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'the Luxurious Fancies Of Vice': Sexuality, Luxury, And Space In The Eighteenth-Century British Social Sphere

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‘THE LUXURIOUS FANCIES OF VICE’: SEXUALITY, LUXURY, AND SPACE IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH SOCIAL SPHERE

by

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DEDICATION

To Carl Rochon.

DULCE EST DESIPERE IN LOCO

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PREFACE

"Here we see Thick Scandal circulate with Right Bohea . . ."

—inscription under a satirical print, 1710

"Tea has had its share of blame, as promoting scandal, but for what reason, I know not; there is certainly nothing in the nature of that much famed Indian weed productive of scandal any more than wine or other beverages."

—Carlton House Magazine, 249 'The Female Rumpus, a Tale' July, 1793

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INTRODUCTION

Most Western-nation people born in the twentieth century take privacy for granted. Whether as an abstraction, a physical space free of intrusion from others, or as information kept separate from the public image of a person, we see privacy as an essential element of liberty, without which a person is deprived of some of their dignity. The advent of social media, public surveillance systems like CCTV, and location-tracking smartphones coupled with an online arsenal of tools that detect preferences and demographics for use by the state and private corporations mean that privacy is a major concern for many individuals who previously never pondered the results of its loss. A recent NSA scandal wherein the United States government stored personal data outraged US citizens.[1] However, the beliefs that privacy is an inherent right and that there is a social imperative to keep certain things private, are not historical universals. Intimacy created between individuals relies on both spoken and unspoken understandings about secrecy and discretion, usually when mutual bonds result from a shared concealment.

Privacy and discretion are two critical principles of modern social intercourse, but when did these notions of withholding and concealing become so important? Contemporary views about privacy grew out of the development of secret-keeping and discretion championed amongst the polite world in the eighteenth century. An anonymous print from 1795 entitled *A Lock'd Jaw for John Bull* (pictured and discussed further in Chapter 4) shows a well-dressed gentleman fixing a lock on the jaw of a plebeian man,

[1] Julia Angwin, Charlie Savage, Jeff Larson, Henrik Moltke, Laura Poitras and James Risen, "AT&T Helped U.S. Spy on Internet on a Vast Scale." *New York Times*, August 15, 2015. Accessed October 24, 2016.

admonishing him to close his mouth and assuring him he will soon become accustomed to doing so. This print uses satirical illustration to emphasize the imperative for discretion. Though this was a satire against sedition, it reflects values that had become part of the social world as well. Plebeian men and women continued to speak freely in public about topics polite society censored.

Noted sociologist Norbert Elias claimed privacy and the expectation that certain behaviors and functions be concealed from public view was a pillar of the civilizing process in Europe.[2] Historically, elites and government officials safeguarded secrets and secret information while those lower on the socioeconomic ladder had to both learn and fight for privacy and discretion. Originating in elite circles, privacy became a marker for refinement, dictating what may be said and done in public and what must be concealed. As men and women refined their daily habits, they began to negotiate what Elias has called a shame frontier that prevented them from indulging in behaviors or acts that would cause public embarrassment.

This paradox of privacy and revelation was complicated. In terms of bodily dignity, what was dictated by manners and what proved popular in social settings was often in conflict. Especially in the middle classes, where refined behaviors were new, propriety and popularity were sometimes at odds. In terms of dress and behavior, proscriptive edicts could in some cases curb the appeal of the correct. Restrictive stays and the perilous social consequences for a lady who neglected to maintain an upright carriage kept women literally and metaphorically upright. Digressions from this norm are discussed in chapter three.

[2] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 60, 118, 142, 414-21.

These restrictions on the body were inherently tied to sexual restrictions. The above woman went on to complain about the paradox of gendered restraint in terms of romantic situations, "…what gives me a great deal of anxiety, and is some discouragement in the pursuit of virtue" were the preference of men for "she who parleys at the very brink of vice' rather than the woman who 'keeps much within the bounds of what is lawful."[3] Though this example was meant as satire in *The Spectator*, the underlying message remained true.

Just as some actions became unrefined and inappropriate for public view, the new architectural spaces introduced the opportunity for new rank-validating social habits, with commodities and objects not yet stabilized by tradition. Men and women molded these new social spheres into sites of contests and negotiations for social power. Thus, not only were the rules of genteel social behavior being determined, but because the civilizing process restricted sexual expressions in public, those expressions emerged in new and unusual ways. Some facilitated a refinement of sexuality by grafting the erotic onto stable luxury goods, as in the erotic scenes on expensive porcelain. In other instances, sexual desires and hints were conveyed in public social spaces, in the arrangement or decoration of rooms, in the subsuming of erotic content into the respected and learned forms of antiquity and allegory, and even in sexual slang that could be spoken in public without unwanted detection.[4] The process of refinement and the removal of sexual activity and talk to the bedchamber, the most private and 'backstage' area of the house, required new understandings of both privacy and sexuality.[5]

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[3] Addison and Steele, *The Spectator No. 563* (September 24, 1712).
[4] Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 3rd ed. (Hooper & Co.: London, 1796), Introduction.
[5] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 138.

Sexuality is often considered one of the most intimate aspects of personality, hidden from public view and in many cases, never wholly revealed even to sexual partners.[6] During the eighteenth century, as various geographic populations responded to the shifts and disruptions in tradition associated with new wealth, new social habits, and the spaces and objects which filled them, privacy and personhood became associated with new social spheres, affected by and contingent upon furniture and particular social spaces. Following Elias's concern with the origin of manners and his convictions regarding the subsequent refinement of great swathes of populations in various European countries from the Renaissance through the early twentieth century, this project seeks to shed light on the most private of activities, namely the changing practices of sexual activity and erotic expression. I also explore the ways sexuality and sexual knowledge figure into the cultural milieu of Britain over the course of the long eighteenth-century in order to illuminate the confluence of privacy, sexuality, and the objects of status and refinement within newly created social settings at home and in public.

Chapter 1. The Social Sphere: Representation, Space, and Status at the Eighteenth-Century British Tea Table

The historical origin of many ritualistic behaviors was often linked to an official position and regulated by the formal manners and ritualistic responses, gestures, and behaviors expected of the public persona of a "great man." At home and in private, people were more free to drop the mantle of their role and behave more naturally. However, as the eighteenth century progressed, time at home was subject to more formality and

[6] Twentieth-century sex researchers frequently cited secrecy between spouses as a given.

refinements. Especially for the British middle classes, the domestic household was becoming more public, as social interactions with acquaintances were conducted in various rooms within it. Even at the level of language, there is a confluence between abstract meaning and physical space. The French word *privé* originally meant both 'devoid of formality' as well as 'at home.'[7] In this definition, we see the inextricable links between behavior and physical space. Horace's assertion, '*Ducle est desipere in loco*' was understood to be bound to the safety of privacy within domestic space.[8]

The basic requirements of shelter and bodily support that underlay housing and furniture needs had undergone such mass refinement by 1754 that the furniture maker George Hepplewhite could claim that the appropriate layout of rooms was 'governed by principles as sure as geometry.'[9] These principles of room decoration, however, were neither static nor historical; they were highly contextual and related to the display of good taste, now seen to authenticate morality, fashionability, and social superiority. In *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (2006), Deborah Cohen explored the changing items of the late nineteenth-century British household and their relation to morality and religion; this dissertation considers the antecedents of those beliefs and seeks to trace their origin in the eighteenth century.

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[7] Roger Chartier, Georges Duby, and Arthur Goldhammer, *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance* Vol. 3 (Harvard University Press, 1993), 400.

[8] Horace, 4 Odes xxii, 28. Translated by Sir John Soane to mean, "It is pleasant to be nonsensical in due place." It can be alternately translated to mean, 'It is delightful to play the fool occasionally' or 'It is nice to throw aside one's dignity and relax at the proper time." The first and last translations emphasize the conditional elements of time and space which enable people to 'throw aside' their dignity 'at the proper time.'

[9] Elizabeth Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 82.

While the domestic house was on the path to becoming the Victorian ideal of a retreat from the world, it was at the same time more public than ever. Fashionable and popular, tea, the table, and the *equipage* necessary to serve it became portals of new social activity that ushered a 'public' of acquaintances through the domestic door. Gossip, news, and ostentation on the part of guests and hosts alike created a new social imaginary for middle-class women. New rights, expectations, and physical objects became part of a collective whole, challenging notions of gender and propriety and the ways these concepts related to the architectural space of the house. No longer reserved exclusively for the family and their servants, nor open to all as part of public charity or political or monarchial events, the household became a new social enclave that was both public and private. As women began entertaining friends over tea tables and men invited friends for port, numerous callers observed the domestic details of other people's households in unguarded, non-ceremonial contexts.

While centuries of practice refined and polished traditional and ceremonial behaviors associated with the court and the professions, shifting parameters of expected social interaction created new, unscripted moments where people had discretionary opportunities to show their refinement and politeness—or lack thereof. Keeping up with the ever-shifting parameters of correct display and behavior was a daunting task. Satirical prints and articles in newspapers like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, along with elite gossip in periodicals like *The Carlton House Magazine* showed readers the social opprobrium faced by those who violated social norms. As taste became associated with personality, the arrangement of furniture in rooms, the style of fashionable clothing worn, and the manner

in which someone took tea reflected more than mere status; it conveyed disposition as well.[10]

Visual information was important for instantaneous social responses based on nuances of rank. Whether in crowded city streets or highly select drawing rooms, eighteenth-century people expected exterior appearance to correlate with rank and social status. Market place goods were more than necessities or luxuries; they conveyed information about personality, character, and a host of other abstract concepts. T.H. Breen revealed the significance of this in terms of the politics of the American Revolution, where homespun cloth, for example, became a badge of patriotism.[11] In contrast, Kate Haulman emphasized the significance of social contests engaged in by men and women in the Atlantic World (who were using a British template of social behavior to model their own on), using social time to display luxuries and fight contests for social power with fashionable items and luxury clothing.[12] Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace has pointed to the plethora of trade manuals and directories from the mid-eighteenth century as evidence of the "urgent need to codify the practices and activities of the merchant" thus professionalizing the trade.[13] Similarly, these same categories of proscriptive literature were also applied to the domestic household, pointing to the evolution of this social space and the shifting roles and behaviors of women within it. Nowhere is this confluence between women, entertainment, social space and retail more pointed than in the furniture

[10] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 82.
[11] T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Introduction.
[12] Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14-8, 34, 35.
[13] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 82.

guides of the prominent English furniture makers of the eighteenth century. In the new domestic theatre of the British middle classes, visual display and attention to detail authenticated the genteel claims of the host.

The first chapter builds on these arguments, showing the links between refinements and the objects that aided them and how this plays out in sexualized social spaces. In the case of the tea table, served in the male-designated parlor, a confusion of established order and gendered understandings of space caused men to attack women with accusations of sexual immodesty and promiscuity. What could be more detrimental and at odds with a template of the hostess as a model of polite womanhood than a discussion about pornography in her living room? Yet at the same time, the refined erotic images of allegorical nudes and *bacchante* could adorn every teacup in the service without raising alarm. This tension over appropriate and inappropriate uses of sexual expression at the tea table shaped social response and assuaged or fueled deeper issues surrounding gender and class membership.

Several factors contribute to an understanding of the meaning behind household furnishings. Beliefs about gender, socioeconomic class, the social and gendered function of rooms, and politeness and manners all figure in a complex equation that changed over time. Tracking these changes yields surprising results at times. As positional goods replaced intangible concepts like piety as badges of valor in social situations, outward appearances were seen to validate and stand in for older concepts of feminine value. As women participated more in the commercial sphere, they upset the balance of household

authority in the arenas of purchasing power, decorative authority, and social acumen.[14] These transitions naturally gave rise to opposition and resistance. Anxious patriarchs feared women's encroachment into their spheres and retaliated against advances they saw as diminishing their authority. The response to middle class women gaining power in any arena was often met with suggestions that they were sexually immoral.

The changing layout of the domestic house and the multiplicity of furnishings influenced gendered social behavior. Whereas women were formerly assessed and valued according to displays of piety and modesty, the social shift away from the Church and toward refined display made them the gatekeepers of a family's social reputation in many social contexts. The template of ideal womanhood was recast. Women of the polite classes were now more often put in the role of shopper and sophisticated consumer, which was beginning to replace religion as the primary organizing principle and central obligation in public. Various strains of moral and religious rhetoric admonished women to return to the role of humility and piety which before was a mark of status. Encouraged to be examples of "holiness, chastity, obedience, charity, meekness, modesty, sobriety, silence, discretion, and frugality" the maids, wives, and widows of respectable families were limited to the confines of the household, restricted from spending on all but mundane household purchases, and unable to participate in a wider social public. Men attacked women's interest in fashion as an expression of personal vanity, declaring "How foul, filthy, unseemly and disorderly a thing it is for every woman to learn every day of an other

[14] Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 89, 121.

woman…how to trick and trim up themselves after the newest and gallentest fashion to set out their bodily beauty."[15] Many women were more compelled by the hard-won prestige and social power available in the commercial realm at the retail level via contests of display. Since their own status bolstered their husband's, they could more easily resist repeated attempts to sequester them to their earlier, narrower roles. Women, domestic furnishings, and the domestic space of the home combined to create new social expectations and meanings. The importance of visual references came to dominate social interactions, where the presence or absence of specific items could help or hinder the social power of the host or hostess. As women became gatekeepers of new social rituals that reflected the socioeconomic status of their spouses or households, they commuted objects into advanced standing in their communities.

Though the tide turned in favor of public display over private piety and humility, many men were interested in regaining authority they felt was lost with the addition of women in the marketplace. They fought back viciously and with their most powerful weapon: the accusation of wayward sexual behavior. Though legally men still retained the lion's share of authority, many men were upset by even the slight inroads women were making toward financial decision making and attacked them for doing so by slighting their sexual reputation. Calling a woman a whore was an actionable offence at the personal level, but stereotyping women tea drinkers as sexually promiscuous in a print was a legal way to condemn women in general without stepping beyond the bounds of the law. Thus, when

[15] Tim Hitchcock and Michelle Cohen, *English Masculinities, 1660-1800 (Women And Men In History)*, 1st ed., (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11, 25-43, 230.

Thomas Stretzer, the author of the pornographic pamphlet "Merryland Display'd" accused polite middle class women tea drinkers of gossiping about pornography over their fashionable and expensive tea ware, he was castigating a new and unstable image of the woman consumer who entertained and spent money as men did.[16]

Furnishings and décor created a stage for social rituals. As refinements multiplied, so too did objects. Many items for special use bridged the gap between stage set and social ritual. For instance, Wedgwood black basalt ware tea services provided the necessary receptacle for serving hot tea, but at the same time the black matte finish contrasted with the fair skin of the hostess serving tea, providing a perfect foil to her fashionable paleness during a ritual that emphasized the graceful movements of her hands.[17] All of this took place in the prominent 'front stage' area of the parlor, a room decorated and furnished to be one of the public showcases of the house.

Chapter 2. Shaping the New Man: Humor, Sexuality, and Change in the Eighteenth-Century British Social Sphere

As the middle classes adopted and modified certain elite behaviors, gestures, and phrases to fit within the changing parameters of an evolving social sphere, they were anxious to behave correctly in every circumstance. Comestibles were now part of social theatre, with elaborate table manners and rigid guidelines governing the content of discussions, the posture and carriage of diners, and the methods of breaking bread, accepting various dishes, and appearing genteel to guests and hosts alike. Gone were the

[16] Thomas Stretzer, *A New Description of Merryland Containing, a Topographical, Geographical, and Natural History of That Country*, 6th ed. (Bath/London: Printed: and Sold by J. Leake There; and by E. Curll), 174; Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 47.
[17] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 36.

lax regulations of elite feasts held in previous generations when it was "acceptable to piss on the stairs after too much to drink."[18] Instead, there was an uneasy tension between the stiff, antiquated manners of courtiers from previous generations and the free and easy manners of the present age which relied on shared bonhomie instead of ceremony. Casual manners and a 'free and easy' attitude were difficult to master, however, as more and more minutes of the day came under social surveillance and people changed their expectations of social interactions with equals, superiors, and inferiors. Within the walls of the household a tension existed between relaxed privacy and publicness.

The second chapter examines the concept of manners and refinements within the context of courtship. Just as manners books established new imperatives about dining and related formal rules and habits to their readership, so too did printers of courtship manuals guide and shape templates of gendered behavior for men and women looking for a spouse or lover. Then as now, humor was used to emphasize normative behavior by showing inappropriate transgressions. Humor and wit are emphasized as advantages for men seeking women. The right riddle, remark, or jest could translate to romantic success for the man well equipped with acceptable but often risqué verbal banter. In Edward Phillip's book, *The Beau's Academy*, humor is an essential element of learning.[19] Just as pornographic texts could claim to teach and divert simultaneously, so too could courting manners books. The danger faced by the couple copulating under a haystack or the fool

[18] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 112.
[19] Edward Phillips, *The Beau's Academy, Or, The Modern and Genteel Way of Wooing and Complementing after the Most Courtly Manner in Which Is Drawn to the Life, the Deportment of Most Accomplished Lovers, the Mode of Their Courtly Entertainments, the Charms of Their Persuasiv* (London: Printed for O.B. and Sold by John Sprint at the Bell in Little-Britain, 1699), 181-200.

who was embarrassed in front of his sweetheart provided warnings within the joke. The *Beau's Academy* links success in love to the manners of courtiers, who mastered the art of charm.

Assignations at court were popular tropes for pornographic and erotic content as well. The shift from Restoration manners and beliefs about the static nature of an individual's place in the world can be explained, at least in part, by the avid consumption of social secrets in print form by curious readers. Armed with this new knowledge, and aided by the as of yet unstable codes and meanings associated with courtier's secrets, successful men and women were able to gain advantages with secret knowledge and demonstrate their elite connections with highly specific and public codes of fashion, consumption, and self-presentation, and also with private skills which came to bear in sexual situations.

For instance, the word *souvenir* originally meant an emotional memory related to matters of the heart.[20] By the eighteenth century the meaning expanded to also include a small token or talisman of love given by one lover to another. From the eighteenth century, then, if not earlier, cultural understandings of love were entwined with objects at every level. "Fairings of cherry colored ribbon," a humble token of affection favored by plebeian youths, vied with miniature erotic paintings framed in gold and accented with jewels in matters of the heart. No matter the price or value, however, these tokens and souvenirs of

[20] "souvenir, n.". OED Online. March 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185321?result=1&rskey=grHXLx& (accessed April 20, 2017).

a relationship could be public or private, and comprised a vocabulary of meanings from the innocent to the explicit that were well understood.

Chapter 3. 'The Luxurious Fancies of Vice': Material Splendor at William Beckford's Notorious Christmas Party of 1781

This new reality certainly conformed with ancient notions of dignity and behaviors, but with this profusion of adjuncts to status and the new behaviors associated with them, men and women living in 'polite' households over the long eighteenth century shaped a frontier of possibilities into symbolic stand-ins for personal status and dignity. Printers, publishers, and their middling readership created meaning out of inanimate objects, new social rituals, and fashions that either confirmed or undermined the status or personality of the wearer or owner. The presence or absence of specific fashionable or polite accessories guided guests' assessment of their acquaintance. Contextual clues reinforced or detracted from initial impressions. Along with their mastery of reading texts, polite men and women were learning an unspoken language of objects and spaces that conveyed social and even sexual meaning.

Historian Roger Chartier explored the seeming contradiction between actual intimacy and artistic representation with regard to early modern conceptions of privacy and the self.[21] Nowhere is this tension more relevant than in the intimate sexual scenes of erotic books and prints. When the sexual scene takes place under a domestic roof and the reader 'intrudes' on the privacy of the protagonists, the first layer of representation of bodies and sexuality is further layered with an additional representation of personality and fashioning.

[21] Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, 161-65.

Status and standing affect the perception and meaning of a holistic sexual tableau. Whether architectural spaces, clothing, or the objects and furniture that fill the room give away clues to personality, they become part of a holistic erotic scene, inseparable from sexual self-presentation. The links between sexuality, secrecy, and space are also entwined with status and cannot be understood individually without being understood holistically first.

The third chapter examines the sexualized utopia that the gentleman William Beckford created for a private Christmas party given at his estate when he was 21. As the richest commoner in England, Beckford's party offers us a lens from which to view the confluence of fantasy, status objects, and sexual expression in an ultimate show of excess, sophistication, and power. Beckford was able to successfully craft an erotic fantasy world and convey his sexual intent through well-chosen objects and the decoration of architectural spaces, which his company was able to visually read and comprehend. Beckford's predilection for self-consciously crafted stage spaces enhance our understanding of the plasticity and diversity of luxury objects that could be employed in particular configurations to convey nonverbal messages to guests familiar with the nuances of luxury. Though Louisa is referring to sexual acts when she mentions "the luxurious fancies of vice" her references to luxury goods like "silken hangings" in conjunction with sexual memory experience show the impact of objects and settings relating to refined seduction. Beckford's construction of an entire themed, theatrical setting for their next tryst is one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for planned sexual space. This extreme instance of planning, anticipating, and paying for the complete transformation of his house into a stage set mimicking an Oriental harem is perhaps the most conclusive proof that the

settings of sexual activity were inherently tied to the experience. Beckford's significant fortune enabled him to capture the soaring ideals of his imagination in tangible objects.

Chapter 4. Furnishing the New Sexual Imagination: The Significant Spaces and Objects in Eighteenth-Century British Erotica

The other layer of refinements came with the enmeshment of status objects into sexual scenarios and the refinement of sexual techniques, both of which featured in the erotica and pornography of the long eighteenth century. Privacy and sexuality became inextricably bound together for those aspiring to polite status, reflected even at the material level of erotic novels and pornographic prints; books containing sexual secrets which were themselves secret, pursued in the genteel privacy of a domestic chamber or another area safe from prying eyes. That many of the illustrations and descriptions in erotic books and prints were based on the conceit of secretly observed activity within secret spaces adds yet another dimension of significance linking the private to the sexual. Voyeurism and autoerotic activities became subjects of mass understanding and concern from mid-century on, and in both cases, privacy was the element which facilitated these activities.

My last chapter examines the mundane objects and furnishings in the background of erotic prints and stories. These objects tell a great deal about the refinement process and the way it insinuated itself into every aspect of life, including the banal background details of explicit sexual materials and the role it played in them. Hidden staircases, blue and white Chinoiserie objects on fireplace mantles, box-pelmet windows, coffee stools, and couches cemented the social status of characters in an erotic scene and provided a more holistic and nuanced understanding of their private lives. As demonstrated in the case of William

Beckford, the lighting, music, and highly specific furnishings of his Christmas party were integral to communicating his risqué sexual agenda to his guests. In this way, relatively new objects, such as the couch, were significant both in person and in print, conveying a message at odds with morality but not fashionability.

Throughout the long eighteenth century, we see different stages of development visible at different times in different geographic and socioeconomic groups, reinforcing the variables and differences that remained despite advances. Of course, this is true of sexuality more than most other issues which could be discussed in public. Publishing secret books that disseminated sexual secrets made object and content a part of a private inner world. Coupled with a private chamber for silent reading, the passions could be indulged and the mind turned to thoughts of lust and fantasy. Such was the case when Samuel Pepys notoriously locked himself in his cabinet to 'read a little of *L'Escholle de Filles*.'[22] This behavior was not limited to men, however. An eighteenth-century painting by Boudin depicts a woman reading with her hand suggestively hidden under her skirts, unconcerned because of the locked door and screen protecting her from prying eyes. These two examples, one from life and one from art, depict a holistic sexual moment. Pepys and the woman in the painting are decades apart, but they both rely on the essential elements of literacy and privacy to shape a sexual moment. In fact, the transition from the bawdy humor of the Restoration, indulged in by both plebeians and elites, eventually gave way to a

[22] Samuel Pepys and Robert Latham, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: Bell, 1974), entry for Sunday, 9 February, 1667/8.

universal, cross-class imperative to remove the sexual to the private realm, in person and in print.

All of these changes were related to the notion of civility and refinement that Norbert Elias has claimed was influencing lives across Europe during the eighteenth century. Elias' concluded that the refinement of manners necessitated that sex was simply removed from public view. The imperative to hide sexuality and the body certainly existed, but that is only part of the story. The refinement process was completed only with the refinement of sexual techniques, behaviors, and personalities, in practice and in discourse. Uncovering this process provides the final piece of the civilizing process and shows that in relation to sexuality, the intimacy of personality and the publicness of self-fashioning are not always paradoxical. Though the furnishings of the rooms in which Samuel Pepys and Boudin's reader may appear to be inconsequential, they are not. The library (coded masculine, like the dining room) was a monument to learning and the leisure essential to gentlemanly status, and the ladies 'closet' or cabinet was the feminine counterpart to this space. The possession or absence of a specific space for certain leisure activities such as reading affirmed or denied one's social status. The décor and possession of books were not merely anonymous objects in the background of the action; they were specifically crafted adjuncts to personality and social standing, even sexual personality. New objects and habits combined in new spaces to reveal the supposed secrets within secret books and images, even as sexuality was fast becoming the biggest secret of all.

Conclusion

As force went out of favor and restraint came to mark the gentile, banter, persuasion, and nuance became more important than strength, and this was reflected everywhere from drawing rooms to erotic literature and pornographic prints. The unilateral European refinement discussed by Norbert Elias cannot be complete without the observation and analysis of various private activities which were removed from the public eye but nonetheless continued as part of daily routine. Sexuality cannot exist in a vacuum. To ignore the effects of changed behavior in every other aspect of life and not link those changes to the essential element of private life would be to miss the chance to complete Elias's theory and would deprive us of an essential knowledge of private culture. The culture surrounding the individual shapes and reshapes even the innermost sanctum of the private mind.

Many questions guided my scholarship. I sought to answer as many as I could, but some remain unresolved. I wonder how this culture of objects developed and how the newly prosperous developed the correct mien and attitude to use them. I attempt to understand how much personality and sexual expression meld with these inanimate objects conveying status, and how the architectural spaces and new understandings about household organization influenced the actions and methods of seduction. As Phillippe Aries and Roger Chartier noted, dissemination was a top-down affair that spread arcane court secrets to the middling and finally to the poor.[23] I question how notions of privacy

[23] Philippe Aries and Roger Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987). This theme predominates in all volumes.

increased or inhibited sexual behaviors, how new beliefs and practices came along with this refinement of sexual manners, and how were they influenced by social status and newly available technologies (such as more refined portable erotic imagery and the development of silent reading.

This dissertation examines the confluence of sexual behavior and representation with status objects and home furnishings within the social sphere of 'polite' Britons over the course of the long eighteenth century. By examining Chartier's concerns in regard to representation and privacy alongside Elias's theory of a civilizing process and linking it to sexuality, I hope to show the links between what until now were separate lines of enquiry. These actions and objects are linked in several ways, starting with the language that describes them. Like the concept of *privé*, other words were also linked to abstract concepts as well as concrete objects.

I look broadly at the ways sexuality became entwined with the new spaces of the eighteenth-century middle classes in Britain. I consider the ways that sexuality was part of social occasions and how it could function as a marker of refinement if properly displayed. The importance of erotic motifs on china and porcelain and the unflattering rumors about overly sexual women both come together in my analysis of the tea table, a social novelty for bourgeois Britons at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The paradox of refinement and sexual danger was joined over stately mahogany tables where women were at once objects of graceful femininity and at the same time destabilized and subject to ridicule because of men's fears about female agency and social power inherent in this new use of social space.

Elias's assertion that "…for what is lacking in everyday life a substitute is created in dreams, in books, and in pictures"[24] dovetails with Kowalski-Wallace's claim that "Modern consumption is a matter not of basic items bought for definite needs, but of *visual* fascination and remarkable *sights of things not found at home"*[25] Both of these assertions address the unique and compelling ways that desire plays out visually. Elias claims that repression gives rise to production and representation to substitute the forbidden, and Kowalski-Wallace links the fascination with objects not usually encountered, especially within the domestic realm, with the sense of sight and visual pleasure.[26] Elias's claim is particularly compelling when applied to the secret books that instilled sexual knowledge and desire in equal measure. Combining new social spaces, new reading habits, and new ways of showcasing refinement and social mastery, the erotica and pornography of the eighteenth century entwined the ephemeral with the concrete to create a new form for sexual ideas. In the many ways sexuality was expressed, whether as tasteful allegory on the side of a Sevres vase or in an explicitly sexual illustration meant to be read in private, the domestic and social spheres were inextricably linked and shaped each other diachronically and synchronically.

[24] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 374.
[25] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 75. Italics added.
[26] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 75.

CHAPTER 1. THE SOCIAL SPHERE: REPRESENTATION, SPACE, AND STATUS AT THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH TEA TABLE

Introduction

Fig. 1 Johann Zoffany (German, 1733-1810) *John, Lord Willoughby de Broke, and his Family*, c. 1766. Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum.

In a fashionable new form of family portrait meant to convey an ease with genteel pastimes, the English peer Lord Willoughby de Broke raises a hand in authority, crooking his finger as if giving direction. His wife, fashionably dressed in tight stays and an expensive silk gown, presides at the head of a diminutive table, while he presides over her. The scene is domestic and indulgent; the children are here permitted relaxed leisure time with their mother in this social but private domestic space. Lady Willoughby indulgently dandles a child on the table top, while another child reaches for a cup of tea and a third

pulls a toy horse across the expensive Turkish rug. The artist, Johan Zoffany, famous for paintings depicting domestic harmony and gentility in the uniquely English style called conversation pieces, has here succeeded in showing the easy command of the husband over the well-appointed domestic scene. Calmness, luxury, and easy manners convey his authority and the harmony of the painting attests to the domestic harmony of his well-run household. Genteel domestic patriarchal values suffuse every gesture, and harmony results. This representation of the family show them ideally, as they wish to be seen by others. In an apparently unguarded glimpse of casual domestic harmony, the underlying ease of each person with their position and the behaviors required of them mark the moment as a reflection of the holistic social image of the family.

Novel representations of domestic interiors and family members emerged in a new genre of portraiture known as conversation pieces during the first few decades of the eighteenth century in England. The fashionability of interior scenes and multiple sitters was tied to other developments concerning households, goods, and manners. The rise of new political beliefs, the tempering of force through restraint, and the refinement of people, spaces, and objects transformed older traditions, challenged beliefs about hierarchies in marriage, and contributed to new ways of thinking, behaving, and consuming that would re-order the social world. Though many of these ideals are conveyed in this canvas through hints and suggestion, by far the most significant addition to this portrait is the solid form of the tea table.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, this new piece of fashionable furniture would disrupt and re-order the social habits and spatial layout of the middle class British

household. Galvanizing patriarchal concerns relating to luxury consumption, women's social and financial power, and the changing manners and mores of a new age concerned with refinement and 'politeness,' the tea table was not merely another place to sit but rather a portal connecting people to a new set of behaviors and paradigms relating to a host of social issues. The cultural changes wrought by tea encompassed far more than innovations in utensils and dining etiquette. Tea went beyond the role of a commodity to influence subtle and nuanced forms of social behavior relating to luxury, representation, and household space. Tea provided a theatrical and genteel backdrop within which new social habits could develop. Tea facilitated an important turn in the development of displays of social leisure and paved the way for a novel way of interacting with others in the form of 'visiting.'[27] The middle class obligation of social calls and 'at homes' so prominent a century later grew from the fledgling habits first introduced with tea to a particular set of fashion-conscious men and women anxious to raise their status and proclaim their awareness of fashion by participating in a ritual of social exclusivity. Gender, patriarchal power, and social acumen, in person and in representations such as paintings or prints, influenced contemporary perceptions of what tea drinking meant, and competing narratives used tea and leisure to gain new ground in old debates. Tea was a lightning rod for cultural anxieties relating to power, leisure, and luxury. The changing world of eighteenth-century Britain witnessed growth in manufacturing, retailing, and a general refinement of manners

[27] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 290; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 199), 157-9; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 232-3, for a discussion of politeness and visiting as it pertains to gender.

and living habits.[28] Change is always accompanied by doubt, and in this case, tea was blamed for creating new problems, or was used to oppose those which arose for other reasons. The policing of class and gender boundaries through this new social vehicle reveals underlying anxieties and fears created by new consumer opportunities that threatened older traditions, particularly in realms of gendered power.

This chapter is divided into several sections. A preliminary excursus will explore the significance of luxury through a sociological lens to better understand the signs of social power inherent in behavior at the tea table. The next section will examine the role tea wares and the tea table itself played in shaping the social developments that related to displaying status in both material and social contexts. These changes facilitated others. Crucially, household organization at the theoretical and material level depended upon new developments in retailing and shifts in perceptions of gendered purchasing power. The next section, Women and Tea, explores the significance of shopping as an act of leisure and shows how this innovation in provisioning contributed to a new feminized ideal of leisure and consumption. Though the image of the consuming wife benefitted the reputation of her husband, anxious men retaliated against new financial freedoms allowed polite women, which they saw as encroaching on masculine privilege and authority. The section exploring representation will examine similarities and differences in images of women tea drinkers. Both positive and negative aspects of these visual narratives will illustrate the ways women and tea drinking could serve as a shorthand for violations of traditional ideas or, conversely,

[28] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, ix-35, for more on the general refinement of manners; Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 137-64, for additional information on manufacturing and household inventories; Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Introduction.

as new statements of gendered power. The final section will look at the several ways sexuality was linked to tea, in both abstract notions of morality and transgression as well as physical objects like erotic china and accusations of waywardness in print culture.

Before exploring the intricacies of a new social sphere predicated on consumption and display, it is useful to view the sociological functions of luxury goods and how they help to structure social hierarchies. Thorstien Veblen and Werner Sombart, writing in reaction to late nineteenth century excess, deconstructed the sociogenic functions inherent in luxury consumption within the social groups of rich elites. Both Sombart and Veblen described patterns that by the end of the nineteenth century had become established and widespread. The second wave of industrial manufacturing had furthered the acquisition of manufactured items to larger groups across the globe, and the subsequent rise in living standards and expectations for non-elites had broadened and sharpened understandings of the meaning of luxury across a wider section of the population. Even after the passage of more than a century, however, the competing beliefs regarding universal comfort and exclusive access to superlative luxury objects had not been resolved. The origins of these beliefs, observable in the period covered by this chapter, had deepened and intensified in many respects by the end of the century following their inception. This brief excursus will highlight the underlying structures and assumptions connecting luxury, corruption, gender, and economic status.

Excursus: Sociological Significance of Luxury

The ultimate danger to the social order was the indiscriminate distribution of luxury to those unable to withstand its corruption. Luxury had been the purview of royals and

nobles whose birth entitled and enabled them to consume appropriately. Privileged by birth and blood, they could safely interact with luxury without being corrupted by it, as ordinary people, especially women and the poor, would be. Luxury preserved the social order, and the spread of luxury beyond the top tiers threatened society.[29] Though new manners and refinements were promoted by Whigs seeking to make social connections and interactions easier for all involved, thereby raising the manners of all of society, luxury was still a danger to those living below the line of the 'polite.' To better understand the beliefs about the corrupting power of luxury and the necessity for display, it is useful to examine the theories of two nineteenth-century sociologists regarding social competition and conspicuous consumption here.

Manners and refinements were necessary to show social mastery and reference the position of one person or object to another within the social sphere. Any distinctive behavior, fashion, or object meant to set the owner apart from the rest of the social body necessarily presupposes an audience. In eighteenth century Britain, luxury goods and new manners were thought to contribute to the ideal of politeness by refining people and their behaviors. The nineteenth-century German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart's definition of 'refinement' is useful to the discussion of eighteenth-century notions of luxury and the debates surrounding new positional goods. Sombart asserts:

> 'Refinement' is any treatment of a product over and above that which is needed to make it ordinarily useful…[But] if refinement were to be understood in an absolute sense, most of our articles of use would have to be assigned to the category of refined goods, for almost all of them gratify

[29] Marcia R. Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture, 1665-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26.

