Reading London: the Literary Representation of the City's Pleasures, 1700-1782

Leya Landau

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the representation, in fiction, of London’s spaces of pleasure, in the period between 1700 and 1782. It examines the way that these literary depictions both reflect and create their own imaginary versions of familiar urban sites. The thesis engages with recent work by social historians and theorists of eighteenth-century culture, and argues that a gradual shift in cultural sensibilities, from polite urbane respectability to a more bourgeois and feminine sentimentalism, is articulated through literary portrayals of London’s urban spaces. My reading of ‘the city as text’ treats London as a place to be deciphered by the reader, and considers historical detail and peculiarities, rather than theoretical and ahistorical interpretation, as integral to the discussion. The chapters are organized as a series of case-studies, centred around places rather than authors, and focus on the relationship between geography and literature.

In the first chapter I investigate the way in which the relocation of the theatres from the outskirts of London to the centre of the city was selectively represented in contemporary literature. The chapter starts with the treatment of the London playhouse in periodicals and scandalous fiction, in the early part of the century, and considers how the cliché of theatrum mundi is given a topical relevance in debates concerning urban identity. It goes on to discuss changing attitudes to the playhouse in various novels, focusing particularly on Samuel Richardson’s mid-century ambivalence about the theatre, in his dual role as guardian of the City’s morals and author of popular fiction. I also discuss the correlation between the identity of readers of novels and the identity of playhouse audiences. The second chapter examines the changing attitude to Italian opera and the Opera House, from excoriating criticism in early Scriblerian satire to praise and acclaim in the later literature of sensibility. In the third chapter I discuss the changing fictional representation of London’s more exclusive pleasure gardens – Vauxhall and Ranelagh. The chapter also considers how certain popular literary works, in particular The Arabian Nights (which first appeared in English translation in 1706) and Richardson’s Pamela (1740-1), shaped the reputation and design of the gardens. The final chapter examines the fictional representation of the coffee-house. I explore the way in which early periodicals like The Tatler and The Spectator construct a polite and urbane version of London through a selective presentation of the city’s coffee-houses. I go on to trace the evolution of early literary tropes associated with the coffee-house, in later works, particularly novels. These include the connection between the variety of coffee-houses and shifting urban identity, and the significance of the absence of women, in literary portraits, from the eighteenth-century coffee-house.
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Introduction

In 1763, a young James Boswell described in his _London Journal_ (1762-3) how he wished to be perceived by his peers:

Could I but fix myself in such a character and preserve it uniformly, I should be exceedingly happy. I hope to do so and to attain a constancy and dignity without which I can never be satisfied, as I have these ideas strong and pride myself in thinking that my natural character is one of dignity. My friend Temple is very good in consoling me by saying that I may be such a man, and that people will say, 'Mr. Boswell is quite altered from the dissipated, inconstant fellow that he was. He is now a reserved, grave sort of a man. But indeed that was his real character; and he only deviated into these eccentric paths for a while.'

Boswell wryly ponders the notion of a 'natural character', identifying an essential latent dignity, which will replace the temporary dissoluteness that has hitherto characterized his stay in London. He wishes to abandon the shifting urban mode of seeming and of performance, and embrace a single part which will most effectively express his 'true' city identity. To 'fix himself in character', he must choose a personality that conveys the respectability he seeks to embody. It is not so much a case of disclosing intrinsic traits and qualities that the writer implies here, as remaining faithful to an unchanging role. He must not deviate from a particular character if he is to 'attain a constancy and dignity' which will be respected by observers.

A few months earlier during his stay in London, Boswell had indicated the part he wished to play in the city:

I felt strong dispositions to be a Mr. Addison. Indeed, I had accustomed myself so much to laugh at everything that it required time to render my imagination solid and give me just notions of real life and of religion. But I hoped by degrees to attain to some degrees of propriety. Mr Addison's character in sentiment, mixed with a little of the gaiety of Sir Richard Steele.

Boswell's familiarity with the pages of _The Spectator_ elicits a desire to fuse two recognizable polite, urban personae into a single metropolitan identity; an alloy comprising

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2 Ibid., p. 62.
the restrained dignified sentiments of Joseph Addison, and the more diverting humour of Richard Steele. Ironically, it is Boswell’s imitations of the authorial identities of writers like Addison and Steele which will endow him with a greater ‘natural’ gravitas, in a city which has the ability to confer a sequence of separate identities on its population.

These private, urban meditations reveal more than the familiar idea that the metropolis, by virtue of its size and anonymity, allows for performance and dissimulation – characteristics which can be identified in representations of the city from almost any period. Boswell’s reading of the capital is filtered through the particular and selective impressions offered by The Spectator (1711-14). What we see is a young ingénu negotiating the city through the pages of an urbane body of writing, which had constructed its own representation of a more polite and respectable London fifty years earlier. As he embarks on a personal exploration of the capital, Boswell treats the city as a text to be read, partly through his own discoveries and interpretations, but more significantly, as it has been described in previous works; and his own urban identity – the way he conducts himself in the city – is significantly influenced and shaped by residual images from earlier urban writings.

