, for it is a body which is composed of 'public' men. The omission was not, however, characteristic of an age which pondered this issue almost constantly. For John Brown it was the defining mark of modern depravity that women paraded in the streets and public assembles of the capital. Defending his emphasis on the corruption of male conduct, he commented that:

It may probably be asked, Why the ruling Manners of our Women have not been particularly delineated? The reason is, because they are essentially the same with those of Men, and are therefore included in this Estimate. The sexes have now little apparent Distinction, beyond that of Person and Dress: Their peculiar and characteristic Manners are confused and lost: The one Sex having advanced into *Boldness*, as the other has sunk into *Effeminacy*.²

Brown's remarks suggest that for those who feared or resisted the cultural changes

¹ My reading of Reynolds's account of gender is indebted to the work of Harriet Guest. See her 'The Wanton Muse: Politics and Gender in Gothic Theory After 1760', in Stephen Copley and John Whale ed. *Beyond Romanticism: New approaches to texts and contexts*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 133-34; and 'Curiously Marked: Tattooing, Masculinity and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific' in John Barrell, ed. *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays in British Art, 1700-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 107-11.

² John Brown, *Estimate of the Manners and Opinions of Our Times*, (London: L. Davis & C. Reymers, 1757), p. 51.

taking place in the period, a representation of personal manners provided an appropriate discourse in which to challenge the morality of that change. In this instance Brown's miserable appraisal was more than supported by the writers of the *Connoisseur*, who wrote that:

To describe the Life of a Fine Lady would be only to set down a perpetual round of visiting, gaming, dressing, and intriguing. She has been bred up in the notion of making a figure, and of recommending herself as a woman of spirit: for which end she is always foremost in the fashion, and never fails gracing with her appearance every public assembly, and every party of pleasure.¹

The acerbic opinions of Brown and his ilk can be contrasted with the vast array of eighteenth-century writers who believed that the entrance of women into the public, and particularly in public discussions, softened and polished what might otherwise have been arid or cumbersome arenas. For Burke indeed, it was the pleasures of association with women, figured as the Beautiful, which carried men into society, and even the curmudgeonly *Connoisseur* was obliged to rehearse an appeal to 'the Ladies' in order to secure itself a polite audience.² Given this abiding concern with the place of women within eighteenth-century conceptions of the public, I want to conclude this study with some more general reflections about the nature of publicity in relation to both the private and the gendered aspirations of the polemics which articulate these spaces.

¹ George Coleman *et al.*, *Connoisseur*, no. XLIV (28th November, 1754), in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General*, 4th ed. 4 vols, (London: R. Baldwin, 1761), vol. II, p. 68.

² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and intro. J.T. Boston, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 199), pp. 40-42; *Connoisseur*, no. I (31st January, 1754), in *The Connoisseur. By Mr. Town*, vol I, pp. 1-2. See also Frances Fergusson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 8, 31, 45.

More specifically, I want to investigate what is an important hesitation in the realm of social and moral rhetoric by offering a more general consideration of the structure which is used represent the nature of taste. The contested place of beautiful woman will receive particular attention as a moment of ambivalence in eighteenth-century culture. This is a structure which has been in force in the history and the politics surrounding Reynolds's portrait of Elizabeth Gunning. It is also present in the fictions of Scott and Lennox, and it is what is being attended to so scrupulously in Beaumont and Usher. In my discussion of these texts I have explored how middle-class discourse sought to limit the power of the 'factitious beauty' by restricting women to the domestic sphere. The confinement of women in the domestic sphere is an important point. However, it is foolish to raise the issue uncritically for women's confinement in the domestic sphere can:

Like the insidious rise of capitalism, the collapse of the community, the nascent consumer society and the ever-emerging middle class,...be found in almost any century we care to look.¹

The caution is an important one. As although the private, more properly the domestic, is employed as the contrary to the public and is designated the special place of women, women in eighteenth-century culture participate in a much more variable and ambivalent field. It is this uncertain separation of spaces which I now want to explore, focusing in particular on the relation between forms of domesticity and the modes of private life.

The division between the idea of open, public forums and the more intimate spaces of the home is perhaps an overly familiar one. In the work of Jurgen Habermas the

¹ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1993), p. 412.

distinction between the two spheres and the corresponding elevation of the public sphere as the scene of reasoned discourse is taken to be one of the foremost achievements of European enlightenment. Habermas places this moment of emergence within the expansion of commercial exchange which produced private citizens with a collective interest in obtaining public authority:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in a basically privatised but publically relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour.¹

Habermas is primarily interested in a notion of the public which seeks to deal only with political regulation.² The discussion I have offered of the ideas of the 'public' generated by the issues surrounding paintings, physical appearance, or polite judgement is suggestive of a more fluid, more uncertain sense of the public than Habermas's polemic seeks to encompass. Habermas has little to say on how the 'Bourgeois Public Sphere' was contested, or how being public might appear dubious. Critiques such as those propounded by Brown and Fawcener have no place in Habermas's account because he only conceives of an opposition to the 'Public' coming in the form of political resistance from an embattled executive. In Habermas's terms, the 'public sphere' though reliant on

¹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Fredric Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 27.

² Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 52. For a useful consideration of the themes and limits of Habermas's work, see, Craig Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Anthony J. La Vopa, 'Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 64, (1992), pp. 79-116.

the private commercial activities of its participants is not judged to be rendered ambiguous by this dependence on trading activities. For a great many eighteenth-century intellectuals the relation of the 'new' public sphere to commerce was not only far too plain, but the source of corruption, not rationality.¹ Habermas is too little concerned with the gendered nature of the polemics in which the debate on the public was conducted in the England of the 1750s and 1760s when commercial enterprise, far from providing an avowed and unqualified imperative, was at once the source of a new culture and the source of imminent collapse.²

The discussion and appraisal of *Beauty, the Beautiful and most tellingly Beautiful women*, as a means of forming communities of judgement *and* of outlining a mode of feminine social practice, cannot be situated easily in the stark topography outlined in *Structural Transformation*. As a textual and discursive enterprise, yet one related to questions of social and cultural practice, the *Beautiful* reveals the limits inherent in assuming an easy separation of questions of privacy and publicity, and of excluding the issue of gender and sexuality from an account of their complicated relations. The ambiguous portrait described in the last chapter gives an important instant of the elaborate connections which preoccupied eighteenth-century society. The picture of the ugly heroine refused to remain quietly private, its consumption alters its significance in a move which unsettles the moral narrative in which it was placed. For the portrait is

¹ The most effective discussion of this debate is still that provided by J.G.A Pocock. See his *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), esp. pp. 467-477, 493-505.

² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 465-70, 491-94.

moved from one location to another; it is private *then* public and *vice versa*. Similarly, the lucubrations of John Gilbert Cooper reveal an attention to movement between different notions of being public and living privately. Speaking of his desire for residence with his beloved Amelia, he exclaims:

I am one of the loyalist Subjects the Sex ever had, and, I dare say [they] will not be displeas'd with this fresh Proclamation of their Dominion. You may add farther, that I think Women are the Fountains from whence flow the blended streams of Taste and Pleasure, and that the Draught of Life is more or less Sweet as they are blended in the Cup.¹

It is this attention to private affection and personal flattery which Cooper regarded as the basis for judgement in a public form.² What is most striking however, is that in both *Letters Concerning Taste* and *Agreeable Ugliness* sexuality and desire are made into important constituents of what defines public and private utterances and practices. For the relations that could exist between notions of sociability, privacy and domesticity undergo frequent negotiation and renegotiation throughout the period.

In order to draw together the different moments of this ambiguity it is necessary to focus on specific instances before offering a more general conclusion. With this in mind I want to take two examples of this process in operation, and to examine how the intervention of two very different women (Frances Reynolds and Elizabeth Gunning) is represented in, and by the languages of polite culture. For it is by exploring the differences between the careers of Elizabeth Gunning and Frances Reynolds that the prevailing ambiguity of eighteenth-century discourse in social space and sociable living

¹ John Gilbert Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1755), p. 28.

² Cooper, *Letters Concerning Taste*, pp. 26-29.

becomes most readily apparent.

Carriage Rides: Between Theory and Housekeeping.

I claimed, much earlier in this thesis, that Beauty encompassed more than a taste for this carriage or that. It was a more complex issue than a liking for this phaeton or that curricle, or so it appeared. This was, to use a phrase of Sir Joshua's 'inadvertently said'.¹ Indeed the converse is true, or almost. Throughout the eighteenth century possession of the accoutrements of fine living - the right clothes, plate, portrait and what have you - was part of the ritual of acquisition which permitted entrance into the debate about Beauty. For Reynolds it was particularly so. Embarrassed by a provincial accent and by rough features the President of the Royal Academy was conscious that his claims to polite taste were forever vulnerable. His status as a practising portrait-painter can only have made his predicament more apparent; indeed the marshalling of classical tastes and the eager fraternity with Johnson and Goldsmith underlines the anxiety he sought to hide. For Reynolds, possession of the right kit for being tasteful was crucial, and perhaps a carriage, again in his phrase, was the 'all-in-all'.

His carriage was indeed magnificent, and was justly celebrated for the immodesty with which it proclaimed both newly acquired wealth and the novelty of rank. In Northcote's sarcastic testimony, it was:

A chariot on the panels of which were curiously painted the four seasons of

¹ Reynolds uses the expression, in a footnote, to gloss over the fact that in 'Discourse VIII' he neglected to mention Burke, or indeed any one else, when he appealed for a 'COMPLETE essay or inquiry into the connection between the rules of Art, and the eternal and immutable dispositions of our passions', *Discourses on Art*, p. 162.

the year in allegorical figures. The wheels were ornamented with carved foliage and gilding; the liveries also of his servants were laced with silver.¹

But there was a contradiction even within such avowed showmanship. For in order to pay for such luxuriance Reynolds had to paint and paint. Indeed he had to work so much and so often that he rarely had the time or the occasion to use the carriage upon which his labour was expended. Unwilling to countenance such waste Reynolds insisted on the compliance of his sister, the unlucky Frances, in a scheme designed to keep the evidence of his success in motion around the streets of London. Frances was obliged to traverse the highways and places of public resort encased within the carriage, her brother's wealth visible despite his absence. Throughout these excursions the blinds on the coach's windows remained down. Frances was to display the equipage, symbol of fraternal success; there was no suggestion that she should display herself.

The image of woman locked into the material expression of her brother's wealth is poignant. It acts as a reminder of the politics and proprieties of display, and of being displayed in the eighteenth century. Northcote notes that the 'coachman frequently got money by admitting the curious to a sight of it', a point balanced by Frances's sense of shame at the coach's ostentation. She thought the carriage was 'too fine' and most damagingly 'too shewy'.² Yet despite her embarrassment, and the many obligations heaped upon her by her brother, Frances Reynolds was not without resource, and though she is most often remembered merely as Reynolds's long-standing housekeeper she was

¹ James Northcote, 'Autobiography', quoted in Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor, *The Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds: with notices of some of his contemporaries*, 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1865), vol. I, pp. 183-84.

² James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, (London: Henry Colborn, 1819), p. 103; Leslie and Taylor, *Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. I, p. 184.

also able to furnish the world of learning with a competent though brief work on the Beautiful. It is a text which Johnson was, after some huffing and puffing, able to praise with a degree of complaisance: 'there are in those few pages or remarks such a depth of penetration, such nicety of observation, as Locke or Pascal might be proud of'.¹

While perhaps less magnificent than Johnson's remark suggests, Reynolds's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste and the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty* is an interesting intervention in a field crowded with amateur treatises of a highly variable quality.² Peter de Bolla is perhaps a little hasty when he concludes that the *Enquiry* is to be read as a 'minor work on the moral sublime'.³ To a large degree de Bolla is only concerned with what in Reynolds's terms is a presumptuous, masculine obsession with the Sublime. Reynolds relates the experience of the Sublime in the same exciting and excited prose style as Burke, and offers her opinion that: 'it is the pinnacle of beatitude, bordering upon horror, deformity, madness! an eminence from which the mind, that dares to look further, is lost!'⁴ However, her concerns - sanctioned always by divine ordination - remain more earthbound, and more sane, than this outburst suggests. She writes that 'it is, I imagine, the moral truth, that is the characteristic truth of beauty...and

¹ Samuel Johnson, 'To Miss Frances Reynolds', Letter, 21st July, 1781, in *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, 4 vols, ed. Bruce Radford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) vol. III, pp. 355-56. See also Samuel Johnson, 'To Miss Reynolds', Letter, 8th April, 1782, in *Letters*, vol. IV, pp. 30-31.

² Frances Reynolds, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste and the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty &c.*, (London: Baker & Galbin, 1785).

³ Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 48.

⁴ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 18.

hence the universal interesting charm of beauty'.¹ She is in fact far less concerned with the Sublime, with its unearthly or absolute Beauty - the point of 'undetermined power' - than she is with the sphere which is just below it; 'Grace'. For as her Dedication to Elizabeth Montagu makes clear, Reynolds proclaims that she has focused principally on 'moral excellence'.² What the Dedication to Montagu also indicates is the gendered nature of Reynolds's project. Her supplication to the famous Bluestocking negotiates the purpose and publication of the *Enquiry* in relation to known female intelligence and admired virtue: 'your character not only secures me from all imputation of flattery, but this public avowal of my admiration of its excellence conveys an honourable testimony of the consistency of my principles'.³ The issue of the relation of beauty and virtue is the key theme of the *Enquiry*, and accordingly I want to read Reynolds's work with reference to how that account unites Beauty and Taste within a gendered account of the social.⁴

Reynolds's *Enquiry* is an intelligent and at times original synthesis of the prevailing opinions of eighteenth-century thought. It is possible to find her introducing Hogarth's waving-line, the Burkean Sublime, her brother's notion of the 'common form' and the moral sense of Hutcheson.⁵ However, it is Reynolds's commitment to the discussion of the Beautiful as a representation of personal moral excellence - a

¹ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 20-21.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. iii.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. iv.