> needs over and above our animal needs. Consequently we must…use the term 'refinement' merely for that degree of elegance which surpasses the prevailing standards of luxury in goods.[30]

Sombart here raises several important issues related to the understanding and misunderstanding of luxury a century before his own lifetime. As I have shown, many social issues and anxieties were embedded in the debates surrounding the concept of luxury in the eighteenth century. As this chapter illustrates, class conflict and gender roles caused confusion about the cause and effect of 'luxury' and the desirability of 'refinement.' While the middle classes used concepts of 'politeness' and the positional goods associated with leisure to raise their social and economic standing in the world, those above and below them in a social hierarchy mocked the pretentions of country rustics, plebeian 'manners' and the debauchery of fashionable society. Opposing ideologies sought to confront a changing material and social world by snubbing competing claims of social identity. Elites mocked the pretentions of those who aspired to politeness but were not born to it, and plebeians responded by insisting on the falsity and pretension of those judging them as lacking authenticity.[31] Daniel Defoe declared the middling position 'the best state in the world' and most prone to produce happiness because it enabled those in it to avoid physical want and labor but at the same time limited luxury. Middling men and women were therefore seen by Defoe and many others, to avoid 'pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind' the snares that came with aristocratic position and the lifestyle

[30] Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 13.
[31] Charles Johnston, *The Adventures of Anthony Varnish: or, a peep at the manners of society. By an adept. In three volumes* (London, Printed for William Lane, 1786), 35, 80, 193, 195, 207.

associated with it.[32] The positional nature of luxury goods, which differed according to class membership, is contextualized in a way that eighteenth-century moralists, philosophers, and print makers do not discuss. While Sombart claims to define luxury in an absolute sense, he contextualizes it as necessarily positional. Mandeville and other eighteenth-century proponents and critics of luxury defined it much more rigidly when they spoke of luxury as an absolute, with no social context other than the condemnation of excess.

Sombart, Elias, and Mandeville would all agree that the tea table provided an opportunity to showcase excess. The objects laid across its surface, in intrinsically valuable metals and high status porcelain, provided opportunities to show the values and material wealth of the household. Because they were so costly and fashionable, they could bear risqué imagery on their surfaces without consequences. Part of the refinement of sexuality was the elevation of sexual imagery and themes through their placement on the surfaces of intrinsically valuable and publicly displayed objects. Whereas previously (and later, during the French Revolution) associations of sexuality were seen to taint and denigrate whatever (or in the case of women, whomever) they were publicly associated with, in this case, the value of prohibitively expensive elite goods recast them as objects to be valorized and envied. Representation, as I will argue in this chapter, was thus judged by the 'third canvas' it was wrought upon as well as its social association with elite living. Whereas a cheap

[32] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 2. Originally published in 1719.

print was seen as tawdry and illicit, a virtuosic painting or engraving was acceptable and lauded in public company.[33]

Within the changing social milieu in eighteenth-century Britain, the placement of people and objects in self-conscious 'front stage' configurations was becoming ever more important in defining membership to different social groups. With a widespread trend toward refinement, older lines of demarcation were challenged and metrics moved. The fluidity of society was facilitated by the acquisition of goods and mimicry of manners of those in the class above the aspirant, but as historians have shown, the 'invisible standard' and elusive entrée into elite society was rooted in the social and was becoming harder to define.[34] The line between the gentry and 'those immediately below them'—in other words, the middle classes, was obscured as mimicry and imitation grew more sophisticated and the refinement process polished social habits at the material and human level. Unlike other European countries such as France:

> the peculiar fact, in regard to the English gentry, is that it is utterly impossible to define its lines of demarcation, especially in relation to that stratum below…Esquire and gentleman were general terms and designated the independent man who lived on his rents, or followed some

[33] Ruth Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12, for analysis of impressionist paintings denigrated for their links to commerce through their visual simplicity that evoked tavern signs rather than high art. This remained true well into the nineteenth century.

[34] Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3; Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 70-77, 88-92. For instance, Iskin points out the many subtle differences between shop girls and customers used to differentiate them despite the fact that (especially in the 1880s) black silk dresses were both highly fashionable for middle class women and were also the informal uniform of many sales girls. The significance of these distinctions, at the visual and social level, were crucial for recognizing the customer from the worker, and created complications and tensions as new behaviors and fashions fluctuated and remained unfixed. Gloria Groom, *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2012), 108-11, for a discussion of the significance of black silk dresses on *haute bourgeoisie* fashion; Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 59, for a discussion of luxury materials relating to surface decoration.

> 'respectable' occupation…[I]t was always recognized…that a man had to command a certain income to be counted among the gentry. But the amount of such income and the definition of a 'respectable' occupation has at all times been left to 'public opinion.[35]

Where class membership was fluid and based on 'public opinion,' the social context of manners and positional goods were all important. Similarly, the boundaries between correct acquisition and acquisitiveness, between the upkeep of appearance and the acknowledgement of that necessity for personal or familial gain, proved difficult to navigate. Moralists were concerned about luxury because of the stimulus of desire and also because of the wrongful pride and self-importance it would foster in the hearts of men and women. Natural pleasures based in the senses and the natural order were acceptable, but 'fantastical pleasures' were to be avoided at all costs.[36] Bishop Berkley condemned greed and acquisitiveness in a very specific and concrete way, writing in 1759 in the *Guardian* No.49, 'It is evident that a desire terminated in money is fantastical; so is the desire for outward distinctions, which bring no delight of sense, nor recommend us as useful to mankind…'[37]

Similarly, the Anglo-Irish Whig M.P. and philosopher Edmund Burke warned that good taste must be distinguished from 'desire or lust; which is an energy of mind that

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[35] Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism*, 12-13; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), 89; Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1985), 119; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 2, 6, for more about taste and social class, 467-71, for social structures; Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 3. Grieg argues the existence of an 'invisible standard' which elites used to exclude the unworthy from polite social intercourse.

[36] In this instance, 'fantastical' conveys artificial.

[37] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 89, quoting Bishop Berkley.

hurries us on to the possession of certain objects.'[38] This desire was related to imitation through acquisition, which Burke characterized as "a second passion of society" that caused " a desire of imitating, and consequently a pleasure in it."[39] These beliefs correlated with the pursuit of taste at the highest levels, where acquisition was justified by abstract concepts of beauty and perfection that raised living to an art form. True art might move the heart and inspire emotion, but restraining the expression of that emotion was the mark of the refinement. While John Bull might ape his betters and acquire luxuries unfit for his station in life, his pocketbook could not support true art, and his imitation made him ridiculous. Without the justifications of beauty and art, objects and representations were merely vulgar displays of an image discordant with the class of the owner, precisely what Bishop Berkley and Edmund Burke warned against. Luxury objects might be acquired by anyone with money, but the display of cultural capital inherent in their correct setting and usage served to delineate the authentic from the pretender.

The next section will consider how the objects of the eighteenth-century English tea table refined the domestic space of the household and helped to develop a vibrant social culture where the unspoken meanings and associations with luxury objects communicated social status. Contests of rank, social power, and struggles between men and women over household authority would all rely on inanimate objects to support individual activity within a newly created social sphere. Central to this new code of material meaning was the introduction of the tea table to British households.

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[38] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 89, quoting Edmund Burke.
[39] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: 1757), 28.

Fig. 2 Jean-Etienne Liotard (Swiss, 1702-1789) *Still Life Tea Set*, 1781-83. Oil on canvas, 15 x 20 in. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum. Note the fashionable 'japanned' tea tray holding expensive Japanese 'china' and silver accessories as well as the slop bowl in the middle and the silver sugar nippers at the right of the composition.

This new piece of furniture and the social behaviors it enabled caused middle class men and women to reimagine their domestic social spaces and their relationships with new objects and commodities. The mahogany tea table, often round or shell shaped, as was the fashion, was many things at once. At the practical level, it held the dozens of silver and porcelain objects that made up the tea 'equipage' and provided a surface upon which guests could rest their cups and utensils. At a more theoretical level, it facilitated a growing trend for elite women to entertain friends in the heart of the domestic household, and offered many opportunities for the fashion and status-conscious to display their knowledge and

engagement with other members of the polite world.[40] Status objects and leisure had long been linked in other realms, such as hunting and dining, but the tea table created a unique confluence of highly specific new objects and rituals that challenged gender roles and re-ordered the household in both concrete and abstract ways.

Tea and Refined Household Space

Tables were far more than flat surfaces for dining—they were vehicles of sociability.[41] Facilitating social interaction and cementing bonds of friendship and obligation, tables provided opportunities. During the eighteenth century, the British middle classes used tables and their spatial surroundings, punctuated by luxury goods, to establish claims to gentility, to reveal social imposters, and to challenge boundaries that limited women's purchasing power, social networks, and authority. At this vortex of identity politics, status, performance, and gender became cemented to spatial designations and the material objects that filled them. These objects became a visual language that observers 'read' to varying levels of understanding depending on their own knowledge. As social gatherings encroached on business and politics, the ability to successfully socialize became a marker of status and began to play a role in other successes or failures in life.[42]

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[40] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 228-29, 232-33.

[41] Ibid.; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors,* 96, 183, 213, 216, 293-94, as well as 288, 302 for a discussion of masculinity in drawing rooms; Mennell, *All Manners of Food,* Introduction, for a more general discussion of tables and the emergence of dining etiquette; Maureen Carroll, D. M. Hadley, and Hugh Willmott, *Consuming Passions, Dining from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 11-22; Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 49-51, 53, 56-59, 67, 72-109, 521-24, for a discussion of the importance of dining as a marker of rank and civility; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196, 198-9, for the continuation of this legacy into the twentieth century (see table 19 for a breakdown of China by glass, etc.); Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain,* for further discussion of the material elements of dining, 145-51 (eating), 8, 109, 175, 177, 204-05 (tables and chairs).

[42] Bernard Mandeville, *Mandeville's Fable of the Bees* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), Remark B, 96. Mandeville emphasized this connection in terms of commercial success, but it could obviously be applied

The addition of a tea table to the parlor or drawing room was a claim to status as well as fashionability. With Bohea, a fashionable black tea, costing exorbitant sums, and requiring its own furniture, lock, and key, for protection, the addition of a table built expressly for its consumption was costly enough, but there were many other primary and secondary requirements to make the activity possible. In addition to the expense of the tea itself was the requirement of the tea equipage, which at the most basic level required a large silver urn with a burner to keep water hot, a silver or hard paste porcelain tea set capable of holding the tea, a large sugar bowl filled with sugar and a pair of silver nippers to cut the sugar, and a slop jar to receive the discarded tea and bread not consumed. The households capable of absorbing these costs were already supplied with servants, but at the most reductive level, the maintenance of a servant could be considered a prerequisite to having tea, at least in the beginning of the century. As tea drinking spread from the most elite to become popular with middling consumers, the cost and variety of equipment became more varied, swinging from the costly heights of custom made equipages adorned with family crests to modest tea sets costing a few shillings. Gradations in expense and difference of design made the tea equipage affordable across the class spectrum and rich and poor alike aspired to own the best they could afford. Imari ware imported from Japan or a tea set in a famille-rose pattern, fashionable Wedgwood Queensware and Jasperware, and cheaper Jackfield pottery items created opportunities for distinction and created a

to social success as well; Wallace, *Consuming Subjects,* 7-9, for a discussion of Mandeville in relation to women's spending.

necessity for a new skill-- the ability to successfully navigate a sea of options and choose the 'right' object from an array of manufactured possibilities.[43]

Tea drinking, when performed correctly, offered the polite drinker many ways to show her gentility and refinement. Ladies had often gathered in social company but the addition of hot beverages, porcelain, and expensive commodities lent an air of refined leisure to gathered groups of women that could not occur when they gathered for mundane tasks related to domestic upkeep.

When tea was taken correctly, it provided a backdrop for men and women to showcase several aspects of politeness and gentility through the correct use, sequence, and gestures associated with elite behavior. These behaviors were articulated in manners books and were theoretically available to any literate person, but the degree of gentility and the success or failure of this theatrical display depended upon the degrees of fashion and knowledge about nuanced particulars that were constantly evolving and shifting. The control of the physical body and the memorization and repetition of specific actions relating to pouring and serving, together with the correct fashionable layout of the table, the display of fashionable attire, and the consumption were only part of the holistic social environment created. Conversation was the volatile element that could underscore the authentic gentility of a lady or conversely, could mark her as a whore hiding her true nature under the cover of expensive finery.

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[43] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 62, for more information on consumer selection in eighteenth-century England; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 77, 145-46 (shopping and china), 270 (connections between shopping and civility); Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 75.

When the seventeen-year-old Hester Thrale recorded in her diary a visitor 'dressed as a fine lady come to take tea' she recorded forever the performative aspects bound within the cultural expectations of visiting in a genteel manner markedly different from casual conversation and acquaintance not glorified by fine clothing and ritual. The performative aspect of showing is highlighted in several 'conversation piece' portraits by fashionable artists like Johan Zoffany. These representations, captured in oil, highlight the bodily carriage, fashionable dress, and physical items represented on the surface of fashionable tea tables. The ephemeral element of conversation that provides the specialized category by which they are classified, however, is obviously absent in the preserved oil and canvas fragment by which we are able to access the past. The fact that it was a significant enough category to base an entirely new genre of portraiture should indicate the significance of this element.

The dual importance of leisure and consumption focused new manners and refinements, causing new social behaviors to develop in particular ways. Though ceremonial presentations of courtiers and other politically powerful people had always been formal, there was no established code for calling on friends and acquaintances until the eighteenth century, when 'visiting' became bounded by specific customs instead of necessity. When visits were formalized with the offering of tea to guests, the physical setting for this display of leisure and tea became more formal.[44] Areas of the house which had previously been only functional were upgraded with new goods and furnishings more appropriate to 'front stage' areas seen by guests. The middling household thus became

[44] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 230.

divided between public and private. In elite houses, the concentration of household wealth had traditionally been displayed in the dining room, which was historically considered the epicenter of patriarchal hospitality. Dining furniture, tableware, and decoration was always the most expensive. In the best houses, red wallpaper, curtains, and silver were displayed as guests ate expensive foods, and this theatrical performance of hospitality and grandeur was credited to the male host.[45] 'Back stage' areas not on display for visiting traffic were those traditionally associated with women. Kitchens, 'closets' and dairy rooms, and store cellars were considered utilitarian and no capital was spent improving them for show. With the rise of tea came a rise in investments in furniture and soft furnishings to augment the parlor, now a 'front stage' theatre for social visits and a place where the standing of the family would be judged by visitors.[46] Significantly, the increase in curtains, utensils, china, pictures, and silver correlates with the rise in the distribution of tea.[47] In both visual recordings such as prints and paintings, and in legal wills, the correlation between tea merchants relative to the population determines the amount of 'luxury' and 'refinement' displayed in the front room where tea was served.

The meanings and understandings relating to traditional concepts of 'private' and 'public' were challenged with the introduction of new behaviors. Privacy had been traditionally associated with elites, but even elite experiences of privacy changed over the course of the eighteenth century, as all people began to place more importance on

[45] J. Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America," in *Journal of Social History 33*, no. 2 (1999): 385-408; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 228.
[46] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 228-29.
[47] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 62, 165, 103, 149-52.

maintaining an idealized social image and separating behavior that would be valorized from that which would denigrate their perception in the eyes of others. As Norbert Elias has shown, this act of self-fashioning and self-consciousness is the dividing line between the civilized and refined and the unrefined.[48] When men and women consciously removed the unflattering or barbaric from consciousness, they eliminated references to occurrences considered taboo or barbaric. The informal and open nature of the houses of early modern tradesmen, yeomen, and laborers reflected a modest expectation of life. Tradesman's work could be brought into the warmest room of the house, the kitchen, and husband and wife might labor together at separate tasks as all household members contributed to the sustenance of life. As refinements crept into every aspect of the socially and materially elevated, however, the desire to remove evidence of primary drives and anything capable of producing embarrassment or shame increased.[49]

With the increase in the 'shame frontier' articulated by Elias came objects existing to cover the necessities of life and maintain an idealized image. Showing status to guests through a genteel performance was greatly enhanced through the addition of material luxury. The increasing desire to live idealized lives required two important changes. Firstly, it required separating the ordinary and mundane from the extraordinary and special, and secondly, it required the modification of living spaces to conform to this new division. The changes, both social and material, that tea drinking fostered in the middling household can be seen by comparing a craftsman's household of the early eighteenth century with the

[48] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 60, 118, 142, 414-21; specifically, see Elias's discussion about shame frontiers and hiding the deplorable from view.
[49] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 60, 118, 142, 414-21.

excess and formality of elite quarters by mid-century. The open spaces of communal living like the workshop and kitchen stood in marked contrast to the formality and ornate ritual of the court or the drawing rooms of elites. Casual conversations between working neighbors were known, as were high protocol appearances before a monarch or noble, requiring court dress and specific bodily discipline in the form of bows, curtsies, and orientation toward the throne, but there was no formalized code for fraternizing with equals. The concept of politeness certainly aided this transformation, but just as important were the physical objects and material possessions that transformed the space from one of adequacy to one of refinement. The correlation of new objects to new settings and new behaviors is essential to understanding the formulation of a middle class paradigm that assigned social meanings to particular signs and signals. Unlike aristocratic signs, which were historical, stable, and permanent, those adopted by the middling came from the marketplace and were arbitrarily related to fashion and novelty recast as a new form of gentility. The fluctuations in signs regulated by taste thus caused anxiety because of their ephemeral and changing nature. This relationship between objects, people and the display of taste significantly influenced and motivated changes in households with people anxious to distinguish themselves from those outside their social group as well as those within it.[50]

The interrelated changes in eighteenth-century middling 'front stage' areas were significant. Applying sociological theories to new social behaviors and methods of display

[50] Grieg, *The Beau Monde*, Introduction, 1-32, 63-99; Bordeiau, *Distinction*, 43-49, for a discussion of inclusion and exclusion amongst different classes. One paradox of fashion is the dual imperative to fit in and stand out simultaneously. Mimicking the norms of the social group while making slight individual distinctions that elevate the participant from her peers contribute to complex signs and visible to the informed but opaque to outsiders.

illuminates the many layered meanings behind luxury in the minds of contemporary men and women. Objects and the decoration of rooms began to take on a new significance when they were modified and changed to accommodate new behaviors rapidly penetrating the growing ranks of the fashionable or aspirational. More significant still were objects and furnishings created and matched to self-consciously display abstract concepts related to self-image and social position. Largely because of the rise in the popularity of tea, the front parlor transitioned from being an insignificant 'back stage' family area to the first impression given to visitors ushered past the threshold and into the domestic household. Though private houses were seen to be essentially different than public rooms at public places like inns, public houses, and coffee houses, the lines between public and private were blurred in the significant social rooms of private residences open to visitors. Since visitors viewed the objects and furnishings belonging to friends and acquaintances from where they stood or sat, these objects became significant to fashion and friendship, and possibly other matters. When successfully arranged, they augmented the status of the host, but a misstep in fashion or the display of something in bad taste undermined his claims to gentility or politeness and could potentially damage his credibility in other matters not related to the current visit. This was especially true of merchants, who began to mix business with pleasure by hosting dinners where conversations turned to commerce.[51] The dining room, however, was already established as the most significant to status before the introduction of tea. It was the rise of the parlor and the furnishings contained within it that

[51] Mandeville, *Mandeville's Fable of the Bees*, Remark B, 96.

helped to add significance and nuance to new objects and established personality and social standing through the correct navigation of this changing social space.

Unpacking the significance of tea on the social, material and theoretical lives of middle class men and women in eighteenth-century Britain is a complex task. Many changes coincide and depend on other innovations or reactions to change. In order to understand the unique position of the tea table as a portal of social change, we must consider several related ideas as they pertain to the construction of culture. Luxury consumption, new social activities requiring display, and patriarchal anxieties relating to women and sexuality were all expressed in representations of this new social habit, which would in time rival Asia for its inherent place in British social culture. The introduction of tea and its accoutrements did far more than broaden drinking options for those who could afford it. Tea raised concerns regarding a multitude of social issues related to gender and class. It sparked a new genre of portraiture and it encouraged negative associations with women and leisure in a vibrant print culture that represented idealizations and transgressions of women in particularly sexualized ways.

Tea and Power

Men and women contested social power, status, and agency through the tea table and its accessories and rituals, which served as a physical site for contests over various forms of gendered power. Power could be displayed through the restraint and discipline of a female body correctly and gracefully executing ritualized gestures meant to showcase her beauty and enhance her desirability to men, but it could also be evident in her free speech

at the tea table, where she might criticize her husband and gossip to other women.[52] The tea table and the silver, porcelain, and high status commodities that sat on its surface connected gender relations, sexuality, domestic space and status goods into a new sphere of sociality predicated on competition. This competition could involve objects or manners, but most often relied on both at once. In a circular argument, the appearance of politeness through external signals and manners validated the inherent existence of gentility and morals held in the heart. This was particularly important for women. By using the visual power and validation of imagery and patina goods to underscore ideals relating to class, gender, and taste, women were able to make inroads toward financial independence. The success of these early economic opportunities shaped beliefs about gender and status, eventually becoming incorporated into an idealized view of the middle class woman as leisured shopper in the late nineteenth century.[53] My contribution to the debates about cultural consumption focuses on the neglected area of 'soft furnishings' and the tea table; areas of fledgling economic agency and identity politics for middle class women in Britain over the long eighteenth century. Woven into the larger contemporary and historical debates about gender, class, and domesticity, these important details shed light on the development of a paradigm of middle class values which placed women in very specific roles as leisured shoppers, hostesses, and arbiters of taste in a variety of new social situations.

[52] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 24-36.
[53] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 90-91.

The construction of a paradigm linking shopping and leisured middle class women was not inevitable. Indeed, it is astounding that this narrative gained a foothold at all, given the tradition of severe opposition to women's leisure, women's spending, and women's access to non-industrious social intercourse. For centuries, men had held a near-monopoly on spending, leisure, sartorial display and entertainment. There was no reason to suppose that this would change with the expansion of the middle classes in eighteenth-century urban centers.

There are many interrelated social changes concerned with representation and luxury. Examining the relationships between the physical objects, primary and secondary signals, and motives behind narrative-driven imagery reveals important connections. The beliefs, objects and ideas associated with women's social influence and new opportunities for domestic and public power contained particular challenges and messages related to the concept of refinement so important to the Whiggish middle classes. It is essential to look beyond the historical record and to analyze the concepts of luxury and refinement from a contemporary and sociological viewpoint. By examining the associations between women, luxury, and sexuality, it is possible to see additional nuances and meanings inherent at the advent of eighteenth-century social behavior. The display of luxury in person and in visual representation was importantly linked to gender and sexuality, and provided a basis (and metric) to index social power.

The introduction of tea caused immense changes in the organization of household authority and social intercourse. Tea and the 'equipage' necessary to serve it radically changed women's participation in economic decision making, making them central actors

in a new retail theatre dedicated to eliciting desire for superfluous objects. This was a radical reordering of the household tradition of relegating only mundane purchases to wives.[54] The tea table also played a central role in increasing the production and consumption of visual representations of women. Fashionable tea tables were unspoken statements about wealth, social power, and politeness. They were desired not only in physical form but also in specialized portraits called 'conversation pieces.' These conversation pieces changed the trajectory of portraiture, creating a uniquely British way of immortalizing those with enough money to pay for the painting and fueling desire for the 'baubles' present with the people in the frames.[55]

Fig. 3 Richard Collins *A Family of Three at Tea*. 1727. London, Victoria and Albert Museum/Collection.

[54] Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 5.
[55] Ibid. Pointon asserts, "Imagery was instrumental in increasing the desire for goods and in promoting emulation."

Fig. 4 Arthur Devis (English, 1712–1787) *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull*, 1747. Oil on canvas, 42 x 34 in. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Lent by New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, Conservation Center.

When signs of status coincided with wealth instead of birth, social reputation was malleable and could be aided through consumption. The purchasing power of the ambitious caused anxiety for established nobles, who were forced to keep up with them. Whiggish belief in personal ambition and success through mercantile opportunities greatly depended on social reputation. Much of this social reputation was now aided and enhanced by wives in social settings, particularly through their display of luxury and leisure at the tea table. Middle class men aspiring to politeness and enhanced status thus faced a double bind. They could maintain their masculine authority through traditional means, controlling their wives

and household by restricting luxury purchases and social opportunities, or they could potentially gain social status through their wives by practicing leniency and allowing her new freedoms to purchase and entertain. By the end of the nineteenth century, the change had been accomplished and middle class women were famed for their leisured shopping excursions as well as their social acumen as hostesses.[56]

Portraiture fulfilled the ostensible wish to immortalize and capture a likeness of a person in an age when paint offered the nearest approximation to accurate representation, but there were many reasons beyond family remembrance that inspired the desire to own this unique style of portrait. The innovation of conversation piece portraits was the inclusion of objects burdened with the task of highlighting the nuanced, myriad ways in which the sitters displayed particular aspects of refined living. These objects contributed to social prominence and aided performative aspects of gentility in person, but when reproduced as part of a fine art canvas; their message was magnified, extended, and multiplied. If the existence of goods speaks of possession and representation changes the meaning and significance of objects, it is in the conversation piece where we see one way men and women concerned with social standing and status contrived to make meaning from the growing piles of retail goods brought home from shops to satisfy their lifestyles.[57] In this case, an abundance of goods did not satisfy, but instead whetted appetites for additional 'baubles' meant to showcase social status and socioeconomic class.[58] When

[56] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 80-84; Daniel Defoe's "On Credit" in Erin Sky Mackie, *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from "The Tatler" and "The Spectator"* (Macmillan, 1998), 272-286, for a discussion of the professionalization of commercial spaces.
[57] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 5.
[58] Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 5.

these superfluous, refined objects became entwined in fine art, they were further glorified by association with the great houses, universities, and Inns of Court where a longstanding tradition of portraits reflected the historical importance of the buildings and those associated with them.

Associations with buildings were not limited to well- known public structures. Several examples of eighteenth-century English conversation pieces incorporated exterior views of impressive houses and grounds into a contrived statement of family grandeur characterized by luxury goods and an air of nonchalance. A few conversation pieces show families at a tea table placed outdoors, communicating the refinement required to navigate the genteel requirements of the tea table and also emphasizing the impressive façade of the familial manse. These surviving examples though a bit obvious and over the top in their desire to communicate status, underscore the intentions of display behind those commissioning these fashionable pictures. For most families, however, the symbolic and fantastical interiors provided by painters underscored the privilege of the sitters in a domestic setting.

An example of a fantastical domestic setting highlighting tea is shown in the painting 'Mr. and Mrs. Bull', where the artist Arthur Devis used props from his studio to craft the social image of his sitters, a prosperous gentleman and his new wife.[59] In this canvas, the table is prominent and the silver and china less so. Nevertheless, the communication of gentility is effective, requiring only the setting and clothing and the

[59] Arthur Devis (English, 1712–1787), *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull*, 1747. Oil on canvas, 42 x 34 in. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Lent by New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, Conservation Center.

suggestion of taking tea to facilitate the assumption of wealth and leisure. Similarly, 'A Family of Three at Tea,' painted by Richard Collins in 1727, shows the importance of status, in this case, through the display of silver on an impressive tea table.[60] Collins' depiction focuses on the tea equipage, in this case made of silver instead of porcelain. With mass market domestic porcelain still a generation away, Eastern tea ware was too expensive for most families. In this painting, the family displays their established social position through the gleaming silver, which was genuine, as Sheffield plate had not yet been invented. With Asian porcelain costing more than silver, many families used silver to fill gaps (which might have ideally been realized in porcelain) to provide the pleasing sight of an expensive and genteel tea table. Silver was often included to emphasize a family's status, but other subtle clues including fashionable gowns, hand gestures, and the presence of musical instruments or leisurely poses showed the variety of ways men and women could express their membership in genteel society, some achieving the enviable status of entry to the beau monde. Silver sugar tongs and tea caddies were not only intrinsically valuable, but elevated and emphasized the high cost of the commodities they stored and served. Taken together in person or as a visual representation on canvas, impressive display and the appropriate manners associated with genteel leisure, the tea table and the objects laid upon it said far more about a family than their actual conversation could have.

[60] Richard Collins (British, unknown), *A Family of Three at Tea,* 1727. Oil on canvas. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig. 5 Philip Reingale (British, 1749-1833) A lady and two gentlemen seated at a tea table.

Not all representations of women and tea tables, however, indicated politeness. Satirical prints expressed patriarchal and class anxieties. Old notions about the corrupting power of luxury on women and the poor fostered a connection between tea drinking women and out of control sexuality. This was expressed in numerous prints, including the artist William Hogarth's famed and popular 'Harlot's Progress' series, where the themes of sexuality, luxury, and plebeian life tell a moral tale reinforcing patriarchal norms.[61] Competing narratives gained currency across the social spectrum. As tea consumption extended further down the social scale, inversion narratives illustrated by the great painters of the day mocked the pretensions of women tea drinkers and delighted in satires depicting

[61] Lars Tharp and William Hogarth, *Hogarth's China: Hogarth's Paintings and Eighteenth-Century Ceramics* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), 34-40; Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 39-40.

coarse, plebeian women and prostitutes as the hosts of tea tables. Hogarth's 'The Harlot's Progress' is meant to elicit humor, horror, and disgust in equal measure. When a sexually available coquette presided over a tea table, the world was turned upside down as surely as her china tea set crashing to the floor. The sexual status of Moll Hackabout precluded her ability to serve tea in a genteel manner. Instead, her unregulated sexual impulses foreshadow her unregulated social behavior. Despite being kept by a merchant, she entertains other lovers. As she willfully kicks the tea table, causing exorbitant sums to be wasted in the shards, it becomes apparent that 'this fall conceals another'; as her patron looks on in horror, her lover escapes in the confusion.

Fig. 6 William Hogarth (English, 1697-1764) *The Harlot's Progress*, 1732.

Women and Tea

In the minds of many eighteenth-century men and women, and often in the print culture of the era, as Hogarth's popular series illustrates, tea was associated with scandal. Popular fashionable periodicals promoted this association, and printed stories highlighted the absurdity and ridiculousness of unsupervised women gathered together for tea. It was not the beverage itself that caused concern and ridicule, but the behavior and manners surrounding its consumption. Traditional moral shortcomings associated with women were recast in a tea drinking context, and new faults and transgressions were added to these associations. Luxury had traditionally been understood as inherently sexual, and though this association was challenged and amended over the course of the long eighteenth century, there were many opportunities for cultural anxieties regarding women, luxury, and sexuality to converge.[62] Inevitably, women became scapegoats for excesses in both material and sexual contexts, as this remained the easiest and most effective way to make them ridiculous and strip them of any possibility of amassing power. An early eighteenth-century print entitled, 'The Tea Table' depicts a group of fashionably dressed women in a polite parlor seated at a tea table. The engraving is amateur and the figures are stiff. Tea cups, leaded glass windows, a fashionable 'Turkey' rug and built-in book coves indicate the polite background of the sitters, but two departing allegorical figures flee through the door. This impropriety is alluded to in the caption, 'here we see Thick Scandal circulate with Right Bohea.' The implied scandal is verbal gossip. Though this print is visually

[62] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, xiii-xiv; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 234-37; Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 33, 53, 76.

ambiguous, eighteenth-century viewers would have understood the implication of the allegorical references as well as the significance of a fleeing lover in the absence of a husband.

Figure 43. "The Tea Table" (c. 1710), engraving; LWL, Print 766.0.37. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Fig. 7 *The Tea Table*, c. 1710. Engraving. New Haven, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Ribald prints existed alongside the respectable 'conversation piece' portraits so popular in England from the 1720s, which often depicted families taking tea together to convey a sense of domestic tranquility and social mastery. The moralizing prints, which relied on depictions of the ridiculous or transgressive to arouse humor, also served to highlight social and cultural fears relating to the fluctuating role of women. Though socially aspiring men were also mocked for falling short of a genteel standard, their transgressions were highlighted through incongruities in their class and the position they aspired to. Middling merchants, who were portrayed with dignity in the frames they commissioned to hang in their parlors and hallways, were made ridiculous in satirical prints which mocked their clumsy acquisitiveness. Though both men and women could be the objects of ridicule in print culture, gender determined the method of their humorous humiliation. In the case of women, the suggestion of inappropriate sexuality was the most effective and useful tool used by satirists to condemn them. Printed sexual references carried a particular association with transgression and differed from verbal banter which might be heard in homosocial groups or even mixed company in particular situations.[63] The original function of pornography was to attach a sexual message to an object to be denigrated. Making sexual references in print was, until the middle of the eighteenth century, a way of adding insult to something. Calling a woman a whore or insinuating that she was not sexually appropriate was the easiest and most effective way to condemn her, as this designation nullified any past or future contributions she might make by casting her

[63] Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* John Hopkins Pbk. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 294-315; Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 82.

out of the bounds of respectability and removing her from respectable spaces. It is therefore not surprising that fears about women and luxury in general should have coalesced into a single subject within popular print culture. Contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality greatly contributed to the ways caricaturists and print makers could make women ridiculous and shed doubt on their ability to fulfill new social roles previously reserved for men.[64]

Not only did women threaten patriarchs by mimicking too closely their social patterns of entertainment and expenditure, they also violated traditional beliefs that women should be industrious through the studied leisure of the tea table. Leisure time was the preserve of men. The instrumental tasks of the household were famously 'never done' and a woman with time on her hands was at the least lazy, and possibly much worse if she did not take advantage of precious minutes and hours to better the material lives of those in her household. Though heavy scrubbing and washing might be hired out to charwomen and washing women, mending was a never-ending chore and was seen as a duty across class lines.[65] The devotion of several hours of a day to self-indulgent leisure was bad enough for the male merchant, according to moralists, but when a woman did so it was insupportable

[64] See Chapter Three for visual examples. Ugliness and beauty were both used to condemn women in print culture for intruding in the world of men. For instance, in a late eighteenth-century print depicting women supporting men in the American colonial tea boycott, their faces are exaggerated and made ugly. Politics was an arena for men, and their ugly faces are meant to make them undesirable and ridiculous for their transgression. Alternatively, they were cast as a beautiful coquette, as was Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, who was portrayed as a promiscuous coquette, trading kisses (and more) for votes for her husband, the Whig Charles James Fox.

[65] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects,* 44. As Wallace points out, idle useless needlework is a way character is revealed in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where Lady Bertram's idleness is reinforced by her habit of "sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty…" In contrast, late eighteenth-century plantation mistresses spent hours a day mending and doing other needlework related to household upkeep; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 22-25, 28.

in relation to established tradition and good morals. Though Defoe warned middling tradesmen and shop keepers that 'pleasure is a *thief* to business' he meant the more expensive aristocratic and time-consuming pastimes like hunting and sports and not intervals of rest in the middle of a productive day.[66] Women, in contrast, were held to a much higher standard for the wasting of time. Busy women were lauded in person and in print, and their industry linked to inherent morality. Unlike women who took tea in an appropriately genteel manner, the 'Ordinary Sort of People' did not visit one another formally, but instead came to see one another 'with their work in their Hands.'[67] In other words, the industry of ordinary people of both sexes was linked to a willingness to work. Women aspiring to politeness and fashion who displayed conspicuous leisure at their tea tables flew in the faces of several groups of the population.

The tea table was a theatrical site of social interaction and display. It would be overly reductive, however, to simply quantify the cost of the commodities, silver, and porcelain without taking into account the nuanced and ever-changing networks of power that underlay these events of social performance and expensive leisure. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the *Carlton House Magazine* entertained its readers with a story that brought together anxieties about female agency using women, tea, and class to convey a situation that underscored their ridiculousness for attempting to navigate the complex social world of men, which was based around politics and business.[68] Though ostensibly aimed at policing pretenders who relied too much on the strictures of elaborate manners

[66] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 164, quoting Daniel Defoe.
[67] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 164.
[68] "The Female Rumpus, A Tale." *The Carlton House Magazine*, August 1793.

codes gleaned from books, the underlying message regarding a 'female rumpus' mocks women for trying to fulfill 'male' roles in the complex world of social codes and cues. Because of their gender, the women invariably get it wrong and make themselves ridiculous.

Why were patriarchs so concerned with the women at the tea table? Why did men dedicate so much effort to castigating women seated indoors exchanging polite conversation and adhering to a demanding code of manners? The tea table galvanized men's concerns about a number of changing social issues related to class, consumption, and social power. Crucially, the tea table was one of the first places where women gained some discretionary spending power and commuted it to social influence. It challenged the traditional hierarchies of gendered space within the household, and it helped successful women gain access to intraspacial arenas where they benefitted from their own social acumen. This interstitial space, a quasi-domestic social theatre, privileged conversational skill and the display of status above biological designation. Men lost their monopoly on social events, their absolute authority on household furnishing, and their social privacy in extra-household 'publics.' The rise of conspicuous consumption and the accumulation of objects by women who 'shopped' was quickly becoming tied to eighteenth-century middle class women tea drinkers, who first made inroads in these categories.

Tea and Women 'Shoppers'

Women tea drinkers shared in a material and social world of acquisition, display, and leisure that required very particular behaviors and investments. The advent of tea drinking necessitated the purchasing of the physical cups, teapots, slop bowls, and tables.