The idea of the ‘city as text’, a place to be read and interpreted, is an appealing one for literary critics, as well as cultural and urban theorists. It suggests that a sprawling and socially discontinuous topography can be deciphered and ordered into some sort of consistent and logical urban code. In one of the earliest attempts to map out a semiotics of the city, Kevin Lynch comments: ‘[I]egibility is crucial in the city setting.’3 Lynch’s study, The Image of the City (1960), treated metropolitan features such as the paths, districts, edges and landmarks as units in a form of urban semantics. His work is invoked by Roland Barthes in an essay entitled ‘Semiology and the City’ (1967).4 Although Barthes expresses certain reservations about Lynch’s approach,5 he offers a similarly abstract approach to understanding urban space: ‘the city is writing. He who moves about the city ... is a kind of reader.’ He continues: ‘[d]ominating all these readings by different categories of readers (for we have a complete scale of readers, from the native to the stranger) we would thus

5 Barthes describes Lynch’s conception of the city as ‘more Gestalt than structural’, Semiology and the Urban’, p. 90.
work out the language of the city.6

What these theoretical analyses imply is that there is such a thing as a synchronic urban language; one that is uncoloured and unaffected by historical or social detail. But they fail to allow for the way that a reading of a city might change over time. Robert Darnton has provided a model of how to read the city in history.7 He offers a painstaking elucidation of the way that a French bourgeois citizen, in 1768, reconstructed and thereby reordered the social topography of his city, Montpellier, in writing.8 Darnton asks: ‘how can one put “the true idea of a city” on paper, especially if one cares about the city and the supply of paper is endless?’9 He goes on to explain how the author’s construction of his city’s social order was ‘dominated by a mixture of the old elite and nouveaux riches ... It derived from the way he read society’.10 What emerges from the Description is ‘[n]either an aristocratic honor code nor a bourgeois work ethic, it expressed a new urbanity and marked the emergence of a new ideal type: the gentleman’.11 The writer demonstrates a reading of the city as the setting for, and cultivator of, a new urban character: the middle-class citizen, whose increased affluence allows him to participate in the same new urban pleasures as the aristocrat.

My own treatment of eighteenth-century London follows Darnton’s approach to urban reading insofar as it considers historical detail to be integral to a literary investigation of the city. I do not want to elide distinct periods and discrete places in a more general and ahistorical analysis of the city’s properties. Instead, the thesis engages with work by social and cultural historians in order to throw light on the way that fiction constructs its own version of the city. I also accept Darnton’s caveat that one can too easily attach to the term ‘bourgeois’ an arbitrary set of values, and then find a body of writing which reflects those values.12 However, I would qualify his claim that the category recognized as ‘bourgeois literature’ is ‘literature that expresses the outlook of the bourgeoisie – without making

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6 Ibid., pp. 95; 97.
9 Ibid., p. 108.
10 Ibid., pp. 126-27.
11 Ibid., p. 139.
12 Darnton adds that, ‘at all levels of research, scholars have responded to the call – cherchez, le bourgeois – but they have failed to find him’, ‘A Bourgeois Puts his World in Order’, p. 113.
contact with social literature'. In this dissertation, I demonstrate how literary representations of eighteenth-century London are in many ways predicated on contemporary social and historical detail. I believe that the most illuminating and significant insights into fictional depictions of the metropolis are to be found in the gap that opens up between literary interpretation and what is taken to be historical fact. In a recent study of the relationship between geography and the nineteenth-century novel, Franco Moretti has termed this disjunction 'an asymmetry of the real and the imaginary'. I suggest that it is precisely when fiction departs from historical representations to generate its own internal urban narrative, that we can begin to explore the way that literature shapes, and not only reflects, our perceptions of the city. While Moretti suggests that geography is the most effective tool with which to explore fictional representations of the city, I believe that a study of a city in a particular period must also constantly engage with contemporary historical versions of the same urban sites.

The appropriation and transfiguration of the metropolis by literature has been noted by readers of the city. Writing about Venice, Tony Tanner comments:

A city's representational life is quite different from its historic, economic, demographic, cartographic, political, ceremonial, cultural life, though of course it may draw on and indirectly reflect or transcribe elements from any or all of these dimensions of the city's existence ... In a very real and important sense, we inhabit the city as it has been written and rewritten as well as the city as it has been built and rebuilt.

Tanner acknowledges that cities which are portrayed and deployed in literature may occasionally relate to other forms of representation. There is a sense, though, in which he underplays the relationship between historical data and the city depicted in fiction; the imaginary city in literature, according to Tanner, differs from its real constituent political, economic and demographic parts.

My exploration of eighteenth-century London concentrates on a particular aspect of the capital, and focuses on the way that Londoners enjoyed seeing familiar urban sites portrayed in the reading matter they consumed. Roy Porter comments: 'Georgian

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13 Ibid., p. 113.
Londoners became city-watchers, self-referential. They relished art and novels, journalism and theatre about themselves and their world ... Londoners fell in love with themselves.'16 The London I investigate is a reflection of a changing city that new consumers wanted to read about. Roy Porter succinctly puts the case for the transformation of London’s cultural life in the eighteenth century: ‘Georgian London’, he writes, ‘had a well-mapped topography of pleasure’.17 It is this version of the city with which I am concerned.