⁴ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 33-34.

⁵ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 16, 18, 6-7, 37.

discursive technique which I have analyzed in relation to the work of Sir Harry Beaumont - that she offers her most suggestive conclusions. Reynolds is clear that Beauty pleases because it is the emanation of inner character, indeed she writes that: '*the body charms because the soul is seen*'.¹ She goes on to claim that, 'the strongest proof that the moral sense is the governing principle' is the realisation that:

the human form, from infancy to old age, has its peculiar beauty annexed to it from the virtue of affection that nature gives it, and which it exhibits in the countenance. The negative virtue, innocence, is the beauty of the child. The more formed virtues, benevolence, generosity, compassion, &c. are the virtues of youth, and its beauty. The fixed and determined virtues, justice, temperance, fortitude &c. compose the beauty of manhood. The philosophic and religious cast of countenance is the beauty of old age.²

The characteristics, and the terms which describe them, were they to be mis-placed or misapplied would invariably displease: 'without congruity there could be no virtue; without virtue, no beauty, no sentiment'. The importance of congruity, as Reynolds emphasizes, is based upon the observation and preservation of key moral and social divisions, first between age and youth, latterly between genders:

the beauty of each sex is seen only through the medium of the virtues belonging to each. The Beauty of the masculine sex is seen only through the medium of the masculine virtues....The softness and mildness of the feminine expression would be displeasing in a man. The robust and determined expression of the rigid virtues, justice, fortitude, &c. would be displeasing in a woman. However perfect the Form, if an incongruity that touches the well-being of humanity mingles with the idea, the Forms will not afford the pleasing perception of beauty: though the eye may be capable of seeing its regularity.³

I want to stress two points at this stage, first, the fact that Reynolds is arguing that

¹ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 21.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 22-23.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 23-24.

Beauty and Taste are acquired cultural characteristics that are capable of cultivation, as witnessed by their relation to the maturation of the individual. She had commented upon this earlier in the text when she writes of the artist's progress from the tastes of his own nation to those of 'Grecian excellence'.¹ My second point is that Reynolds believes not only in the necessity of identifying the differences of age and gender (she comments elsewhere on the issue of race) but in keeping the terms apart once they have been so designated.

Reynolds sense of this division is surprisingly capacious. She writes, 'it will be found, that, there exist principles which are analogous to those that constitute beauty in the human species' in virtually all aspects of the created universe.² The form and colour of flowers, for example, pleases precisely according to this connection:

They afford an ocular demonstration, in the pleasure with which we contemplate their particular forms, that the pleasure, we receive from the beauty of the human form, originates from mental characters: witness the charms of the infant, innocence of the snow-drop, of the soft elegance of the hyacinth, &c. and, the robust, unmeaning, masculine, piony, hollyhock, &c. &c.³

As curious as the idea of a butch 'piony' may seem, it constitutes what Reynolds terms a '*moral good*', one which makes judgement possible:

It is, I imagine, to the principles of the masculine and feminine character, that we owe the perception of beauty or taste, in any object whatever, throughout all nature and all art that imitates nature.⁴

¹ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 13.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 30.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 32.

⁴ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 29.

The extent to which de Bolla's reading is both hasty and partial should now be clear. The question for Reynolds is not about subordinating ethics to the 'topology of the sublime', but quite the reverse.¹ The Sublime is beyond the immediate scope of Reynolds's researches. She is interested primarily, in what is properly 'agreeable'.² To be agreeable one must be 'able to assimilate...some amiable interesting affection'.³ This addition of pleasing characteristics must be appropriate to the age, class, and most importantly gender of the person under consideration.

To Reynolds all perceptions of Beauty arise because the perceived objects accord with 'some preconceived idea of beauty.'⁴ Furthermore she has absolute confidence in the fact that these ideas, or rather 'principles' are moral: 'I have no more doubt that the principles of beauty are moral, than the principles of happiness are moral'. So much so that:

Whatever appears, to each individual, the most excellent in the human system, at once constitutes his idea of *happiness*, of *morality*, and of *beauty*; and all mankind, I imagine, would agree in the same idea.⁵

In her explication of taste - I have been focusing on her account of Beauty - Reynolds makes these claims still more emphatically. She begins her discussion by stating that: 'Taste seems to be an inherent impulsive tendency of the soul towards true good'.⁶

¹ de Bolla, *Discourse of the Sublime*, p. 49.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 27.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 30.

⁴ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 32.

⁵ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 33-34.

⁶ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 35.

Reynolds's sense of the divine is unmistakable - most contemporaries, Johnson included, thought her an exceptionally pious woman - and while not ignoring this aspect of her writing, I want to concentrate on her account of Taste in relation to her description of gender difference.¹

As Reynolds's discussion of Taste continues, she refines her emphasis on the social and cultivated aspects of judgement, such that:

In the progress of civilization, the polishing principle, which I call taste, is chiefly found in the highest sphere of life, highest for both internal and external advantages, wealth accelerates the last degree of cultivation, by giving efficacy to the principles of true honour; but it also accelerates its corruption, by giving efficacy to the principles of false honour by which the true loses its distinction, becomes less and less apparent, nay, by degrees less and less real.²

The decline of Taste is a particular problem for women, who are more prone, in Reynolds's view, to the depredations of fashion.³ This is a subject on which Reynolds says that she could 'expatiate largely'. Initially preferring to remain broadly schematic in her 'outline' of taste, Reynolds maintains that there are three major components of the tasteful: 'virtue, honour, and ornament':

Their triple union cannot be broken; but taste is nominally distinguished by one or the other, according as its objects, situations, circumstances, &c. vary. Ornament and honour seem the public character of taste; virtue to be the private and domestic, where, though unperceived by the vulgar, to the eye of taste, she appears in her highest ornament, highest honour.⁴

Each of these principles of Taste appear to correspond to a particular 'order' or 'sphere',

¹ Taylor and Leslie, *Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. I, pp. 121-22.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 39-40.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 41.

⁴ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, p. 41.

though Reynolds is by no means clear as to their precise distinction. The first is that which is divine, the next that which is social, embracing the external effects of 'true taste' and 'moral virtue'. Lastly there is the third order, that of 'general ornament' which encompasses the arts, fashions and decorations of the world.¹ This last one is most open to corruption, an opinion in line with Reynolds's general view of fashion and high life.² It is also, logically enough, the sphere which will prove most receptive to regulation and correction. This is important because it is ornament which produces the outward marks of virtue and honour. Characteristically gender defines the nature of this representation:

As the virtues differ, in some degree, as the character of the sexes differ, of course so must the sentiment of taste differ. The taste of the one and of the other seems to differ as justice does from mercy, as modesty from virtue, as grace from sublimity, &c. &c. And as exterior feminine grace is the most perfect visible object of taste, the highest degree of female excellence, externally and internally united, must of course constitute woman, the most perfect object of taste in creation.³

The place of woman as both most likely to fall victim to the corruptions of wealth and fashion and as the emblem of that which is truly virtuous was a familiar image in the eighteenth century. What is more interesting is the extent to which Reynolds opposes this prescription, if only implicitly, to the love of fame and riches which constitute the character of the upper-class male. It is a diffidence which probably explains the disagreement between herself and her brother concerning the latter's overly opulent

¹ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 42-43.

² Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 42, 38.

³ Reynolds, *Enquiry*, pp. 45-46.

coach.¹ Compared to this showy munificence the ornaments of the domestic sphere, no matter how precarious, are always to be valued. Reynolds proposes the idea of the private or domestic world are the true arena of taste. It is a realm which she takes to be distinctly and appropriately feminine, its modest and retiring virtues making plain its gendered character.

Reynolds's embarrassment at the ostentation of her brother's equipage, and her own investment in the retiring charms of femininity suggests a compelling connection of eighteenth-century ideologies. Harriet Guest has argued that such discursive alignments can be understood in terms of an evolving articulation of both class positions and gender roles:

This progressive devaluation of display can to some extent be understood in terms of an aristocratic hierarchy of values giving way to a more bourgeois morality, which emphasises gender difference, rather than minute stratifications of social position, and identifies femininity with domesticity.²

As a result of this realignment - one which is manifestly a concern in *Sophia* and *Agreeable Ugliness* - the domestic comes to be highly valued. This is an ideological position to which Frances Reynolds seems peculiarly committed, and yet Reynolds's view is not one which everyone would have found appealing. It is a vision of society, which whatever the rhetorical blandishments of texts like Richardson's *Pamela* and Fielding's *Amelia* or the diatribes of Beaumont and Usher, governed the lives of all women. Elizabeth Montagu would be an important exception. In the next section I return to Elizabeth Gunning, a woman who has been a recurring presence throughout the

¹ Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, pp. 102-103.

² Harriet Guest, 'A Double Lustre: Femininity and Sociable Commerce, 1730-60' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Summer, 1990), p. 482.

narrative I have been telling. In the final instalment of her story, I want to look at how she is perceived, once again, to act in a way which is disruptive of the difference between public and the 'private and domestic' spheres to which Frances Reynolds so piously adheres. Indeed her intervention viewed here through the beleaguered, confused eyes of James Boswell, acts, as such interventions so often do, to disclose the fabric of the social and to reveal the fraternal and homosocial nature of its hegemonic concerns.

Dinner with a Duchess: Johnson's Class and Boswell's Guilt.

When, in an earlier chapter, I discussed Reynolds's portrait of Elizabeth Gunning I was keen to offer a clear account of competing notions of the public. I therefore stressed how an endangered mode of civic or political iconography was translated into a more consciously polite environment. While the account did not avoid questions of gender, or of the social place of woman in the eighteenth century, it was conducted largely in terms of the consumption, albeit by a diverse range of social groups, of a painted image. It is, however, possible to tell another, slightly different story about Elizabeth Gunning, and of her intersection with masculine culture, which concerns her physical presence and actual participation. The point of contact in this case is the practice of male biography and the dynamics of male homosociality. The Duchess's presence within this setting is disruptive, and yet the discussion and representation of her allows for the expression of a discourse which opposes her intervention. It is a process however, which reveals the problematic and ambiguous connections between notions of privacy and domesticity. The moment is the meeting between Elizabeth Gunning, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell; a scene which Horace Bleackley, the

Duchess's Biographer, choose to label, 'With the Immortals'.¹

Late in October 1773 Boswell and Johnson arrived in Inverary, Argyllshire. They had been on the road for some months and were travelling south in the general direction of Glasgow, where Johnson expected to find letters. Despite his eagerness to proceed Johnson could not avoid being detained by Boswell's sense of polite conduct and desire for social eminence. Throughout the Tour, Boswell had been keen to offer Johnson, and by extension himself, to more or less every notable they happened to meet; the Duke of Argyll, already known to Boswell, could be no exception to this general rule. Nevertheless Inverary castle, for all his boasted prior acquaintance, posed a problem. As Boswell was to recall, 'I told Mr Johnson I was in some difficulty how to act at Inverary'.² His 'difficulty' concerned the residence at Inverary of Elizabeth Gunning, who was by this time the mistress of the castle, and Duchess of Argyll.³ The account of the visit which follows is, I want to contend, both embarrassed and embarrassing, a function, apparently, of the presence of a beautiful woman and Boswell's *confused and* only partially concealed antagonism towards her. For throughout the two days following the confession of his 'difficulty' (and perhaps beyond) Boswell will be troubled by

¹ W. Horace Bleakley, *The Beautiful Duchess: Being an Account of the Life and Times of Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*, 2nd ed., (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1927), pp. 161-171.

² James Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides* ed. Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (London: Heineman, 1963), p. 353. The account which follows employs both the Journal Boswell kept during 1773, published as part of the Yale Edition of the Private Papers of James Boswell, and the account of the Journey he published in 1784 as a forerunner to his much larger *Life of Johnson*. The slight textual differences between the texts will be commented on as the argument proceeds.

³ Elizabeth Gunning had become Duchess of Argyll, as well as of Hamilton, with the accession of her second husband to the title in 1770.

Elizabeth Gunning. In particular her intervention in his relations with other men will be deeply unsettling, and it is the elaboration of this aspect of his 'difficulty...at Inverary' that I wish to pursue.

Boswell's involvement with Elizabeth Gunning dated from the period 1766-67, when he was engaged in what became known as the 'Douglas Cause'. The affair, a protracted and ruinous court case, concerned the accession to the Duchy of Douglas. The suit was contested, over several years and in numerous courts, between lawyers representing the claims of John, 7th Duke of Hamilton (Elizabeth Gunning's eldest son) and those pleading for Archibald Douglas, an apparently dubious heir presented by the late Duke's ageing sister. Throughout Boswell was implacably opposed to the Hamilton side, both in public and in private. For him the Duchess's willingness to argue for her son's right to the Douglas Estate represented a monstrous assault not only on the sanctity of the law, but also on the security of landed families in Scotland. More particularly the burden of the case, in Boswell's eyes at least, lay in the idea of 'filiation'; the necessity of knowing who was whose son. The case was no Family Romance, more a gothic insistence on the sanctity of inheritance in which Boswell cast himself as the defender of the existing order. Boswell's enthusiastic support for the Douglas side led him to write a novel, *Dorando, a Spanish Tale*, and a series of fairly poor poems of which *The Hamilton Cause*, is perhaps the most bearable:

Like Samson of Old, I confess we now find
That *our beauty* has charms which have made us all blind;
So in rage and despair, with a terrible joy,
The house we'll pull down, and the law we'll destroy

*Derry down, down, etc.*¹

In common with his other efforts, *The Hamilton Cause* continues to attack the Duchess on a range of matters: her apparent duplicity, the haughtiness of her beauty, and the ambiguity of her social position. Throughout she is represented as an inappropriate, intrusive presence and a vile and disruptive incursion into the hallowed sphere of the Scottish nobility.