With the passage of time, tea was associated not only with the physical equipage but was also associated with the excursions to retailers necessary to procure these items. It was through the pursuit of tea that women first became linked to leisured shopping. Before the eighteenth century, provisions had been purchased in a very different environment than the retail spaces that ultimately supplanted them. Seventeenth-century imports had been sold to men at auction.[69] When East India Company ships arrived laden with cargo, temporary quarters, often coffee houses, held auctions where everything from tea to Old Masters and Canton china was sold by candlelight.[70] Historic markets associated with towns and cities offered other options for purchasing goods in smaller quantities.[71] Markets provided for a diverse range of household wants. A seventeenth-century engraving depicts the mistress of the house accompanied by her maid shopping for furniture at an outdoor market, but second-hand clothing, candles, shoes and every available household good could potentially be purchased there. Tinkers repaired and sold metal pots and pans, candles, and other sundries, and individual craftsmen and suppliers came to the doors of grand houses and middling abodes alike.[72]

It was not until the eighteenth-century, however, when shops transitioned from temporary to permanent residences separate from the living quarters of the merchant.[73]

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[69] Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 3; Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 86.
[70] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 3; Brewer, *The Pleasures of Imagination*, 223, 232-4, with regard to public access to art, ix, 64, 204, 223.
[71] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 70-90 (the influence of towns); Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 217-19.
[72] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 83-7. This was true of Samuel Pepys in the seventeenth century in his middling house and also true at Chatsworth House, seat of the Duke of Devonshire.
[73] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 79-98.

This was significant for polite women, who had traditionally provisioned their household stores from the threshold of their own house, or who occasionally had gone abroad with a servant for a less commonly needed article, as with the woman shopping for chairs in the engraving.[74] Napoleon Bonaparte's sneering epithet about the English being a nation of shopkeepers was true by the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the transition of retail space had been completed.[75] Retailers, who had formerly traded in cramped spaces on limited days with irregular hours, now opened their shops to customers on a more regular basis.[76]

The regularity of hours and the burgeoning consumer opportunities in urban spaces lured away from their houses customers anxious to see new items. Moralists throughout the eighteenth century and well into the twentieth debated the morality of tempting customers to purchase items they did not need.[77] One of the first categories of supremely superfluous items accessible to women was tea wares. As shopkeepers began to establish retail codes of practice, they became more adept at adopting the façade of a salesperson. Regulating their demeanor and appearing pleasant when faced with trying customers was a challenge unique to retail. Some of the first trying customers were polite women, who made a social outing out of provisioning. Shoppers might ask to see wares without

[74] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 17.
[75] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 79-98.
[76] Ibid.
[77] George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller, *Phishing for Phools: The Economics of Manipulation and Deception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 1-9. Indeed, this debate continues. The recent publication of two leading economists (one received the Nobel Prize in Economics for his work on this subject) discusses the implications of the economics of deception, which grew out of the practices of eighteenth century business men; Wallace, *Consuming Subjects,* 79-98; Mackie, *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 169-73.

purchasing anything, costing the shopkeeper time and the effort of hospitality and yielding no profit.[78] A retailer of tea ware in Covent Garden complained of a group of women who came to 'vent their spleen' looking at his teapots and tea cups, who had 'not the least intention of buying.'[79] While retailers were universally annoyed with browsers who failed to purchase, there seems to be an added layer of resentment when a woman failed to do so.[80] Since the first luxuries women were able to browse were often tea wares, these annoying women browsers were identified with the other shortcomings of women and thus tied to tea.

Though 'shopping' could now be added to the list of female leisured pastimes, the display of purchased objects in front of visitors remained the ultimate goal. Visually, few things look more decorous than a well laid tea table surrounded by polite women participating in a genteel ritual dependent on leisure. The bodily discipline of siting perfectly upright, balancing a hot porcelain cup with no handle between the thumb and forefingers, and nibbling on 'wafers' of bread and butter was testimony to practice and the necessary financial means and leisure to acquire these skills. Tea drinking provided a social setting for contests of rank, popularity, and gentility. It allowed women to display gendered power in fashionable dress. It allowed guests and hostess alike to compete to 'set the fashion' or follow it; to trade gossip and information, and to visually display wealth with subtlety or ostentation. In these and many other ways, the ability to successfully navigate a tea table served as a litmus test of respectability and a guarantor of class membership.

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[78] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 79-98.
[79] Ibid. Especially useful is a cited passage by Daniel Defoe about a man forced to be a lamb in his shop abusing his wife and children because of the unnaturalness of having to conceal his real feelings, 82-87.
[80] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 79-98.

The tea table, however, brought instability at several levels, and these would have to be negotiated and resolved before tea drinking could transition from novelty to established practice. Many new habits considered novel in the first decade of the eighteenth century would become commonplace, but until these social transitions were stabilized, much ink was spilled attempting to regulate and control women's spending, leisure, and sexuality by castigating their alleged transgressions at the tea table.[81]

Household Organization

While some elite women had shared specific household tasks relating to the provisioning of cellar stores and supervision of servants and meals, they had never been permitted to entertain in the same manner as men. The dining room was seen as masculine space, and though women dined with men and were part of the social milieu of the dinner table, the hospitality was seen to extend from the male host and correlated to his social rank.[82] The tea table, ensconced in the domestic walls of the private household, was situated in the parlor, and offered women the opportunity to entertain social and economic equals, inferiors, and superiors around a table, as men did, but without the air of formality and command that the masculine space of the dining room conveyed.[83] Somewhat similar in form to the tavern, where elite men pursued business and gossip in a predominately homosocial environment, there were several important differences. For elite women aspiring to politeness, many public venues could be dangerous because of their associations

[81] Ibid.
[82] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 113; J. Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America," in *Journal of Social History 33*, no. 2 (1999), 385-408.
[83] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 288, 302.

with prostitutes. Since the tea table was located within the safety of the household, it could be considered domestic. By increasing the flow of visitor traffic through the household, however, the tea table served as an interstitial space between older understandings of respectable domesticity and a new, more showy and public exhibition of the house as backdrop for social rituals. This quasi-domestic setting, with its carefully constructed layout of polite furniture and status objects meant to be on show for guests, challenged the historic division between public and private. The arrangement of rooms and showy objects and furniture that helped a family to collectively convey an image of gentility became problematic to men when women were seen to benefit and gain independence from this status.[84] Though 'conversation piece' family portraits usually took place around a tea table, with mixed company easily conversing and engaging with each other in a genteel social scene, there was a darker side to the tea table. While permitted as an adjunct to status in the image of a painting, the tea table was also a potential source of unsupervised social time for women and their friends. While hetero-social gatherings on behalf of the male householder were seen as enhancing to his reputation for gentility and politeness, homosocial groups of women were perceived to escape masculine control, disrupting the entire foundation of social order.[85]

Further suggestion of a disruption of traditional hierarchies came with a statement from Thomas Stretzer, a well-known pornographer, in 1742. The 1740s witnessed intensification in the accumulation of available luxury goods, the spread of tea to an even

[84] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 230-31, for a discussion of satires pertaining to women tea drinkers.
[85] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 21.

larger segment of the population, and resurgence in the popularity of conversation piece portraits, which had waned since their introduction two decades earlier.[86] When Stretzer accused women of discussing his latest contribution of somatic pornography at their tea tables, he was providing a concrete example of the bad behavior alluded to in print culture. When rich women were given too much leisure and luxury, men feared, they would soon be corrupted, particularly in the realm of sexuality. The new conception of women as passionless and respectable was still being formed and was not yet finalized in middle class circles.[87] The older traditional image of women as sexually insatiable, still popular at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, was challenged as more and more refined and restrained behaviors became marks of public decency and respectability. To Stretzer and others, however, these behaviors were mere screens, concealing the inevitable sexual misconduct of women not closely guarded by patriarchs.

I will explore more fully the spatial designations of sexuality with regard to Norbert Elias's theory of a civilizing process in later chapters. There are, however, important points relating to the development of new boundaries for sexuality with regard to the tea table that help contextualize the intent of Stretzer's message. Norbert Elias's suggestion that sexuality was restricted and suppressed in accordance to new social regulations concerned with politeness and gentility tells only part of the story of a reassignment of sexual expression concerned to different spatial and social arenas. Elias's observation that specialized night clothing came into vogue along with a more developed shame frontier

[86] Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993), 70-73, 78, 123, 124, 299, 302, 303.
[87] Julie Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 190-93.

relegating the sexual to the world of the private is only partly complete.[88] Elias's refinement process can only be completed with the refinement of sexuality, which, as I shall show, became bounded by expensive luxury goods. One of the first appearances of refined sexuality came on the surface of expensive porcelain tea cups. It was the medium of porcelain, one of the most expensive and status enhancing materials capable of absorbing the pejorative associations with erotic expressions, that helped integrate sexualized messages into acceptable forms, tempered through the reductive costs of high status materials.

Sexuality was not, therefore, removed; it was refined. Elias's contention that repression begets substitutions in the forms of dreams, books, and in pictures was proven in the medium of erotic porcelain during the long eighteenth century.[89] Though there had been an extensive tradition of portraying human bodies on the surfaces of ceremonial objects, including plates and cups, for centuries, it was only through the medium of expensive porcelain tea wares and table accessories that a wider, middle class audience became owners and participants in erotic imagery at the table.

Porcelain and silver were so indicative of high status that even images in direct violation of the shame frontier posited by Elias could be breached without affecting personal status. High cost and virtuosity have always helped to differentiate between 'erotic' and 'pornographic' and between high and low art. In the case of erotic porcelain

[88] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 138-39; Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169.
[89] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 374.

and its associations with the high courts of European royalty, social transgressions of politeness were overridden by associations with costly, high status materials.

Though the queen of France could drink tea from porcelain breasts without censure, associations with ordinary women and sexuality at the middle class tea table were not seen to be innocuous or refined. Instead, men like Thomas Stretzer could accuse them of mentioning his latest pornographic work and effectively dismiss them as wayward prostitutes. Though sexual content was not seen as incongruous with gentility in an inanimate luxury object, mere words, without the overlay of virtuosic substances, could condemn a woman who violated a new understanding of genteel social norms to speak them. Stretzer was not speaking of specific women; he was merely using the configuration of a decorous space and women with new social prerogatives to condemn women who might claim social power. The mere suggestion of impropriety associated with the tea table was effective because anxious men wished to erode women's newfound social and financial power which threatened masculine traditions of consumption and display.

In the case of Thomas Stretzer's comment, the association with sexuality and the tea table was meant to castigate women associated with conspicuous consumption and leisure by showing them as sexually unstable and making them ridiculous. There were other associations of erotic content at the tea table, however, that were valorized instead of condemned. A case of imported china tea ware intended for the British market features erotic scenes of men and women on the surfaces of the cups and saucers. A set of cups with a contemporary British couple dressed in shades of gray frolic on the surface of a tea cup, the man grasping the woman's breast as they hide in the bushes to conceal their tryst. A

saucer from the same era shows a monk copulating with a woman. Though erotic content in print was seen as cheap and tawdry, porcelain was so expensive it could raise the perception of content through its association with luxury. This unusual confluence of status and sexuality will be discussed at length in chapter three, but it is important to note that there were other connections between status, sexuality, and the tea table which were not seen to undermine the social order. Perhaps among the elite consumers of prohibitively expensive erotic china, which included the French queen, the content was mitigated by the surface it was painted on and the people it was associated with.

Conclusion

John Brewer has articulated the perceptions of luxury that caused eighteenth-century Britons so much anxiety. Luxury was, ultimately, according to Brewer, about 'power and sex.'[90] Though Brewer relates these concerns regarding cultural corruption to despotic courts, particularly at the French court, England's greatest rival, the same feelings of distrust surrounding sex and power were visible in the microcosm of government within the British household. Just as courtiers had to navigate the realms of power through deceptive means, so too did women have to tread carefully in order to wrest small liberties from traditional patriarchs, be they fathers or husbands. A vast literature exists on the topics of gendered power, and it is not my intention to reiterate these findings here.[91] Instead, I have built on these foundations and added to the understanding of gendered power in the particular realm of the middle class woman's expanding purchasing power and have shown

[90] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 83.
[91] Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126-148; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 4-5, 273.

how the 'baubles' and commodities of the marketplace shaped and facilitated social power. I have demonstrated that the new form of sociality in the tea service, fully dependent on acquisition, bolstered the esteem of the entire household and carved out a unique place for women as consumers and hostesses which had never existed in this particular configuration. When traditional patriarchs chose to deny their wives some measure of financial independence, they may have retained their ultimate authority, but they also risked looking outdated, unrefined, and foolish amongst other men. In much the same way as domestic violence had traditionally been punished communally by a charavari, amongst the refined, the man denying his wife or female dependents access to small luxuries risked his reputation. In a case of financial disagreement escalated all the way to the courts, the gentry of Buckinghamshire were appalled and people spoke of his actions with horror.[92] Instead of 'rough music' outside his window, ephemeral gossip might circulate verbally or in letters. Private miserly actions taking place behind closed doors could suddenly be made public, exposing him to ridicule and the loss of respect.[93] Tea was not only a grocery consumable; it was the gateway to conspicuous consumption and a new freedom for women in the commercial realm. The tea table was beginning point of a gendered social sphere supported by and dependent on the idea of the female shopper. Until 1764, the word 'shop' had been understood only as a noun designating a place.[94] When 'shop' became a verb, it was largely because leisured women made a social event out of provisioning, which

[92] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 200-01.
[93] Ibid., 194-98.
[94] "shopping, n.1". OED Online. March 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37364121?result=1&rskey=8xg5B5& (accessed April 20, 2017); Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 75.

had previously been mundane.[95] The expansion of their purchasing opportunities and the retail goods on offer transformed the routine replenishment of household stores into a social opportunity for entertainment and display. Just as in the realm of politics 'emollience and charm were necessary to manipulate the monarch whose word was law'[96] at court, so too was subtlety and caution utilized by women under the legal charge of men to make forward progress in terms of household power.[97] Extended purchasing powers for new consumer opportunities were the foundations for new female freedoms in the private household and, later, in the public realm. The tensions between social standing and private power for male householders echoed the paradox articulated by Mandeville. Public reputation and, for Whiggish merchants, commercial interests, were facilitated by private lenience, and anxiety remained and flourished. As Brewer affirms, these anxieties revolved around power and sexuality, and the new household power gained by women was balanced by anxieties regarding their sexuality. The surest way to fight female power, then as now, was the accusation of sexual impropriety, which stripped a woman of social validity and excluded her figuratively and literally from polite company.[98]

The ripple effects on social behaviors coinciding with the introduction of tea were significant. As goods from the East India Company were distributed through new sales channels, their acquisition and consumption became associated with changes in women's behavior. Competing social groups spread competing narratives about women, leisure, and

[95] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 247-78.
[96] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 83.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Nina Burleigh, "From 'We Saw Your Boobs' to 'Abortion Barbie': The Year in Sexism." *New York Times*. Accessed January 13, 2016.

status. The increase in visual imagery created new opportunities for merchants to market novel goods by painting them with a diverting scene. The proliferation of cheap prints and more expensive conversation pieces painted by fashionable artists enabled more people to see more imagery more often. They also served to reinforce prevailing narratives and humor regarding beliefs about gender and class. The high status tea equipages and genteel accessories painted on the canvases of conversation pieces intensified their meanings and stimulated desire for these fashionable goods. This desire for goods and the new habit of women 'shopping' changed the physical layout of retail venues and stimulated a refinement of selling techniques which had not previously been necessary when business was largely a wholesale event predominated by male merchants. By investigating Norbert Elias's claim regarding refinement and analyzing sociological claims regarding luxury, I have shown the social changes significant to middle class identity were first forged by Whiggish aspirants at the eighteenth-century tea table. By the end of the nineteenth century, the role of middle class women aspiring to politeness and fashion would be characterized by leisured shopping, conspicuous consumption, and the refined manners necessary to drink tea in a genteel manner. Though these same behaviors were seen as threatening when first introduced, the benefits accrued by polite households across gender lines ultimately helped them triumph and stabilize. Centuries after its introduction, there are few things considered more middle class and British than tea drinking. The threats of scandal have disappeared, and respectability is now conveyed by the same behaviors that once would have threatened it. Sexuality is no longer associated with women tea drinkers, and elite women shoppers are seen as victims of a fashion system instead of victimizers of shop keepers.

The next chapter will examine the ways positional goods associated with men helped to reorder templates of masculinity. As spatial settings and furnishings recast notions of hospitality and power in gendered terms, men were increasingly aware of and subject to the nuances about their honor, reputation, and intentions bound up in the material items they wore, gave, or were associated with. Particularly in the arena of courtship and sexuality, objects and settings became a visual shorthand for observers to read. As masculine norms shifted and politeness became an important factor in middle class courtship, power was recast as restraint. In novels, prints, ballads, and merry stories, the connections between spatial settings, furniture, and personal possessions revealed additional meanings to those familiar with the context of these goods. Since women had little recourse against abusive husbands, validating the intentions and personality of a man during the courtship process was very important for future brides. Representations of kind and cruel men were often layered with visual clues hinting at their personality. Associations with objects and settings revealed personality, and authors, engravers, and printers used these to reinforce the heroic or barbaric in representations.

CHAPTER 2. SHAPING THE NEW MAN: HUMOR, SEXUALITY, AND CHANGE IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH SOCIAL SPHERE

Introduction

On Tuesday, January 24th, 1660, Samuel Pepys, an administrator to the English admiralty, recorded his feelings about a wedding he and his wife had attended. Pepys often commented on the behaviors of others, recording his feelings in a detailed, private diary. He was particularly observant of behavior that did not meet his acceptable standards. In this case, Pepys was unhappy with the bawdy revelry of the newly married couple as the wedding guests "cut the ribbons off them." A wedding tradition still practiced in Pepys' day was the cutting of ribbons off the bride and groom, a symbolic practice that preceded the consummation of their marriage vows. It was a time of 'boisterous mirth' often accompanied by bawdy talk, lewd joking, and suggestive revelry.[99] Pepys commented on the usual "mad stir" after dinner.[100] He recorded, "there was pulling off Mrs. Bride's and Mr. Bridegroom's ribbons." Though this was still standard behavior, Pepys' elevated social position and sense of propriety in public caused him to disapprove of the "great deal of fooling among them" which he likely deemed too bawdy in front of his wife. Two years later, however, Pepys participates in the same style of hazing at the marriage of his colleague Lieutenant Lambert. Pepys recorded, "we made ourselves very merry by taking away his ribbans and garters…" We see here the beginnings of refinement as the transition from undressing the bridegroom had given way to the slightly more private attribution of symbols, which still kindle bawdy talk and sexual references, but are not as intrusive to

[99] Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, entry for Tuesday, 24 January 1659/60.
[100] Ibid.

personal privacy in these matters. Before refinement could be accomplished, however, underlying issues justifying the standard misogynistic view toward women had to be addressed.

Religious Misogyny

Much of the underlying misogyny directed at women in marriage came from the Church. Men and women of all classes entered into this binding life contract with the understanding that men were to wield disproportionate control over wives. Sanctioned by God, men of all classes were free to enforce their will, sexually or otherwise, without fear of consequence. Before a genteel template of masculinity came into being, all men were united in their similarity with each other and their difference with women. Men, because of their physical strength and presumed intellectual superiority, were seen to be the natural leaders of the household and the marriage. Any power given to women might make them imperious, and this tendency needed to be guarded against.

The Church laid the foundation for inequality in marriage at the wedding ceremony itself. In a sermon "Preach'd at a wedding, May the 11th, 1699, at Sherbourn, in Dorsetshire" John Sprint expounded on the faults of women in general and their particular failings in marriage. Beginning with the caveat that all "good wives are no more offended with my discourse than modest Matrons are when vile Strumpets are painted in their proper Colours" he proceeded to set forth the problems caused by women who wished for equity. Such women were "imperious wives" and could do well to learn from the example of "The

Persian ladies" who have "the resemblance of a Foot worn on the top of their Coronets, in token that the height of their Glory, Top-knot and all, does stoop to their Husbands Feet."[101]

A lack of humility was not the only obstacle husbands confronted in their quest for an excellent wife. The mental capacity of women was believed to be so inferior to that of men that constant re-teaching was necessary. Many men agreed with Sprint that "Women have need of Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept" and even then, it was not enough "to make them perfect in their Lesson."[102] Women's 'weaker Capacities to learn" in comparison to men, made them constant burdens for men. Fortunately, "men can learn to command, and rule fast enough"[103] and could insist on women's submission to their will through intimidation and physical violence. All problems, according to most religious texts and popular opinion, were caused by the wife failing to submit to the superior intellect and reason of her husband. Reasons such as "women's wild nature" and "Obstinacy and Stubbornness of disobedient Wives" wreaked havoc in domestic quarters, where women who failed to please and submit to their husbands affronted tradition and created a space "…so like *Hell*, as the House wherein they dwell."[104]

Physical and verbal violence were proofs of wifely disobedience. The wife who "instead of being careful to oblige and please her Husband"[105] should "pout and louse, frown and fume, rail at and wrangle with her Husband" made the house "too hot to hold him" and when this occurred any retribution was well earned. If the husband was "of a

[101] John Sprint, *The Bride-womans Counsellor, Being a Sermon…, May 11, 1699*, 12.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 4.
[104] Ibid., 8.
[105] Ibid.

rugged and resolute Temper, and will retaliate the Affronts that are offered him" he was justified. Venting his passions in "a stormy and tempestuous manner" was understood as normal behavior for all men, occasioned by the least example of "imperiousness" in wives, which could include something as innocuous as frowning.[106]

While the man's implied physical abuse was understood to be provoked and thus justified, "the imperious, clamorous and turbulent wife" was seen as the root cause of suffering in men as well as herself.[107] It was not only a wife who "at every word spits Passion and Poison" and verbally provoked her husband who earned justified wrath. Women who engaged in the "common and foolish Practice" during courtship "to use all the Arts and Methods they can contrive or devise" were at fault for letting their good temper and appearance slip after marriage. Having grown "as remiss and careless in their Endeavors to please their Husbands, "Now their pleasant Smiles are turned in Frowns, the neatness of their Dress into Sluttery."[108] The appearance and words of a wife directly reflected on the status of the husband. Along with the positional goods and adornments to announce his standing in the material world, a woman's obedience and submission to her husband was part of the tally of his importance as a man.

Power was obliquely judged. Even a wife's use of address toward her husband was scrutinized in this equation of power. A wife calling her husband by his first name was "a custom more common than comely" because it indicated they esteemed them at no higher a rate than their very Servants that attend them…" Wives who "will not condescend to give

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 9.
[108] Ibid., 12.

their Husbands the title of Lord and Master" would grow bolder with time and not hesitate to "usurp that Authority which that Title doth imply."[109] With modalities of power assessed in explicit terms, the man who granted his wife freedom and dignity "may quickly experience what it is to be under the discipline of the Apron."[110] Such a man was weak and not respected by his peers. His claims of manly authority might be mocked, and within this dyad of power in marriage, it became obvious to onlookers that he had ceded his masculine authority to a woman, rendering him unnatural and the butt of jokes.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the temperament of all men was explicable by the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. Universal manhood had been "sadly changed" when "Woman seduced her Husband from his Innocency" and "his Temper grew harsh and severe."[111] Whereas the pre-fall template of manhood had been one of "Affability and Sweetness of Temper" the change occasioned by the fault of Eve now made it the universal job of women to use "a great deal of Art and Skill, of Diligence and Industry" to tame his "troublesome Humors."[112] In religious as well as secular understandings of masculine temperament, gendered behavior was explicable by biology and rooted firmly in "nature" rather than class based notions shaped by the "nurture" of culture. This would change significantly in the eighteenth century, when changes spearheaded by refined ideas began to change concepts of masculinity in middle class social and private spheres. A man's control of his wife was paramount to his respect in the community.

[109] Ibid., 13.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.,12.
[112] Ibid.

In contrast to polite values, plebeian culture clung to wedding traditions asserting the primacy of the bridegroom and his future household authority over his wife. Several of these traditions involved a verbal or physical show of force. In a paradigm where marriage was a yoke to be borne, a battle for the breeches, and a fight for household authority, plebeian men sought to enforce their newly sanctioned authority. Sexual assaults, therefore, soon gave rise to jokes and ballad sheets reinforced the humor of the husband showing his authority through aggression. Two rhyming 'merry stories', which could be sung to music, reinforced this 'tradition' in the 1730s. The divergence between high and low culture grew more pronounced in the sexual realm as the century continued, and was greatly influenced by new forms of polite behavior and refinement that had begun to characterize gentleman as distinct from 'the great unruly herd of men' socially and economically beneath them. In particular, the concept of *noblesse oblige*, the guiding principle behind polite behavior, changed the way men viewed their duty to women, especially their wives. The hallmark of the gentleman began to be his consideration for others. This applied to his wife as well, and the polite traditions of men aiding and deferring to women through gestures such as holding the door, pulling out a chair, and other social niceties became more commonplace and universal at this time.[113]

The duty of a gentleman was first of all to protect his wife and consider her inferior strength and position, and to aid her in whatever manner he could. For men well versed in the arts of love, this included sheltering her from the pain of first intercourse and enabling her pleasure. Amongst middle class men who would claim to be genteel, brutality was no

[113] Addison and Steele, *The Spectator No. 433* (July 17, 1712).

longer a way of valorizing reputation. Brute strength had settled arguments and defined successes and failures in life in a previous age, but to triumph in an unfairly weighted contest was now seen as crude and far from laudable. A man able to make himself irresistible to women had advantages in the social realm as well as in his sexual conquests. Rape and sexual violence had become the hallmark of the weak, oafish man, so unappealing he could not gratify himself in any other way. This was one of the most significant divergences of sexual culture, which paved the way for sexual specialization and elaboration in the West. Though ancient and Eastern cultures had long histories of sexual arts and knowledge, it was not until the production of books of knowledge in the eighteenth century when these aids to sexual refinement could be disseminated and integrated into cultural practice.

Books relating to sexuality had existed for centuries, but because of their high cost and low levels of literacy outside the universities and courts, they were not meant to appeal to a wide audience. *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, one of the most famous, featured a hermaphrodite depicted as a monster in the frontispiece, and though it examined many areas of sexuality, it was primarily an explanation of "the secrets of generation" as medical experts and folklore understood it at the dawn of the eighteenth century.[114] At the more salacious end of the spectrum, Il Modi, or *Aretino's Postures*, as it was known in English,

[114] Aristotele, Pseudo, *Aristotle's Masterpiece Compleated in Two Parts* (London: Printed by B.H., 1698). This remained popular into the nineteenth century, and ran to several editions, including the 1755 edition, Aristotle, *Aristotle's Compleat Masterpiece In Three Parts: Displaying the Secrets of Nature in the Generation of Man. Regularly Digested into Chapters and Sections, Rendering It Far More Useful and Easy than Any Yet Extant.: To Which Is Added, A Treasure of Health ; Or, The Family Physician, Being Choice and Approved Remedies for All the Several Distempers Incident to Human Bodies* (London: Printed and Sold by the Booksellers, 1755), Title Page.

was available at the same time, was considered a lewd foreign book, typical of the Italians, because its primary purpose was to illustrate various positions for sexual intercourse.[115] The publication of Edward Phillip's book, *The Beau's Academy,* in 1699, signaled a new wave of books relating to sexual prowess aimed at a masculine audience concerned with appearances and able to read.[116] The middle classes would voraciously consume advice literature on a range of topics over the next several centuries, and the precedent set by Phillips and his imitators was important. The combination of instructions on love and other aspects of gentility, especially writing and witty conversation, would characterize most guides over the course of the next century. The ability to write in verse was especially genteel and signaled the education and cultural capital of true elites. Though courtship, sexual congress, and marriage were all important, it was the execution of these skills within the context of refinement understood in terms of class that reinforced the necessity to present a holistic view of politeness to women. As the middle class expanded, they sought literary advice on how to behave in multiple categories. This chapter looks at one sub category, advice literature that aimed at refining the behaviors relating to matters of love.

Charles Freeman's *The Lover's New Guide, or, A Complete Library of Love* promised readers "full instructions" for "Love, Courtship and Marriage."[117] Booksellers sold guides to men eager to have an advantage with women. Even those challenged in

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[115] Walter M., Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987), 58-60, 62-63, 97.
[116] Edward Phillips, *The Beau's Academy, Or, The Modern and Genteel Way of Wooing and Complementing after the Most Courtly Manner in Which Is Drawn to the Life, the Deportment of Most Accomplished Lovers, the Mode of Their Courtly Entertainments, the Charms of Their Persuasiv* (London: Printed for O.B. and Sold by John Sprint at the Bell in Little-Britain, 1699).
[117] Charles Freeman, *The Lover's New Guide: Or a Complete Library of Love* (London: n.p., 1780), Title page.

various aspects of romance could be sure of success; "every part" being "rendered perfectly easy to all Capacitors." The four main sections point to the new weight given to writing in the pursuit of romance. Section two, "Conversations on the subject of love and marriage, equally interesting to Parents and Children" is the only section that does not deal with instructions on writing. Section one teaches the reader how to write "love letters in a great variety of forms." Section four details how to write "Love letters in *Verse*" and section three teaches the writing of "Cards of Compliment proper to be used in Courtship by Lovers of either Sex; and suited to all the Emergencies of Human Life."[118]

In contrast to an earlier age where writing was reserved to elites and scholars and most people "labored under the misfortune of a *Slender Education"* books like this sought to "prevent this inconvenience for the Future" by providing examples suited to addressing various people based on rank and social standing.[119] Widows must be approached differently than young women, daughters of merchants were distinguished from maids of all work, and prostitutes differently still. "A virgin of fifteen years" could be won over by the singing of a love sonnet, sweets, and the touching of her smicket, or petticoat.[120] These differences related to age and class, reinforcing the use of dress and material items to the process of courtship and seduction. As readers of courtship guides began to practice these techniques, they helped to create a variety of new behaviors associated with a particular type of man. By adjusting their behavior, they added alternative practices to the current

[118] Ibid.
[119] Henry Scougal, *A New Academy of Compliments or the Compleat English Secretary. Containing the True Art of Indicting Letters, Suitable to the Capacity of Youth and Age… To Which Is Added, I. The Art of Good Breeding and Behaviour... With a Collection of the Newest Play-house Songs* (London: Printed for R. Ware, 1748), Preface, A3.
[120] Ibid., 148.

template of masculinity that were associated with class. In this way, class became an important factor in dictating the behavior of men toward women in matters of courtship and sexual practice. The presence or absence of particular objects and behaviors was a shorthand for revealing holistic 'types' of men, and these became especially significant in print culture, where they helped to reveal character and intention in an image or a sentence.

As the material and social conditions in Britain changed over the course of the long eighteenth century, new thoughts and beliefs about marriage, courtship, and sexuality were also destined to undergo refinement. Privacy, class association, and the spatial arenas where activities relating to love took place all influenced the lived behaviors of men and women wishing to conform to a particular lifestyle suited to their identity within a continuum of social hierarchy and rank. As refinement crept into more and more arenas in the social realm, an alternative template of masculinity began to exist amongst traditional behaviors relating to wooing, courtship, marriage, and sexual activities. Whereas men of previous centuries had relied on a simple metric of physical strength to win contests of honor with other men and prevail over wives, men choosing to ascribe to a new ideal of politeness demonstrated their power through restraint instead of force.

It was not only the individual, but the state that could be judged on the treatment of women. Women were a particular focus for gauging successful refinement, from the domestic to the national level. As one contemporary observed, '[T]he rank… and condition, in which we find women in any country, mark out to us with the greatest precision, the exact point in the scale of civil society, to which the people of such a country have arrived; and were there [sic] history entirely silent on every other subject, and only

mentioned the manner in which they treated their women, we would, from thence, be able to form a tolerable judgment of the barbarity, or culture of their manners.'[121] Manners aided refinement and facilitated cultural change, in front stage areas as well as private arenas. As the middle classes moved into the social and mercantile spaces created by a newly formed public sphere, they were influenced to change their behaviors to conform to new notions of masculinity and gentility. By reading printed manners guides and reshaping their behavior, the middle class men who sought to refine their manners and achieve social, educational, and financial advantages were able to distinguish themselves from both the gentry above them and those socially and economically beneath them. The sophistication and superiority of the British was now seen as oppositional to inferior nations that practiced barbaric sexual violence against the fairer sex.

The now established notion that the sophistication of a country can be judged by the treatment of women was proposed by Sarah Fygg Egerton in 1769. Much of Britain's claims to global domination and superiority rested on their genteel behavior that differentiated their way of life from 'savages' not versed in the art of living. Ultimately, men utilizing restraint were seen to be more powerful and palatable by men and women, but until older templates of masculinity were successfully overturned, much ink was spilled castigating those who ventured to refine their behavior. Polite men who privileged women and raised love to an art form created a stark division in masculine behavioral norms. Deviating from established social traditions and church sanctioned hierarchies within marriage, these men faced opprobrium in person and in print. Accused of diluting their

[121] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 191.

masculinity with refined objects and false "graces" they responded by highlighting the brutish, selfish nature of men who opposed the new "varnish" of manners in the structure of companionate marriage.[122] Print culture, advice literature, ballads, and newspaper accounts of "criminal conversations" (adultery) reflected both sides of an increasingly contentious argument about the "true" behavior of "true" men. These sources often used humor to underscore viewpoints. The tensions revealed the shifting social and sexual landscape of a changing Britain.

Marriage was a particularly important arena from which to observe the underlying tension pervasive between men and women that was reinforced by class and gender norms inherent in culture. Beginning with the historical legacy of misogyny inherent in Church wedding ceremonies, we see the common paradigm of masculine strength over feminine weakness that influenced all classes of men in the seventeenth century. Before class associations became relevant in a holistic picture of masculinity, marriage, courtship, and sexuality were seen as levelers that all held in common. Great and humble men behaved as men, and saw themselves as united in a common brotherhood in opposition to women. The manners of men in Pepys age, which were at the time seen as masculine in opposition to feminine, united him with other men in a dyad of strength and overt power. Seventeenth-

[122] Charles Johnstone, *The Adventures of Anthony Varnish Or, a Peep at the Manners of Society. By an Adept. In Three Volumes* (London: Printed for William Lane, 1786. Parodies of new manners were popular and provided a counterpoint to the validity of new social behaviors. A popular book by Charles Johnstone created a character called Anthony Varnish, whose newly varnished manners were presented as a source of humor. Print culture also offered many satirical examples of 'high life' accompanied by pictures of objects purchased for ruinous sums.

century gentlemen were given more latitude than their eighteenth-century counterparts and were permitted to "talk bawdy" in mixed company.[123]

By the 1730s, however, Pepys's behavior would have appeared not masculine, but plebeian. The new refinements utilized by men well versed in the cult of seduction through literary primers had succeeded in dividing men from other men based on class and behavior as opposed to biology. As commerce replaced the Church as an organizing principle of life, polite men accommodated refined objects, behaviors, and activities into a new template of masculinity both novel and understated that greatly impacted their relationships with women and splintered a universal fraternity with other men. Culture began to replace biology as the primary metric of association. By looking at the cultural significance of the wedding night and the meaning of marriage in the social arenas of different classes, it is possible to trace the evolution of new gender roles greatly influenced by diachronic and synchronic elements of print culture.

New Concepts of Manhood

By the end of the seventeenth century, middle class men began to polish their skills in the arts of love and courtship. Pioneering guides like *The Beau's Academy* were widely imitated and improved upon, and had multiplied to such an extent that by the end of the eighteenth century they had become commonplace. *The Beau's Academy* recommended both bawdy talk and extremely formal court speech to show gentility and wit illuminating new social conventions for those unaccustomed to elite life.[124]

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[123] Talking bawdy was often construed as wit, and the importance of wit in courtship was reinforced at the didactic level as well as in novels and personal correspondence.
[124] Phillips, *The Beau's Academy*..., 14-15.