It is a different London from the city so imaginatively and exhaustively revealed by Pat Rogers in his classic study, Grub Street, first published in 1972.18 In his book, Rogers argues that Grub Street is not merely a dead metaphor deployed generally to define the target of scathing criticism by a group of satirists in early eighteenth-century London. For Rogers, Grub Street is ‘the proper home, topographically and morally of the suburban muse’.19 It is situated on the outskirts of the City, not far from Moorfields and Bedlam, and provides a ‘route-map to explore the comedy of Grub Street’.20 The hacks and dunces associated with this area are shown to occupy a real and specific topographical area in the city. Rogers comments: ‘[t]his means that the scribbler’s environment is as much the satiric target as the writers themselves. Grub Street is the Dunce’s milieu; but it is also the expression of their corporate identity.’21 The urban space inhabited by these scribblers – ‘that harsh, fetid, oppressively physical world of pain and pestilence which dominates the landscape of Pope, Swift and Hogarth’22 – is inseparable from its denizens, and their surroundings appear almost as frequently as the hack writers, in satirical works by writers like by Pope, Swift, Gay, Defoe and Fielding; ‘London, indeed, becomes a central symbol of their work.’23

This dissertation also considers London to be its main subject, and like Rogers’ study, ‘it has one foot in the real world, the other in an imaginative realm’.24 But it focuses on a different aspect of eighteenth-century London. The capital was developing a ‘culture of

17 Ibid., p. 169.
19 Ibid., p. 31.
20 Ibid., p. 6.
21 Ibid., p. 3.
22 Ibid., p. 2.
23 Ibid., p. 2.
24 Ibid., p. 3.
sociability ... [in] increasingly secular form and content, contributing to what has been called the commercialization of leisure'. In an analysis of the ‘consumer revolution’ which took place during the eighteenth century, Neil McKendrick asserts that, ‘by 1700 the embryonic development of a consumer society had already begun’. McKendrick draws attention to the importance of London and emphasizes that its ‘potential for influencing consumer behaviour was enormous. It served as the shopkeeper for the whole country, the centre of forms of conspicuous consumption which would be eagerly mimicked elsewhere’. In demographic terms, the fact that, between 1650 and 1750 one in six adults had, at some point in their lives, experienced working or living in London, meant that its significance for dictating and disseminating new trends and fashions far outstripped any other English, or even European, city. In his recent, extensive survey of English culture in the eighteenth century, John Brewer writes that ‘London ... stood out as the metropolis of the moment, a city of riches, conscious of its rising status and eager to clothe its naked wealth in the elegant and respectable garments of good taste.’ If, as Walter Benjamin claimed, Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century, it seemed that London occupied the same status in the eighteenth century.

London’s unique position as the commercial heart of the country was not limited to the range of consumer goods and luxuries increasingly available in the capital. It also manifested its cultural prestige through the emergence of new spaces of pleasure in the city. Their appearance also signals the increased influence of the fruits of commerce. Again, John Brewer comments:

[I]n the late seventeenth century high culture moved out of the narrow confines of the court and into diverse spaces in London. It slipped out of palaces and into coffee-houses ... ceasing to be the handmaiden of royal politics, it became the partner of commerce. Between the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the accession of George III one hundred years later, art, literature, music and the

27 Ibid., p. 21.
theatre were transformed into commercial enterprises.\textsuperscript{30}

As high culture detached itself from the royal palaces, it refashioned itself geographically in different places in London; mostly in the increasingly fashionable ‘Town’, but also sporadically in the City. The relationship between commerce and London’s new urban pleasures was established and strengthened by the part played by managers and financial investors in the popularization of these metropolitan pleasure resorts. Pat Rogers has examined the role of the impresario, particularly in relation to the theatre, opera and masquerade during the eighteenth century. ‘In an age of commercial consolidation’, he writes, ‘even the haunts of pleasure were put into the hands of a professional.’\textsuperscript{31}

This dissertation explores the literary representation of some of these new urban spaces. Rather than treating fiction as a transparent medium and a useful contemporary source of information, I examine the relationship between these places and the genres in which they are depicted. The thesis spans some eighty years, covering a range of authors and literary genres. It moves from periodicals and scandalous amatory fictions in the early eighteenth century to the developing novel, and through to the literature of sensibility that becomes dominant after the mid-century. Fanny Burney’s epistolary novel \textit{Cecilia}(1782) is the latest work of fiction to be considered in this dissertation, and corresponds with the chronological and historical limits of my research, at the end of the 1770s. This study also registers a change in the emotional climate, which, as I will discuss in more detail below, had an influence on the way London’s pleasure resorts were perceived in this period. In this sense, the intentions of my thesis differ from the treatment of London in eighteenth-century literature offered by Max Byrd in his study \textit{London Transformed},\textsuperscript{32} which views London respectively through the works of Defoe, Pope, Boswell and Wordsworth. Although Byrd’s study is broader than his subject divisions imply, I put an emphasis on places rather than limiting the field to a series of individual authorial perspectives – albeit perspectives which span many years and employ different genres. By tracing the changing depictions of particular urban sites in the fiction of the period, I suggest that one can detect a relationship between changing literary forms and sensibilities, and the shifting