Boswell did not scruple to avow his opinions in public, so that by 1773, he had good reason to feel more than a little apprehensive about encountering his former protagonist face to face. Indeed he was confident that 'she hated me, on account of my zeal in the Douglas Cause'.² His misgivings first emerge in his account of the previous day, October 24th, when he and Johnson are deciding how to get an invitation to dine at Inverary without actually appearing to ask for one. Boswell's final hesitation concerns the possible displeasure of the Duchess should they be invited. Talking to Johnson:

I mentioned, how disagreeable my company would be to the duchess. Mr Johnson treated this objection with a manly disdain, "That, Sir, he [the Duke] must settle with his wife".³

The significance of Johnson's 'manly' refutation cannot be underestimated. It articulates both the supposed triumph of men over women, and the bonds which exist between men. It is a source of comfort which Boswell will use throughout the ensuing visit and

¹ Quoted in Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell. The Earlier Years, 1740-1769*, (London: Heineman, 1966), p. 317. A full account of the case and its ramifications for Elizabeth Gunning is provided in Bleakley, *Beautiful Duchess*, pp. 74-76, 91-124, 128-36.

² Boswell, *Journal*, p. 351.

³ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 352.

meal, reminding himself in the face of the hostile Duchess that, 'I was the Duke of Argyle's guest'.¹

I want to situate my reading of Boswell's predicament in relation to the analysis of 'male homosocial desire' provided by Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick's work is impressive for its commitment, particularly in her reading of *A Sentimental Journey*, to see the politics of gender within the context of class consciousness.² For Sedgwick class-based, homosocial bonds (the threads and unions of 'patriarchy') are formulated over and across the presence of women.³ Analyzing the conversation between the Calais landlord and the hapless Yorick Sedgwick suggests that through their conversation both men are able to establish a union via a process of 'mutual support and definition'. Their relationship is, crucially, formulated 'over the ruined carcass of a woman'. In these terms Boswell's 'difficulty' can be brought into a clear focus. He will not be able - either with Johnson or with the Duke of Argyll - to form such a connection, rather he will undergo the reverse, a feeling which Sedgwick describes as a 'change in the course of a relationship with a woman [which] feels like a radical degeneration of substance'.⁴

Boswell's allegiance to what Sedgwick sees as the 'male homosocial continuum',

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 354.

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York: Columbia, 1985), pp. 67-82, see also, pp. 10-11, 15.

³ Sedgwick is not the first person to use the phrase 'male homosociality', but, her work has had a profound impact on English studies. For a discussion of Sedgwick's work which usefully accounts for the sources of her work (Levi-Strauss, Irigaray *et al*) and the limitations inherent in such a project, see Joseph Bristow, 'Men After Feminism: Sexual Politics Twenty Years On', in David Porter ed., *Between Men and Feminism*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57-79.

⁴ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, pp. 76, 45.

is signified in the appeal to his status as the Duke's guest. Despite Johnson's assurance, however, his troubles begin early:

I sent in my name, and was introduced. Found the amiable Duke sitting at the head of his table, with Campbell of Airds and several more gentlemen. I was very graciously received, drank some claret, and gave some particulars of the curious journey which I had been making with Dr. Johnson. When we rose from table, the Duke came close to me, and said, "I hope you and Dr. Johnson will dine with us tomorrow"....This was all as could be wished. As I was going away, the Duke said, "Mr. Boswell, won't you have some tea?" I thought it as well to put over the meeting with the Duchess this night; so respectfully agreed. I was conducted to the drawing-room by the Duke, who announced my name. But the Duchess took not the least notice of me. I did not mind this as the Duke was exceedingly civil.¹

It is striking how the assured tone of the passage ebbs away from the confidence and pleasure represented by 'This was all as could be wished'. Until this point Boswell has been entertained in an exclusively male environment, and entertained with distinctly male pleasures: drinking claret and relating stories of journeys taken, and those planned. Suddenly, he is confronted by the Duchess, and disconcerted by her resolute practice of ignoring him, a mode of behaviour which will be repeated throughout the evening. She refuses to make it easy for Boswell to move in the mixed sphere in which she is clearly in control, leaving him to affiliate, solely, with the Duke's gentlemanly conviviality.

Despite this initial set back, the engagement for the following evening is entered into with enthusiasm on Boswell's part. However things soon go awry, and rather embarrassingly. Emboldened, or maddened by the duchess's indifference, Boswell attempts to bolster his position at the dinner table:

I knew it was not the rule here to drink to anybody. But that I might have the satisfaction for once to look the Duchess in the face, with a glass in my hand, I rose a little and with a respectful air addressed her: "My lady

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 352.

Duchess, I have the honour to drink your grace's good health." I think I repeated all these words audibly and with a steady countenance. This was rather too much. But she had set me at defiance.¹

As a attempt at phallic steadfastness this is somewhat pathetic; particularly as the phrase 'This was rather too much' could refer to either the transgression against established practice at Inverary, or the effect of the failed challenge on Boswell. The account is toned down and made less equivocal for the published version. In the later text Boswell removed the clause 'I think' from the sentence concerning his speech, so that the final line reads: 'This was, perhaps, too much; but some allowance must be made for human feeling'.² The change between the 1773 text and that published later cannot obscure the fool Boswell made of himself. It was a moment of intrepidity which Peter Pindar found irresistible:

Knowing - as I am a man of tip-top breeding,
That *great folks* drink no healths whilst they are feeding,
I took my glass, and looking at her GRACE,
I stared like a *devil* in her face;
Said I, my *LADY DUCHESS*, I salute ye:
Most audible, indeed, was my salute,
For which some folks will say I was a brute;
But faith, it dash'd her, as I knew it wou'd;
But then I knew I was flesh and blood.³

The humour of the encounter, enlivened by Boswell's imbecilic, childish recalcitrance underlines the fact that he is debarred from the full exercise of his sociable intentions.

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 354.

² Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland and a Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides*, ed. and intro. by Peter Levi, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 378.

³ Peter Pindar [pseud. John Walcott], *Bozzy and Piozzi: or, the British Biographers. A Town Ecolouge*, 10th ed., (London: G. Kearsley, 1788), pp. 20-21.