The Beau's Academy is a curious and quite crude start towards the process of refinement. Bridging the bawdy court practices that had not yet gone out of style with a new focus on politeness and gentility makes for interesting and, at times, seemingly contradictory advice. We learn for instance, about what was still acceptable in mixed company when women were widely supposed to be sexually insatiable. Though flirtatious games and double *entendres* remained popular throughout the Georgian era, the paradigm of the passionless woman is nowhere in sight in the pages of this book. Popular mixed company games look like a crude version of 'truth or dare', where 'One lady was commanded to put her busk in a Gentleman's codpiss' and 'Another lady was commanded to pull it out.' Hilarity ensued when the second 'lady' rummaged in the gentleman's codpiece and "occasioned some sport, for she laying hold of something else, after two or three pulls gave over, excusing her disobedience, by pretending that the busk was tackt to the Gentlemans belly."[125] This sexual theatre was an important aspect of socializing. Proper responses for the day were permissive, but even these responses were regulated by shared beliefs about men, women, and conduct in public. Clearly, evening entertainments that involve handling the sexual organs of another in public indicate a permissive social environment where sexuality is regarded as humorous and inseparable from social practices. The men in the room were also expected to reveal something. Counterpart questions for gentleman included the command to reveal "how many of Aretin's postures he had tried" along with "how many bastards he durst not own" and "how many times he

[125] Ibid.

could lie with a woman in one night."[126] Public discussions of sexuality required participants to reveal potentially embarrassing personal details relating to their sexual status and abilities. Though public conversation about women's virginity would continue throughout the Victorian era, direct questions in front of onlookers at elite functions such as balls would not remain permissible for long. Commanding a woman to answer 'whether she had her maidenhead or no' was an acceptable form of banter in 1699, but as early as twelve years later it would begin to be considered vulgar and unrefined.

A New Academy of Compliments or, The Lover's Secretary, the fourth edition printed in 1715, was followed by *The Lover's New Guide, or a Complete Library of Love*, and by 1754, *A New Academy of Compliments* was in its fourteenth printing.[127] It would continue to be popular and had spread all the way to Glasgow by the 1780s.[128] Many books like this ran to several editions by the end of the 1780s, showing how popular the content remained and testifying to the expansion of interest facilitated by a growing middle class. The *Oeconomy of Love*, written in verse in the style of Milton, and aimed at a refined audience familiar with poetry and classical languages, existed alongside content focused on the humorous foibles of courtship and sexuality. Various plays, such as 'Three Hours After Marriage', and 'Woman is a Riddle' and novels like *The Polite Road to an Estate*, and *The Gallant Companion* poked fun at various intersections of refined or unrefined behavior and the romantic pursuit of women.[129] Differences in class were often articulated

[126] Ibid.
[127] Freeman, *The Lover's New Guide,* Title Page; Scougal, *A New Academy of Compliments*, title page.
[128] Scougal, *A New Academy of Compliments*, title page.
[129] Christopher Bullock, *Woman is a riddle. A comedy, As it is acted at the Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields* (London: M. DCC. XXIX. 1729 B3. ECCO). The Polite Road to an Estate, or Fornication One Great Source

as a source of humor. Humor was different in different cultural milieus, and the style of humor presented in these various forms of print makes it possible to distinguish the class of the intended audience. A wide variety of printed literature appealed to different "ranks and conditions of men."[130]

Ballads continued to be sold by chapmen on street corners. A traditional distribution channel for a traditional vehicle of culture, they continued to resonate with traditional plebeian men and women, whose lives reflected continuity with the past. This was less true for their middling counterparts, who were undergoing great change in their ambitious pursuit of higher styles of living. Literacy for middle class men and women in urban centers was nearly universal by the 1740s and the books intended for this swathe of the population were more expensive, more refined, and more subtle than the messages stamped onto ha'penny sheets and 'merry stories' costing six pence.[131] Importantly, these guides offered content with a completely different purpose than the casual ephemera that also relied on love as a topic. It is important to realize, however, that whatever the intended audience, purchasers of erotic content bought according to their erotic preferences. Sailors, for instance, were happy to purchase more expensive content when they had the money to do so, and gentlemen at public taverns and private dinner parties often sang traditional bawdy songs associated with low life. While the content might have been developed and segregated by publishers anxious to attract particular audiences, a particularly humorous

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of Wealth and Pleasure The Gallant Companion, or, an antidote to the hyp and vapours. (London, printed for J. Cooke, 1759).

[130] *Curtain Lectures; Or, Matrimonial Misery Displayed. In a Series of Interesting Dialogues, between Married Men and Their Wives. In Every Station and Condition of Life* (London, printed for J. Cooke, 1770), frontispiece.

[131] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 33; McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 51-56.

ha'penny sheet might attract an aristocrat and a more genteel tome, beautifully bound, might have been purchased for the mistress of "a common tar."[132] Lover's guides, like other manners guides, were printed with the intention of educating men and women in the practice of genteel behavior they might have alluded to having already known. Refined speeches, polite forms of address, and correctly written letters helped readers polish their skills at courtship. For those wishing to marry ambitiously, they provided clues to acquired behavior as judged by different levels of social rank.

Red calf bindings with gold stamping and intricate scrollwork on extant copies indicate the means of the purchaser, who would have had these books custom bound for a private library and might have kept the knowledge secret for the social advantage it could afford the possessor. This contrasted greatly with the ephemeral nature of ha'penny song sheets, which were valued for shared mirth in public instead of secret content perused privately. Ballads and ephemera associated with low life were much simpler and suited to those who were not able to read and might not have been formally educated. While many plebeian men were capable of simple business accounting and basic literacy skills, elaborations on stylish modes of writing or references to classical themes were beyond their education and style of living.

Literacy was quickly becoming a hallmark of middle class living. Education and the ability to write well became an increasingly prominent mark of class membership for both genders as the century wore on. *The New Academy of Compliments, or Love's Secretary*, reflected the importance of literacy and financial success in its subtitle, which

[132] *Curtain Lectures*..., 27; Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 33.

promised "divers Examples of *Writing* or *Inditing* Letters, relating wither to Love or Business."[133] Writing competent letters to lovers was now seen as important to the polite as "casting accompts" was to merchants who owed their new style of living to commerce and the expansion of commercial spheres.[134]

As the century progressed, men and women began to see distinctions in styles and behaviors relating to matters of love and sexuality. These stylistic distinctions were greatly influenced by lover's guides that provided examples for every rank and condition. One category useful in charting social change is humor. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century men and women valued sexual humor, and it remained an important element of sexuality, but the venues, people, and manner in which it was expressed changed with the advancement of time. For those wishing to claim the status of the polite, it was now necessary to navigate the increasing prohibitions and rules surrounding the expression of risqué content. The expression of power and restraint had become important elements in judging the character of a gentleman, and these metrics carried over into sexual matters and marital relationships, greatly affecting both. When powerful men were lauded for restraint and compassion in the new configuration of companionate marriage, the older image of brute masculinity was challenged and began to look outmoded at best and brutish and uncivilized at worst. Men wishing to distinguish themselves as members of the polite world were now obliged to control their expressions of sexual language and behavior.

[133] Scougal, *A New Academy of Compliments*, frontispiece.
[134] Ibid.

Seventeenth-century men of all classes had viewed women as sexually insatiable, more concerned with pleasure than anything else. This paradigm of women's uncontrolled sexuality ran parallel to sexual humor involving cuckoldry. As the examples from *The Beau's Academy* illustrate, the desire of women for men and the desire of men for women dovetail in anxious humor surrounding the possibility of sexual deception and broken marriage vows. Interestingly, when women become passionless and men are stereotyped as sexually insatiable, anxieties and humor make rape the focus of punchlines. Cuckoldry and rape highlight the broad spectrum of power and sexuality inherent in gendered understandings of household authority within marriage. Humor revolving around these topics raises questions in terms of women's influence and control over their bodies, their households, and their husbands.

Because of this emphasis on control, women's sexual status was an important preoccupation of men. Virginity began to take on a new seriousness in the eighteenth century as all classes became more concerned with the possibilities of deception. It was not only on their wedding night that men assessed the sexual status of women. Men were in the habit of judging women in terms of sexual desirability and sexual morality, and social status influenced both categories. Samuel Pepys illuminated his thoughts on women's appearance, sexual availability, demeanor, and honor in various entries in his diary. In one month of 1663 alone, he recorded several instances of sexualized material that he witnessed or heard about. In a month that included a laundry list of sexually related happenings, including his wife's maid accidentally falling and 'showing her arse in the boat' he lusted after various women and commented on their availability or off-limits status. The daughter

of a respectable family caught his eye. Bored with his social call, he was grateful for the distraction of a pretty girl, commenting that, '…I was much pleased to look upon their pretty daughter, which is grown a pretty mayd, and will make a fine modest woman." Seeing her rank as equal to his own, Pepys alludes to her modesty. This was not the case when he witness another woman, the very next day, who was beneath him in the social continuum. Pepys' observations, when read together, highlight the ways that class affected the sexual perception and indeed the sexual safety of the woman in question. Passing by a questionable sexual scene on Ludgate Hill in his coach, he witnessed 'two gallants and their footmen taking a pretty wench.' This 'pretty wench' that Pepys confessed he had 'much eyed' was 'a seller of riband and gloves' and therefore outside the bounds of sexual protection or the suggestion of modesty and honor. Despite witnessing the four men 'seek to drag her by some force' Pepys did not intervene. When 'the wench went, and I believe had her turn served' Pepys was not remorseful for having witnessed sexual coercion and rape and done nothing, but instead was regretful he could not participate and enjoy in lived experience 'the thoughts and wishes I had of being in their place!'[135] The next day, Pepys visited 'his little milliner' at home without her husband. Though he only records that they 'chatted' he mentions the absence of the husband and adds, 'and a mad merry slut she is.' For Pepys and other gentlemen living in England in the seventeenth century, the shame threshold Norbert Elias suggests regulates behavior in the civilizing process had not progressed to the point where taking advantage of women was shameful. Samuel Pepys, so concerned with his newly entitled social rank and anxious to display genteel behavior

[135] Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, entry for Wednesday, 3 February, 1663/64.

and be recognized as superior for it, here sees no discord between his desire to be perceived as a man of honor and his desire to switch places with the rapists on Ludgate Hill.

Print culture reflects the widening divergence of polite and plebeian sexual mores over the course of the long eighteenth century. As more content became available, more examples of what to do and what not to do were available for public and private consumption. While prescriptive literature based on polite models advised sexual mastery as the hallmark of the gentleman, low culture continued to celebrate more traditional expressions of plebeian masculine authority involving bawdy humor and sexual violence. In contrast, the polite man highlighted different aspects congruent with a new vision of masculinity that reinforced his reputation as a skilled seducer and revealed his class membership. By placing the needs of women above his own, he cultivated a refined air in keeping with the restraint that governed his other social activities and public persona.

These differences in masculine deportment are highlighted in the many ballads, primers, and books that flourished in the popular culture of cities and towns. Particularly in the arena of marriage, sexual congress, and the pursuit of women, humor and anxieties surrounding romantic and sexual themes reveal new norms and shifting cultural values. The polarity between polite and plebeian masculinity in matters of courtship, first intercourse, and marriage became more exaggerated as time passed, and this was reflected in and influenced by the literature concerning courtship. Ballads, merry catches, and ha'penny song sheets began to be associated with low life. All content relating to love, courtship and sexuality became increasingly class conscious, and relied on traditional

behaviors associated with plebeian men as a source of humor in opposition to the 'real' advice in legitimate love guides aimed at refining the practiced behaviors of middling men.

Bawdy Ballads and Merry Stories

Ballad culture was traditionally associated with bawdy themes. Often sung in the streets and in places of public revelry like taverns and pubs, ballads allowed participants to explore topics relating to love and sexuality while they were merry with drink. The lyrics, as well as the woodcut illustrations that accompanied them, were often sexualized. Though not all ballads related to themes of love, most songsters and compilations relied on the inclusion of "merry catches" and "witty stories" as a selling point.[136]

As society became more refined, the public nature of bawdy content in ballads caused discomfort. The "numbers of impudent ballad singers" were antagonistic to the refinement of society.[137] They were seen by some as a corrupting force, a moral contagion contaminating "many parts of the town" and the minds of those exposed to their songs. The dissolute morals of the ballad singers spread to their audience, made up of mostly "young and simple persons" who listened, and were encouraged in idleness and waste.[138] "Both sexes" were seen to "loiter away time and money" better spent productively as they were drawn in by ballad singers "singing the most impure songs they can possibly lay their hands on."[139]

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[136] *The Amorous Jester* (London, printed for R. Randall, 1776), frontispiece.
[137] *The Agreeable Companion: A Collection of Polite Tales and Fables: In Which Are Display'd, the Most Material Incidents in Human Life* (Berwick: Printed by and for W. Phorson, and B. Law, London, 1783), 130.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

Popular songs written by and enjoyed amongst elites from an earlier era were now condemned as coarse and antagonistic to refined expressions of love. It was now seen as "unfit" to use "Bare ribaldry, the poor pretence to wit" in a song discussing love.[140] Lord Rochester's songs were condemned as "obscene words, to gross to move desire."[141] Instead of inspiring "warm thoughts of the transporting joy" they "like heaps of fuel only choke the fire."[142] The *Westminster Magazine* published a suggestion by the Duke of Buckingham on the perfection of songs, which he believed came from "Exact propriety of words and thought" amongst other factors.[143] Clearly, publications promoting genteel and polite values were not in favor of sexual language in public and sought to refine the coarsest elements of town life by removing "obscene words" from casual social encounters by raising social awareness about the impolite nature of them.[144]

It was not enough to merely remove ballad singers from the streets. Those critiquing public singing of salacious ballads recognized the sources of the problem; namely, the songsters, pamphlets, and ballad sheets that sold so well. With the increase in literacy, ballads were reprinted in magazines as an enticement. An opponent in the *Westminster Magazine* observed "our periodical publications teem with ballads made to raise their several Mistresses' eyebrows" with drinking and "jolly songs" were separated from love songs categorized as "soft songs" that focused more on romance than ribald passion.[145] Ballads, which were memorized and sung, could be spread even by the illiterate. The long

[140] Ibid., 131.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., 130.
[144] Ibid., 131.
[145] Ibid.

tradition of shared musical revelry was enhanced by sexually suggestive woodcut illustrations printed on the ballad sheets, but even for those who heard the song without possessing the sheet itself, the snatches of song or phrases referencing established lyrics established an undercurrent of transmitted sexual messages in public arenas associated with popular life. Especially in urban areas, many opportunities existed for men and women to read or hear sexual content. Often sung in taverns or while drinking, rhymed verse could be set to a variety of tunes. This facilitated the spread of these verses, which were easier to memorize when sung.

Two 'merry stories' enjoyed immense popularity in Britain in the 1730s. They reflected a turning point in sexual humor and templates of masculinity. The tale, "Kick him, Jenny!" was so popular it inspired a parody, "Kick him, Nan!" Both were published in 1734, and both highlight the importance of first intercourse to establish the dynamics of power within marriage.[146] The importance of class and gendered expectations regarding sexuality, seduction, and violence show the establishment and reinforcement of skillful seduction and sexual assault in differing masculine identities dictated by class. "Kick him, Jenny!" is far more descriptive of sexual violence as the main focus of sexualized humor. Rape, though here treated as humor, is also an explicit threat.

While obviously a way to retaliate against the threat of "imperious" women and a tool of control, sexual violence was also used to reinforce the lowly social standing and class associations with men unable to genteelly show power through restraint. Though rape

[146] *Kick Him Jenny, a Merry Tale* (Dublin: London: Printed for Roger Clevercock: and Dublin: Re-printed for Dorothy Kilcock, 1734); *Kick Him Nan: Or, a Poetical Description of a Wedding Night By the Author of Kick Him Jenny* (London: Printed for T. Reynolds in the Strand, 1734).

remained a threat to women in reality as well as the fictional worlds of literature, it was increasingly seen as the last resort of brutes. Threatening or attempting rape increasingly marked a man as unrefined and oafish. In novels, rapists were increasingly portrayed as the "bad" characters, out of control and therefore unfit for society.

Novels might portray rapists as foreign, highlighting their crude brutality, as an example from a 1768 novel did. The barbarity of the rapist is as prominent as his foreign Indian heritage, and he is unmoved by her pleas and appeals. His animal nature becomes apparent through his crudeness and violence as much as his inability to understand that he should be moved by the appeal of a gentlewoman. The novel, set in India, describes the foreign rapist in terms of a bear and emphasizes his lack of refinement. Despite her appeals to him to behave as a gentleman "she found the ravisher, like a hungry bear, deaf to the voice of his expiring prey, rejoicing in his own strength, and preparing to glut his brutal appetite…"[147] Her appeals to his honor are ineffective because he is not a man of honor.

Several domestic novels from mid-century onward explicitly contrasted the threat and danger of rape with new behaviors relating to gentility. In Fanny Burney's novel *Evelina*, the ways in which men approach the protagonist hint at their sexual agendas. Sir Clement Willoughby, who is shown to be uncouth and inappropriately familiar when pressing his sexual suit, is revealed as a sexual predator firstly by his lack of good manners. Manners were not merely a display of correct knowledge of behaviors, they were insights into the deeper qualities held in the heart. "Artificial decorums" might be learned from

[147] Alexander Dow, *Tales, translated from the Persian Inatullah of Delhi In two volumes* (London: T. Becket/P.A. de Hondt, 1768), 190.

observation and replication, but "true delicacy is opposed to cruelty, impertinence, and boldness."[148] Unlike the genteel and restrained Lord Orville, whose manners were "so elegant, so gentle, so unassuming, that they at once engage, esteem, and diffuse complacence," other men engaging in the varnish of good behavior to cover up, instead of reveal, their inner thoughts and motivations were neither genteel nor safe in private.[149] Evelina's anxiety about different men's lack of breeding in public arenas relate to her assessment of them as moral actors, and foreshadows their actions in private.

In contrast to men capable of exercising restraint and consideration for women in all situations, the sexual predator who would commit assault was out of control and of inferior "breeding". He could be described as "one of those brutal minds which can be gratified with the violation of innocence and beauty without the least pity, passion or love…"[150] Clearly unskilled in "the soft arts" capable of winning women's "favor" the rapist was portrayed in many instances as the uncouth brute.[151] When portrayed in terms of the ignorance of savages, this narrative of uncontrolled sexuality and brutal, beastly behavior fed into a message positing the inherent superiority of British conquerors over "uncivilized" foreigners. The mere gratification of carnal desires was not enough for the British man of refinement. While some men might indulge in sexual congress "to enjoy the satisfactions which are reaped from the possession of beauty" they could be simultaneously

[148] Frances Burney, *Evelina, Or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.* ed. Edward A. Bloom. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 218.
[149] Ibid.
[150] *The Agreeable Companio*n, 5-6.
[151] Ibid.

an "utter stranger to the decencies, honors, and delicacies that attend the passions toward them in an elegant mind." [152]

By 1768, the suggestion of foreign overtones could be used to further denigrate those who committed sexual assault. When Sarah Woodcock, a maid, accused Lord Baltimore of sexual assault, his mistress, Sophia Watson, wrote a pamphlet to humiliate him. Though he was a tilted peer and had been acquitted of rape, popular opinion favored his victim, and he fled England. The pamphlet, *Memoirs of the Seraglio of the Bashaw of Merryland* reported details of how Lord Baltimore had attempted to keep a harem of women at a house in London, mimicking the customs of lands considered beneath the civility of the British.[153] According to Watson, he had "imported every species of Asiatic luxury" but without "consulting his constitution."[154] Watson alleged he was unable to perform sexually, and thus could not satisfy one woman, let alone eight. This pamphlet was written to humiliate Lord Baltimore, and to cast aspersions on him as a man for failing to live up to a standard of restraint expected in elevated circles. Suggestions of impotence and "Asiatic" manners are here meant to add additional layers of shaming associations for a man raised in the world of the polite who failed at demonstrating finer feelings.[155] By exposing him to sexual ridicule, Watson used every association possible to denigrate his name for his violation of honor.

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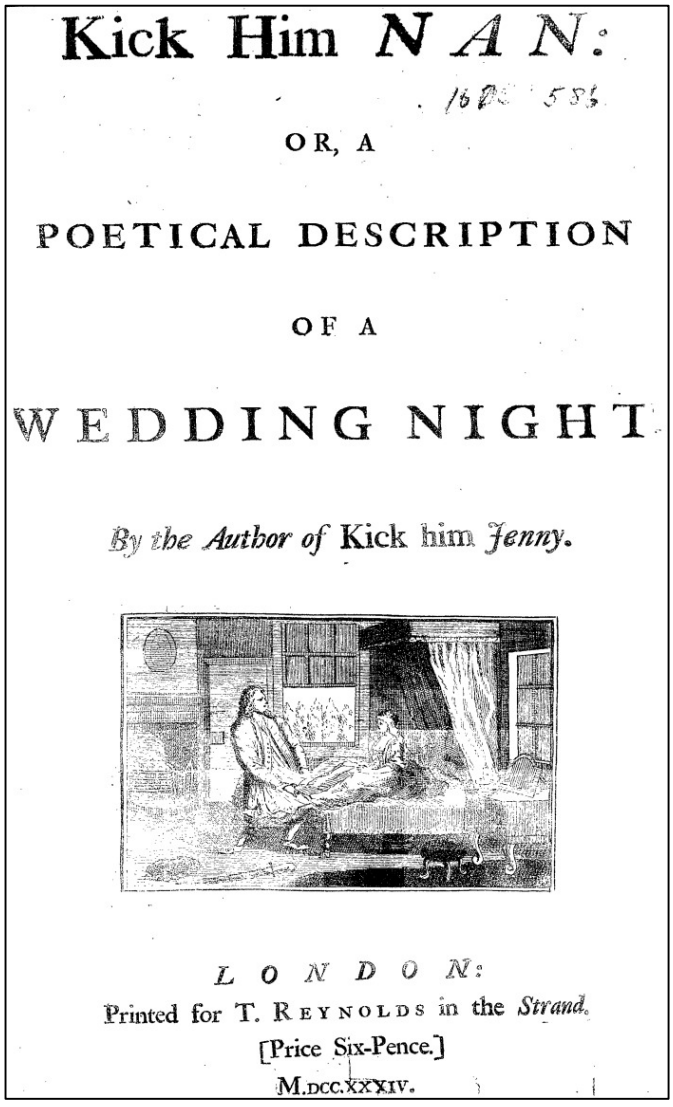
[152] Ibid.
[153] Sophia Watson, *Memoirs of the Seraglio of the Bashaw of Merryland* (London: Printed for S. Bladon, 1768), 6, 13, 67, 70, 132.
[154] Ibid
[155] Ibid.

Though sexual violence continued to exist in reality and fiction, eighteenth-century men and women began to associate it with the uneducated, uncouth men who relied on force where charm failed. Gentleman could rely on an arsenal of approved social behaviors to win over the women they desired. They could follow explicit directions in courtship guides, use approved phrases and banter to win interest, and ultimately triumph by overcoming the "toyful protests" of their intended through their ability to incite lust.[156] The rapist, on the other hand, was a man of no "finer feelings" and did not hesitate to use trickery and deceit to get his way. He caused physical and emotional pain instead of inspiring lust, and his actions were based on his own gratification, which was out of control. A popular book of fables characterized such men thusly: "He was one of those brutal minds which can be gratified with the violation of innocence and beauty without the least pity, passion or love to that with which they are so much delighted." The failings of such men originated in their "brutal minds" which stood in contrast to honorable men able to enjoy not only the physical satisfactions of intercourse with an elegant restraint unavailable to flawed, base men who "knew what it was to enjoy the satisfactions which are reaped from the possession of beauty, but was an utter stranger to the decencies, honors, and delicacies that attend the passions toward them in an elegant mind."[157]

The gentleman might use whatever verbal or civil tricks he could to entice a woman, but the rapist tricked her into danger. Though seducers were potentially dangerous to reputation and fortune, it was their skill at inciting lust that caused women to undo

[156] John Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love a Poetical Essay* (London: Printed for T. Cooper, 1736), 11.
[157] *The Agreeable Companion*, 17.

themselves. Unable to resist his charms, women who fell prey to a seducer were not subject to the same control as those who fell victim to sexual violence at the hands of a brute. The importance rests on consent, not sexual action. These two opposing stories offer two opposing versions of masculine conduct and rely on class association to determine the humor of the different characters.


Kick Him NAN:

OR, A

POETICAL DESCRIPTION

OF A

WEDDING NIGHT

By the Author of Kick him Jenny.

LONDON:
Printed for T. REYNOLDS in the Strand.
[Price Six-Pence.]
M.DCC.XXXIV.

Fig. 8 Cover, Kick Him Nan: Or, a Poetical Description of a Wedding Night By the Author of Kick Him Jenny. London: Printed for T. Reynolds in the Strand, 1734.

Fig. 9 Illustration, *Kick Him Jenny, a Merry Tale*. Dublin: London, 1734.

The "merry story", "Kick Him, Jenny!" tells the story of a young woman's courtship with a "jolly country swain" named Roger.[158] Roger makes many attempts to seduce Jenny, but she rebuffs his sexual advances and insists on marriage. Knowing his sexual frustration, she leverages his ardor against him and says she will not yield sexually until he provides "further Proof" that he is "as he said, her Slave."[159] To plebeian men, a woman demanding authority within marriage was dangerous. Roger is a "Country swain" and far from genteel.[160] He has absorbed some of the instructive literature, however, and "knew the Oaths by which men swear/when they their love to maids declare."[161] His

[158] *Kick Him Jenny*, 5.
[159] Ibid., 8.
[160] Ibid., 5.
[161] Ibid., 8.

imitation of gentleman who swear they are the slaves of their intended shows his knowledge of genteel deportment in love, but his next actions show he rejects this template of masculinity. His flowery language and declarations of love are not true to his identity. Testing the truth of his words, Jenny takes her demands further and whispers to Roger "kiss my Breech."[162] Roger agrees and says he will kiss her anywhere if she agrees to go to bed with him, "But all the while laughed in his Sleeve."[163]

Jenny has issued a challenge to Roger's brand of masculinity by demanding he humble himself to her, and though genteel masculinity often ostensibly bowed to the wishes of women, plebeian norms could not accommodate any hint of inferiority to the weaker sex. Roger comes to her bed chamber the next day to seduce her, and Jenny's suspicious parents have each made peep holes to watch.[164] Again, Jenny identifies herself as 'imperious" when she insists that he kiss her breech before she will yield to his sexual advances. Declaring he "must do it with your Face/Not kiss your Hand upon the Place/For if you sham it, how can I/Be sure of your Fidelity?" Jenny, at this point, has used the lure of sexual congress to extort future promises about their married relationship.[165] She does not desire to be controlled by her husband, and believes that he will honor his promise to obey her, reversing the traditional masculine and feminine roles. He responds to her trickery with deception of his own and reclaims his lost dignity through the revenge of sexual violence.

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[162] Ibid., 9.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 15-16.
[165] Ibid., 17.

After laying Jenny down on her stomach, ostensibly to obey her request to "kiss her breech" he throws her petticoats over her head, pins them to the sheets "With two great Corking-pins he brought/ On purpose for't---a lucky Thought!"[166] Jenny, awaiting her kiss, complains of Roger's tardiness, "Methinks you're very long about it!" and orders him to "do't at one, or go without it!"[167] He then rapes her. The title of the merry story comes from her mother's words while watching the assault through the peep hole. Shouting "Kick him, Jenny! Kick Him!" she aligns with her daughter and urges retaliation. Jenny's father, however, takes Roger's side.[168] "Gay Sir John, who lov'd the Sport" was angry at his wife for suggesting Jenny kick Roger.[169] "Mad at his wife, he cou'd have struck her/Aloud cry'd----her, Roger-----her!"[170] Not only does Jenny's father watch and encourage his daughter's rapist, he is also furious at his wife and tempted to exact physical violence to punish her. The men, united in a show of force, do not distinguish between sexual violence and sexual intercourse; "Gay sir John" is moved to consider violence against his wife for daring to oppose another man who presumably, also 'lov'd the sport.'

Roger and Sir John are united as men against Jenny and her mother and any hint of imperious behavior in the women is severely punished. In a paradigm where power came from physical strength, threats to power were settled with physical strength, even between a husband and wife. Sexual violence and rape were humorous in this context because they provided a suitable retort to a woman's "imperious" demand that she rule her husband and

[166] Ibid., 18.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 19.
[170] Ibid.

detract from his authority. Despite Jenny's verbal and physical protests—she "loudly bellow'd at the Smart" and "into Prayers and Tears she fell" Jenny begs, rescinds her demands, and pleads twelve times for him to stop.[171] She appeals to him to spare her physical pain, "I cannot bear it!—I shall vomit; such burning Pain!" but her pleas fall on deaf ears as he continues to assault her, and her father "laughed out loud to hear her roar."[172] Both men enjoy traditional roles of power within marriage, and are immune to the suffering of women. The frontispiece, depicting the rape, is the only illustration.

In contrast to "Kick him, Jenny!" "Kick him, Nan!" is "A poetical description of a Wedding-Night."[173] It can be seen as a reply to the first merry story, a more refined alternative with several important differences that point to a different set of class based masculine values. Voyeurism and protest also figure in this text, but it results in the bride enjoying herself. Women protesting sexual advances had become a mark of respectability as the eighteenth-century progressed.[174] As gendered behavior in women began to correlate with restraint and control displayed as a lack of passion, genteel behavior demanded a show of resistance even to husbands. This helped to reinforce their status as virgins and establish the expectation of respect in marriage.

Nan verbally protests, "Pish---nay, then---what now!" but her fear is based on a lack of privacy.[175] "Somebody comes!" and she is afraid of discovery, so she pleads for her

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[171] Ibid., 20.
[172] Ibid.
[173] *Kick Him Nan*, 4.
[174] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 190-3.
[175] *Kick Him Nan*, 4; Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books,* 159, for a discussion of the importance of sexual privacy; McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 243-268, for discussion about the origins of subdivided domestic spaces.

husband to "forbear" and whispers "Have patience til we are in Bed!"[176] Nan's protests are not based on fear of physical harm or pain, but instead are concerned with propriety and privacy. "I dare not yield, and yet I must, Lest to myself I prove unjust" are Nan's last words before succumbing to his advances.[177] In contrast to Jenny's violent assault and her futile attempts to kick Roger, Nan cannot obey her mother's command to kick her husband. Instead, versed in the arts of love, he inflames her desire "with pleasing art" and "for every kiss he gave before, she thankfully return'd a score."[178] Nan, representing a more genteel woman, is seduced by her legal husband within the parameters of marital seduction advocated by more elevated guides. This expected template of coy protest and eventual acquiescence was proscribed in more genteel guides and verse, such as *The Oeconomy of Love,* published two years later, where bridegrooms are instructed on the 'soft attack' in the war of love and warned of the 'toyful protests' of 'melting maids' on the brink of succumbing to their husband.[179] Obviously, the twin tracks of alternate masculinities were part of lived experience before becoming material aimed at critiquing behaviors.

The imagery accompanying each of these "tales" is similar, with several important differences. The large woodcut depicting Roger on the verge of assaulting Jenny focuses on her exposed buttocks. She is faceless, covered by the petticoats he has pinned over her head. His unshaven face looks to the door where the knight and lady are calling their respective commands, and his personal items, a tricorn and walking stick, are thrown hastily on the floor, emphasizing the immediacy of the action for the reader. Respectable

[176] *Kick Him Nan*, 4.
[177] Ibid., 5.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love*, 11.

furnishings like the looking glass and canopied bed hint at the socioeconomic status of the participants. Jenny, the daughter of a knight, is respectably provided for in terms of furniture and accessories for her bed chamber. Two six-panel sash windows, a fireplace with andirons and a poker, cabriole leg furniture and a stool, and the ornate carving on her bed place her comfortably in the middle class, though she lives in the country and is not up to date on the latest modes of behavior or furnishings.[180] In "Kick him, Nan!" however, which claims to be a "poetical description of a wedding night" small and subtle changes showcase the genteel status of the participants.[181] The author's allusion to poetry elevates the theme, and the changes in material objects reinforce this change visually. The cast off walking stick has transformed into a sword, and the bridegroom faces Nan, looking into her eyes. She remains fully clothed. The viewer is privy to a voyeuristic moment which should be private, but nothing untoward is illustrated. Instead, the gentleman, in his wig, hints at the impending seduction only with a hand at the edge of Nan's fashionable gown.[182] Whereas Roger left the work of his farm to have unsanctioned intercourse before marriage, Nan's bridegroom has waited until after the ceremony, another indication that they are more polite than plebeian. The bed, the furniture, and even the trees remain the same, but the slight differences reinforce the subtle differences in culture that the author wishes to highlight between a rustic rapist and a gentleman attuned to the arts of love.

Journeymen, sailors, apprentices and other plebeian men living below the watermark of polite society continued to revel in older forms of sexual humor,

[180] *Kick Him Jenny*, frontispiece.
[181] *Kick Him Nan*, frontispiece.
[182] Ibid.

characteristic of men living in more traditional households where sexuality was simply another topic woven into the fabric of daily life. In contrast, their well-educated middle class and elite counterparts were separating casual references to sexuality from daily routines and cordoning it off into a private sphere which was both more elevated and separate. The range of courtship guides and books aimed at refining sexual practices or providing escapist opportunities allowed those able to afford more expensive literature to explore a range of more exotic options.

Early guides to love, written in the seventeenth century, focused on bawdy talk and the humor of cuckolded men. Much of the humorous jests in Phillip's text that relate to sexuality have to do with casting adultery in a humorous light by making Welshmen, sailors, and others the victims of cunning women. Sixteenth and seventeenth century British communities used adultery as a tool to shame men.[183] Not being able to control the sexuality of one's wife was the ultimate proof of weakness, and dishonored the husband. While cuckoldry was a standard line of humor in jest books, it was a weighty matter in court.[184] Until the paradigm of the passionless women became current in the early decades of the eighteenth century, women had been believed to be sexually insatiable because their legacy of weakness associated with Eve caused them to succumb to sinful temptations or sexual impropriety. 'What is the most lascivious part of a woman?' Phillips asks in the miscellany section of his book.[185] The answer—"her rowling eye" reinforces the idea that

[183] Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 95-100.
[184] Maria Nicolaou, *Divorced, Beheaded, Sold: Ending an English Marriage 1500-1847* (London: Pen and Sword, 2014), 76 (regarding Middleton vs. Rose); "John Rose was sued for £10,000 in damages, the equivalent of more than £500,000 today, for committing adultery with another man's wife, and he was imprisoned to await trial."
[185] Phillips, *The Beau's Academy…*, 198.

women are constantly looking for sexual satisfaction.[186] The undercurrent of most sexually suggestive humor reinforces the gendered hierarchies of men and women, especially in the dyad of marriage. On several occasions, readers encounter jokes and jests that reinforce a man's superior status over his wife by casting her as the victim of her own lust or as the victim of men's wit. In these cases, the humorous aspect is often related to the notion of female power, viewed as ridiculous, and the punchline is on her unchaste behavior. For instance, readers learn that women are more inclined to love "than other creatures" because they are "more soft and ticklish" but that "the highest respect an honest wife can tender her husband" is to "expose herself to his embraces, to make him lord of her body and master of her thoughts." All of the jests about women underscore the basic premise of another riddle, "What is the female without the male?" Imperfect.[187]

While plebeian ballad sheets spread songs about the consummation of marriage in terms of sexual violence and trickery, more sophisticated men were supposed to adopt a 'soft Attack' and consider the pleasure of their wives.[188] The restraint of the gentleman is here taken to its most extreme. Polite restraint in the marriage bed and the sparing of pain to innocent virgins is here lauded as preferential to brute force and selfish indulgence at the expense of the woman. Three texts relating to sexual instruction from the 1730s and 1740s highlight the different views and methods men might hold and employ when seducing their bride for the first time. *The Oeconomy of Love* provides an elite perspective replete with poetical verse, while *Kick Him Nan* offers an almost mirror image alternative

[186] Ibid.
[187] Phillips, *The Beau's Academy…,* 201, 205, 207.
[188] Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love*, 8; Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 81, for a discussion of Armstrong and allegory.

to *Kick Him Jenny,* showing the benefits of consideration in response to the humor of sexual assault. While the sexual assault of an 'imperious' woman counted as humor in male circles in the 1730s, rapid social changes caused authors to respond with alternative readings of wedding nights and seductions. Virginity and first intercourse were serious subjects relating to the correct or incorrect assessment of the character of the bride and groom, and preoccupied the imaginations of English men and women during the eighteenth-century.[189] Power dynamics in marriage directly related to the physical aspect of conjugal union. Though it was possible for men of all stripes to masquerade 'in the form of a gentleman' the true consideration or brutality of a husband would be revealed in the bed chamber after the ceremony was over. By taking into account multiple evaluations of gentility, a woman could preserve herself against the horrors of the wrongly chosen husband. Even the best metrics were not foolproof, but women everywhere sought to avoid missing telltale signs of deficiency that would be revealed after the ceremony was over. Polished manners could be deceitful, as one author noted, but it was better to gain as much knowledge of a man's character as possible during courtship, because it was well known "the character of a flatterer can be better preserved under the cover of a letter before marriage, than between the sheets afterwards."[190]

For gentlemen who upheld honor, consideration for their bride came at the expense of their own selfish pleasure. In plebeian culture, however, sexual cruelty was just another way of affirming their power in marriage, where the 'battle for the breeches' was won by

[189] Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 78.
[190] *The Polite Road to an Estate, Or, Fornication One Great Source of Wealth and Pleasure* (London: Printed for J. Cooke, at the King's-Arms, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1759), 8.

brute force and trickery to keep a wife in her place.[191] Though themes of courtly love had been explored in England centuries before, it had still been in keeping with rank for a knight to punish his wife by punching her in the nose.[192] Violence remained the way men of all classes kept women 'in their place' and asserted their higher status, but changing beliefs about high and low life cast it in a less acceptable light as time and refinement progressed.[193] It was not until the eighteenth century that masculine power was expressed as restraint instead of force by an identifiable group.