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 3.
The chapters take the form of a series of four case-studies, each centred around a specific resort in London: the theatre, the opera-house, Vauxhall and Ranelagh pleasure gardens, and the coffee-house. In each case, the beginning of the eighteenth century marks either the introduction of a new form of cultural entertainment to the capital, or a significant change in the location or social character of an already familiar venue. In the first chapter I examine the changing representation of the theatre. In the seventeenth century, the London playhouse gradually ceased to be associated with marginal and liminal zones, outside the jurisdiction of the city’s authorities. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the theatres moved inwards, and were no longer attached to the sites of royal palaces, establishing more permanent sites in the Town, as well as generating illegal competition in the City. In the second chapter I look at the progress of Italian opera, which was introduced to London in 1705, where it soon established a less equivocal, fashionable residence in the Haymarket, in the western part of the Town. The third chapter deals with London’s two most exclusive pleasure-grounds: Vauxhall and Ranelagh, which were situated on opposite banks of the Thames, in Lambeth and Chelsea respectively, on the outskirts of the city. Although Vauxhall existed in the second half of the previous century, when it was known also as Spring Gardens, it was only during the first half of the eighteenth century that its hitherto scandalous reputation was transformed by the entrepreneurial talents of Jonathan Tyers into a more identifiable urban respectability. In 1742, Ranelagh, a rival to Vauxhall opened, offering a polite alternative to the semi-reformed Vauxhall Gardens. The London coffee-house forms the subject of the final chapter. Although coffee-houses were also part of the urban landscape in the later part of the seventeenth century, their refashioning as urbane spaces of polite, masculine conviviality, both in the Town and in the City, took place early in the eighteenth century, largely through the pages of periodicals like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

What these urban resorts all shared, apart from their contemporary novelty, was a popular reputation, or at least a wish to be seen, as polite and respectable venues for a particular social group. Although these places attracted aristocratic members of the beau monde, they also appealed to a more middle-class market. Paul Langford describes how:

> a society in which the most vigorous and growing element was a commercial middle class, involved both in production and consumption, required a more sophisticated means of regulating manners. Politeness conveyed upper-class
gentility, enlightenment, and sociability to a much wider élite whose only qualification was money, but who were glad to spend it on acquiring the status of gentleman.33

The commercialization of London’s public sphere meant that the new purchasing power of a newly affluent class enabled its members to emulate their social superiors by gaining access to the same urban spaces of pleasure, on payment of a fixed admission fee. The character of the place itself, constructed through different forms of urban writing, conferred on its visitors, almost regardless of their true social status, a temporary public identity. In a form of urban negative capability, the unknown individual, lacking any intrinsic identity, was able to absorb the character of his surroundings before moving on to the next venue. Given the size and anonymity of London’s population, it became almost impossible to distinguish between those, mingling in the same public setting, who were truly members of the more fashionable strata of society and those who were acting out that role. The city is increasingly invoked in the writing of this period to describe the unsettling experience of observing unstable and constantly metamorphosing public identities. Urban sites are used in contemporary literature to provide a distinctive vocabulary with which to describe the relationship between popular spaces – assisted and promoted by commerce – and the social performances they fostered. This point can be illustrated with an example from probably the most famous mid-century novel, Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747-8).

After escaping from virtual incarceration in Mrs Sinclair’s bawdy house, Clarissa takes lodgings with the Smiths, respectable shopkeepers, in the City. Clarissa gives a description of them to her friend Anna Howe. Mr Smith is:

- a glove-maker, as well as seller. His wife is the shopkeeper. A dealer also in stockings, ribbands, snuff and perfumes. A matron-like woman, plain-hearted, and prudent. The husband an honest, industrious man. And they live in good understanding with each other. A proof with me that hearts are right.34

Clarissa’s new protectors are presented as honest City workers, endowed with the puritan

work ethic which Richardson himself advocated. That Clarissa chooses to stay in the commercial part of London while Lovelace is shown to be a natural resident of the Town implies the mapping out of a kind of moral geography in the novel. Shopkeepers possess an innate decency which is shown to be lacking in London’s more fashionable circles. Lovelace conveys his churlishness when he enters the shop in an attempt to find Clarissa, and threatens and insults the establishment’s clientele by temporarily adopting the pose of a shop assistant. During the eighteenth century, shops became increasingly popular features of the city’s topography. Neil McKendrick describes how London became the ‘radiant centre of the fashion world and conspicuous consumption, transmitting through its season, its exhibitions, its shops and their trade cards, new patterns of consumption more widely than ever before’.