Boswell accordingly finds the Duchess of Argyll thoroughly disagreeable. Throughout the evening, at least as it is represented by Boswell, it is possible to read a level of antagonism towards his hosts, and principally towards the duchess. A dislike that stems from her perceived neglect of him and corresponding indulgence of Johnson: 'She was very attentive to Mr. Johnson'.¹

The Duchess continues to exacerbate Boswell's discomfort by calling him a 'Methodist', a 'hit' as Boswell terms it for his 'credulity' in the Douglas cause. The remark is particularly pointed as it is 'the only sentence she ever deigned to utter to me'.² It is however, later in the meal that the final insult occurs when, in a response to a question of Johnson's, she replies:

"I know *nothing* of Mr Boswell". I heard this, and despised it. It was weak as well as impertinent. Poor Lady Lucy Douglas, to whom I mentioned this, observed, "She knew *too much* of Mr Boswell". I shall make no remark on her grace's speech. I indeed felt it as rather too severe; but when I recollected that my punishment was inflicted by so dignified a beauty, I had that kind of consolation which a man would feel who is strangled by a *silken cord*.³

No consolation at all then, unless Boswell enjoys the forms of ejaculatory brinkmanship relished by de Sade. It is an occasion of pleasurable suffering, of self-inflicted injury. Quite why Boswell wished to remind himself, in Peter Pindar's words, that he was 'flesh and blood' is unclear. Perhaps because he is excluded, 'she had set me at defiance', he feels the need to reassert himself. It is striking that Boswell's account, and Peter Pindar's poem, represent him undergoing precisely what Sedgewick terms a 'radical

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 354.

² Boswell, *Journal*, p. 355.

³ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 356.

degeneration of substance'. He feels all evening that he is 'flesh and blood'; a man merely and not an honoured guest, certainly no champion with the ladies. Throughout his discomfort Johnson continues to engage the duchess: 'Dr. Johnson was all attention to her grace....I never saw him so gentle and complaisant as this day'.

The ambiguities of the text are I think many. It is possible though to be fairly clear about the transgression Boswell believes has been committed by his host. First and foremost Elizabeth Gunning has broken, or at least frustrated, the homosocial bonds which ought, as Boswell sees it, to have existed between himself, the Duke and Johnson. This much is evident in Boswell's constant assertion of his relationship to both the Duke and to Johnson; and of course in his prickling resentment of the attention Johnson lavishes on the Duchess. After all the passages I have cited Boswell immediately notes the rapport between Dr. Johnson and the Duchess of Argyll. He can only watch and observe their conversation, participation is impossible. Her presence is then a problem, and it is a problem not only because it has endangered Boswell's status as a gentleman, though he is clearly disturbed, but because her wilful inaction, a theatre of indifference, disrupts the prospect of sociability.¹ Her behaviour destroys or prevents conversation; she does not give Boswell the chance to speak, she excludes him. Most damning of all she preoccupies Johnson, Boswell's friend. In so doing she refuses the prevailing eighteenth-century expectation about women fostering conversation and sociability.

Moreover, the duchess's presence appears to remind Boswell that the horizontality of polite culture is reliant on specific and hierarchial structures, which are based on the

¹ Even the Duchess's own biographer finds her conduct distinctly unhelpful at this point. See, Bleackley, *Beautiful Duchess*, pp. 165-66.

dual articulation of class and gender; a context in which middle class sentiment has a prevailing currency. Beautiful women, able to move between social stations, represent a particular and unwelcome fluidity in these relations. Boswell was, of course, not alone in this. Johnson himself makes this kind of attack on beautiful women both in his *Rambler* and, ironically, in his version of the Scottish trip. In these terms the 'Meditation on A Pudding' recorded from Johnson's speech the day before is oddly prescient. The Pudding contains he avers:

Flour that once waved in the golden grain and drank the dews of the morning. Milk pressed from the swelling udder by the gentle hand of the beauteous milkmaid, whose beauty and innocence might have recommended a worse draught: who, while she stroked the udder indulged no ambitious thoughts of wandering in palaces, formed no plans for the destruction of her fellow-creatures.¹

Elizabeth Gunning is no milk maid, indeed in Boswell's eyes she is to be despised precisely because she harbours 'ambitious thoughts...for the destruction of her fellow creatures', as he made clear in *The Hamilton Cause*. Similarly a definite class consciousness, and an antagonism towards class mobility, structures Boswell's sense of outrage and betrayal. A poem, also written in 1773, makes clear the kind of resentment felt at Elizabeth Gunning's elevation. The poem, *The Mob in the Pit: Or, Lines Addressed to the Duchess of A-----l*, describes a scandal at a play house. The poem concludes with this piece of invective addressed to the duchess:

Spare all reproach on the licentious times:
Tax not the times, severe and hard to you -
They hold a faithful mirror to your view.
Such has thy conduct been - reflect, and say,
It is not justice boldly to convey
The story to public ear, and show

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 350.

To all the world, what all the world should know,
Tho' lifted by the Beauty of a Face,
Tho' lifted from vile plebian to Patrician race,
That, spite of Titles, Dignity and Fame
The paltry breed of G-nn-ngs is the same.¹

Here Elizabeth Gunning represents the antithesis (precisely) of all that is solid, worthwhile and dependable. The poem is committed, and it is clear throughout, to a bourgeois morality which opposes, implacably, the elevation of beautiful women to the ranks of the aristocracy. The closing lines make this evident; the trappings of nobility - 'Titles, Dignity and Fame' - are insufficient to hide the unpleasant facts of the Gunnings's equally low morality and origins, and she remains therefore a 'vile plebian'. The vitriol with which this last remark is made ought not to mask the more ambivalent class position the Duchess holds in the rest of the poem. Throughout, her class position is doubled, because while she represents the grubby aspiration of the plebian, she also images the aristocracy at its most shiftless and degenerate. This double investment with the Duchess as both 'vile plebian' and 'puissant Duchess' is one Boswell seems to share. It is an antipathy to the authority of the Argyll family which spills over into his account of the evening, despite his evident pleasure in the elevation it casts upon himself.

Boswell, as I have argued, has felt betrayed by Johnson throughout the meal at Inverary. Despite being gratified by the success of Johnson's relation to the Duke - it gives him the doubled pride of introducing Johnson to the Duke, together with the pleasure of showing Johnson the worth of Scotland, represented metonymically by

¹ Anon, *The Mob in the Pit; or, Lines Addressed to the Duchess of Argyll*, 2nd ed., (London: S. Bladon, 1773), p. 7.

Argyll - Boswell is bitterly frustrated.¹ There is little sense of him standing back 'to relish the scene' in the way Frank Brady suggests, he is too unsettled.² Boswell's exasperation comes out a day or so later when he complains of Archibald Douglas's neglect of his mother's grave at Holyrood palace:

Dr. Johnson, who, I know not how, had formed an opinion on the Hamilton side in the Douglas Cause, slyly answered, "Sir, sir, don't be too severe on the gentleman; don't accuse him of a want of filial piety! Lady Jane Douglas was not *his* mother" He roused my zeal so much that I took the liberty to tell him he knew nothing of the cause, which I do most seriously believe was the case.³

Johnson intimates that once Archibald Douglas (the final victor in the Douglas cause) had proved that Lady Jane Douglas *was* his mother in court, his subsequent conduct undermined his claim by his lack of 'filial piety'. Johnson's wit is ill-timed, as it gives Boswell the opportunity to vent his revived hostility against the Hamilton side, a fury which the evening at Inverary had reawakened.

The Douglas cause represented many things to Boswell, but most pertinently it reflected his belief that the family represented a stable social unit which communicated both wealth and patronage to sons, such as himself.⁴ Boswell's investment in the ideal of the family is most apparent in his novel *Dorando*, written some five years before

¹ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 360.