As the century wore on, the desire to protect and defend women was becoming an essential element of genteel masculinity. By 1793, *The Carlton House Magazine, or the Annals of Taste, Fashion, and Politeness* castigated Dr. Johnson for his 'deliberate abuse of the fair sex.[194]' Though Dr. Johnson had not physically harmed any woman, he was ridiculed for his failings in gentility for even speaking badly about women. So angry was the author that he supposed anyone hearing of this 'unmanly' behavior would desire to "toss the author in a blanket."[195] Clearly, the parameters for gentility and masculinity were now tied to the treatment of women. What had been acceptable even a generation previously was now so contemptible that men could be expected to condemn even other prominent men for their failings toward the fairer sex. In this instance and many others the social status of the man, judged on aspects of genteel behavior, hinged on the polite treatment of women.

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[191] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1995), 87-88, 152-200, 550-51, 616-17; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 83-85, 185-188.
[192] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 247.
[193] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 191-206.
[194] *The Carlton House Magazine, or the Annals of Taste, Fashion, and Politeness* (1793), 242.
[195] Ibid.

Conclusion

With the shifts in masculine identity related to new behaviors associated with polite culture came complications and moral outrage. Seventeenth-century life, though bawdy, was ruled by the organizing principle of religion. Eighteenth-century life, in contrast, was ruled by the organizing principle of commerce. Though religion continued to play an important role in the calendrical year, alternatives began to exist. These benefits stemmed from material consumption and the creation of a refined social image reinforced the primacy of money over morality. The material turn in social situations, including courtship, reinforced different types of masculine ideals and recast acceptable behaviors along lines of class instead of gender alone. Affluent middle class men set new material and sexual standards that influenced those beneath them. By the 1720s, the panic over a world turned upside down because of a confusion of rank and morality was common fodder for prints, novels, and newspapers. A play of 1729 lamented the confusion of morality associated with rank. Footmen had become 'prophane' by aping the example of their 'betters' who were failing to provide a good example.[196] This was connected to new class constructs of refined men, because 'Lewdness' had become "the distinguishing mark of a fine gentleman"[197]

No longer shamed by terms like 'whoremaster,' elite eighteenth-century men became proud of what had once been clandestine. Though sexual practice and speech was curtailed in mixed company, the double standard regarding sexuality and reputation became more polarized, and sexual prowess came to symbolize and verify a particular

[196] Bullock, *Woman is a riddle*….
[197] Ibid.

brand of elite masculinity. The flaunting of sexual skills related to flaunting material objects. In many ways, sexual profligacy excused men's luxury consumption and transformed it from foppish, weak and effeminate to the ultimate refinement of sexual prowess. The context of lewdness being the mark of a gentleman here refers to the pursuit of conquests through skill and rank, not the casual bawdy talk of seventeenth-century social discussion.

Seventeenth-century men of all classes had viewed women as sexually insatiable, more concerned with pleasure than anything else. This paradigm of women's uncontrolled desires ran parallel to sexual humor involving cuckoldry. Class association and the shaping of behavior to conform to economic identity were significant in the reevaluation of expected power dynamics within the marriage bed.

The next chapter will examine the relationship between luxury goods and sexuality within social spaces. How did the specific arrangement of furniture and the ability to 'read' furnishings reveal hidden messages? How did the new template of refined masculinity influence and inform behaviors at elite social gatherings? How did posture, Orientalism, and furniture contribute to a risqué environment that guests saw as inherently sexual? These are some of the questions that guide the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3. 'THE LUXURIOUS FANCIES OF VICE': MATERIAL SPLENDOR AT WILLIAM BECKFORD'S NOTORIOUS CHRISTMAS PARTY OF 1781

Introduction

When the English gentleman William Beckford (1760-1844) planned a Christmas party in 1781, he spared no expense to create a sensory experience for his guests. In November, he wrote letters to his paramour, who was also the wife of his cousin, to tell her of the environment he planned for their "especial delight and reunion." Having been separated for months, both William and Louisa Beckford were looking forward to private time together for another lover's tryst even as William planned to seduce the youth Kitty Courtenay, a peer he had fallen in love with but had not yet lured into his bed. The Christmas party he was planning would set off a chain of events that shaped the course of Beckford's life. His literary ambitions were realized as he penned *Vathek*, one of the first gothic novels, in the aftermath of the party, and his infatuation with the young Courtenay would explode in a scandal four years later that would cause his social demise as Beckford's homosexual seductions made him the target of society's rage and disgust. The Powderham Scandal, reported in the *Times*, caused Beckford to be socially ostracized and shattered his opportunity to realize a peerage, which had been nearly complete before this revelation.[198] Rumors about the Christmas party would be circulated in letters and in print for many years afterward, and the public notoriety of Beckford's sexual predilections would haunt him for the rest of his life. As he planned the party, however, Beckford was

[198] Robert J. Gemmett, *William Beckford* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 84; Harold Alfred Nelson Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill* (London, Laurie, 1956), 19.

confident in his abilities to create a physical space that would aid him in his intended seductions.

Beckford relied on particular luxury goods, specifically arranged in communal areas, to convey the social parameters and expectations of the gathering. Since all of his guests were privileged and met the minimum requirements for the threshold of politeness (with some vastly exceeding it) they were familiar with the rules of decorum governing social spaces. When Beckford flagrantly violated these norms and sought to create a sexual mood with particular furnishings, his guests were aware of his intentions, as they were well versed in 'reading' objects. How did Beckford plan a party to convey his salacious intentions? He relied on specialized furniture, particularly 'Oriental' goods, and the intentional violation of social norms to announce his intentions to guests without speaking of them explicitly. In addition to using specialized lighting and music to create a mood of decadence, Beckford also used Eastern furnishings to break rules about decorous posture.

Beckford's story is highly unusual, and his habits of extreme indulgence tell much about the norms and extremes of luxury, as well as the limits of politeness and the importance of objects in creating a social mood. While the polite world existed on a spectrum from the middle classes up through the gentry and nobility, their shared belief in the importance of manners and good living shored up the rules of genteel social interaction which were shared by all who lived in a paradigm of politeness mediated by taste and sexual morality.[199]

[199] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 19-20.

By manipulating the social spaces in his estate, Beckford sought to alter the moods of the guests assembled there. Because the space was created specifically for sexual expression, it provides a rare example of plastic sexual fantasy made real. Anthony Giddens has emphasized the importance of what he has termed 'plastic sexuality'—sexual activities divorced from reproduction. As new viewpoints on pleasure emerged, however, it was not only sexual acts that were reevaluated but also the manner and environment in which these activities took place. I will show how the physical and social environments where sexual pleasure took place were also essential to notions of sexual propriety, decadence, or deviance and helped to constitute a holistic sexual experience. The settings, furnishings, and social atmospheres created by the manipulation and creative arrangement of goods added additional layers of significance, meaning, and refinement to trysts. The nuances provided by inanimate objects contributed to a richer and more varied physical and social setting that was itself plastic and could be tailored to the preferences of individuals. The combination of a new paradigm freeing intercourse from reproduction and the simultaneous use of luxury goods to enhance the emotional charge of spaces created a new way of thinking about sexuality and objects. The relationship between sexual spaces and activities was underscored in the changing representations in the fictional worlds of erotic art and stories, which became more detailed and began to reflect the quotidian details of domestic life as well as the fantastical décor of decadent, sexualized luxury. Beckford's pioneering efforts in this quarter provide an early and exceptional example of one such imagined space carefully crafted in the material realm and memorialized in his emotions. Beckford reflected on that fateful party decades later, when, at 84, he found himself

"chilled by the present age" and the loss of the beautiful objects and estate that had characterized his materially and sexually profligate life. The catalysts for the events of his notorious party were rooted in the particular social atmosphere he created for himself and his guests through the careful presentation and arrangement of particular objects. His 'Oriental' furnishings in particular helped to create a confluence of sexuality and social space which intentionally violated social codes of politeness and thus signaled his licentious intentions to his guests.

William Beckford's party setting provides a rare example of a plastic world constructed to aid the possibility of plastic sexual fantasy.[200] While obviously beyond the economic powers of most Britons, this Fonthill party encapsulates the hedonistic possibility the creative arrangement of luxury goods could inject into social settings. Beckford thus provides a case study of the plastic sexuality of an individual's erotic wishes fulfilled in the material world. This example also shows how significant the seemingly mundane task of arranging luxury objects and furniture in "front stage" areas of houses was to guests observing these very particular configurations of furnishings. Though Beckford disdained middling aspirants as beneath him, he and others established in social circles governed by concepts of politeness and taste were cognizant of social rules of decorum that pertained to display. Though Beckford intentionally violated social norms, he relied on an implicit knowledge common in his circles of acquaintance to produce the shock value associated with his flagrant disregard.

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[200] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3.

As illustrations from the previous chapters have shown, objects and the layout of houses began to play a significant role in family presentation and status during the long eighteenth century. As middle class households sought to increase their social standing, they displayed costly objects and novel innovations in particular ways within their living quarters. Above all, individuals and families wished to communicate their good taste that helped to form the "invisible standard" necessary to pass in order to gain entry into the social world of the polite. The concept of taste was first aligned with the tongue, and the well born were thought to have inherent differences in their senses brought on by generations of good living and superior blood which gave rise to an enhanced palate capable of detecting good taste in food.[201] This heightened sensitivity of the palate separated those able to tolerate the less exquisite from those incapable of ingesting inferior food.[202]

The concept of taste became extended from the palate to include a wider constellation of values. These included the ability to correctly select objects, conversational topics, and self-presentation so important for demonstrating politeness and an alignment with polite culture. Particularly in the arena of acquisition, politeness and taste were all important. When buying objects and considering the increasingly varied arrays of goods available, eighteenth century cultural beliefs posited that those with good taste were able to instantly recognize and select the correct objects from an increasingly diverse range of

[201] Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-12, 24-64.
[202] Ibid.

products.[203] For the less genteel, the selection of objects and novelties in port cities, boutiques, country shops, and foreign lands could prove perplexing, but for the elite, even the most obscure and unique objects presented no challenge to their innate abilities.

As travel became more commonplace and well-to-do middling families imitated the gentry by sending their sons on grand tours, they vied with one another to bring home the most culturally loaded objects that would display the good taste they hoped to convey.[204] This is exemplified in Johan Zoffany's painting, 'Charles Townley and Friends in His Library at Park Street, Westminster (Townley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, 1798). Ancient statues, busts, and marbles signaled the intelligence, culture, and economic assurance of the collector. Intense competition for cultural capital within elite circles multiplied the nuances and distinctions necessary to distinguish good taste from bad. Displayed in the house, these marbles and busts mingled with furniture and domestically produced goods to create a snapshot of a family's pretensions to politeness and social standing. As more of the population profited, manners books and advice literature instructed those not well born on the finer points of politeness and refinement. At the threshold of entry to the middle class, individual preference and necessity were no longer the determining factor of room decoration and furniture placement; expert advice was needed to convey the correct dignity of a newly acquired status. Middle class households anxious to display a correct knowledge of tasteful interiors sought the expert advice of

[203] Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*, 47. Haulman has discussed this in terms of gendered fashion and status in the Atlantic world, but I extend this argument to encompass not only dress for the body but the furnishings of the household, which were also judged and 'read' for signs of status, gender, and sexuality by visitors.

[204] John Newenham Summerson and London Sir John Soane's Museum, *A New Description of Sir John Soane's Museum* (London: The Trustees, 1991).

decorators at the top of their profession, often in printed guidebooks.[205] Upholsterers responsible for communicating the good taste of their customers created the overall look for an entire room, from paint and wallpaper to candelabras and the furniture novelties like sofas.[206] As the interior decorators of their time, upholsterers were responsible for coordinating the many trades involved in housebuilding (painting, furniture making, cloth merchants, etc.) to produce a pleasing and unified theme in the correct proportion to the social status of their employers.[207]

Fig. 10 Zoffany, Johann, *Charles Townley in his Sculpture Gallery*, 1782, oil on canvas. 127 x 102 cm. Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley.

[205] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 132-36.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

From the 1720s, the taste of fashionable middle class interiors appeared alongside people in a new genre of portraits. English portrait painters like Francis Haymore followed the lead of William Hogarth, and began to place special emphasis on objects within the painting to give clues about the personality and aspirations of the sitters.[208] From the 1720s, small canvases called 'conversation pieces' were popular and fashionable. These family portraits depicted a scene of the family interacting and sought to convey a snapshot of family life and the personality of the sitters. Whereas portraiture had traditionally been executed in full or half canvas busts, emphasizing the unsmiling faces of the sitter, the shift toward conversation pieces brought about several changes to the canvas and its function within the house. In conversation pieces, multiple sitters engaged in a social activity and used contemporary status items, often novel and innovative, to show their familiarity with them and thus demonstrate their genteel way of living. Instead of the usual dry "inventory of bottles, etc." painters of conversation pieces began to take a special interest in portraying the interaction between sitters and their ease in social situations guided by objects, such as the tea table, as discussed in Chapter One.[209]

A painting of the family at home with their furnishings was able to convey a holistic picture of family life. In the words of the English engraver George Vertue, a good conversation piece was a "work containing the true likeness of the persons, shape aire &

[208] Though symbolism had been used for centuries to convey messages in art, the items in Haymore and Hogarth are middle class objects from the market rather than semiotic clues based on mythology, religion, or the supernatural.

[209] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 70-73, 78, 123, 124, 299, 302-03. The vogue for conversation pieces coincided with the rise of tea. Many conversation pieces feature families and friends gathered around the tea table, highlighting the patron's easy sociability as well as their refinement and high status possessions, such as silver and furniture.

dress."[210] Though shape and dress were related to the physical body, the "aire" of personality was conveyed by their interaction with these objects within the entire scene. These actions usually involved objects and furniture. Thus, we see the relaxed confidence of men comfortable and proficient with the rituals of taking tea or entertaining friends. Servants uncork bottles and men of means casually rest an elbow on the table or relax by reading in overly ornate Rococo chairs.[211] The presence of physical items like cards, and fashionable servants, particularly young black servant boys in livery, alongside details like candelabras and writing desks provided additional clues about the style of social and material living a family aspired to.[212]

Much of the furnishings in the backgrounds of early conversation pieces were studio props, but instead of relying on traditionally symbolic items like books to convey learning, these families were portrayed with contemporary objects. Sugar tongs, tea tables, and Rococo pier glasses were the height of fashion and good living, and these families sought to show their association and ease with a polite lifestyle through these newly invented objects and social rituals. Whereas older, more established families worried about how their contemporary fashions might date the canvases they contributed to the ancestral hall, newly prosperous middling families anxious to highlight their familiarity with elite living relied on objects like sugar tongs and Wedgwood tea cups to authenticate their claims to the lifestyle they had recently acquired. Families with older wealth saw this as *arriviste*, and hesitated to break with tradition, but the manufactured objects of status were

[210] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 155.
[211] Tharp and Hogarth, *Hogarth's China*, 82. Rococo was satirized by Hogarth and others for its ostentation and overly ornate patterns.
[212] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 21, 23-24, 44, 86, 87, 281.

as important as the family members depicted in these conversation pieces to those who commissioned them.

Newly minted householders found themselves in the awkward position of validating their claims to gentility through the display of status goods which the vulgar could not afford, but their predilection for showy display marked them as tasteless to more established elites, who countered the status claims of the newly rich with disdainful comments about their vulgar showiness and lack of knowledge. These competing strains of social values created an atmosphere of competition and animosity in print culture, where objects and behaviors were singled out for ridicule in humorous ways. Different economic and cultural spheres viewed objects and behaviors in different lights. Then as now, what was valued in one circle might be ruthlessly mocked in another. In the middle of the eighteenth century good taste eluded many, even (and perhaps especially) newly rich middling men and women who sought to display their new status through material trappings placed in the right configuration, hoping to signal 'refinement' instead of 'upstart.' In this way, and in many other more subtle ways, even the smallest details of room decoration and the layout of furnishings became significantly entwined with the expression of personality and status.[213] Men and women began to view the possession and use of objects as metrics of refinement and became capable of 'reading' rooms, fashions, and social spaces, looking for clues not only about status, but personality and social intention. With the new habit of taking tea (discussed in the first chapter) came a more intense focus on the drawing room, a 'front stage' area where social visits occurred.

[213] Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 32.

Company came to judge, and anxious *nouveau riche* householders were willing to spend vast sums with experts proficient in the principles of good taste so they might be judged genteel instead of vulgar.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, many English middle class householders relied on advice books and guides from the ranks of upholsterer's who had sprung up in the previous fifty years to provide advice on household decoration for those in need. Pamphlets like Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet Makers' Director* and, later in the century, George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, alerted prospective customers to new trends, and helped them avoid pitfalls that would hurt their social reputation.[214] By the late nineteenth century, the multiple campaigns for good taste in previous decades and centuries reached down to the lower classes, who were becoming familiar with broad and specific claims regarding good and bad taste.[215] These famous furniture makers of the eighteenth-century built their reputations and fortunes on steering middle class customers in the right direction. Complicated rules of propriety and gender ordered rooms, and it was social folly to venture outside strict parameters of politeness and possibly commit an egregious and vulgar error. Though wallpaper was a new invention of the 1720s, multiple stipulations on its use were not only in place by the 1750s, but were well known. Upholsterers were not merely

[214] Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director: Being a Large Collection of the Most Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture, in the Most Fashionable Taste* (London: Printed for the Author, 1762); George Hepplewhite, *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* (London: Printed for the Author, 1794).

[215] Cohen, *Household Gods*, 3-13. By the nineteenth century, the rise in literacy and the refinement of the working classes built on traditions of elites a century earlier, making them nearly universal by the beginning of the twentieth century, though important distinctions in the manner of taking tea or decorating remained. For a further discussion of the ways Methodism in particular influenced the decorations of plebeian houses.

merchants seeking to profit; they traded their knowledge of good taste for patronage and association with elites. Much like valets, butlers, and other servants relied on for their knowledge of what marked a true gentleman in terms of dress, they were seen to be responsible for their customer's reputation in domestic living.[216] Just as a valet would never allow his master to go forth to dinner incorrectly dressed, an upholsterer would not allow his customer to overspend or decorate in bad taste. Thomas Chippendale warned that, when a client was headed down the wrong path, "it may be necessary by some gentle hints" to "direct him to a more moderate plan."[217] While drawing rooms, dining rooms, and state bedrooms were seen as display rooms and appropriate venues for displaying luxury goods as indications of status, decorating lesser rooms with rich trappings was vulgar.[218] Red wallpaper might be hung with good effect in the dining room, but was inappropriate for the kitchen.[219] Expensive wallpaper might be hung in the entrance hall and partway up the great staircase, but continuing the paper all the way to the top where it disappeared from the view of guests standing on the threshold was an obscene waste and the height of bad taste. The status of the space in question was correlated to its showiness and ostentation meant to be seen by visitors. Dining rooms, drawing rooms, and parlors, used to entertain visitors and offer hospitality, were fundamentally different than hallways, kitchens, and 'backstage' areas meant to be unobservable to guests performed utilitarian duties and were conceived of differently than grand rooms 'for shew' to guests. [220]

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[216] Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director*, Introduction.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 177.
[219] Ibid., 174-76.
[220] Ibid., 174-79.

Just as clothing and accessories proclaimed the rank and status of the wearer, household furnishings revealed the social habits and style of daily living a family was accustomed to. Fashions extended not only to wearable accessories like white silk stockings, fans, and high roll wigs, but also to the particular style and arrangement of furniture.[221] Participation in fashion cycles was a way for members of the polite world to signal and authenticate their membership in an elite group. Just as fashionable clothing signaled the behavior to be expected from one wearing that clothing, furniture also indicated the height of a householder's aspirations and financial means. Whereas popular luxury items like tea and silk stockings could be easily obtained by plebeian individuals, furniture signaled a more stable and permanent measure of class, as it was far more expensive than fashionable populuxe goods and its durability was a more accurate measure of patina.[222]

As luxury goods and refinements became more commonplace and trickled down to the middle classes and those of more modest means, urban fashion cycles became important markers of cultural knowledge. The 'discovery' of Ancient Roman and Greek ruins and literature by eighteenth-century English scholars sparked interest in mythology and ancient history. Some scholars have argued that a knowledge of Greek and Roman myths and histories became part of what might today be called 'popular culture,' generally

[221] Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain*, 32-33; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 37-40, 114; Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 166-192.
[222] Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 175; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 114; Cooper-Hewitt Museum and David Revere McFadden *Furniture in the Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, 1982), 121, for a discussion of patina on antique furniture.

accessible to many, and referenced outside scholarly and elite contexts.[223] The appropriation of ancient history for fashionable goods, paintings, and objects of both status and low life was a hallmark of the English population during the long eighteenth century, and extended into literature and painting as well as common objects like cameo jewelry, vases, printed curtains, and more or less disposable conveniences.

The British Perception of 'Oriental' Goods

Another fairly recent 'discovery' also concerned distant lands newly accessible to travelers. As trade and travel to the East grew, general interest in Eastern ways of living fascinated the British and Europeans.[224] Eastern objects and Anglicized interpretations of Eastern motifs for house decoration became extremely popular and fashionable. The color yellow was not aligned with traditional color hierarchies and was almost unheard of in Britain until the 1740s. Yellow, closely aligned with the Orient, became a fashionable choice for drawing room wallpapers at this time, and communicated the house owner's fashionable status and awareness of Asian influences in fashion.[225]

Middle-class householders showed their awareness of the fashionable and new by decorating their living spaces, especially their 'front stage' areas, with fashionable chinoiserie. Chinoiserie was the architectural and furnishing style which invoked Asiatic artisanal techniques and motifs.[226] These Anglicized interpretations of 'Oriental' life were fashionable additions to households participating in fashion cycles of the polite world

[223] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 83-85.
[224] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 3; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 19-20, 24-25, 48, 69-70, 72, 74-75.
[225] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 100, 172, 175.
[226] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 133, 134, 140, 143, 145, 307.

throughout the eighteenth century. Pier glass frames, candlesticks, furniture, lacquered trays, beds, and sofas, and countless other items, including tea cups, were emblazoned with representations of Asian men and women, villages, and buildings.[227] Trade pattern books, such as Matthias Darley and George Edwards' *Drawings in the Chinese, Gothic and Modern Taste for any Manufactury Business, and Engraving of Any Kind in Architecture, Ornament, Landscape, Heraldry, etc. or, the New Book of Chinese Design,* helped make these items possible. [228] Despite its success, Chinoiserie was vilified by some as vulgar. Elizabeth Montagu was unimpressed with fashions rivaling the elegance of more elevated themes, and did not hesitate to express her dislike of new decorative trends, "Thus it has happened in furniture; sick of Grecian elegance and summetry [sic], or Gothic grandeur and magnificience [sic], we must all seek the barbarous and gaudy gout of the Chinese; and fat headed Pagods, and shaking Mandarins, bear the prize from the finesse works of antiquity, and Apolo and Venus must give way to a fat idol with a sconce on his head."[229]

Eighteenth century Western culture vilified the East because it was a site of illicit sexuality. Paradoxically, Eastern goods and styles were both highly fashionable as well as tainted by sin because of their association with unregulated sexuality which was a barbaric affront to the disciplined manners of polite Western elites. As long as the images of Asian 'grotesques' appeared on the surface of porcelain, carved into furniture, or painted on the

[227] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 59. Wallace observes that it was the British mastery of kaolin that facilitated the mastery of Orientalist imagery.
[228] Snuff boxes, portraits, rings, reverse intaglio brooches, and prints celebrated the allegorical mythology so intrinsic to eighteenth-century popular culture. Though earlier examples, such as a rock crystal intaglio depicting the judgement of Paris, (museum number A.23-1942) existed amongst the nobility, the revival of these themes in the eighteenth century extended to more popular audiences.
[229] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 143.

surface of a japanned tray, they were distant enough from the actual lifestyles of Eastern sultans and concubines to be permitted as a fashionable and slightly risqué adornment. It was acceptable to flout religious convention in pursuit of fashionable living, as long as the association was slight. It was not acceptable to cross boundaries of propriety, class, and sexuality by recreating an actual harem setting. The composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, which stages a scene in Act V in a Turkish seraglio, faced censorship because of this depiction of immoral space.[230] Off the stage, Lord Baltimore, after being accused of rape and publicly condemned, was further satirized as a dissolute and immoral man by a widely circulated pamphlet likening his unregulated and dishonorable sexual behavior to a barbaric sultan, and assigning him the title 'Bashaw of Merryland' while suggesting he kept a harem in London.[231]

Contradictions and inaccuracies about Asian culture were deepened and disseminated by European's imaginative and fanciful depictions of Asian culture. The most important defining characteristic of 'Orientals,' near or far, was their uncivilized, un-Christian status as 'heathens and brutes' making them less reasonable and more sexualized than native Anglo-Europeans. These beliefs, established by colonial conquests, helped to reinforce the superiority of British social behaviors based on the importance of control in direct contrast to other people who did not share the same behaviors and values. Controlling the body in all situations was the hallmark of elite refinement, and the out of control sexuality displayed by people in foreign lands served to justify feelings of superiority

[230] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, ed. Nicholas John, (New York: Riverrun Press, 1983); Alison Mero. "*Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro, Adapted for Covent Garden, 1819* by Henry Rowley Bishop (review)." *Notes* 69, no. 4 (2013): 814-816. https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed April 20, 2017).
[231] Watson, *Memoirs of the Seraglio*, 18.

amongst the British at home. Especially in novels and sub genres of pornography, harems, concubines, and Sultans added a mythical status that cast these populations as uncivilized. Seen to be more appropriate as a decorative motif or a sexualized beast, eighteenth-century Westerners were able to indulge their cultural fantasies about "those little azure grotesques" without according them human dignity.[232]

To the Anglo-European imagination, the East was first of all a sinful and sexualized site, in reality as well as the imagined representations increasingly popular in literature. The sexual undertones of Eastern culture were well understood by the British, and though they embraced shallow, casual references as part of fashionable living, they assessed their own refinement in direct contrast to these 'heathens' and would continue to do so well into the twentieth century. The fashion for Turkish hairstyles and dresses reflecting Turkish elements could be worn by genteel English ladies precisely because of their obvious distance from actual harems and the unregulated sexual proclivities these sites engendered. It was risqué and fashionable to reference safely Anglicized Oriental motifs on one's person or in one's household, but it remained completely unacceptable to condone or embrace the 'heathen' ways of these uncivilized people.

With the expansion of British territory in colonial outposts, British men and women remained fascinated by travel narratives well into the nineteenth century as territorial expansion introduced them to new societies they could explore while simultaneously being assured of their inherent superiority over the conquered. The Near and Far East held a special fascination because of their ties to illicit sexuality and 'heathen' lifestyles.

[232] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 59.

Innocuous references to Oriental culture were many and varied; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed 'Music for the Seraglio' in his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* and women's fashions in dress and hairstyles reflected elements of Turkish and Levantine culture.[233] Aristocratic women were painted in Turkish dress, and Lady Mary Wortley Montague wrote her famed "*Turkish Embassy Letters"* which was welcomed with much fanfare and support.[234] There was, however, another, more insidious side to European views of the Orient. Unlike civilized and Christian Britain, the East harbored a culture of decadence and deviance and stimulated the sexual appetite in decidedly 'heathen' ways. Pornographers capitalized on this association, and illustrated the unregulated sexual acts taking place in harems and elsewhere. A typical late eighteenth-century pornographic story uses a Chinese woman named Cham Yam, to tell a lascivious tale of perversion and sexual violence in *A Chinese Tale*.[235] The protagonist engages in many sexual acts that were then taboo for English women. In this way, British men and women could interrogate the perceptions of female sexuality without risking the devaluation of their own countrywomen. By projecting their sexual and cultural fantasies onto to unregulated and out of control heathens, they maintained their cultural superiority and inborn morality.

Beckford himself was very familiar with the East as a sexualized site of imagination. In his youth, he was fascinated by illustrations in sexualized books that

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[233] *The Feather'd Fair* 777.07.00.01+ Lewis Walpole Library, Yale.
[234] Gemmett, *William Beckford*, 102; Mary Wortley Montague, *Turkish Embassy Letters,* 23 (Broadview edition 16, editions were published between 1763 and 1800). William Beckford owned a copy of Mary Wortley Montague's Turkish Embassy Letters and relied on them for accuracy when composing his own gothic novel set in the East.
[235] Ma Quang Sou, *A Chinese Tale. Written originally by that prior of China the facetious Sou ma Quang, a celebrated Mandarine of letters; under the title of Chamyam Tcho Chang, or, Chamyam with her leg upon a table... With a curious frontispiece, etc.* (J. Cooper, 1740).

depicted harems, concubines, and slaves. His tutor, after supplying these books to Beckford for some time, insisted he dispose of them, and forced young Beckford to burn them. Beckford later discussed his distress at that bonfire, depicting it in his novel *Vathek.* While heterosexual English men consorting with prostitutes had always enjoyed a double standard that legitimized their conquests, the regulation of sexual activities in Great Britain had always been aimed toward the sacrosanct ideal of the harmonious family. As the eighteenth century wore on, beliefs about women and desire underwent dramatic change. Whereas the sixteenth-and seventeenth-century English woman was believed to be sexually insatiable, the eighteenth-century ideal was moving toward a template of indifference or coldness, at least in public. The notion that gentility and passionlessness went hand in hand in a female body was a compelling one, and supported a cultural paradigm in which sexuality was a dangerous force in need of strict control.[236]

Whereas Tudor and Stuart men relied on cuckold jokes and made the 'sign of the horns' at their enemies to take tension off the real fear that their wives were unfaithful, polite Georgian society's emphasis on companionate marriage and the increasing importance of self-control placed the blame for sexual deviance squarely on the shoulders of the transgressor. With sexuality increasingly moved to the realm of the private, uncovered transgressions were viewed with more intense hostility when they became public. Deviating from the ideal sexual template of copulation within marriage for the sake of children was only excused when a heterosexual man fornicated with a prostitute or servant, and even these transgressions could cause considerable trouble for the offender.

[236] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 367, 484, 505.

This new ideal made domestic sexuality part of a private realm, forced underground into secrecy. At the same time, however, an outlet became available in the form pornography, often involving elements from newly 'discovered' Eastern lands. Amongst uncivilized 'barbarians' different understandings of sexuality fascinated elite male travelers, who published works focusing on the outrageous sexual practices of foreign people. Especially titillating were Eastern harems, where hundreds of women were kept by caliphs or sultans to satisfy their sexual appetites. This unregulated sexuality extended beyond heterosexual polyamory, however, into the realm of pederasty and homosexual relationships thought to be common practice in the fabled Orient, though other foreign countries were also suspect because of their un-English refinement. Italy, Spain, France, and the Americas were all used as foils to show the inherent superiority of the British way of life.

Richard Payne Knight would publish *The Worship of Priapus* in 1786 to trace the role of priapic worship throughout history, complete with multiple illustrations of phalluses and statuary.[237] Numerous pornographic and erotic books and prints were set in the fabled East, a site of sordid sexuality in the British imagination. In this way, the British could explore alternative sexualities and indulge their curiosity under the guise of critiquing foreigners' heathen ways of living. 'Oriental' pornography allowed them to live out fantasies and interrogate women's sexuality without tainting the reputation of their

[237] Richard Payne Knight, Esq., *An Account of the remains of the worship of Priapus, lately existing at Isernia, in the kingdom of Naples: in two letters; one from Sir William Hamilton, K.B. His Majesty's Minister at the Court of Naples, to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. President of the Royal Society; and the other from a person residing at Isernia: to which is added, a discourse on the worship of Priapus, and its Connexion with the mystic Theology of the Ancients* (printed by T. Spilsbury, Snowhill, 1786), Illustrations.

countrywomen, and for those so inclined, it allowed them indulge in homosexual acts in their fantasies without fear of persecution that might accompany lived trysts. Lord Byron famously visited the Levant to pursue homosexual relations, and when William Beckford visited an 'Oriental' palace in Portugal he was inspired to "voluptuous" sexual thoughts by the sight of beautiful male slaves.[238]

William Beckford's Fonthill Christmas: Taste, Orientalism, and Scandal

The cultural imperatives surrounding the themes of good taste, Oriental furnishings, and unregulated sexuality came together at the Christmas party given by William Beckford at his Fonthill estate in 1781. Beckford was exceedingly meticulous about the way his belongings and surroundings reflected his status. Due to his immense wealth, he was able to indulge his imagination and create a virtual world that reflected his longtime fascination with the East and its libertine sexual culture. Instead of using trivialized and lampooned Eastern figurines and motifs, Beckford sought to re-create the mood and appearance of actual places and spaces he had read about or witnessed in person. Fonthill, his sprawling estate, became an ongoing architectural project, and he successfully re-created exotic spaces intended to arouse emotions and signal sexualized intentions to observers. Though he had inherited his estate from his father, Beckford transformed it beyond recognition. Beckford reflected his keen interest in all things Oriental by creating a Turkish room and an Egyptian Hall to compliment his social gatherings.[239]

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[238] Drummond Bone, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Byron: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66-67.
[239] Gemmett, *William Beckford*, 29, 84.

William Beckford's fascination with the Orient began at a young age when he was exposed to salacious literature set in the East. According to his own pen, the illustrations in books he read as a child with his tutor, Alexander Couzens, "instilled in me a flame of Orientalism" and often caused him to think deeply about the implications and possibilities of such imagery.[240] These representations of the East inspired him to recreate the material environment of various exotic locales in different rooms of his house as well as outdoors. The Turkish room and the Egyptian Hall at Fonthill were permanent but Beckford often manipulated his environment to recreate the atmosphere he desired.

Beckford was so well known for his specifically crafted living spaces that one historian has described his life in terms of a stage set. In many ways his life was so carefully crafted it took on a contrived, virtual reality different from both the "free and easy manners" of the middle classes and the ceremonial pomp of the nobility. The tension between the self-consciously created atmosphere of his social spaces and his desire for distinction was mediated by his insistence that everything he owned be authentic. The many luxurious props in his beloved Fonthill estate were priceless works of art and worthy of collection by royalty.[241] Indeed, many had been previously owned by doges, kings, and queens before they came into his hands.[242] Beckford styled himself a taste maker, and cultivated an elegant genteel aesthetic, but did not hesitate to use his own judgment and daring to create a mood or indulge a whim. He had no tolerance for vulgar fads or imitations.

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[240] Philip Hewat-Jaboor and Derek E. Ostergard, *William Beckford, 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 63.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

Thomas Chippendale, in *The Gentleman and Cabinet Makers Director*, advised a wide readership of polite customers on the purchase of fire screens with Chinese figures, 'japanned' vases, table tops, and other chinoiserie themed items, but William Beckford mocked those who accepted substitutions. Beckford's snobbery and distaste for easily procured, 'trendy' objects was well known. He often used his taste and preferences in objects as a weapon of social condemnation, vilifying both object and owner in his comments. Though a fad for 'Chinese' furniture signaled adherence to elite fashion norms, Beckford declared, "I would not disgrace my house with Chinese furniture."[243] It was one thing to own an extremely rare *object d'art*; it was quite another to imitate a middle class fashion for *faux* gentility in an attempt to claim status. The middle class favored Chinese furniture, so Beckford condemned it and simultaneously used it to slight one of his social enemies when he stated that even "Horace Walpole would not have suffered it in his toyshop at Strawberry Hill", implying that Walpole's taste was worse than his own but not as abominable as the lowly Chinese furniture favored by the middle classes.[244]

Beckford's real criticism was not the Asiatic taste Walpole displayed, but rather his imitation of middle class trends. The "Chinese" furniture purchased by fashionable householders was created in Britain to satisfy a fashion. Trivial in Beckford's eyes, it represented a lowly imitation of real objects, like those he displayed at Fonthill. Beckford did not wish to participate in fads as others did. Instead, he sought to set the fashion with

[243] Chippendale, 9, plate XXV, plate XXVI. For instance, his aversion for "Chinese Chippendale" advertised in Chippendale's guide, was articulated in acerbic barbs against his social enemies, like Horace Walpole. See especially plate XXIII, which depicts the type of Chair he was mocking Walpole for possessing at Strawberry Hill; L. Melville, L.S. Benjamin, and J.S. Storer, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford, of Fonthill...* W. Heinemann, 1910), 320.
[244] Ibid.

something impossible to imitate. Beckford sought only the most universally prized items, previously worthy of royal owners, and now worthy of his own exacting standards. Many furniture makers and other merchants verified fashionability and assured the middle classes of their importance by listing their subscribers or displaying Royal Warrants. In most cases, the Duke endorsing the merchant would commission an exclusive and prohibitively expensive piece, while his middle class counterpart would buy something far less valuable.[245] Beckford shunned imitation and sought the *ne plus ultra* in objects and experiences.