But it is not so much the material depiction of the shop on which I want to focus as the way that this increasingly familiar urban site is reflected in a new vocabulary for articulating a sense of urban identity. In Clarissa, a particular city location which has previously been identified as a morally safe resort is deployed by two of the novel’s more dubious male characters. In an extended correspondence, Lovelace and his former cohort, the recently reformed Belford, debate the notion of a true and integral identity. Responding to a letter from Belford, in which the friend appears to be turning against the seducer, Lovelace offers a description of his former ally:

Men are known by their companions; and a fop ... takes great pains to hang out a sign, by his dress, of what he has in his shop. Thou, indeed, art an exception; dressing like an coxcomb, yet a very clever fellow. Nevertheless so clumsy a beau, that thou seemest to me to owe thyself a double spite, making thy ungracefulness appear the more ungraceful by thy remarkable tawdriness when

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35 Patricia Meyer Spacks comments: ‘The Harlowes are often said to represent bourgeois consciousness; the Smiths, however, much more directly epitomize the rising bourgeoisie’, ‘Women and the City’, 485-507, in Johnson and His Age, ed. James Engell, (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 496. Spacks also points out that Fanny Burney’s Evelina (1778) advocates more aristocratic sensibilities in its obvious snobbery and disapproval of Evelina’s shopkeeping relatives, the Branghtons.


The marketing analogy, with its associations of display and exhibition is an appropriate and modern one for a character whose stock-in-trade is outer show and performance. The shop advertizes its inner wares by hanging a sign outside; the urban actor tries to persuade the observer that what he sees is a reflection of the inner character. What Belford does is to disrupt this neat correlation by divorcing the external view – in his case, ‘dressing like a coxcomb’ – from a more artful (Lovelace resists recognizing his friend’s superior moral sensibilities at this point) interior. If men are ‘known by their companions’, then Belford complicates matters by appearing as what he is not, thus confusing Lovelace’s own sense of identity.

When Belford replies, he modifies the analogy to draw a definite distinction between himself and the seducer and destroyer of Clarissa Harlowe. He writes passionately: ‘As to my dress, and thy dress, I have only to say that the sum total of thy observation is this: that my outside is the worst of me; and thine the best of thee: and what gettest thou by the comparison? Do thou reform the one, and I’ll try to mend the other.’ Belford implies that Lovelace’s urbane and attractive exteriority belies an innate corruptness which can only be reformed through genuine repentance; his own disjunction can be more easily remedied by a change of clothes. But what these characters both indicate is the ease with which it is possible to deceive and dissimulate in a setting like the city, where appearance governs everything. Two letters later, Belford recovers the original mercantile metaphor:

But you are really a strange mortal. Because you have advantage in your person, in your air, and intellect, above all the men I know, and a face that would deceive the devil, you can’t think any man else tolerable.

It is upon this modest principle that thou deridest some of us who, not having thy confidence in their outside performance, seek to hide their defects by the tailor’s and peruke-maker’s assistance (mistakenly enough, if it be really done so absurdly as to expose them more); and sayest that we do but hang out a sign in our dress, of what we have in the shop our minds. Lovelace, tell me, if thou canst, what sort of a sign must thou hang out, wert thou obliged to give us a clear idea by it of the furniture of thy mind.

38 Richardson, Clarissa, pp. 1108-109.
39 Ibid., p. 1124.
40 Ibid., p. 1131.
In this letter, Belford resumes Lovelace’s shopping analogy. Instead of resorting to the banal and commonplace observation that a person’s outer appearance often contradicts their true character, he extends Lovelace’s conceit. He challenges his former companion to choose an external indicator of his corrupt character by allowing a familiar and contemporary feature of the cityscape – the London shop – to mediate a debate concerning the notion of public and private identity.

What is implied here is the idea that London’s topography, particularly one defining its sites of pleasure and consumption, is becoming familiar and recognizable enough to its readers to allow the author to use a specific urban location, in either a material or abstract sense, to impart a sense of an unstable urban identity and an idea of the city’s moral geography. Londoners and readers were increasingly able to enjoy reading about themselves and their city in the reading matter that they consumed. John Brewer remarks that ‘London was now repeatedly represented on the stage, in prose and verse, in painting and engraved image. The city had become not only the centre of culture but one of its key subjects’. What we see is the mirroring of a collective urban identity through different cultural media. And the contemporary novel was particularly susceptible to this tendency towards self-reflection: in the literature they consumed, urban tourists were able to read representations of familiar city pleasure resorts; portrayals which defamiliarized well-known features of London’s cityscape. Works like Daniel Defoe’s Tour though the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724-26) attempted to examine the allure of London as the highlight of the author’s itinerary, while certain sub-genres of the novel such as the epistolary model especially lent themselves to the fictional reinvention of the metropolis: the novel-in-letters often comprised the naive, untutored perspective of a young newcomer to the city, who describes his or her impressions to a remote recipient, who is equally ignorant of the city’s manners and customs. The more sophisticated and initiated reader delighted in seeing London read anew in these writings. The perennial urban thrill of ‘seeing and being seen’ in the metropolis is transferred to the pages of literature, as Londoners and other readers were able to indulge in ‘seeing themselves’, subtly transformed, but still recognizable, in fictional representations of their city.