² Frank Brady, *James Boswell: The Later Years, 1769-95*, (London: Heineman, 1984), p. 79.

³ Boswell, *Journal*, p. 359.

⁴ The period covering the events of the court cases and the publication of the novel are included in *Boswell in Search of a Wife, 1766-69*, Yale Edition of the Private Papers of James Boswell, ed. Frank Brady & Frederick A. Pottle, (London: Heineman, 1957), see esp. pp. 60-61, 72-74, 90-102.

these events take place. Given Boswell's sense of the importance of securing bonds between men, it is hardly surprising that *Dorando* - a novel described by the *Gentleman's Magazine* as 'zealously but feebly written' - should constitute nothing less than an outraged fantasy of identification, and of fraternal affiliation secured through the certainties of the male line.¹ The novel, in what is a thinly veiled allegory, advances the case against the Hamilton claim and represents the Douglas case as an important affirmation of the sanctity of marriage and of the family. Boswell's whole involvement with the Douglas Cause rests on a resistance to the active role of women and a firm belief in the rights of sons. Hence his resentment of the Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll, and his sense of being cuckolded by her at Inverary. In *Dorando* Boswell fantasies the establishment of a pure connection between fathers and son and, in an important parallel, between members of the aristocratic elite.² This desire is particularly in evidence in the speech of the 'illustrious grandee', a figure who is made to function as the author's mouthpiece. Summing up the fictional version of the case, the grandee reflects that:

Though long accustomed to hold with a steady hand the balance of Europe, and mark the fate of nations; I confess, most mighty signors, that I have at no time been more affected than I now am by this private question ---- Private did I say? ---- I recall the expression ---- It is a question of the most public nature ---- in the event of which every thing that is dear and valuable to humanity is concerned ---- What is Spain? What is our country? It is not the valleys though ever so gay ---- It is not the fields, though ever so rich, that attach us to our native land ---- No. It is our family ---- It is our wives - ---- It is our children ---- And what have we before us? A daring attempt to

¹ Review of 'Dorando. A Spanish Tale', in *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. XXXVII (July, 1767), pp. pp. 361-62; [James Boswell], *Dorando. A Spanish Tale*, (London: J. Wilkie, 1767), see especially, pp. 40-44.

² Boswell, *Dorando*, pp. 26-27, 34-35, 45-46.

render our children uncertain. If adulterers have been thought worthy of death, what punishment do those deserve, who would introduce what is still more dangerous to society?¹

The insistence on the high valuation of the family, on the very public, national nature of 'this private question', is a striking manoeuvre. It is particularly so, when taken with Boswell's abiding sense that these relations are informed by class stratification of a highly subtle and nuanced kind. This would seem to fulfil Sedgwick's claim that, 'this modern narrative of the male-homosocial subject was first and most influentially elaborated as part of a broad and very specific reading of class'. It is in Sedgwick's terms an ideological move which relies not only on the rejection of aristocratic power and exploitation of 'working people' but also on the mobilisation of 'a new narrative of the "private" bourgeois family'.²

It is not necessary to place the burden of this change within Boswell's ultimately slight and idiosyncratic narrative. However, it is clear that, in Sedgwick's terms the dinner at Inverary represents a disturbance of the bonds which exist between men, and which seek to ensure a controlled 'exchange of women'.³ Her private malice and personal commend have intruded on a mixed dinner-party to the extent that it becomes a public humiliation. For Boswell such 'private questions' go to the very heart of how society is organised, and are indeed themselves issues of a public, if not national

¹ Boswell, *Dorando*, pp. 40-41.

² Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 68. For a very different reading of the nature of the family in eighteenth-century society see, Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage, 1550-1800*, abr. and rev. ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); and Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, (New York: Academic Press, 1978).

³ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 86.

importance. In these terms Elizabeth Gunning's behaviour reveals the insecurity of process, her conduct represents a refusal to accept the primary importance of bonds between men. In Boswell's embattled terms for her to intercede in this way is for her to act in a profoundly disruptive way. An act which leaves Boswell and the Duke of Argyll in enfeebled and impoverished positions.¹

Elizabeth Gunning's blunt refusal to play the self-effacing hostess leaves Boswell unable to gain access to a reassuring image of feminine domesticity. He has instead to hope for the much more vulnerable bonds which exist between men. Relations which as Johnson's conduct has indicated can be neglected for domestic complaisance and idle flirtation. Boswell is consequently left in a precarious position, one which both reveals the ways in which notions of different kinds of space (domesticity and social conviviality) are thought of as distinguished by gender difference, and which indicates that the distinction between such locations is ambiguous. So much so in fact that it appears that the domestic and the private are not necessarily connected. It is, after all, a separation which Elizabeth Gunning, is prepared to transgress. And it is this militant obstinacy which makes her presence in the narrative so compelling. It is with this idea of separate nature of not only public and private, but also private and domestic that I will now conclude this thesis.

¹ Boswell was to meet the Argylls a second time, and again his account is imbued with a highly gendered version of contemporary manners and social roles: 'TUESDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER [1777]...This day the Duke and Duchess of Argyll stopped at Ashbourne to change horses, going to London. Dr. Johnson and I waited on the Duke, who was very civil to us both. But I was sensible of a deficiency of force in him to operate on one's mind as a great man should do. The Duchess was courteous to the Doctor. But, as at Inverary, would hardly take any notice of me.', *Boswell in Extremes, 1776-78*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle and Charles McC. Weis, (London: Heineman, 1971), pp. 182.

Serious Business: Alienation, Pleasure, and Identity.

The whirling of words and wheels; a drunken toast and a fantasy of hanging: each action attempts to negotiate with the difficult predicament of a public woman. Boswell's intimations of his own mortality, however, are contrasted with Elizabeth Gunnings's resistance to any easy division of public and private space; equally emblematic, though, is the restricted taste of Frances Reynolds. The differences between the two accounts are important, but what is most striking is the repeated insistence, of the individual or the culture, to think of the difference of space in terms of a difference of gender. In these terms to become public is to do more than move between known locations. Consequently 'public' and 'private' are more profitably thought of as terms within an ambiguous discursive field than as knowable, material locations. The ambiguity of conduct within these uncertain spaces beleaguers Boswell inordinately. Boswell's unease was perhaps indicative of the kinds of confusion inherent in the majority of texts that I have been describing. His sense of the uncertainty of behaviour in mixed, part-public, part-private spaces is common to many eighteenth-century texts.