When William and Louisa Beckford began a tumultuous and scandalous love affair, they consistently referenced the material surroundings that witnessed their love. As the son of the Lord Mayor of London and the richest commoner in England, William Beckford began life surrounded by luxury and spent his days in material comfort that often surpassed his titled peers.[246] For Beckford, however, luxurious furnishings and their arrangement communicated more than mere status. Relying on Philip de Loutherborg, a renowned European stage set designer, he planned to transform Fonthill into "a realm of fairy" for his guests, especially those with whom he was intimately involved with or with whom he had hoped to become involved.[247] Louisa Beckford, his cousin's wife, and the youth Kitty Courtenay, a titled peer, were invited guests. The ongoing sexual interest between this love triangle would soon give rise to a scandal that would change their lives forever. In the aftermath of the party, William Beckford would be hastily married to Margaret Gordon

[245] Berg, 179-182, 130-35. Silver plate and biscuit ware, for instance, imitated more costly silver and Imari ware but looked visually similar to more expensive objects.
[246] Gemmett, *William Beckford,* 29; Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 1-3.
[247] MS Beckford c. 18 fols 1-27. William Beckford letter to Louisa Beckford, November 19, 1781.

and shipped to the continent, where he lived in exile for much of his life before returning to England.[248] With one of the richest bank accounts in England, Beckford was aware of the accoutrements money could buy, both in terms of goods and sexual pleasures, and he did not hesitate to use his wealth to obtain carnal gratification. This obsession with objects of luxury and objects of desire would stay with Beckford over the course of his long life, causing him to remark that the two were inseparable. He once remarked that the physical beauty of objects and the sexual beauty of youth are equitable; "It's cruel to hear talk of fair boys and dark jade vases and not buy them."[249]

William Beckford's Christmas party differed from other elite gatherings in significant ways. While the polite convention of an elaborate dinner was preserved, the decorations and thematic objects that graced the unusual Eastern architecture added to guests' perceptions of being in a space different from the conventional norms of British society. While middle class hosts and royal dinners focused on the table as a site of opulence and show, Beckford had saved his most dramatic entertainments for afterward. Beckford's transformation of his entire estate into a "realm of fairy" eclipsed even his renowned collection of beautiful porcelain dishes at "a table gleaming with silver" which served to reinforce his polite status even as he prepared to violate established rules of propriety with his scandalous floor seating and sexualized social spaces intended for seductions.

[248] Gemmett, *William Beckford*, 14-16, 121.
[249] Ibid.

Hidden Messages and Influencing Moods: The Affective Role of Furnishings

Beckford had already added a gothic tower and an Egyptian Hall, but his exclusive use of Eastern décor, including ground pillows for sitting, "porcelain salvers of richest japan" and "wood aloes on cassolets" was meant to create a *feeling* of sensuality for sexual pursuits.[250] Though Beckford was a pioneer, he was not the only person to indulge in mood-setting décor. By the end of the nineteenth century, the average middle class housewife in Britain would be cautioned on the importance of decorating with the right colors to prepare against "every mental emergency."[251] Especially in the bedroom, which had become private to the point of being almost unmentionable by the end of the nineteenth century, the choice of color and "surroundings" was a chief concern in the regulation of emotion.[252] According to Mrs. Eustice Miles, "It is here we are alone with ourselves and our undisguised tempers, and we are far more likely to be upset in this frame of mind by shortcomings on the part of our surroundings, or soothed into amiability by their general harmony."[253] Beckford was certainly ahead of his time for seeking a holistic mood, especially an implicitly sexualized mood, but he was not the only recorded example of a powerful and wealthy man seeking to create an unusual staged setting to intentionally influence the moods of guests in his house. The gentleman architect Sir John Soane, architect of the Bank of England, among other impressive buildings, transformed a standard set of row houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields into a monument meant to inspire

[250] Guy Chapman, ed., *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill, Edited with a Memoir and Notes* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Constable and Company Limited/Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 105.
[251] Cohen, *Household Gods*, 140.
[252] Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 189.
[253] Cohen, *Household Gods*, 140.

emotion. A single room in Soane's house, the Monk's Parlor, housed "objects which cannot fail to produce the most powerful sensations in the minds of the admirers."[254] This was no accident; both Soane and Beckford knew the importance of carefully choosing decorations, paintings, and furnishings to create a thematic mood. Soane went so far as to incorporate a monk's tomb, remarking 'The tomb of the monk adds to the gloomy scenery of this hallowed place…' Soane confessed his predilection for the dramatic in a quotation from Horace: *Dulce est desipere in loco*.[255] His acknowledgement of his contrivance, carved in stone, underscores the importance of specific furnishings and their arrangement in creating a social setting governed by the parameters of decoration and the mood these objects created. Just as Soane and the late Victorian housewife manipulated color and light to create a mood of lightness or melancholy meant to extend to all who entered the space, Beckford relied on lighting, architecture, and especially the unstated, erotic undertones of his highly specific Eastern furnishings to send a message to his guests about the erotic nature of his party.

The possession of furniture was a mark of refinement. Though elites dined, sat, and drank from refined objects meant to ease their bodies and support rituals of class and gender, the majority of people in England and the Atlantic world lived without the luxuries and 'trumperies' of the well to do.[256] In France and the American colonies, chairs and tables for dining would not become universal until the turn of the twentieth century.[257] As new

[254] John Newenham Summerson, *A New Description of Sir John Soane's Museum* (London: The Museum Trustees, 1991).
[255] Ibid. Translation: 'It is pleasant to be nonsensical in due place.'
[256] Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*, 47.
[257] Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 166-92.

objects and furnishings made their way into the social spheres of the privileged, they became imbued with social meanings not known to the majority of people in the world who could not afford them. Many ate standing, with shared wooden trenchers instead of porcelain plates, relying on two handled cups to steady the passage of drinking vessels between many hands sharing a single cup. Amidst the social world of the elite, every refinement provided another metric for those familiar with these codes to judge the wealth and standing of others. By the late eighteenth century, fashion cycles and novelty objects had become a coded language which allowed observers to 'read' people and furnishings. The accumulation and display of objects created a material syntax for the structured series of social contests between host and guest. Social experiences increased an individual's access to social knowledge, but even those who were not *au fait* with the endless nuances of fashion and status knew to look for them and decipher what they could while adding to their store of social knowledge. The knowledge of rooms and decorating with color that would become commonplace among common people a century later was pioneered by individuals like Beckford and Soane in the eighteenth century.

Though households might differ in their degrees of displayed status, the dining table and chairs, the tea equipage and tea table, and extraneous seating and tables were requirements in admitting people to the status of middle class householders. Looking at the furniture in the house of a new acquaintance was a way to verify their status or expose their shortcomings. Even the lowest members of the elite paid careful attention to the content and arrangement of rooms, noting their correct or incorrect form.

The Importance of Posture to Women's Respectability

When Beckford arranged pillows on the ground for sitting along with other accoutrements specific to an Eastern harem, his guests would have noticed the departure from convention. Contemporary erotic and pornographic novels and prints set in harems highlighted the difference in seating as 'heathen' and sexualized. It was primitive and barbaric to sit on the floor, and suggested other untamed appetites. Posture was not only indicative of status, it was also an essential part of the performance of manners and class that aided the individual in social situations and guided the makers of furniture.[258] Extant eighteenth-century pornography is illustrated with scenes of concubines reclining on pillows. It was the undisciplined body, reclined as if lying on a bed, which made pillows on the floor so barbaric. The association with the unregulated sexuality of the Eastern harem served to undermine lounging, but it was not only the nearness of the floor or the link to a harem. The introduction of the couch in the late eighteenth century also created scandal. Huge sofas capable of seating from eight to a dozen people had been considered a necessary addition to any household that aspired to gentility by the middle of the eighteenth century, but the smaller couch, more suited to a couple, and hence the creation of intimacy, was still subject to satire and a frisson of sexuality in a satirical print of 1782.

One print, entitled 'Captain Jessamy learning the proper discipline of the couch,' features a uniformed soldier, his scarlet coat open and draped beneath his splayed legs, lying lengthwise on a small sofa, directing his gaze at the bosom of a meretricious woman

[258] Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 173.

dressed in a riding habit, who leans down to return his gaze.[259] His hand draped across the back of the couch and his inviting gaze suggests that she may soon be joining him on it. This print would have been read as bawdy humor because of the soldier's reclined position. Etiquette guides emphasized the importance of a rigid carriage and upright seated posture as a mark of elite status and proper deportment. Even when dancing, a rigid posture and a particular way of raising and lowering the hands marked the polite from the vulgar.[260]

Fig. 11 *Captain Jessamy learning the proper discipline of the couch*. New Haven, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

[259] Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, call number 782.04.02.04+
[260] Charles Pinot Duclos, *Memoirs Illustrating the Manners of the Present Age: Wherein Are Contained the Remarkable Incidents in the Life of a Young Nobleman. By Monsieur Du Clos... Translated from the French by a Gentleman. In Two Volumes...* (London: Printed for J. Whiston and B. White, 1752).

Particularly for fashionable women, furniture and comfortable postures were paradoxical. Because elite women wore constricting stays that forced them to adopt an unbendable, straight carriage, they were not able to relax their back into a comfortable cushion the way men were. Especially in homosocial settings, men were free to lean back into the supportive backs and cushions of chairs and furniture without physical encumbrances or social strictures, bur women in stays could only sit straight, relying on their whalebone undergarments and willpower to keep them perfectly upright.[261] Some furniture made especially for women accommodated their farthingale skirts; the seat was made narrower than standard couches so that a lady could perch on the end of the seat without falling backward. When full skirts could be accommodated so could erect posture, which would have been compromised if she sat back further, as men could and did, without censure. Even elite men were permitted freedom.

Another print entitled, 'Mr. Peter Manigault and his Friends' illustrates the contrast between posture expectations for women and men. This print depicts a masculine gathering at a dining table, where drunken conviviality stops just short of chaos. Leaning back and sprawling across chairs, men laugh and talk across disarrayed dishes and a wig on a stick shows just how far they bend propriety along with their bodies.[262] Women were not granted the same leniency, as lax posture indicated lax sexual mores in a female body.[263] A reclined position, or even the suggestion of reclining, marked a woman as promiscuous in person as well as in the print culture of the era.

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[261] Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 25-28.
[262] George Roupell, *Mr. Peter Manigault and Friends*, 1760. Charleston, SC, Gibbes Museum of Art.
[263] Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 173.

Fig. 12 George Roupell, *Mr. Peter Manigault and Friends*, 1760. Charleston, SC, Gibbes Museum of Art.

In a 1783 print by Sayer and Benett entitled 'Damon and Pastora' it is the woman's reclined position that suggests her sexual allure.[264] Her fashionable attire and hat which mark her as a lady are compromised by her reclined position, which hints at her sexual availability. The verse beneath it tells of Damon's wayward thoughts and his lust excited by her reclined pose:

> 'Pastora beneath a broad poplar was laid/
> When Damon in exstasy enter'd the Shade/
> He sigh'd & he swore by the powr's overhead/
> If she'd blefs him today tomorrow he'd wed

[264] British Museum, Recto, museum number 2010, 7081.932.

The only transgression 'Pastora' commits is her wanton laid back carriage. It is through the act of reclining that the print's sexualized joke is made possible. Though couches were linked with immoral sexuality in women, it was the posture they encouraged that made this link possible.

Fig. 13 *Damon and Pastora*, c. 1783. Print by Sayer and Benett.

The couch, like the tea table, was a new refinement for the polite world. The purpose of the couch was to aid genteel deportment and bolster the social reputation of the family in general and the social status of the woman hosting tea or entertaining in the role of hostess in particular. Because this new furniture had not become a stable reference point like conventional patina goods of past eras, its newness and instability allowed conflicting and often sexualized messages to be relayed through its presence. Whereas later generations of etiquette bound Victorians would construct specialized courting seats and see no threat in a small sofa or love seat, Georgians instead saw scandal.[265] Compared to the court sofas they were familiar with, the small couch was an invitation to sexual revelry, holding only two and encouraging reclined postures in men and women alike.

Fig. 14 A Victorian Confidante, velvet and walnut.

[265] Charles Boyce *Dictionary of Furniture* 2nd edition (Roundtable Press: New York, 2014), 70; see the entry for *confidante*; Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblentz, "Furniture 1: Prehistoric Through Rococo," *The Smithsonian Illustrated Library of Antiques*, ed. Brenda Gilchrist (Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, 1979).

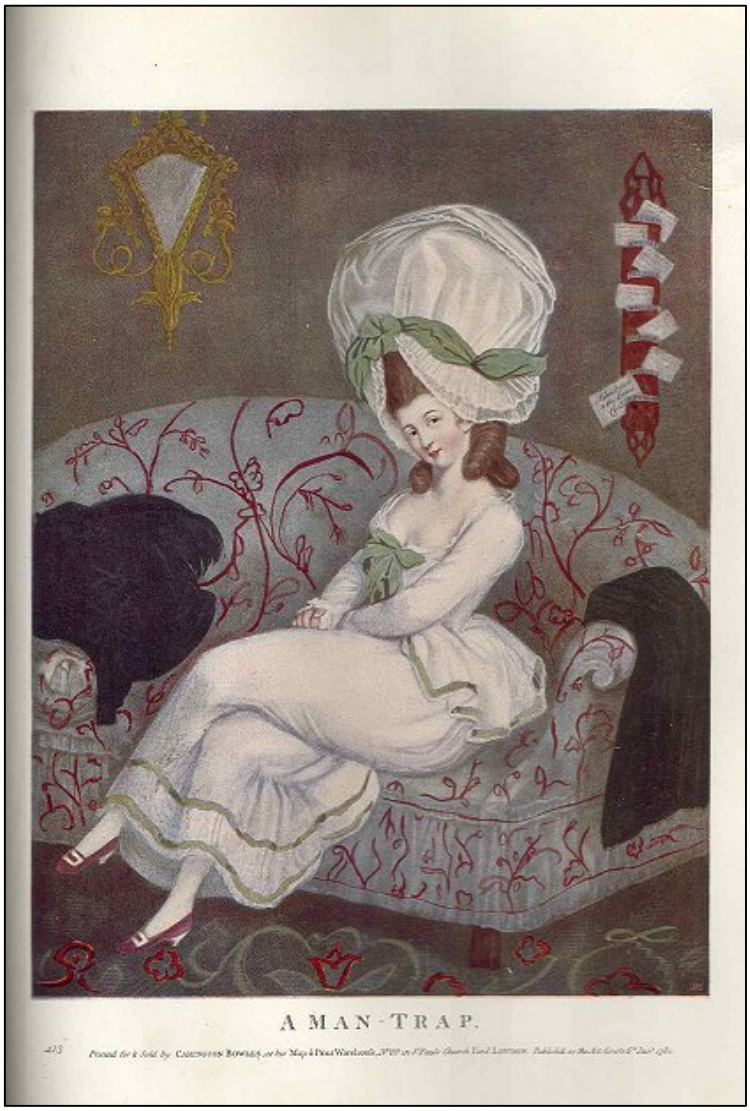

Fig. 15 *A Man-Trap*, c. 1780. Print by Carington Bowles. Artist: Unknown.

Another print of the era highlights the importance of the couch in creating a harlot. The 1780 print, 'Man Trap' by Carington Bowles lampoons the politically active Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, and uses the couch to suggest her sexual promiscuity. Because of her active campaigning for her husband, Charles James Fox, Georgiana was attacked in

more than 85 prints.[266] The most convenient way to decimate a woman's reputation was to suggest sexual impropriety, and Carington Bowles and other print makers relied on imagery of Georgiana trading kisses for votes and displaying herself in public to level her reputation. In this print, however, the same message of promiscuity and sexual availability are conveyed with the help of a couch. The Duchess is seated on a couch, facing the viewer in a three quarter turn. Her bold gaze and coquettish tilt of the head confirms the validity of the material elements of the print which suggest her sexual promiscuity. Her red shoes and the many calling cards in the holder hanging on the wall behind her are cemented by her position on a couch.

For those looking to the messages in print condemning her as a sexually inappropriate woman, the couch she is seated on is as much a part of this message as the older, more traditional harlot marker of red shoes. The gendered association between women and couches was still relevant eight years later, when Sayer printed another version of the popular 'Man Trap' print, this time with a military theme. The same trope of the sexually available woman on the couch is here even more explicit. Though there is an evident copying of the original 'Captain Jessamy' scene, the woman appearing in the riding habit has unbuttoned her habit to reveal her bare breasts underneath. This is meant to be racy: Georgian women wearing a fashionable habit would have worn a shirt underneath it. This print explicitly ties the erotic to a couch similar to the one depicted in the original print, which is reproduced inside the confines of a military tent (presumably an officer's

[266] Amelia F. Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 121.

tent, as her fashionable clothing and the sumptuousness of the tent's middling domestic interior here identify the rank of the owner as a member of the elite.) The couch itself was an elite object, available only to the middling and well-to-do, who shared a culture of polite furnishings and could afford them. Like the tea table, however, this new furniture, when connected to women and contextualized by elite male sexual rendezvous, became a synecdoche for seduction and a convenient short hand for sexually available women. The popularity of these prints, obviously in conversation with one another, reflects the cultural shorthand and popular tropes of stereotype and belief. While not everyone immediately thought couches were synonymous with sexual expression, this convention was familiar to most.

Since this trope was based on the deeply ingrained taboo of polite women reclining, men could not see the woman on the couch as anything but sexual. Polite dress and polite furniture were immediately discounted without the correct mastery of the body, and the woman reclining on a couch was no lady, but a wanton. The success of this print eight years after the first and the profusion of other couch sitting seducers during the same decade shows how deeply entrenched the societal taboo on bodily relaxation was for Georgian women.

Fig. 16 *A St. James Beauty*. Print. Artist Unknown.

Another print of the same era, entitled 'A St. James Beauty' hints at the sexual availability of a woman seated on a couch as she shows herself to the world through the window, linking her choice of seat to her intent to display herself through the window to onlooking men. She is obviously a prostitute, and her fashionably striped chaise lounge, which has no back, suggests a reclined position. Her fashionable clothing and tea table were sought-after items in middling and elite households, and these domestic fashions blur the line between respectable households, fashion, and sexuality, suggesting illicit and corrupt sexuality existed beneath the veneer of respectable goods and also respectable

looking women. Many suggestive prints rely on the trope of a woman on a couch near a tea table to convey her sexual availability.

A print by Robert Sayer from 1780 depicts a sailor fondling the breast of a woman on a couch. Sayer's print, 'Jack got safe into port with his prize' was so popular it inspired several cheap imitations. Despite color changes and slight wardrobe alterations, however, the action and focus of the print remains on the sailor about to gratify his sexual urges with the woman seated on the couch. The print references another popular print which is framed and hanging on the wall in the background. The framed print 'The Sailor's Pleasure', a popular print by Carrington Bowles, depicts a sailor grasping a glass in a toast, his full purse spilling out on the table before him. The private joke, a picture framed in the background of 'Jack got safe into port with his prize', informs the viewer that the 'prize' is shifted from a nautical to a sexual theme. Though sailors and prostitutes were standard fare in the print business, the tavern and docks are here replaced with a respectable domestic middle class drawing room, filled with respectable furniture and a fashionably dressed woman. The implication of easy virtue is thus suggested by the furniture of the polite. Instead of reaching for a fluted toasting glass, as he does in the Carrington Bowles print, Jack instead reaches for the breast of his companion, showing viewers what the real pleasures of the sailor are and indicating that the couch will soon become a site of assignation.[267]

[267] Kyle Dalton, "Jack Got Safe Into Port With His Prize, 1780," *British Tars 1740-1790: Exploring the Dress of Common British and American Sailors from 1740-1790 Through Primary Source Images*, Friday, June 20, 2014, http://britishtars.blogspot.com/2014/06/jack-got-safe-into-port-with-his-prize.html

The contrast of another Carington Bowles print highlights the expected domestic behaviors and characteristics of a polite and sexually respectable woman. In a series dedicated to the four seasons, woman's domestic and sexual virtues are depicted according to the calendrical year. In 'Winter' a woman sits perched on the edge of a chair, facing the fire as she reads. Her back is turned to the window, where men are visible in the background, but she directs her gaze across the room as if greeting her husband. 'Autumn' finds her similarly seated, again leaning forward from the back of the chair she sits on, facing away from the door with a guitar resting near her chair. She is permitted to be near a window only in the print 'Summer' but her eyes are not directed out toward the world, but instead rest on her pet monkey. Instead of the calling cards present in 'The Man Trap' or the suggestive print in 'Jack got safe into port with his prize', a songbird in a cage keeps company with the honorable woman. The bird echoes the life of a virtuous wife, visible yet contained. The walls of the cage mimic the walls of the household; encasing and protecting and allowing the semblance of freedom without the risks. Virtuous women sit straight backed in chairs, turning their bodies and their thoughts to domestic performances of gentility and virtue; sexually promiscuous women attempt to lure men in with bold gazes fixed at them or the outside world, and await assignations reclining on couches made for two.

Fig. 17 *A St. James Beauty* and *Spring.* Prints. Artists Unknown.

Fig. 18 *Jack got safe into port with his prize*, c. 1780. Print by Robert Sayer.

Fig. 19 *Jack got safe into port with his prize*, c. 1780. Print by Robert Sayer.

Humorous bawdy prints capitalized on the cultural associations between new forms of middle class furniture and their associations with promiscuity and sexuality. Erotic novels and prints further reinforced this connection with illustrations and descriptive

passages combining the sexual scene with the material underpinnings of the elite domestic house. This functioned to make sexuality more immediate. The author of the sixteenth century erotic manual, *Aretino's Postures*, which was still popular in the eighteenth century, had removed his figures from the domestic bedroom. Instead of an intimate room for intimacy, Aretino's sketched figures perform in a large stone hall or sparsely furnished rooms. Removed from involvement in their setting, all of the images taking place indoors could as easily be depicted in a bucolic countryside. In contrast, eighteenth-century erotic prints and stories gravitated toward one of two settings; the domestic household or the Eastern harem.

William Beckford managed to combine these two settings into a holistic illicit theme when he decorated his house for his Christmas party in 1781. His predilection for the Oriental would have been permissibly excused if he had restricted it to popular imagery on surfaces like china cups and vases. Instead, he recreated the actual furnishings and spaces of a harem, requiring his visitors to not only acknowledge the forbidden with their eyes, but also to lower their bodies on the ground, reclining as they partook of "sweetmeats and other delicacies."[268] The commonplace understanding of couches and the reclining they encouraged among women (which translated to sexual availability) was compounded by the fact that his entire social space had been redecorated to appear as a concrete version of a forbidden sexual site in the British imagination and in illicit erotic stories and explicit pornographic prints. Though the couch was an unstable novelty with ties to moral laxity in

[268] Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 37; Wallace, *Consuming Passions*, 143-60. Eating at a table and the pomp and circumstance associated with dining was an important delineating mark between the civilized and the barbaric.

women; the harem was not ambiguous. Even the theatrical suggestion of a harem on a stage could threaten the reputation of polite women in their boxes at the Opera. To sit in a private stage-crafted version in a reclined position was very daring indeed. To do so while eating was to discard the two most important restrictions on gratification and politeness, and to transform from a civilized person to a heathen beast, more fitting for uncivilized colonials than gentrified British society. The Orient was not only a dangerous geographic place; it was a contagion. Architecture and furnishings that ventured beyond flip and fashionable imitation could corrupt the morals and gentility of those exposed to the unregulated lifestyle it supported.

Beckford's Christmas Party

When William Beckford's elite guests arrived on that snowy evening of 1781, they were well versed in reading fashion and status in people's clothing as well as mood and sensibility in rooms. The Egyptian Hall at Fonthill was superimposed with an additional layer of mystery and eeriness. Philip de Loutherbourg had not stopped with furniture, but had added steam and fog to create a "necromantic light" and transformed the space into something resembling that "realm of fairy" requested by Beckford more than a month earlier. That Beckford hired a stage set designer to manipulate his domestic space to the extreme has not gone unnoticed by his biographers and historians, who have characterized his contrived way of living as a private stage set.[269] Beckford's high standards and reputation as the consummate collector suggest the attention to detail and thematic integration of his possessions into a holistic experience. The additional construction and

[269] Hewat-Jaboor and Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 91.

furnishing of his magnificent estate would occupy him for more than 27 years, and he insisted on perfection at every step. According to Beckford's own pen, "Everything depends on the way objects are placed, and where. Horrors in one place discount beauties in another."[270]

Though his opinions had become even more entrenched in old age, this attitude underpinned the meticulous planning for his Christmas party, which had begun weeks in advance. Beckford wrote a letter to Louisa on November 19, 1781, noting that preparations had begun that very day for the decorations that would transform his estate. Sparing no expense, Beckford hired a team of decorators to transform his estate into "something eye has never seen nor heart of man conceived."[271] Beckford was ostensibly preparing for a luxurious fete, but he voiced his ulterior motives to Louisa. Beckford had been corresponding with her for months, awaiting an opportunity for a lover's rendezvous. They had been foiled at every turn by her husband, Peter Beckford, who cancelled visits and changed plans, preventing his wife from seeing William.[272]

When Beckford wrote to Louisa in the weeks before his party, it was to assure her that he was doing everything in his power to arrange an opportunity for them to meet again. Because they had been put off for so long, he was making it more memorable and special with his fanciful and transcendental furnishings and accessories that would enhance their sexual rendezvous. He assured her he was transforming Fonthill for her, in the moments they would again enjoy one another's company, though his desire for the youth Kitty no

[270] Stephen Clarke, "William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent (review)" In *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): 93-97.
[271] MS Beckford c. 18 fols 1-27.
[272] Ibid.

doubt fueled much of his efforts. One of the most extravagant parties of the century was in reality an elaborate cover for an illicit tryst. The set designer was, Beckford assured Louisa, transforming "our favorite apartments" (the site of their adulterous affair) into the "strangeness and novelty of a fairy world…for our especial delight and reunion."[273] Though he entrusted the bulk of the heavy work to Philip de Loutherbourg and his "principle imps", Beckford clearly gave them a direction to proceed in, and encouraged Loutherbourg to follow the "wildness of his imagination" rather than the conventional rules of polite taste.[274] For the physical fantasy-scape he created out of material objects to help fulfill his sexual whims, William Beckford spared no expense and overlooked no detail. These spaces were planned, paid for and executed, according to Beckford's own pen, specifically as a sexualized setting meant at the very least to enhance, if not to aid, his intended seductions. His intention to create a mood for his guests and surprise them with the fantastic had become an intrinsic part of his social reputation.

Beckford's violation of social norms through the medium of extreme luxury leads to the opposite direction of the vulgar violations of manners and sexual mores. Instead of the usual opposition of the coarse commoner at odds with the refined gentleman, here we see the licentious wishes of a profligate millionaire corrupting the polite sphere with sexual intent which is ultimately seen as barbaric despite the many refinements and luxuries that accompany it. Beckford was able to convey his sexual intentions through the medium of a very particular luxury, and his choice of objects says much about popular notions of

[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid.

propriety and sexuality. His party at Fonthill was not simply an accidental overflowing of sensual feeling in a luxurious setting; it was an intentionally created social space meant to facilitate and enhance a sexualized party.

Sexual orgies amongst the elite were nothing new. The Beggar's Benison in Anstruther, Scotland, established in 1732, was famous for the licentious sexual activities of its members as well as its motto: "May your prick and your purse never fail you."[275] Beckford's party, however, differed from that illustrious organization. Unlike the Beggar's Benison, Beckford and his guests were not members of an organized sex club, and though he planned every material detail with seduction in mind, the guests had ostensibly gathered for a Christmas dinner, not an orgy. Thus, Beckford's use of décor and luxury objects served to communicate his intentions silently, serving as sexualized visual shorthand for his polite male and female guests well acquainted enough with the rules of manners in the polite world to know when they were being flagrantly violated.

Conclusion

Though his beloved Fonthill did not ascribe to middling taste or décor, the fundamental rules of manners amongst the polite world held true across a variety of circumstances. A 'lady' was not only socially and materially elite, she was also well mannered and, above all, had inviolable sexual boundaries. Many of these boundaries were reflected in manners relating to dress, carriage, and setting. This collection of behaviors, specifically the taboos, were the fundamental principles which underlay a woman's reputation and placed her on one side of a binary separating private, polite women and

[275] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 28-32.

respectable plebeian women from public women and prostitutes. Common women could dress well and mimic genteel behavior like taking tea, but their violation of gendered codes of politeness revealed them.

The way a woman sat, stood, and walked revealed much about her. Fashionable undergarments divided polite women from commoners. The severe steel and whalebone enforced stays dictated by fashion inhibited women's movement and simultaneously aided an upright carriage. Without the ability to bend at the waist, and with side to side movement heavily restricted, elite women adapted a severe and upright posture made graceful only by highly specific movements dictated by manners books. Women who did not belong to the polite classes wore leather stays and 'jumps', often over their shifts, which supported their backs but remained flexible, allowing them a greater range of motion and flexibility.[276] Sitting upright was not simply fashionable good form; however, it was a mark of sexual respectability. A woman lying down signaled sexual promiscuity to men. This was repeated in warnings to girls and refracted in a vibrant print culture which castigated recumbent women as morally loose "man traps" awaiting their next assignation. Especially from 1780, a woman lying down or reclining was seen to be sexually available to men. Whether on the ground near a stream or seated alone inside her drawing room, a woman not sitting upright was not morally upright.

Further clues illuminating Beckford's intentions behind his unique party come from his own pen. Though old and bankrupt, William Beckford had created the *ne plus ultra* of

[276] Steele, *The Corset*, 26-7. Though jumps were initially plebeian, they gained popularity with elites by the end of the eighteenth century, when the fashionable conical shape of the 1740s-1760s became outmoded, partly because of how difficult it was to wear.

erotic excess for those brief days in his youth, and the memory of it continued to bring him happiness despite the chill "of the present unpoetic age" of repressive Victorian morality which blanketed Britain by 1844. Sixty three years after the party that changed the trajectory of his life, he reflected on the evenings that ultimately cost him so much. At the age of 84, the recollection of his "voluptuous festival" in 1781 brought him solace in "the present chilling age."[277] He fondly recalled the material details of his former estate, as well as the feelings and emotional responses the setting engendered in him and his guests. Musing on "this little interior world of exclusive happiness" he had artificially created, Beckford recalled the delight of being "surrounded by lovely beings" and the effect of the intentionally erotic setting, where "monotony of every kind was banished."[278] The effect of this "fairy world" stood out in his mind more than six decades later, when he asserted, "The delirium of delight into which our young and fervid bosoms were cast by such a combination of seductive influences may be conceived but too easily…it was, in short, the realization of romance in its most extravagant intensity."[279]

[277] Chapman, *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*…, 105.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4. FURNISHING THE SEXUAL IMAGINATION: THE SIGNIFICANT SPACES AND OBJECTS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH EROTICA

Introduction

This chapter will examine the significance of the furnishings and physical settings that stirred the sexual imagination of eighteenth century British readers. The various settings fashioned for readers of erotica and pornography found in varied texts attest to the influence of space on social behaviors. Even in the represented worlds of fictional stories focused on sexual activities, places and settings, one would find descriptive illustrations within the text of polite conventional norms. While the particular rooms and furnishings often imitated real spaces, the particular arrangement, style of décor, or decorative theme often revealed erotic undertones. Privacy and secrecy were also important elements. Concealed spaces allowed protagonists to indulge in an alternative, plastic universe where objects and social space was layered with additional erotic overtones. Inanimate objects conveyed licentious intent, whether replicated from actual buildings and known spaces or altered and embellished with erotic references to enhance the salacious social mood.

Couches foreshadowed ensuing encounters, concealed pipes on buildings helped to hide illicit trysts and the recognizable windows and gallery of a royal residence foreshadowed the clandestine rendezvous of lusty courtiers. Mirrors, statuary, furniture, candelabra embellished with sexual statuary, explicit paintings, and even well-known prints of the works of William Hogarth heightened the imagination of the reader and protagonists alike as they negotiated the intimate social and sexual framework fabricated by the author. Inclusions of domestic details or well-known buildings, such as the

Courtier's Gallery of Kensington Palace, and plausible social settings enhanced the readers' sense of immediacy and involvement with the characters they encountered in these texts. The English writer Daniel Defoe differed from literary convention by describing the settings of his stories in more detail than was common. The sense of recognition and immediacy between the reader and the text became increasingly important with the development of the novel, but previously the value of books was seen to come from the moral or factual message they delivered, or the elegance of their verse.

The development of silent reading and the conflation of the reader with the protagonist initially caused worry for many sections of the British population. Reading was an activity meant to be conducted aloud, for the benefit of an audience, or when alone, for scholarly pursuit. The danger of reading for pleasure was further augmented when the content was salacious and related to sensorial gratification. With even relatively harmless novels seen to be corrupting the moral fiber of people, especially women, the increase in available imagery and descriptions of private behaviors for private realms was seen as nothing less than a crisis of morality.

The combination of fictional settings, palpable materials and prior experience helped to entrench readers in an imagined space where reality could be altered and enhanced. Many of these fictional settings relied on the architectural details and presence of decorative luxury goods to show an inverted world where the private was exhibited in public, or where decorative detail had descended to decadence. Rooms might be decorated according to conventional elite norms but embellished with erotic symbols, or they might intentionally violate norms of politeness to signal an interest in the illicit. It was only after

the establishment of formal guidelines of sexual conduct and propriety that the reading public could distinguish a digression from societal norms. Furnishings relating to front stage areas of the house and the entertainment of visitors were deeply entwined with concepts of fashion and luxury.[280] These objects and the rules governing their polite use were among the first to become entwined with additional meanings relating to status and rank.

Many of these meanings were additionally complicated when they contributed to a sexual context. Writers of erotic fiction and engravers of pornographic prints added dimension to storylines and decadence to the forbidden when they used these items to foreshadow secret encounters in plot lines and imagery. Symbols had long been employed in paintings and portraiture to signify personality and rank, but new objects and furniture had no established meanings and were, therefore, not stable. By using unstable objects, writers, printers, and engravers were able to add nuance and contextualize certain combinations of objects and settings that heightened the sexual imagination within a newly formulated social context. By doing so, they established new connections in the minds of their readership which have been lost over time. At the same time, the rules of politeness and the impropriety of their violation became more firmly entrenched in the minds of readers encountering them in person and in print.

This confluence of positional goods freighted with additional meanings in erotic representations established the bedrock for the formation of what Anthony Giddens has termed "plastic sexuality." Plastic sexuality encourages the manipulation and arrangement

[280] Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 31, 41-47.

of particular spaces, behaviors, and adjuncts to sexual behavior in order to maximize pleasure. Plastic sexuality is intentionally separated from reproduction and provides a space for the exploration and manipulation of pleasure.

The correct or incorrect display and arrangement of goods became entwined with the behaviors and moral character and predilections of eighteenth-century British society. As more households became prosperous, the display of goods in the correct context became a way for people to discern those who were familiar with good taste and those who were vulgar but had money. The increasing hostility to the expanding middle class was a familiar theme in print media. The inappropriate use of luxury goods, expensive clothing and fashionable accoutrements incongruous with the bottom rung of elite society caused much anxiety.

By suggesting that sexual perversions or anomalies correlated with status and positional goods, authors and printers participated in fostering snobbery and signaled allegiance to a particular class through the denigration of another. This had great implications for the splintering of sexual materials into divisible categories based on class. As chapter two has shown, different strains of masculinity and femininity were coded by positional goods and their use and were then linked to sexual behaviors and sexual personalities. Depictions of sexuality were also used to denigrate. The juxtaposition of polite furnishings with the revelation of impolite behavior, particularly in regard to sexuality, was a popular trope in erotic materials. Bourgeois values were mocked by both plebeians and elites, who used sexual timidity or hypocrisy to shock and titillate readers while allowing the reader to distance herself from the people violating social and sexual

conventions within the structure of the text or image. At the same time, however, the reader was an active participant in a voyeuristic experience that was inherently sexual.