There is a sense here of a relationship between genre and place; a connection between a particular perspective – both social and topographical – of the urban landscape and the form of literary expression through which it is communicated. Arthur Weitzman outlines the

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41 Brewer, The Pleasures of the Imagination, p. 3.

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relationship between writing and the city:

The growth of the city, its increased sophistication, fosters literacy and the demand for ‘culture,’ however one wishes to define it. A new industry materializes to supply this demand, and new art forms emerge: the novel, the sentimental drama, essays, newspapers, magazines, journalism of every type. We tend to take this development for granted, even to applaud it, but to the gloomy satirists of the Scriblerus circle the existence of Grub-Street and popular poetizing was an affront to older aristocratic ideals.42

The traditional scathing treatment of London in satirical portraits is noted by other critics. Ian Donaldson writes: ‘London is a constant background and a constant preoccupation in Augustan verse satire. The satirists offer us many views of London: scenic views, and moral views; in many subtle ways, the former assist the latter.’43 In other words, the conventions of satire dictate the representation of the city more forcefully than the personal prejudices and sensibilities of individual writers. Nowhere was this inconsistent and, to some extent, impersonal attitude to London embodied more clearly than in the various and disparate urban pronouncements of Samuel Johnson. In his early poem London (1738), he describes London thus: ‘Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire / And now a rabble rages, now a fire’ (ll. 13-14).44 As critics have frequently pointed out, Johnson’s London is closely modelled on Juvenal’s Third Satire, a poem which inveighed vehemently against the corruption of Rome.45 It is not my intention here to provide a close analysis of Johnson’s poem, but rather, to note, as others have, that Johnson’s adoption of a Juvenalian pose allows him to read the city through an earlier model of urban satire, much as Boswell was to read London through the pages of The Spectator. Juvenal’s Rome was ‘a sewer, a viciously corrupting force leading to brutality, sexual excess, and various forms of civic crime’.46 In London, Johnson asks: ‘For who would leave, un brib’d, Hibernia’s

land, / Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?’ (ll. 9-10). ‘The answer is’, as T. S. Eliot drily pointed out, ‘Samuel Johnson, if anybody.’ For it was Johnson (as recorded by Boswell) who performed the ultimate urban volte-face, when he declared, in 1777, in what is possibly the most hackneyed of truisms about eighteenth-century London: ‘Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.’ Although this is the most famous urban platitude attributed to Johnson, it seems to represent a more genuine feeling about the city than his earlier satirical ventriloquism had done. Paul Fussell comments: ‘[a]ctually, Johnson adored London and was exhilarated no end by its racy surface, enormities included. What he was doing in London: A Poem was turning a penny and bidding for reputation by providing readers with something familiar and yet just slightly new.’ In other words, Johnson’s early writings experimented with fixed genres which, it could be said, predetermined an apparent hostility to London; his real feelings were, perhaps, left to the anecdotes of amanuenses and admirers.

Johnson’s later reflections on the city are probably a more accurate indicator of his true feelings about London; his earlier satirical pose in London appears to be just that: the adoption of a recognized rhetorical position which says more about the tendencies of urban satire and Johnson’s anxieties as a young struggling writer than it does about the city itself. His celebration of the metropolis, later in his career, confirms the popular view that eighteenth-century London was becoming the capital of urban pleasures. And if satire was predisposed to a more prejudicial and jaundiced bias, other urban literary forms focused on the venues frequented by its readers, implying a more aspirational middle-class audience.

But although this form of urban writing conveyed a different London from the Tory perspective of early eighteenth-century satire, it could also be distinguished from more popular urban publications. Ian Watt comments:

The novel in the eighteenth century was closer to the economic capacity of the


50 Paul Langford, for example, writes: ‘some of the most notable cultural developments of the period, for example the expansion of the market for books and the immense popularity of novels and histories, reflected the taste of middle-class consumers’, Langford, A Polite and Commercial People, p. 59.
middle-class additions to the reading public than were many of the established and respectable forms of literature and scholarship, but it was not, strictly speaking, a popular literary form.

For those on the lower economic fringes of the book-buying public, there were, of course, many cheaper forms of printed entertainment; ballads at a halfpenny or a penny; chapbooks containing abbreviated chivalric romances, new stories of criminals, or accounts of extraordinary events, at prices ranging from a penny to sixpence.51

The novel was not the most popular form of urban printed matter; other, cheaper publications outstripped the consumption of the increasingly popular novel. But, what I want to show is that there is a connection between the fictional representation of London's venues and the implied readers of the many novels which dealt with urban themes; a reciprocal relationship between the metropolis and the fiction depicting its pleasure resorts, and the way that literature, in turn, shaped London's reputation in the public imagination. Arthur Weitzman asserts that one can detect 'the city's relentless influence on literary form. As the focus of literature shifts from an aristocratic ambience to the middle class, the traditional genres give way also'.52