This ambivalence is important because within eighteenth-century conceptions of the social the subject was defined, and then judged according to the kinds of public affiliation and private relations he (and in some cases she) were able to form. Commenting on one of her case studies, Elizabeth Shackleton of Alincoats, Amanda Vickery writes that:

She resorted often the 'public papers', perpetuated her dead husband's 'publick spirit' by selling his famous rabies medicine at an affordable price, witnessed her second husband's 'publick humiliation' in the house of a tenant, and saw her own kitchen become 'very publick' with a stream of unexpected visitors. Doubtless, the likes of Mrs Shackleton figured in that 'publick' addressed by both the *Ladies Magazine* and the *Leeds*

*Intelligencer.*¹

Perhaps most importantly, Shackleton has access to the 'public' she most valued, that produced by access to 'company, opinion information'. None of the definitions of the public attributed to Shackleton by Vickery would be unfamiliar to most people in the eighteenth century. With this degree of mobility within the terms, it can mean here readership, social gathering and embarrassing exposure, as well as the more obvious significance attached to trade and social gatherings, the term 'public' is much more unstable than Habermas's argument might suggest. As Dena Goodman argues the process was one in which the uncertainty of the situation was apparent:

The eighteenth century was the historical moment in which public and private spheres were in the process of articulation, such that no stable distinction can or could be made between them - a moment in which individuals needed to negotiate their actions, discursive and otherwise, across constantly shifting boundaries between ambiguously defined realms of experience.²

Goodman, while accurate in her delineation of the 'constantly shifting boundaries' of public and private life, is wrong to attribute this to a unique occurrence of the eighteenth century. The ambiguity of these conceptions was evident at least as early as the beginning of the seventeenth-century and constitutes one of the defining moments of the modern period. A point which is I think, supported by Vickery's reflection that the 'domestic sphere' like the poor and the rising middle class are always with us. However, what is peculiar to the eighteenth century is the emergence of a discourse on these

¹ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres', p. 412.

² Dena Goodman, 'Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime' in *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History*, vol. 31, (1992), p. 14.

spaces which is rendered ambiguous by the unwelcome (or for some welcome) facts of commercial enterprise; and it is worth noting that a significant proportion of the publics in which Elizabeth Shackleton moves are determined by either trade or financial transaction of some kind.

This is important because in many respects what I have been describing is a profoundly ideological attempt to manipulate and disguise the divisive nature of commodity culture. The figure of the polite, virtuous woman is central to this endeavour. Eighteenth-century writers, even Frances Reynolds in her own hesitant way, tend to argue that a preference for an object (particularly commodities) is like exhibiting a preference of a woman. The reasons why one likes women depend of course on the particular writer: because they are virtuous, or voluptuous, polite or polished. The effect though is the same, an attempt to mask the alienation of owning within the reassuring intimacy of desire, or domesticity. However, eighteenth-century accounts of the domestic were often troubled by the ambiguous position of women relative to the commodity. In the mid-eighteenth century Lord Hardwicke's marriage Act, which became law in 1753, sought to further establish woman's non-presence in English civil law. It was a suppression which paralleled the non-existence of the married woman, as *femme covert*. To the more liberal-minded amongst the middle classes Hardwicke's Act represented the confirmation of an aristocratic traffic in marriageable young women.¹

¹ For an overview of the political and social debates surrounding the passing of the Marriage Act see Erica Harth, 'The Virtue of Love: Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act' in *Cultural Critique*, (Spring, 1988), pp. 123-54; Susan Staves, 'Matrimonial Discourse in Fiction and in Court: The Case of Anne Masterman' in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski eds. *Fetter'd or Free: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 169-185; and Susan Moller Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions in Some Current Views', in

Despite this uncertainty, women, or rather idealised versions of middle and upper-class women - Mrs B*** and her kind - were enshrined as guardians, not only of beauty and sensibility but of preserving the culture from its own depravity. This produced a new attention to sexual difference. Commenting on Brown's assertion that the difference between the sexes had been lost, Guest writes that:

The moralisation of commercial society can...be seen to demand both that the boldness of women be confined to modest domesticity, and that the "apparent Distinction" between the sexes should become more visible. The ideal of feminine retirement might be described as the flip-side of the "aristocratic" coin of display, and that ideal provides a set of terms that constitute the most powerful account of feminine virtue and value in this period. The manifestation of that ideal in the visible and selfless domestic indicates its appropriation to bourgeois discourses of feminine propriety, and marks in those a relation between modest retirement and distinctive display where the later is prescribed and not only prohibited.¹

It is not only Mrs B*** who manifests this new retired-yet-displayed status. Its centrality to middle-class thinking can be evidenced by a consideration of Hogarth's attention to, and enjoyment of, the detailed lines which compose the face and dress of virtuous, but sensuous women.² It was a pattern of features and expression from which he could read the 'index of the mind'.³ What is produced by these reflections is a reading of morals and the physical appearance and social presence of women which also be found not only in other writes on taste, such as Spence and Usher, but in the practices of painters like Reynolds and in the mid-century novel of sentiment.

Eighteenth-Century Studies, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1983-84), pp. 121-38.

¹ Guest, 'Double Lustre', p. 483.

² William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste*, (london: J. Reeve, 1753), pp. 123-31.

³ Hogarth, *Analysis*, pp. 125-26.

For the middle classes 'distinction' from their social inferiors, and just as importantly, from the luxuriant aristocrats they affected to despise could be achieved by an image of 'familial coherence'.¹ In a culture of alienated commodities it was necessary to develop a distinctly proprietorial gaze. Employed by a male spectator it signalled his absence, his non-presence, within the field of his objectified property, but also his insistent ownership of the properties upon which he looked.² The figures of bourgeois women attain a peculiar prominence in this field. They are objectified and made alien: sexual difference is elaborated beyond the distinctions of anatomy to encompass character, social place and moral inclinations. And yet women return as the subject (a subject crucially is not assumed to own or to look) who is to alleviate the male subject's own self-imposed absence from the sphere of their property, be it marital or commercial. Images of femininity became therefore ambiguous, but profoundly resonant images of the new culture; a culture both of the domestic and of the public spaces of pleasure and business. Such images managed to be the representation of property, and the means of overcoming the alien, dissociating aspect of possession. The enshrinement of the feminine, was not accompanied by any corresponding empowerment

¹ I take the terms of this final argument from Marcia Pointon's discussion of the eighteenth-century Conversation piece. See her, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 159-74.

² For a further discussion of the development of 'alienation' in eighteenth-century culture see, James M. Carrier, 'Alienating Objects: The Emergence of Alienation in Retail' in *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 29, no. 2 (June, 1994), pp. 359-80.

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¹ I take the terms of this final argument from Marcia Pointon's discussion of the eighteenth-century Conversation piece. See her, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 159-74.

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³ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 10-17.

For if women are to act as compensation for the alienation of the market, then they must be eminently marketable.

The ambiguous representation of women in eighteenth-century culture instances the highly gendered nature of the debate about the meaning of beauty in the period I have been describing. However the kind of representation offered in this context is also indicative of the two other major changes which have been explored in this thesis. First, the relationship of the discussion of taste to the emergence of a culture that was profoundly conscious of the nature of commerce. The prevailing account of taste changed radically in the mid-eighteenth century, and began to encompass a respect and a desire for privately owned objects. Secondly, the changed articulation of social spaces which occurred concurrently with that development established new spaces in which polite sociability could be given its fullest expression. It is this combination of political and social imperatives which enacts Beauty as ideology at its most imperious.

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