The change of setting within erotic stories and pictures was an important development in eighteenth-century British literature. As class associations became more significant in assessing sexual performance and practice, the inclusion of domestic furnishings and architectural details became essential in distinguishing the variances of sexual behavior. As the natural world was tamed and ordered, and the concepts of civility tamed the nature of human beings, the rooms, beds, and assorted objects depicted became part and parcel of the voyeur's understanding of this new sexuality. These settings, whether within the domestic household or in gardens and other areas of public frolic, contributed to the erotic tone and conveyed information about the broader life style of the people depicted within each scene.

This refinement of erotic details portrayed in representations paralleled the refinement taking place in social circles. The combined elements of luxury goods and domestic improvements offered opportunities for a separate reading of these refinements juxtaposed against behaviors which were now increasingly private and designated 'vulgar.' In many cases, the details of the background of trysts provided additional clues adding to the frisson of the forbidden. Staircases hidden from view, portraits witnessing debauchery, and the intentional replication of 'Oriental' spaces added depth and nuance. In contrast to early erotic works like *Aretino's Postures*, which had depicted muscular bodies engaged in

various positions for copulation, newer works invited the viewer to follow a story line where additional details added depth and meaning.[281]

Quotidian and fantastical details supported an alternative reality and aided the reader's ability to imagine herself in the scene. This link between the reader and the imagination is a key development in the formation of modern sexuality. Imagination was not separable from fancy to most eighteenth-century people, including Dr. Johnson, who defined it as "the ability to create ideal pictures; the power of representing things absent to one's self or others."[282] The ability to craft an elaborate world in the imagination sheltered private sexual content to a hidden and inaccessible cache accessed only by the creator. When sexual fancies were transposed from the imagination to the pages of books, these too were hidden and designated secret. As the safety of privacy and the imperative to keep sexual content hidden grew stronger, ever more elaborate and explicit varieties of erotica and pornographic content flourished in the secrecy of the private page and within the imaginations of readers. This shift was noticed by contemporaries, who frequently commented on the perplexing variations of the imagination.

In the case of content not memorized by rote, recited, or given public recognition, the link between the imagination and forbidden sexuality was significant and not subject to either the limitations or the restrictions of the existing norms. This distinction allowed for a flourishing of creativity and elaboration that transformed sexuality from an act rooted

[281] These idealized bodies were drawn very similarly to the way artist's idealized sketches of the human body are drawn in art classes. As anatomical renderings, there is a technicality to their execution that disappeared in later works.

[282] See "imagination, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press: accessed March 2017) http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91643?redirectedFrom=imagination&

in reproduction to a universe filled with possibility. This 'plastic sexuality' relied on the creation and recreation of alternative worlds of pleasure, depicted with all the realism and detail of the physical world, right down to the locks on casements and the polish of door knobs. These imaginary portals provided a safe space to release and explore elements that would otherwise have remained repressed or could not have been realized because of the limitations of the physical world. This transformation to plastic sexuality[283] paved the way for the modern idea of "sex as such."[284] The privacy of forbidden books and the untraceable portal of the individual imagination provided fertile ground in which this forbidden knowledge could dwell and flourish. Both sexuality and private thought were seen to be the ultimate reflections of personal liberty and possession. At the same time, however, the expansion of a library of sexual knowledge and content relating to pleasure changed society at all levels as men and women responded to new content which had previously not been reified.

Materialism and Sexuality

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a society that would later be characterized as a nation of shopkeepers, the 'baubles' signaling status and social exclusivity were amongst the most prominent parts of an admixture of sexuality and the secret spaces that contained it. The role of positional goods and privacy were influential on English erotic materials, and contributed to the new understanding of sexuality and the recording of sexuality in print. The imperative for privacy amongst genteel and middling members of the polite world,

[283] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2, 27, 112, 121, 144, 156, 167, 178-80 (for a discussion of plastic sexuality).
[284] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 270-77.

particularly sexual privacy, led to a social secrecy regarding sexual practices.[285] Privacy changed sexuality by promoting a shame frontier that encouraged men and women to hide their own amorous activities and restrict them to approved locations safe from public view.[286] At the same time, the secrecy associated with private sexuality allowed for deviation from accepted sexual activities because of the acceptance that most of what occurred would not be shared.

The personal fancy of the imagination, like private letters, was reserved for a private audience. Revealing such personal information was tantamount to revealing "the souls of Men." Explicit sexual honesty, while tantalizing, allowed these souls "to appear undress'd." While even the most salacious texts might, like personal correspondence, "be fit to be seen by one or two in a chamber" they were "not to go abroad into the Streets."[287] When new social manners associated with refinement and gentility forced sexuality underground, representations of sexual activity emerged in books and pictures in incredible detail. These books were 'secret' and in turn housed secrets. Copulation became associated with the bedroom and increasingly took place behind closed doors.[288]

The containment of erotic action within the bedchamber imbued that space with special associations. The marriage bed had long been recognized as symbolic, but once it

[285] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 270-77, for a look at changing beliefs about privacy in general and sexual privacy in particular. See especially the illustration 'A Lock'd Jaw for John Bull' (pictured) and 'La Lecture', 1760, by Pierre-Antione Baudouin; Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 8, for a discussion of domestic privacy as depicted in erotica and pornography; Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 189; McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 318-19, for a discussion of the contemporaneous privacy structures in pornography and the domestic novel.
[286] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 138.
[287] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 56, quoting Thomas Sprat.
[288] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 138.

was contained in a private room secured with a door, it became private and thus a fertile ground for speculation, especially in print culture. The secrecy and excitement of exploring the forbidden led to increasing portrayals of voyeurism in erotic texts and illustrations as the century wore on, as the sexual thrill was linked to uncovering the depraved and impolite acts of the polite world.

Fig. 20 *A lock'd jaw for John Bull*, c. 1795. Print by S W Fores.

Spaces

In both practice and representation, outdoor conjugal activity was a normal part of life for many seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century couples.[289] At Vauxhall, the path known as the bird cage was famous for the beautiful prostitutes who practiced a brisk business amidst the green.[290] Alfresco plebeian couplings in haystacks, barns and other rural extra-domestic settings provided humorous punchlines to popular jokes but were rooted in reality. In cities, domestic servants and apprentices with no private rooms of their own went to pubs and taverns where they often, according to a popular rhyme, "tasted love upon a chair."[291] The further development and refinement of representations of smaller and more intimate spaces functioned as an alternative setting for erotic activity. The settings reflected different styles and manners of living. In many cases, the smaller spaces conveyed privacy and thus aided the erotic suggestion of voyeurism. Some scholars see this as a cultural reflection of the transition from an agricultural economy to a manufacturing economy, highlighting the cultural shift from rural to urban living.[292] The 'modes of living' reflected in the depiction of architectural spaces and specific furnishings and accessories reflects not only a change in space and more luxurious living, but also a reassessment of the values underpinning the change in lifestyle, specifically those relating to sexuality and privacy.[293] Privacy was becoming the most valued abstract possession, further validating the material luxuries and accoutrements that came with good living in the modern style.

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[289] Greig, *The Beau Mond*e, 50-75.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Edward Ward, *Hudibras Redivivus: Or, a Burlesque Poem On the Times* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010), 7.
[292] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 191.
[293] Ibid.

Early Erotic Imagery

Eighteenth-century men and women did not witness the birth of erotic materials. Ancient cultures from India to Pompeii had recourse to public art work on temples and mosaics in bath houses to inspire them. A major innovation for the consuming public was the portability of new materials. Small books and single sheets of paper could be stored and transported, perused in private or shared with a select audience. Though this would have been possible in previous centuries, the number and diversity of sexualized representations had grown considerably. Royal patrons had access to erotic paintings built into their residences or concealed in private rooms, but for the majority of men and women, it was the combination of literacy, price, and portability that made modern pornography a viable purchase. Just as the internet has created a much larger overall consumption of pornography because of low cost content and the ease and anonymity of consumption, the publishing of sexual media in eighteenth-century Britain was aided by printers bringing new, lower cost technologies to the book trade and capitalizing on salacious content that was sure to sell.

As printers developed new techniques to more accurately produce images, more people purchased them. Sexual themes have always held the interest of the public, and when techniques for reproducing high quality artist renderings became cheaper, they changed the level of expectation for consumers who had been formerly contented with rougher symbolism. Seventeenth-century ballad sheets routinely depicted topless women and alluded to sexual matters. Ballads, however, were illustrated with crude wood block prints, which often did not correlate with the verbal content. Even when they did, the low

quality of the imagery did not resemble reality the way an engraving could. Two dimensional line drawings signaled lewd content but did not raise the passions the way finer renderings could.

For instance, in '*The Vertuous Maids Resolution*' a ballad about two honest lovers, sung to "a pleasant new tune," a male and female figure are set into the lines of type spelling out the lyrics.[294] The man sports a mustache and close fitted hat, and wears a jacket with five pieces of braid. The woman wears a pearl necklace and her enormous but disfigured breasts completely obscure her gown. Both figures were separate interchangeable images, and this is clear because of the sloppy job as well as the perspective; neither figure looks at one another and though the exaggerated breasts of the woman are meant to be a focal point, their disproportion with the man (each breast is larger than his entire head) make for a jarring juxtaposition with the text and her companion figure.

[294] Anonymous, *Shewing what unconstant men there be, that use deceit and flattery; they'l cog, dissemble, swear, and lye, a harmeless maidens life to try, to all such lovers she'l be coy, and says, my freedom's all my joy. To the tune of, I am a poor and harmless maid &c.* London: Printed by and for W.O. for A.M. sold by J. Deacon., [1700] Wing (CD-ROM, 1996)/V651 Early English books tract supplement interim guide/C.20.f.8[552].

Fig. 21 Illustration from John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Vol. 1* (London, 1748).

The half and three quarter poses, the rough sketches of ugly faces, and the crudely patched nature of the composition render it convenient shorthand for bawdy content rather than an incitement to erotic activity or a depiction of the possible interactions between a pair of heterosexual lovers. The disembodied scene is not believably linked to the song, and though sexuality has been invoked through the woman's bare breasts and the lyrics, the sense of immediacy common in erotic texts and illustrations is not present.

In contrast, the illustration from a mid-eighteenth-century erotic novel show an implicit moment, with the lovers in a contextual domestic setting replete with nuanced furnishings highlighting the material details of their lives. Again and again, voyeuristic scenes were recreated with an attention to detail that made them instructive as well as diverting. The tea equipage on a round top mahogany tea table and the roaring fire in the

grate highlight the immediacy of a domestic idyll interrupted by passion. Though tea tables were often used as a trope to signal the decay behind the façade of respectability, as in Hogarth's progress, they also signaled domesticity and class affiliation. Though a rich harlot might also have access to a tea equipage and set herself up as a lady, it was also a gendered claim to refinement. The quarter panels on the door and the frieze surrounding the fireplace further reinforce the suggestion that a polite woman has been interrupted during a quiet hour before dinner for an amorous frolic.

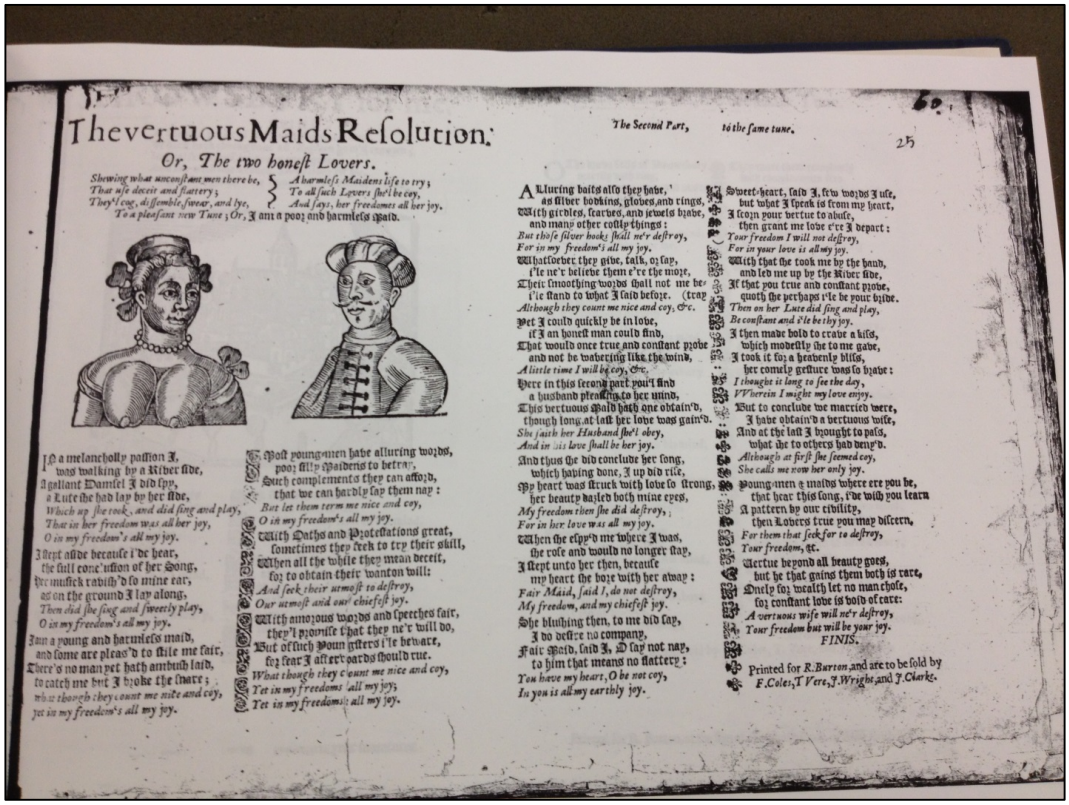

Fig. 22 The Vertuous Maids Resolution, Or, The Two Honest Lovers. Detail.

The refinement of sexuality was possible in large part because of the instructive nature of pornographic imagery and erotic writing. Just as manners books disseminated information and provided a common reference point from which men and women

measured their own behavior, erotica served both as diverting titillation and a repository of arcane secrets. By taking a private act and creating templates of erotic action which a reading public could imitate and reference, printers of erotic and pornographic materials provided a tangible reference from which a literate public could engage. The progression from the bawdy and ribald joking about sexuality to its treatment as a serious topic could not have happened without the aid of a robust print culture that facilitated the spread of uniform messages.

Reading and the Imagination

As a reading public became more familiar with the necessity of imagining a story line in their head as they read silently, they were no longer satisfied with laundry lists about adultery or mere mention of the generic 'crim con' or criminal conversation that had begun the cultural fascination with the sex lives of elites.[295] They wanted details of the precise actions taken by bodies engaged in the arts of love. The existence of a literary repository of sexual acts was not revelationary. The refinement of these representations of sexualized content, modified to include new social habits, positional goods, and domestic space replete with the hidden messages about personality connected to domestic furnishings and status objects, differentiated the British pornography and erotica of the eighteenth century from other sexualized content that had existed before.

Nearly a century after the Courtier's Gallery at Kensington Palace was depicted in *Alexis the Courtier*, 'typical' British pornography would focus on class and the furnishings of polite households nearly as much as the naked bodies displayed in their tinted color

[295] Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 16-17.

plates. Having further developed the associations between gentility and sexual performance, the middle class domestic house would become the default setting for most pornographic content. The multiple and varied settings for representations of sexuality had been narrowed to the domestic household of middle class Britons. These settings reflected a multitude of new items and spaces when compared to the texts that came from earlier in the century, but they show a homogenization of social expectations and 'typical' household spaces that reflected the culmination of a universal understanding of these objects as familiar rather than singular.

A further refinement in these early nineteenth-century erotic texts is the construction of highly refined and elaborate sexual spaces created for the express purpose of conjugal activity. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, sex was and could be anywhere. Whether taking place in a barn or behind the promenade of a fashionable garden like Ranleigh or Vauxhall, both elites and plebeians recognized the reality of alfresco seductions. With the increasing valorization of privacy, however, houses were re-ordered and conjugal activity was more often removed to the private realm.[296] By the nineteenth century, the middle class prudishness which had developed during the previous generations made sexuality a prohibited topic amongst all classes, forcing sexuality underground where it emerged in highly specific and detailed constructions within private rooms in private books.[297]

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[296] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 138; Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 189; Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 175; *Curtain Lectures*…, 8-12, 24, 52, 59, 61, 64, 75, 79, 93, 103, 118, for descriptions of conversations between husbands and wives involving beds or bedchambers.
[297] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 139-45.

In the late 1820s, just before the beginning of the Victorian era, two erotic novels with pornographic illustrations appeared for sale. With the customary five color plates complementing the text, *the Adventures of Thermidor and Rozette* and *The Intrigues and Amours of a Ladies Maid* tell stories of sexual passion and illicit love within the physical and social framework of the middle class house. When compared to sixteenth and seventeenth century works like *Aretino's Postures* or the ballad sheets and shilling illustrations featuring sailors and bawds, the domestic focus is the most obvious shift. By 1830, the assumption of a private domestic room as a theatre for bodily passions had become a cultural commonplace. These texts interweave the domestic furnishings and architectural details of the house (or symbols of them) into the story line, relying on the physicality of hidden staircases and supportive furniture to facilitate illicit sexual practices. They differ sharply with seventeenth-century depictions of large hallways and classical poses to highlight the minutest details of domestic furniture arrangement and the profusion of objects in the background of love trysts.

The understanding of sexual intentions is often communicated by entry into a private room where the owner's sexual intentions are revealed by the furnishings present in the room. Explicit statuary, 'Turkish' couches, and strategically placed mirrors serve as clues, warning the protagonist what to expect and facilitating secrecy, silence, and desire. Even after the Regency, couches still carried a frisson of illicit sexual intention. When the couches were in the Turkish style, linked to older representations of harems and associations with dissolute 'Oriental' culture, the intention was unmistakable. Some furnishings within these novels are themselves explicit. A pornographic candelabrum

buried within the secret walls of an apartment built for adulterous assignations lights the way for each couple; a mirrored ceiling reflects a secret lesbian orgy, and a concealed stairway facilitates cross class adulterous romance in a middle class marriage as the husband sneaks away for a tryst with his wife's maid.

These refinements in architecture and furnishing combined with notions about refined manners, class membership and privacy to push sexual activity to the bedroom and entrench the notion that sexual expression was not acceptable in public. Like other bodily functions, conjugal activity was regulated to the realm of the private and secret. This secrecy made the closed doors and perceived forbidden activity of the bedroom a compelling setting for erotic tales. In this way, the genre itself was refined from a mechanism for showcasing hypocrisy or satirizing the faults of others into a library of secret knowledge that claimed to reveal secrets of sexual mastery as well as common practices that had no acceptable outlet.

Elias's claim that the forbidden is revealed in dreams, in thoughts, and in pictures was proved again and again in the successful editions of voyeuristic pornography and erotica that privileged the domestic household as a theatre of sexual activity and often, perversions.[298] Voyeuristic elements had always highlighted the illicit nature of pornography, but with the concrete elements of realistic furniture and material details of middle class households laid out before the reader, the entire scene was contextualized in a more complete way. Instead of historically, ethnographically, or professionally removed fantasies, such as religious figures in cloisters or Oriental harems, or transcripts of criminal

[298] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 186.

conversations, (often called 'crim cons') providing titillation, reading audiences were now more compelled by what might be going on next door at their neighbor's house.[299] *The Intrigues and Amours of a Ladies' Maid* brings all of these elements together, and is representative of the transition toward the private and domestic bent of Victorian pornography that would become typical after 1830.

The opening page of 'Ladies Maid' begins with the protagonist, the maid Louisa, shouting "Coming" to her mistress, who has summoned her with a bell. The increasing desire for privacy and service in the suburban villas and bourgeois terrace houses necessitated the system of bells for calling servants that would become a synecdoche for the master/servant relationship and a hallmark of elite Victorian pretentions. Louisa's answer is both humorous and true, as she happens to be engaged in libidinous activities with the master of the house, the husband of the woman summoning her.[300] Though many differences exist in erotica and pornography from the eighteenth-century to the nineteenth-century, the use of humor and wit in erotic materials remained a common feature in erotic works.

The *escalier derobe*, a hidden staircase by which Sir Simon descends to conceal his illicit (and adulterous) sexual encounter makes his movement in the house undetectable. The concealed staircase conceals his secret sexual life, hiding him from the polite and genteel areas of his house as it enables a secret sexuality to coexist with the height of refinement. '…unwilling to leave her pleasing employment, she had waited til the word

[299] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 303, 469-80.
[300] J. Ryder, *The Adventures, Intrigues, and Amours of a Lady's Maid* (Portobello Passage, London, 1822), b.

'Coming!' had not only the piquancy of the *apropos*, but also the merit of being literally true.'[301] Her secret adventures cause Louisa to take five minutes to reach the summons of her mistress in the drawing room. While subverting her social rank and undermining the sacred bond of marriage between her employers, Louisa's 'amours' reveal much about the class, status, and sexuality as it played out within domestic space in lived reality. It also speaks to the importance of accuracy and detail in representations of physical spaces within erotic texts and imagery, which helped readers reconstruct spaces in the plastic arenas of their imaginations.

The first page of this erotic novel relies on an architectural detail to facilitate the private sexual revels of an unequal relationship predicated on privacy and status. Without the separation of the living quarters between master and servant, this hypocrisy and adultery would be impossible. The emphasis on external appearances and the dignity of the employing class is ironically the very spatial arrangement that conceals the adultery that threatens domestic life. By the dawn of the Victorian era and the Romantic age, the desire for status caused men and women to privilege social perception at the expense of domestic tranquility.

The pornographic illustrations in both books emphasize current fashions from the 1820s and 1830s, with the hand tinted plates colored with saturated reds, yellows, and greens. In *The Adventures of Thermador and Rozette*, the illustrations show copulation between the protagonist and her seducer, but though the same artistic style in used in *Intrigues and Amours of a Ladies Maid*, illustrations are much more pornographic, focused,

[301] Ibid.

with emphasis on the conjoined genitals of the protagonists privileged above detailed depictions of furnishings. In these compositions, however, the background may recede but does not disappear.

For an audience already familiar with the symbols and meanings of household spaces, little is needed to convey the representation of spaces associated with privacy and seduction. Different household spaces are suggested by abstract impressions rather than the concrete details present in earlier works. The reliance on drapery and the shadowy suggestion of library shelves is all that is needed to convey the inherent privacy in a scene where Louisa the maid is seduced by the Reverend Mr. J in the masculine space of the library. Another illustration places her again with the Reverend Mr. J, but this time alfresco on the banks of a stream. Again, the focus is pornographic, focused on what lies beneath her fashionable gown, raised to accommodate the lustful wishes of her protector, which occupies a third of the frame. The abstract trees and "natural bed which had witnessed our transports" is here rendered in cartoonish pastels, diffused of detail.[302] In contrast their conjoined genitals are portrayed as the detailed focal point of the image without subtlety.

In the next illustration, Louisa is portrayed on the verge of a lesbian encounter with her new employer, a woman named Madame Fieschi. Both women occupy the entire frame, naked except for a dildo strapped to one figure. While the presence of sexual accoutrements gives no doubt as to the sexual intentions between the two women, Louisa does not learn of her employer's sexual interest through their appearance. At her initial meeting with her

[302] Ibid., 84.

future employer, she is shown into a room. It is through her observations of the furnishings in the room that Louisa learns of Madame Fieschi's lascivious intent.

Fig. 23 Illustration from Ryder, J., *The Adventures, Intrigues, and Amours of a Lady's Maid*. (London: Portobello Passage, 1822).

After she is examined and found fit to assume her duties as a maid by Madame Fieschi, Louisa is left in the saloon, where she notes:

> I had the opportunity of examining the saloon, in which instead of chairs were ranged low Turkish sofas, with the exception of the end facing folding doors, which formed an

> alcove, in the recesses of which was placed the couch of eider down, raised three steps above the floor, on which Madame Fieschi had been seated. In a niche above it was an alabaster statue of Silence, her finger on her lips and beneath it the inscription, 'For boundless bliss, the sole return we crave/Is Silence, deep as tenants of the grave.[303]

This message about the imperatives of sexual secrecy is delivered through the inscription of an allegorical statue. Madame Fieschi's saloon was obviously not for strangers, and it relied on the implied and overt messages inherent in the furnishing to communicate her lascivious intentions to those ushered in it. Merely having been in the room in the presence of these revealing furnishings is a harbinger of future sexual exploits.

> That this was not the room where Madame Fieschi received strangers, was evident; and I could only attribute her having done so in my instance, and giving me time to satisfy my curiosity, to her wish of gradually preparing me for some mysterious ceremonies, secret worship of some dea ignota, the sudden revelation of which she perhaps fancied might shock my island notions of virtue, and render abortive the projects she had formed respecting me.[304]

By showing her to an obviously private room replete with Turkish sofas, Madame Fieschi has tipped her hand to Louisa, revealing future licentious intent. Both are aware of the sexual messages and intentions revealed in the furnishing of the room and the crossing of thresholds from the public to the private realm. After describing other statues of goddesses and a few allegorical paintings, Louisa notices further unusual décor in the form of mirrors on the ceiling.

> The ceiling was covered with fine Venetian mirrors, which being alternately and slightly raised and depressed at the jointures, had the effect of Cen tripling every object contained in the saloon. . . Judge then, what it must have

[303] Ibid., 82.
[304] Ibid.

> been, when all the decorations which belonged to it were arranged in the now vacant spaces; when the light, streaming from twenty-four wax tapers, placed around the lustre, made the resplendent ceiling look like an ocean of fire, and instead of me alone, motionless, too, as I was, the room was occupied by twelve lovely women, completely naked, full of life and animation, now circling in the voluptuous waltz, and now, exhausted with fatigue, reclined upon the sofas…such was the scene I once witnessed.[305]

Every sexual encounter Louisa describes takes place in a new and specific architectural setting. These settings and the objects within them add nuance and meaning to the action taking place within them; especially in the case of sexual meaning. When Louisa's former employer wishes another rendezvous with her, he instructs her to meet him in town at the Cigar Divan, ostensibly a tobacco shop catering to men. When she arrives, she is escorted by the proprietor into a secret apartment without windows, concealed by surrounding industrial buildings. Sir Simon meets her there via a concealed stairway and tells her the space is called the "Temple of Happy Lovers."[306] Sir Simon reveals the complete history of this sexualized space, which is shared by several men and their paramours. He first reveals the economic structure of the rental agreements, and Louisa hears how:

> The expence is defrayed by subscription and the profits are divided between the tobacconist and the leaseholder of the warehouse." After the trail of rents and monetary divisions has been explained, the location and secrecy of the building's structure is revealed. The building, '… is situated over the warehouse adjoining the Divan, and, as there are no windows to the street, nor to the rear…[307]

[305] Ibid., 83.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

Despite the fact that this story is fictional, realistic details and explanations showing how this space could be recreated in reality show the importance of real world details in the creation of fictional space. Though the heating of the rooms is never of subsequent importance, Sir Simon explains the intricacies of it to Louisa, telling her how the room " is ventilated by secret pipes…" showing how physical details in the representation of sexualized spaces contributed to the essential element of privacy necessary for decadence.

Details of the structure and financial arrangements, concealed windows and pipes, and the explanation of the single entrance that assures "none but the initiated are aware of its existence" reassure Louisa of absolute privacy. These details could easily have been omitted in the convenient structure of fiction, but their realism establishes the connection to reality for the reader, and helps to establish the possibility of the same circumstances existing in the social world of the reader. These details also importantly show how the specialization of room use had become important not only within the domestic household but also within the imagined world of fiction. The 'back stage' existence of a secret den of assignation, where even pipes for ventilation had been concealed, speaks of realms so unknown that they could descend into the most depraved perversions.

Sexuality and secrecy were not only linked in popular culture, they had become inseparable. Secret spaces were seen as places to conceal what was not permissible to discuss, and the more secret these spaces the more decadent they could become. The objects in such hidden rooms could be even more decadent because the fear of discovery was absent. While rooms in Madame Fieschi's house sent covert messages about sexual intentions, the space in the "Temple of Happy Lovers" was not subject to the constraints

of the domestic household. Purpose built for sexual excess, these secret rooms functioned as a symbolic space where freedom extended to imagery so licentious it was capable of shocking a servant.

Louisa, temporarily alone, describes the objects she first encounters. "On the table, before the indicated panel, was a folio family bible, surmounted by a blue Morocco prayer book." Above the fireplace was a large image of the day of judgement, as well as a framed series of prints depicting Hogarth's Harlot's Progress, and a Chinese lamp and Turkish ottoman, along with curtains "…close drawn, and as evening was approaching, afforded me but just sufficient light to distinguish the objects I have enumerated."[308] The approaching nightfall, the gothic warning of religious laws about to be violated, and the symbolic placement of Hogarth's moral works; themselves full of symbolism, indicate a mood of sinful decadence to the reader. After Sir Simon takes Louisa from "sensibility to dishevelment"… "over an ottoman, upon which, ere I had time to recover from my astonishment, he with a rush of impetuous delight in a few seconds made me forget every thing but the ecstasy of our mutual embraces," he offers her a cordial glass of liquor and explains the secrecy of their adulterous apartment, created specifically for the purpose they have used it for.[309] After listening to Sir Simon's explanation, Louisa looks around her to see the material details of a room dedicated to sexual decadence. Like the saloon of Madame Fieschi, mirrors play an important role in signifying decadence and luxury.

[308] Ibid., 47.
[309] Ibid.

Unlike her previous employer's household, however, additional erotic imagery is present. "Mirrors, reaching from ceiling to floor, were distributed at intervals along the festooned walls, and between them were paintings representing the amorous conflicts between demigods and of men, in every possible attitude that the lascivious imagination of Aretin ever committed to paper."[310] Invoking Aretino's historic love guide, the author indicates the additional layer of decadence present in the imagined space of his creation compared to the historic examples. Paintings were accompanied by allegorical statuary in the same theme, 'Beneath these paintings, in small niches, were alabaster groupings of fawns [sic] and satyrs, and of the priestess of Cybele, suspending the votive phalli of prostrate virgins on the gigantic and heaven directed weapon of Priapus. But all this was nothing to the demoniac [sic] and hideously convulsive figures, which, from the lamp, reflected by polished mirrors, seemed to surround the spectator with the realities of Pandemonium."[311] Louisa is shocked to see allegorical imagery depicting sexual conquests, and 'was on the point of screaming with afright' when Sir Simon kisses her passionately and reassures her.[312] Though Louisa has been initiated into lesbian sex by her former employer, she models the reserve expected of more genteel women in the eighteenth century with her "fright" at the imagery before her. Sir Simon assures her that they are below the level of art but useful for inciting lust. "Don't be alarmed my dear girl these are mere shadows. They are grotesque and Van Bruegel-like caricatures of the sweet mysteries of Venus."[313] Louisa, however, ascribes to gendered notions of reserve and innocence when

[310] Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*, 15-16, for more on the history and significance of Aretino's *Postures.*
[311] Ryder, *The Adventures, Intrigues, and Amours of a Lady's Maid*, 47.
[312] Ibid., 8.
[313] Ibid., 47.

she claims she cannot fathom the real purpose of these depictions, and asks Sir Simon about the meaning of these objects, "But Sir Simon, what occasion to represent them at all on canvas?"[314] He explains it is to incite lust, and then uses them to teach her new sexual positions. We see here a difference between what is considered classical allegory and what has become obscene. It is interesting to note that extant monochromatic alabaster statues of the type described in this passage were a common decorating trope for the polite world in Britain, France, and the Atlantic World throughout the long eighteenth-century, and well into the nineteenth. For Louisa to have worked in a great house and failed to encounter statues like these would have been exceptional. Placed in a room intended only for the fulfillment of lust, she sees them in a pornographic light. On a dining table at Clandon Park or in the drawing room at Chatsworth House, however, these items signified refinement and elite taste. Here we see a shift in values toward a greater refinement of sexuality reflected in a gendered expectation of prudery.

Eighteenth century plebeian women were not placed under the same strictures regarding the repression of sexuality as their sisters in the polite world. Eighteenth century servants, men and women alike, were chided for looking at erotic imagery in print shop windows, teaching their master's children about masturbation, and were accused of sexual promiscuity. Still able to joke, run races, and play leap frog, eighteenth-century servant girls would have been conversant in sexual mysteries which elite women were meant to feign ignorance of.

[314] Ibid.

With the increasing intolerance of bodily display that came after the Regency, however, the restrictions formerly placed only on elite women in polite circles extended downwards to the serving class. Whereas formerly innocence and naivety were the marks of a lady, it was now a gendered expectation of all women, even servants. What had been a mark of distinction separating elites from the rest of society had become a predilection associated with all members of the fair sex. In this passage then, Louisa's behavior showcases a crossroads of gender and class confusion. She does not know Latin, and has not been educated in classical mythology, but she sees the allegorical art as pornographic. She is a plebeian servant girl, yet she is unfamiliar with objects commonly found in the houses of elites (which required extensive dusting by servants) and she assumes the air of an innocent well brought up girl of the eighteenth century when she is in fact a knowing participant in an adulterous affair. These details of social position, facilitated by knowledge of furnishings and familiarity or ignorance with them, show the many facets of knowledge that refined people possessed.

This confluence of furnishings, privacy, and specifically sexualized space distinguishes the erotic and pornographic representations of the long eighteenth century from the examples of previous eras. The context of furniture, fashions, and private spaces had become essential to the sexual plot. Though details might be contradictory and fictional, the presence of concrete objects and theoretical privacy presented sexuality in a way that had never before been done. Industrial production and pornography are considered the hallmarks of modernity, and in the pornography of the long eighteenth century we find

a system of understanding sexuality mediated by the fruits of international trade displayed alongside amorous activity.

Conclusion

Eighteenth-century erotica can be broken down into several categories, such as anti-religious, anti-noble, flagellation, and pastoral. To understand the many additional layers of meaning behind the categories, however, we must examine contemporary social events and the shaping of social rituals related to status and gender. Sexuality and status became entwined in unique ways during the long eighteenth century, and these combinations in turn produced new understandings about each separate category. Even within known political and anti-clerical works are inclusions of material culture that add nuance and reveal information about gender, status, and sexuality. Men and women of different classes changed their images and worldview by participating in new social rituals involving newly created objects. These objects contributed to a totally new social space which necessarily included sexual space. Sexuality is inherently tied to self -image and public image, and neither can be altered without altering its intrinsic meaning. Eighteenth-century men and women of many classes were undergoing gentrification in dining, fashion, and living habits, and this refinement was echoed in both ephemeral physical encounters and in the material record of pornographic books, prints, and the representations of domestic spaces within the physical pages of the books. The refinement of objects, then, produced refined representations of these objects, even in places thought sordid and vulgar. The spread of the desire for privacy and its proportional relation to class also influenced the material details of the sexual scenes depicted. Before and after 1750, when Peter Wagner claims

pornography "became an aim in itself" domestic settings and architectural details reflect the particular frisson of *private* sexual encounters.[315]

Adhering to or violating privacy added a layer of understanding to sexual practices. In voyeuristic depictions of copulating couples, the viewer's experience is predicated on the two secrets kept from the participants. In other words, the couple engaged in amorous activity revels in the secret delight of ecstasy, while the thrill of the voyeur comes from viewing these secrets in secret.

Secrecy and privacy were not quotidian expectations for most men and women. Hierarchy governed distance and dependency. It was common, for instance, for entire families to share a room for sleeping. It was usual for employers to lock their servants in their rooms for the night, and it was nearly impossible for those without a house to conceal and keep goods that did not fit into pockets.[316] By the end of the eighteenth century, however, notions of privacy had shifted from older ideas and contrary to the special physical and social distance created around the king and other nobles, privacy had become a reasonable expectation even for servants (though to a lesser degree).

Elias's civilizing process relies almost entirely on privacy to set new standards of decency in public. By removing bodily functions and sexuality from public view, a

[315] Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 99; Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*: *Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 75-79, for further discussion of pornography.
[316] Ariane Fennetaux, "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 20: Iss. 3, Article 5, 2008.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol20/iss3/5; Vickery, figure 3 for John Wilkes' detector lock.

repository of secrets was created to contain shameful or uncivilized behavior. Records of these changes exist in secret libraries about the most forbidden topic; sexual activity.[317]

Many historians have attempted to place erotica and pornography in context within a cultural milieu. I have identified the situational confluence of sexuality and new understandings of politeness as they related to objects, gender, and social spaces. In terms of pornographic and erotic imagery and amatory novels, the domestic details that are described to aid or enhance sexual scenarios reflect a change in the overarching structure of sexual understanding and practice. The change in details reflects the change in larger thought and belief. This is particularly true of sexual practices as they relate to social practices.