The genre of the novel can, I suggest, be linked to the growing popularity of urban novelties. In his exploration of the emergence of the culture of sensibility and its expression in the increasingly popular novel, John Mullan speculates that it is appropriate that 'we should look first to the novel for the signs of sentimental fashion, and for the development of social instinct'. He goes on to propose that the 'novelistic fashion for sentiment should be understood in relation to the anxieties and the opportunities of a literary form which appeared unprecedented'.53 If the culture of sensibility can, by virtue of its newness and fashionability, be linked the recently established novel, I believe that the emergence of public urban spaces hosting new forms of urban entertainment share a similar sense of novelty and uncertainty about their lack of tradition.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I consider the correlation between the audience of London's more fashionable and licensed theatres in Drury Lane and Convent Garden

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and the readers of novels. This discussion frames an examination of the urban cliché of *theatrum mundi*, and places it in a contemporary topographical context, by tracing the inward movement of playhouses from the outskirts of London to the acknowledged centre of the beau monde in the Town. I trace the shifting attitude to, and representation of, the London theatre in early writings of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* as well as the scandalous amatory fictions of female writers like Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood. I contrast these literary depictions with contemporary attacks on the theatre by moral guardians of city morals, who object variously to the dangers posed to virtuous women by the playhouse and to the cultivation of performances and dissimulation in the streets of the capital. Samuel Richardson's mid-century hostility to the London stage continues this anti-theatrical tradition, but his dual authorial position as purveyor of the ethics of City commerce and writer of popular epistolary fiction renders his position more complicated. In his pamphlets, he objects to the unlicensed theatres in the City because of their detrimental influence on the formation of the character of the urban apprentice. In his fiction however, Richardson ignores the City theatre and focuses solely on the more fashionable playhouses in the Town. His ambivalence about the more popular theatres, however, is not shared by contemporary novelists, who deploy the popular idea urban performance and disguise in an explicitly theatrical context. The shift to a more favourable depiction of the theatre indicates both a changing attitude to the London playhouse, but also, more significantly, I suggest, the shaping of a more respectable reputation for a venue frequented by readers of these novels in the literature they consume. This relationship is disrupted, though, by the more complex and paradoxical treatment of the theatre in sentimental novels: in the literature of sensibility, the idea of creating a public identity through performance and dissimulation is condemned by a cultural movement which advocates emotional integrity and candour, but which is also distinguished by dramatic displays of feeling and inarticulate expression.

In the second chapter I trace the changing literary representation of Italian opera during the eighteenth century. Critics have often dwelt on the harsh treatment of opera by early satirists. While I also look at the portrayal of opera and the ridiculing of the popular castrati in these early works, I show how many of the abuses levelled at Italian opera share a critical vocabulary with writings expressing anxieties about the feminizing and corruption

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54 Peter de Bolla considers the relation between the activity of reading and other urban leisure pursuits. He discusses the 'social significance of the reading activity. In the first instance it is an indication of money: the ability to purchase reading matter, the possession of the leisure time in which to read, and the ownership of the social space in which to be seen engaged in the reading activity', *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 235.
of the city itself. I go on to demonstrate that the depiction of opera gradually changes, almost in conjunction with the transformation of literary sensibilities. The mid-century novel shows a Janus-faced response to Italian opera. A few works reprise certain phrases frequently deployed in satirical works from the beginning of the century. For example, echoes of the disapproval of Addison, Steele and Pope in the sequel to *Pamela*, published in 1742, look back to earlier satire and have an affinity with the contemporary aspersions cast on Italian opera by Pope’s final version of *The Dunciad*, completed in 1742 and published in 1743. This is countered, though, by a more sympathetic approach offered by other novels of the period, which showed qualified approval. Finally, I demonstrate how sentimental novels embraced Italian opera as a cultural form of expression which accorded with the current climate of excessive emotion and feeling. Although contemporary records show that the new comic opera was becoming increasingly popular, sentimental literature focuses almost exclusively on the more tragic *opera seria* for its own purposes, making the formerly criticized location in the Haymarket a resort for those who wished to be seen to possess more refined sensibilities.

Significantly, London’s pleasure gardens rarely feature in sentimental literature, despite a programme of reform initiated in the 1720s to make Vauxhall a more respectable venue, and the opening of Ranelagh in 1742 as a more polite rival to the transformed Spring Gardens. Although contemporary newspaper accounts and commissioned descriptions of the city’s two most popular pleasure gardens constructed a picture of a morally improved respectable urban environment, literary representations create a more ambiguous narrative, which never succeed in relinquishing the earlier scandalous reputation of the gardens. I also examine the way that the gardens’ designers exploited current popular fiction to create a particular cultural ambience. In particular, I look at the portrayals of scenes from *The Arabian Nights*, a work which was first rendered into English in 1706, and illustrations of episodes from Richardson’s bestseller, *Pamela* (1740-1) – famously a novel about a virtuous young girl – paradoxically displayed in a morally suspect urban resort.