Once certain rooms were established as theaters of sexual activity, refined details multiplied. Dining and seduction have always been linked as the primary sensory pleasures of the human condition, and as dining regulations multiplied and became ever more elaborate and nuanced as signs of good living, so too did the forbidden and secret spaces and techniques of sexual congress.

Giacomo Casanova built his social reputation on his sexual prowess, but it was his status as a gentleman that made this possible. Had Casanova been further down the social ladder he would not have been able to leverage his sexual assignations as social currency. It was because of his background and knowledge of the polite world that he was able to act with impunity when he intentionally transgressed these boundaries. According to his own pen, his interests were primarily sensory, "Cultivating whatever gave pleasure to my senses

[317] Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*, 69-70.

was always the chief business of my life; I never found any occupation more important. Feeling that I was born for the sex opposite of mine, I have always loved it and done all that I could to make myself loved by it."[318]

As part of a sybaritic social group with the financial clout to buy every conceivable luxury available on the market, Casanova was part of a founding movement of men embracing a version of Bernard Mandeville's reconfiguration of economic and moral imperatives. Whereas Mandeville excused private vice for public benefit according to the fledgling principles of eighteenth-century economics, pleasure seeking elites added an additional layer of private vice in the form of private sexual realms accessed only by a privileged few. For this reason, perhaps, a collective curiosity arose with respect to luxurious settings and sexual games played by elites in secret, often in secret chambers furnished for that purpose only. Just as other activities became suffused with additional status meanings and social meanings that required elaborate equipment and the knowledge to use it correctly, so too did sexuality, as it was now ostensibly sealed off from prying eyes and gossip, only to emerge as specialized knowledge in forbidden books. Just as the tea table created a new desire and requirement for knowledge and material trappings necessary to engage in this social activity with genteel correctness, so too was sexual practice now a series of actions which could be measured against a rubric of genteel performance and ranked acceptable or not.

[318] Giacomo Casanova and Arthur Machen, *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova De Seingalt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2011), 20.

The concealment of sexual practices required private space. Plebeian culture often referenced the humorous results of couples caught *in flagrante delicto* as they copulated in semi- public areas. The tale of the country couple who nearly killed the man sleeping under the haystack they fornicated on was a public joke, but it addresses the very real difficulty plebeian couples faced when they attempted to gain fleeting privacy for sexual practices.[319] Public fornication was both a standard jest, published in almost every guide purporting to enhance wit, and also standard practice, even amongst the elite. Samuel Pepys witnessed an assault from his carriage on Ludgate Hill, and James Boswell engaged the services of a prostitute on "that noble edifice" of Westminster Bridge.[320] While gentleman might choose to engage in sexual congress outdoors, they also had the option of private specialized rooms if they desired. This was not the case with plebeian men and women, who shared space and whose rooms served multiple purposes. It is important to understand the novelty of privacy and its class associations to fully grasp the nuances of private space as it related to sexuality in eighteenth-century British culture. When private elite spaces were depicted, they were novel to most.

Ultimately, furnishings became entwined with status and sexual personality in the eighteenth century, and the population at large became intrigued by the alleged finesses and perfections of sexual congress practiced in the secret chambers of elites. Pornographic novels and prints thus became instructional vehicles not only for the actions and techniques

[319] John Brewer, *The Common People and Politics, 1750-1790s: The English Satirical Print, 1600-1832* (Cambridge: Princeton University Library, Chadwyck-Healy, 1986); McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 166; McKeon, plate 18 for *Stand Coachman, or The Haughty Lady Well Fitted, 1750*, for a depiction of class tension surrounding privacy in public spaces.
[320] James Boswell, *London Journal 1762-1763* ed. Frederick Pottle, (n.p., 2015), 255, entry for 10 May, 1763.

of erotic play, but also sexual manners books of sorts, instructing readers in the importance of surroundings as adjuncts to sexual feeling. This was well known to elites, as they were used to all of the ways that luxury objects and settings contributed to an integrated experience. Furniture not only supported (sometimes literally) sexual activities, it also contributed to the social tone of the room, and by extension, the sexual personality of the inhabitants of the house. In many cases, architectural details became physical supports to adulterous relationships or forbidden love. In the erotic novel, *Intrigues and Amours of a Ladies' Maid*, the hidden servants' staircase allows the protagonist's master to access her room despite his wife's presence in the house. In the case of William Beckford, the necromantic lighting and fog at his Christmas party, combined with his Eastern architecture and placement of Turkish sofas and floor pillows communicate his space as sexualized before a word was spoken. The voyeuristic element of eighteenth-century pornography evolves from the relative novelty of sexual privacy. These secret worlds, not accessible to most, created a fascination with the violation of sexual privacy, which revealed not only the sexual acts taking place but also the secret living habits of those able to cordon off impolite bodily acts from the knowing eyes of the world.

Though secrecy and privacy were often used to convey additional messages about class conflict and the hypocrisy of women in general and aristocrats in particular, the underlying desire of it was rooted in essential differences between the daily living habits of plebeians in contrast to those who could claim at least a minimal level of polite gentility. While the uninitiated sought new knowledge of background furnishings and the practices associated with them, those to the manner born treated them as necessary minimums for

pleasure. Louisa Beckford, writing to William Beckford a year after his notorious Christmas party, contrasted the memory of his "silken apartments" with the tawdry room at a French inn where she was currently forced to pass Christmas.[321] Bitter about spending time apart from her paramour, she notes with distaste her current surroundings in comparison to his planned sexual haven. Whereas the Fonthill fete had catered to every sense and raised it to an Elysian refinement, her room in Brignoles was a dystopian nightmare, "hung with dark tapestries" and illuminated, not with the celestial light, but "lit with a single taper." As she recalled the "luxurious fancies of vice" they had enjoyed the previous year, Louisa encouraged William to do the same: "Recollect this day last year and think of how I must suffer when I compare it to this."[322]

These refinements in sexual practices are inherently connected to refinements in dining and social concepts of politeness and taste that suffused eighteenth-century popular culture and contributed to a new social sphere mediated by manners. The general rule dictating appropriate behaviors to appropriate spaces extended to include sexual spaces, even though new understandings of privacy prohibited the sharing of these rules. Members of the elite classes asserted their superiority with correct behavior in every circumstance whether or not an audience observed it.

The cultural acceptance of new manners significantly limited and contextualized behaviors. Whereas formerly, men and women of all ranks relied on their emotions and feelings to dictate their behavior in public and in private, they were now obliged to restrict

[321] MS Beckford c. 18 fols 1-27, Louisa letter to William Beckford 1782 (Brignoles).
[322] Ibid.

their behaviors to a narrow set of acceptable responses and actions deemed appropriate for the public realm. By dividing the world into two discreet theoretical concepts, 'public' and 'private' were not only oppositional, they were often contradictory in aim and in nature. The disappearance of certain behaviors in public led them to become secret. What cannot be spoken of may appear, as Elias and Greenblatt suggest, in dreams, in books, in pictures, and in allegory, but they cannot give rise to robust public discourse until they become public.[323] It is easy to see how the secret nature of erotic materials and behaviors condemned them to the realm of the illicit. What is interesting is that representation and intimacy were not actually separable. While it is true that image crafting was slackened in certain areas within private spaces and in private company, the 'exact accounts' of sexual voyeurism depicted in erotic and pornographic materials inevitably depicted elements contributing to social status and representations. Within representations of sexual intimacy were inherent clues to social status. These combined elements served to craft and announce clues to sexual personality. As readers incorporated secretly gleaned secret knowledge into their personal practices, they established a template for normative sexual behaviors based on fictional representations.

In many ways, the sexually proficient gentleman in an erotic storyline provided a vision of refined masculinity that could coexist with sexuality. The cultural transition from crudity to refinement had created the satirical figure of the fop, a man so refined he had lost his masculinity and, by extension, his virility. The fop's refined clothing, predilection

[323] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 3; Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 65, for a discussion of Todorov, delayed meaning, and allegory.

for powder and patches, and effeminate 'French' manners robbed him of his sexual attraction to women, or so men alleged. With fictional examples of courtiers and gentlemen who seduced women on a regular basis and were also conversant with high fashion, powder, and social niceties, there was room for the development of alternative templates in which these social markers of refinement and status did not preclude the possibility of successful seduction. Indeed, the existence of Giacomo Casanova, a man famed for his excessive sexual conquests, mirrored the template provided by so many extant erotic novels.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Casanova's success as a lover was predicated on his gentlemanly status which was seen to bolster his sexual expertise. Refined sexual practices were seen to be connected with the refined spaces and refined people. As the refined man became acceptably sexualized and so legitimized, the brutish man who relied on force and strength to assert his sexual will over women fell out of favor with women and men alike. The aim of all good manners and refinements was the realization of comfort for the other. Noblesse oblige in the context of sexuality meant shared pleasure and mutual consideration. Just as good manners had refined everyday situations from shopping to the new social habits of tea and coffee, so too did new sexual manners and accepted behaviors taught in the erotic examples in print refine the practices in person.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the social and cultural fabric of British society evolved and changed. The relationship of material objects to ownership, gender and class became increasingly linked to new perceptions of power and rank. Tangible objects and representations of objects served as both structure and grammar for new social situations, and were formally recognized in legal codes. The evolution of an understanding of property not only as land but as movable chattel goods spread across every socioeconomic class, reshaping and complicating traditional symbols of power and the relationships of those relying on power. With the first phase of industrialization in Britain coupled with a wider mercantile theatre of foreign luxury goods and populuxe goods for mass consumption, old symbols of social power were supplanted by new and unstable goods which relied more on the symbiotic relationship between owner and object than inherent historical symbolism. This relationship between object and personality was further strengthened and intensified through representation in pictures, prints, and books. Accumulated objects served not merely as a representation of social status, but also as key indicators of personality and expectation. The material consequences of the civilizing process that Norbert Elias claims occurred in Europe from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries became bound up in new objects that facilitated social eminence and helped the owner claim status and power in the unstable new world of casual sociality. The relationship between owner and possession became highly personal in a social context even as its production became more mechanized. It was the eighteenth-century middle classes, in particular, who helped facilitate this transition from land to chattel property, from the

anonymity of pre crafted goods to the personal relationship of object and owner, especially in the new social spheres where these goods were used: "If the inanimate objects amassed carry the burden of sentiment through time, representing these objects serves only to enhance their intensity."[324]

Perhaps one of the most profound changes related to these developments was the creation of a new social sphere predicated on refined behaviors. At the table, in the drawing room, and outside the household walls, the importance of personal image in the configuration of rank and the power attached to it became greatly magnified. Objects and spaces began to play a more significant role in establishing the condition, temperament, and personality of the people associated with them. Lorna Weatherill's pioneering research on tea wares in household inventories across Britain, Amanda Vickery's profound contribution of middle class Georgian households analyzed in terms of gender and power and Norbert Elias's theory regarding the civilizing process that occurred in Europe from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries have greatly influenced my analysis of the social and cultural changes that occurred over the long eighteenth century in Britain. It was Elias who inspired me to think about the ways material culture, politeness, and new social rituals and paradigms challenged and bounded expressions and perceptions of sexuality.

The tea table and the couch, though ostensibly new furniture, were also new social spaces that functioned as portals to new social situations, many involving aspects of sexuality. The cordoning off of sexuality from other aspects of social interaction was a hallmark of refinement, as references to copulation became taboo and vulgar, yet there

[324] Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 30.

were many instances of more refined sexuality becoming entwined with the domestic social sphere. In the third chapter, for instance, we see the confluence of status and luxury goods with a specifically crafted sexual setting meant to influence the company to participate in an unregulated moment of sexual excess. The plasticity and flexibility of goods relied on social context to explain them and the status of their owner to verify their significance. This symbiotic relationship complicated understandings and created longer periods of instability for new items and by extension, the standing and motives of their owners. Satirical prints and magazine articles lampooned those who would use the market to their social advantage, pretending a status they did not possess with the possession of an object. The hostility to those who united the marks of labor with the symbols of leisure was unrelenting and harsh. Sir Joshua Reynolds, famous for his disdain of the *nouveau riche*, remarked on the impropriety of baubles on bodies that were unworthy of them. He asserted in 1777 that '… many a good woman whose arms are marked with an eternal red, from the industry of less prosperous days, considers the Bracelet, with the Minature [sic] Painting, as an ornament necessary to her Station in Life.'

The enhanced significance and intensity of objects represented in books and in pictures echoed throughout the social sphere. The creation of the conversation piece as a genre of personal self-expression underscored and immortalized the well understood relationship between portable chattel goods and individual personality within the physical and theoretical boundaries of the social sphere.

The treatment of women and the beliefs surrounding appropriate gendered behavior by men and women became yet another layer in the intrinsic identity and lifestyle

associated with practices such as dining, shopping, and celebrating. Art and song, food and fetes, came to reflect not only representations and idealizations of sexual paradigms, but also shaped them. As associations between objects and behaviors became more nuanced they enabled the transmission of coded sexual messages easily read by those in the know.

The importance of objects in relation to people, and in turn, their interactive social relationships, has been a compelling focus for anthropologists, sociologists, and historians for decades. Objects speak of ownership, of possession, of status, and death. Representation of these objects reinforces their symbolism and their significance, and this collective social repository of meaning acts as an underlying structure of all social relationships, communicating messages of personality and status within a social sphere.

The confluence of 'genteel appearance' luxury goods, and sexuality within social spaces was communicated visually through fashionable clothing and accessories that facilitated desire and heightened erotic feeling. Men and women of the polite world of the eighteenth century, whether located in the metropole or further afield in the Atlantic World of the American colonies, abided by codes of presentation dependent upon established social locations. While geographic locales differed in terms of a variety of goods and the particular styles of fashion, the shared knowledge of behavior appropriate to each specific social zone within the domestic house transcended the miles between the Old and New world, uniting them in a shared belief that gentility correlated with appearance, and in many ways depended upon fashion.

The combination of fashions and social spaces gave rise to many connections between the accessories appropriate in a polite drawing room and the social power

connected to them. Often, social power was connected to sexual desirability. In the specifically set social stage of the domestic drawing room, it was necessary for men and women alike to make extra efforts in terms of their appearance. Lady Sarah Lennox, for instance, distinguished between casual, powdered 'everyday' hairstyles and something 'perfectly genteel' that was appropriate for a drawing room; the social epicenter of the polite house.[325] Her instructions to her sister, Susan Fox-Strangways, carry an implicit warning about the social dangers of disregarding a genteel appearance, 'To be perfectly genteel you must be dressed thus…The roots of your hair must be drawn up straight, & not frizzled at all for half an inch, above the root.'[326] Lady Lennox's sister Emily used fashion in a more explicitly erotic context. Using expensive and fashionable stockings as a foil to set off her legs, she requested several pairs of elaborate clocked stockings from her husband when he visited London in 1762. Perhaps because of their obvious connection to erotic thought, he bought her even more than she had requested, making her a 'present of the dozen.' Inspired by thoughts of her 'dear, pretty legs' in his purchases, he confessed to Emily that, 'The writing about your stockings and dear, pretty legs makes me feel what is not to be expressed.' A sexual transaction was necessary to complete the order for stockings, however, and he made clear to Emily that he expected her to reward him for his expenditure; 'I… long very much for the acknowledgement [your] dear, dear legs are to make me for the trouble I have had upon their account, and make no doubt but that I shall be amply rewarded for the care I have had about them.' So distracted was Lord Kildare's

[325] Stella K. Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 85.
[326] Ibid., 86.

mind with thoughts of his wife's 'dear legs' in the clocked stockings that he feared he would 'sleep but little tonight thinking of them.'[327] By 1762, however, he knew the bawdy joking of a previous age to be vulgar and incongruent with gentility. Kildare references 'what is not to be spoken' but keeps his reference vague. The bawdy jokes and double entendres recommended in *The Beau's Academy*, published in 1699, were not only out of date, but vulgar. Not only does Kildare rely on euphemism to express his desire, but also the accoutrements of fashionable undergarments, purchased in a shop hundreds of miles from his wife, to stand in and enhance his future sexual bliss. This sophisticated seduction, which relied on luxury goods and objects to enhance the sexual experience, used the goods of the marketplace, the concept of fashion, and the newly important element of privacy to create new expectations for sexual satisfaction. When these objects, furnishings, and social settings were represented in prints and books in a sexual context reliant on the disruption of privacy and the sharing of secrets, a new paradigm of sexuality was born. No longer primarily thought of in relation to reproduction or blasphemy, sexuality had become an art in its own right. Giacomo Casanova's genteel seductions and William Beckford's sybaritic worlds were crafted with elite objects and furnishings meant to complement, rather than obscure their other gentlemanly pursuits. Relying on social cues, physical objects and spaces, and gendered beliefs about performance, the eighteenth-century paradigm regarding sexuality exhibited an important shift toward modernity as the objects of a productive marketplace and notions of gentility combined in a sexual arena to produce a new way of imagining erotic activity.

[327] Ibid., 88.

In a changing Britain, the tea table galvanized old concerns about women and power, the accumulation and display of wealth, and the control of sexuality. This new social ritual, which would become so innocuous and respectable a century later, was fraught with tension, instability, and distrust at its inception. It played upon men's fears about women's sexuality and power, and it introduced new refined objects that mediated sexual inappropriateness through patina goods, which were so valorized in their own right they could bear the associations with impropriety and emerge unscathed. The tea table also helped to re-order the spatial zones of the household, ultimately aiding women able to perform this social ceremony with flair, and placing men in a double bind over power and authority. Anxious patriarchs castigated women tea drinkers as prostitutes and associated them with ugliness and promiscuity, attempting to wrest power away from this new spatial zone that enhanced female social power. Ironically, the material items depicting erotic scenes, most notably erotic porcelain tea cups, were not used to disparage women tea drinkers. As long as risqué content was emblazoned on prohibitively expensive surfaces like silver and porcelain, it could avoid negative associations. Even as allegorical nudes, *bacchiante*, and erotic porcelain was becoming more common at tea tables across Britain, new prohibitions on speech were effectively curtailing the public mention of sexuality that had previously been a staple of social mirth. The simultaneous repression of sexualized speech and the emergence of erotically themed patina goods and decorative objects allowed men to effectively criticize respectable women drinking tea. When sexuality was transformed from the ephemeral to the concrete, it was tempered by the materials of luxury and thus recast as acceptable.

As a popular sexual expert in the 1920s, Dr. Gallichan explained the cultural changes regarding the practice and beliefs surrounding sexual expression that had been new in eighteenth-century Britain had become so deeply engrained that by the twentieth century, biology was used to explain what were now seen as universal differences amongst men and women. These templates of behavior had not always been normal or obvious. The struggle between the stereotype of the fop and the brute, fought in satirical imagery as well as public venues, had no obvious outcome to contemporaries witnessing the fracas. The enduring legacy of behaviors and beliefs first understood in terms of narrow class associations and notions of civility and refinement continued to evolve in the next century. The roots of these ideas grew until they became so popular during the Victorian era that they extended down the class ladder and were eventually considered universal. As associations with class vanished, biological difference explained behavior. The roots of revelations about women's "natural" sexual reserve and men's "impulse to dominate" are a product of a culture of respectability first forged amongst the British middle classes in the eighteenth century in opposition to prevailing norms.[328] As this dissertation has shown, marriage provided an arena for the expression of power and sexuality. When outside forces challenged this traditional balance of power, gender, materiality, and power were reconfigured and altered. As power was recast as restraint amongst the polite, barbarity and overt force were denigrated by their association with lower classes. In terms of sexual behavior, this was crucial in shaping future beliefs about the nature of men and women,

[328] William J. Fielding, *Sex and the Love-Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), 100.

and the nature of sexual expression and consent which still resonate today in the twenty-first century.

These beliefs introduced into the middle class social circles of Britons living in the eighteenth century when middle class women began to show refinement by restraining their sexual passions and ascribing to a template of gendered behavior that valorized sexual restraint as genteel. Novels, lovers' guides and didactic literature provided new models of restrained women resisting the advances of men determined to seduce them. While seventeenth-century women were seen to be sexually insatiable, the new model of womanhood championed polite sexual behavior amongst the middling. As I have illustrated, the 'coy resistance' of women in eighteenth-century Britain was intrinsically related to class. The twentieth-century statement about "coy resistance" called on the same historical ideas related to notions of respectability and, ultimately, class, but now biology was brought to bear in a sexual equation that cast man as hunter and woman as prey.[329] Sexual assault and force, in 1927, was conveniently relegated to a biological shortcoming on the part of men when their out of control 'nature' drove them too far in the pursuit of the "mating impulse."[330] Whereas early guides had spoken explicitly about the sequenced steps of seduction, advising actions such as "grasping her waist" and other step by step actions to promote pleasure, the twentieth century man knew that sexual expertise was a necessary precursor to marital happiness.

[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.

The stark divisions between polite society and their plebeian counterparts were mirrored in distinct patterns of social behaviors. Once social superiority was established by distinguishing behaviors related to economic associations, the opportunity for distinction compelled men and women to modify their behaviors in every category of life to avoid being associated with those considered beneath the minimum standard of decency. As the men and women of Britain became more refined over the course of the long eighteenth century, their ways of thinking about sexuality evolved and became more complex. The carnal urges associated with lust and sensory gratification were made more palatable and dignified by the polite classes through privacy, refined reference, improved technique, and an appeal to higher ideals. For middle class men and women, elevating conjugal activity from the rude passions of lust to the level of art required metaphors and an appeal to philosophic principles. The presence or absence of higher ideals underlay the actions of men and women, motivating them to different courses of action. Thus, while polite men were capable of indulging in the amorous "combat" of love, they did so motivated by "finer feelings" instead of animal lust.[331] As prohibitions of violence toward women expanded to include sexual violence, men assaulting women were now viewed as violators submitting to their lowest instincts.

When sexual impropriety could compromise a man's social standing or honor, men who had previously acted without discrimination were now socially, if not legally, accountable for their actions. Rape had always been punishable in the courts and in the

[331] *Agenor and Ismena; or, the war of the tender passions. A novel. In two volumes.* (London: 1759), 49, 177.

community, theoretically, but the link between actions of sexual violence and personal honor had never been as explicit as it was made in eighteenth century Britain.

Print culture reinforced this, with authors narrating violent assaults with inclusions about the moral shortcomings of the rapist. Privately printed pamphlets revealed the true nature of exalted figures condemned in print for sexual assaults against helpless women.[332] Eighteenth-century British society censured men who could not abstain from committing these ultimate offenses. Sexual assault, more often associated with foreigners and barbaric types, was thus considered below polite society and impervious of sexual restraint.

Restraint in the social world paid dividends in standing and respect within the community contributing to the 'invisible standard' necessary for acceptance into elite social circles. Tea had to be sipped slowly, with the top and bottom of the tea cup grasped precisely by the finger and thumb. Appetite had to be restrained and food consumed in a genteel manner, and dress, dancing, and conversation were to take place in ideal scenarios designed to highlight the practitioner's ease with these complex tasks. Sexual assault was the ultimate lack of control. It revealed a weakness or distaste for the rules of restraint that governed society and enabled it to function properly. Successful men relied on "Cool Reason" to provide "curbing Power" when lust threatened to overwhelm them.[333] The careful study of books dedicated to teaching refined methods of seduction helped these

[332] Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 164-69; John MacLaurin and Lord Dreghorn, *Arguments and Decisions in Remarkable Cases Before the High Court of Justiciary and Other Supreme Courts in Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1774), 117; Robert Drury, *The Devil of a Duke: Or, Trapolin's Vagaries. a (Farcical Ballad) Opera, As It Is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane. to Which Is Prefix'd the Musick to Each Song* (London: 1732), 11.
[333] Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love*, 21.

men raise their actions "Above the merely sensual touch of Brutes" and reap the rewards of sexual delight well into the future. The new image of man as the seducer directly challenged the traditional role of men as physical enforcers of their will, challenging them to heroically restrain their passions not only to avoid moral and legal crime in terms of assault, but also for the greater reward of women's pleasure. The modern valuation of men as skilled seducers was forged in the eighteenth century as men were challenged to show personal restraint and focus on the gratification of their partner. Sexual harmony between a husband and wife was an important dimension of marriage and men anticipating the possibility of a woman "demanding the dues of Venus" did not wish to risk being branded an inadequate "fumbler" unable to impress.[334] To the degree that rape and sexual assault validated the true nature of the brute who committed it, a successful seduction resulting in mutual pleasure reinforced the supposition of the presence of 'finer feelings' doubtless present in the mind and breast of one who had been tutored in the arts of love. Whereas men of earlier generations could coerce and use force to ensure their sexual needs were met without negative consequences, the changing social landscape of Britain was increasingly hostile to men who did not meet the minimum requirements of gentility, including those related to matters of love. With the profusion of lover's guides teaching men everything from how to write letters to their amorous prospects to the particular physical skills necessary to please their partner sexually when the time arose, competition increased. Men aware of the existence of these techniques now strove to perfect their own skill lest it harm their reputation. The imperative for sexual privacy left the possibility for

[334] Ibid., 5; *Curtain Lectures…*, 174, 225.

gossip and rumor to loom larger than previously. In the Stuart age, for instance, when bawdy talk was permissible and a shame frontier had not yet developed around sexual matters, gossip could be publicly refuted.[335] As prohibitions surrounding the discussion of sexual matters infiltrated the social circles of the polite, private behavior had to be guessed at through the observation of other activities that validated what could not be spoken of publicly. In this way, we see how the public image of the gentleman, showing his restraint and skill in the dining room and at the hunt, could be presumed skillful in private matters, including conjugal activities.

Print culture reinforced and contributed to links between social 'stages' and notions of civility or barbarity. The material furnishings in front parlors, dining rooms, and saloons were seen not only to reflect the degree of wealth and social standing of the householders, but also to reveal unspoken statements about personality. Interestingly, in the represented worlds of erotic fiction and pornography, furnishings were arguably more significant than they were in person. Marcia Pointon's claim that the meaning of objects is magnified in representation is especially true in the private imagery consumed in private on a topic increasingly restricted in public. The public nature of luxury objects made them ideal transmitters and receptacles of signals too risky to verbalize. With every passing year, refinements multiplied and spread across society, encroaching on the freedoms of self-expression and recasting parts of the social self into symbolic items capable of speaking what was now unsuitable to voice.

[335] Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, chapter 3 "The Language of Insult".

In print culture, the signals known in polite social circles were replicated, signaling the authenticity of "true" reporting and adding to the sense of voyeurism experienced by the reader. For courtiers reading *Alexis the Courtier*, the depiction of the Courtiers Gallery at Kensington Palace, completed in 1714, would have been familiar and recognizable, for a person lower on the social ladder, the depiction of such an elite space connected to social and political power could inform her of other lifestyles only accessible in the representative world of print.

The invisible standard of true elites was made of the material cyphers inherent in the arrangement of furniture in social spaces, in the canvases and prints displayed on their walls, and in the particular configuration of their tea tables, decorated with elite imported commodities. In terms of eighteenth-century sexual media, the presence of these publicly valorized luxury objects provided a layer of refinement to the sexual content. To aspirants consuming stories of private assignations amongst the elite, the imagery and descriptions of furniture also offered a view into the social and private spaces of elite households. Just as a middling merchant might have read didactic literature to learn how to genteelly ask an acquaintance to dinner, anyone reading erotica or pornography set in the social worlds of another class would learn of particulars they might never see in person. As items multiplied, meanings became more nuanced. Couches and Turkish rugs, as I have shown, were viewed with suspicion in eighteenth-century Britain because of their 'obvious' sexualized nature, but by the nineteenth century, these items had become not only banal, but indicative of the typical furnishings of a respectable middle class household. This was significant in lived behavior as well as in representations of private acts in erotic storylines,

where the presence of these items foreshadowed the licentious intent of the householder. As long as items remained unstable, they were capable of speaking sexual messages. Unlike allegory, which subsumes and makes palatable "that which cannot be said", furniture freighted with sexual connotations added a frisson of the forbidden and grafted the inappropriate onto the respectable. This carried over into lived experience. As chapter four has shown, when William Beckford wished to signal his intentions of sexual decadence to his guests at his Christmas party in 1781, he did so through the manipulation of his household space and the display of goods, punctuating 'front stage' areas with "Turkish couches" and "Turkish rugs."

A late nineteenth-century art critic writing about the painting, "Love Unbinding the Zone of Beauty" commonly called "Snake in the Grass" revealed the contrast in social manners occasioned by the display of particular imagery in public. The painting, which had hung in the dining room of Sir John Soane from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, was seen in a later and more conservative time, to be scandalous. The allegorical depiction of Cupid untying the ribbons on the dress of a nymph, which had been seen as an elevated subject fitting for the dining room of an elite and cosmopolitan man at its execution, was now viewed as too explicitly erotic. Despite the exemplary skill and fame of the artist and the refinement of allegorical symbols and classical allusions, this work was now seen to intrude on a refined social sphere that demanded the removal of sexual references from public view. In the eighteenth century, as I have shown, allegory and classical allusion bounded sexuality and made it a permissible and even refining element in household rooms increasingly specialized by use. Thus, the dining room at Lincoln's

Inn Fields would have been an exemplar of refined social space suited for elite socializing. The Pleaides painted on the ceiling above Mrs. Soane's customary chair and the painting by Reynolds would have been viewed as tasteful, elegant expressions of eroticism, suitable for mixed company and in keeping with the refined and public nature of the dining room, an epicenter of public entertainment in a genteel household.

The contrast, obvious to Soane and his guests, between coarse bawdy talk and the beauty of the female body, depicted by a virtuoso like Sir Joshua Reynolds, would have elevated and made permissible the erotic nature of the painting. Expressing sexuality through refined erotic imagery elevated content and made it appropriate in public. Showcasing such elevated imagery helped establish connections between the householder and refined feelings of delicacy that demanded a subtle and luxurious expression. As chapter one and chapter four have shown, valuable luxury goods associated with higher artistic properties were acceptable vehicles for the expression and containment of erotic imagery. Items like this painting and erotic china tea cups bounded sexuality and transformed an unruly, uncouth, subject into a refined image in a refined medium able to be displayed in front of visitors. While Georgians saw such imagery and allegorical objects as containing and controlling unruly sexuality, their descendants saw only the sexual elements of the composition. The Georgians refined sexuality; the Victorians removed it from view. Through the end of the seventeenth century, women were the obvious targets of clerics and other moral reformers quick to link their inherent sinfulness to the fall of Eve and condemn them for any attempts to gain power, especially social power associated with visual display. The familiar narrative of sermons posited women as vain, artificial, and

morally frail; potential Jezebel's on the brink of a fall if not kept strictly in line. This narrative served as a convenient excuse for anxious patriarchs wishing to deny the women under their control material items and elements of fashionable life that would enhance their social standing. By 1701, however, some pamphlet writers contested the religious arguments against women enhancing their beauty and following fashion through "painting the face."[336] There were practical reasons for a lady to resort to cosmetics, such as "to keep up that which time would needs diminish."[337] The traditional objections to bodily adornment and display were directly challenged by the advancement of a marketplace based on the selling of superfluous luxury goods to a wider middling market. This pamphlet provides an example of changing thought that would be greatly expanded on as the eighteenth century progressed.

This dissertation has shown the refinement of sexuality as concurrent with the refinement of social behavior and the placement of material possessions in various physical settings. While the Georgians' more refined and civil behavior contrasted with their predecessors, the Stuarts, the Georgians' legacy of refinements was taken even further by their own descendants who saw them as having lived in a time of comparative freedom. While Sir John Soane's guests would have seen good taste and restraint in one of his favorite paintings, the next generation saw profligacy and vulgarity.

In a letter written in the last year of his life, William Beckford, then 84, reflected on the change in social mores that differed so starkly from his youth. His pleasures, hopes,

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[336] John Gauden, *Several Letters Between Two Ladies: wherein the lawfulness and unlawfulness of artificial beauty in point of conscience, are nicely debated* (London: 1701), A4.

[337] Ibid,. A3.

and dreams, catered to and enlivened during his Georgian youth, were now supplanted by more rigid social codes that prohibited the freedoms most precious to him. He was "chilled by the present age" which he saw as fundamentally different from his youth. By 1844, the proliferation of refinements had changed the social landscape and made it more restrictive than it had been in the Georgian era. Tea was seen as respectable, and began to take on connotations of the civility represented by empire as Britain triumphed over much of the globe. The splintering force of new manners in the Stuart age that had caused so much tension in the eighteenth century had been resolved in the Victorian era. By 1830, the imperatives of respectability and public image extended even to servants. Beliefs about public behavior, women, humor, and sexuality had been elaborately codified and respectable behavior could be expected even from the low born and uneducated. Britons were united in a nationalistic show of civility and superiority in opposition to the rest of the globe. From New Delhi to Rhodesia, Britons of all ranks had come to believe their native blood was superior to those of the "savages" they presided over. Race had replaced class as the metric of value.

The Stuart courtier who viewed bawdy talk as a social asset had been refined into the eighteenth-century patriarch whose orderly and elegant household reflected his polite status. The Victorian man now navigated a social world so refined and complex that no matter his class he was obliged to change clothes multiple times a day. Sexual media, too, was inherently different than it had been previously. New printing and lithography techniques had made high quality, detailed imagery accessible to all classes. The two dimensional line drawings on seventeenth century ballads had disappeared with the advent

of better engraving techniques, but lithography, color plates and the new invention of daguerreotypes was further changing the visual expectations of consumers of erotica across all classes. The fledgling division between public and private had been considerably strengthened, and all classes of people were now concerned lest their public reputation be damaged by rumors of their failure to restrain or control some aspect of their bodies, their expressions, and their disclosures. Removing the impolite from public view, suppressing the primary drives of the body, and behaving in refined and polite ways in social company was no longer the purview of a small group of elites distinguishing themselves through this behavior, it was the minimum standard of social discourse for all members of society. In terms of gender, sexuality and power were assigned to men, who were seen to have sexual passions they needed to guard against, while women were seen to be colder and less libidinous than ever. The category of sexual media, however, safely private, catered to a variety of sexual tastes. The categories of Victorian erotica were so extensive it took Henry Spencer Ashbee years to meticulously catalog them. Class became even more entrenched with these depictions of sexual behavior and desire. Men and women now well versed in the language of objects were presented with specially crafted rooms, furniture, and spaces meant to raise desire and showcase decadence. Erotic plot lines incorporated secret spaces, hypocrisy, and specialized arrangements of furniture to showcase the personality and style of living where actions occurred. The dirt rubbed off of the Stuarts had become the new varnish of the Georgians, which in turn became the daily expectations of the Victorians. Sexuality was not permitted in public at all, but in private spaces and private books, it flourished in a way impossible before these prohibitions had added to its scandalous nature.

Humor reflected these changed beliefs. The tales of cuckolds, so amusing to seventeenth-century Britons, had been replaced by rape as a current joke, but by the Victorian era, rape was the ultimate tragedy, no longer even permissible to discuss except in the euphemism "ruined." The household structure was now portrayed as women's natural environment, safe from the dangers and impurities of the corrupting world. Women were now seen to have natural authority over the décor and management of the house, and their most acceptable foray into the outside world was shopping. Change had been achieved through hyper refinement extending to all classes, and would continue to affect generations coming of age in the twentieth century.

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ABSTRACT

'THE LUXURIOUS FANCIES OF VICE': SEXUALITY, LUXURY, AND SPACE IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH SOCIAL SPHERE

by

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This project examines the refinement of sexuality over the course of the long eighteenth century in Britain in relation to a changing social and material world. The class connotations associated with seduction and sexual violence were used to elevate and denigrate men who aligned on one side of the divide between restraint and force, and the sexual nature of men was often indicated by the positional goods they were associated with. In person and in print, objects became freighted with meanings connecting sexuality and status in ways that could not be separated. By analyzing the decorative objects and luxury furnishings depicted in prints and literature, it is possible to understand the construction of many social norms connected to sexuality. Masculinity, restraint, feminine posture, and 'turkey rugs' were diachronically and synchronically linked to the representations of people and objects in social situations, shaping and shaped by the magnification inherent in visual reproductions.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Joelle Del Rose researches luxury, sexuality, and social spaces in eighteenth-century Britain. She is particularly interested in social changes brought about by new objects, and their representations in paintings and print culture.