The final chapter explores the depiction of the London coffee-house in eighteenth-century fiction. I look at recent historical evidence which revises and challenges the idea that women never visited the urban coffee-house. I show how literature creates its own internal narrative, as the exclusion of women from these establishments forms a consistent literary trope in genres as diverse as newspapers, early scandalous fictions and later novels. The exclusively male milieu of the London coffee-house becomes a conventional place for
the traducing of female reputations. The other theme I address in this chapter is the representation of the range of eighteenth-century coffee-houses. I examine the way that the sheer variety of coffee-houses allows its unknown visitors to adopt a myriad of different urban identities. I argue that there is no such thing as a typical London coffee-house, and that fictional representations exploit the differences separating distinct establishments to debate the notion of an unstable, fluid city identity.

The following chapters show how literary portrayals of the city construct narrative patterns and contain internal echoes that occasionally accord with other historical representations, but which ultimately serve their own purposes. This inconsistency is evident in other related artistic fields. Malcolm Warner writes that '[h]istorians of London are constantly disappointed by the failure of visual documents to correspond to what they know, from more reliable sources, to have been fact'. Literary writings show a similar tendency to convey a London which does not necessarily coincide with more factual accounts of the same places. What I suggest in the following chapters is that, although an attentive reading of fiction dealing with the eighteenth-century metropolis reveals 'the city's relentless influence on literary form', there is a reciprocal exchange in which literature actually shapes the perception of, and attitude to, the city. In a dialectical movement, fiction depicts London for a readership eager to see its city defamiliarized in literature, but these portraits also influence the ways in which people go on to read their city through the imaginative distortions of literary interpretation. Different forms of urban writings inform the way that contemporary readers use fiction to construct their own various readings of eighteenth-century London.

On 12 May 1763, James Boswell recorded an evening’s entertainment at Drury Lane theatre in his *London Journal*. The repertoire included *King Lear* and a popular contemporary farce: George Colman’s *Polly Honeycombe*. Boswell is stirred by Nahum Tate’s Shakespeare, shedding ‘an abundance of tears’ at David Garrick’s interpretation of *Lear*. He is, however, more deeply affected by the ability of Colman’s one-act play to arouse in him the capacity for mirth and good humour after a long period of unrelieved depression and general gloom. Having recently lamented the metropolis’s failure to yield sufficient entertainment to dispel his spleen and restlessness, he applauds the London stage for its restorative powers: ‘The farce was *Polly Honeycombe*, at which I laughed a good deal. It gave me great consolation after my late fit of melancholy to find that I was again capable of receiving such high enjoyment.  

The humorous afterpiece, *Polly Honeycombe*, first performed in 1760 and still going strong three years later when Boswell was writing, proved to be an immensely popular attraction for London audiences, often drawing greater numbers than the main performance that it accompanied. David Garrick added it to his repertory in Drury Lane on 5 December 1760, and after an uncertain couple of days, its reputation rapidly spread. A week later, the theatre received a special royal request to add a performance of *Polly Honeycombe* to the end of a staging of the main piece, *The Rehearsal*. The *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser* reported the next day:

By Command of His Majesty at fifteen Minutes past Six, His Majesty went to D—- L—- House, attended by several great Officers of State, to see the *Rehearsal* and *Polly Honeycombe* ... The Bills were stuck up [in the] morning for only the *Rehearsal*, but about ten o’clock a message was sent signifying his Majesty’s pleasure to have the new dramatick novel of *Polly Honeycombe* added to it; upon which fresh Bills were printed and pasted up ... In consequence of a strict order from the managers not a single person was admitted into the house before the doors were opened; nevertheless the Pit was filled in the space of four minutes.  

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Royal presence ensured a full house, while official approval reflected *Polly Honeycombe*’s increasing popularity. The afterpiece continued to command impressive audience figures for a number of years in London’s licensed theatres, enjoying approval in the city’s two main sanctioned and fashionable playhouses – Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

In *The Life of David Garrick*, 1801, Arthur Murphy described the play as a ‘piece designed to ridicule the follies of a young girl, whose imagination was bewildered by romances and novels from circulating libraries’. Polly’s quixotic perspective on urban life is skewed by her addiction to the increasing popularity of the novel: at one point she exclaims, ‘Novels, Nursee, Novels. A Novel is the only thing to teach a girl life, and the way of the world, and elegant fancies, and love to the end of the chapter.’ In a reflexive move, the immediate audience both enjoyed Polly’s exaggerated preoccupation with the many twists and turns of her beloved heroines and also recognized themselves in her insistence that her reading matter has provided her with the vicarious experiences essential for teaching her the appropriate urban etiquette.

But my cross Papa will hardly ever let me go out. – And then, I know life as well as if I had been in the Beau Monde all my days. I can tell the nature of a masquerade as well as if I had been at twenty. I long for a mobbing scheme with Mr. Scribble to the two-shilling gallery, or a snug party a little way out of town in a post-chaise ... Oh, ... a Novel is the only thing.

What the immense popularity of a play like *Polly Honeycombe* demonstrated was the relish with which the city’s playgoing public enjoyed seeing its urban manners and social behaviour, as well its literary tastes, reflected on stage. The ingenuous heroine boasts of surpassing the exploits of a *Clarinda, Polly Barnes, Sophy Willis*, in addition to the more instantly recognizable *Clarissa*, Miss Howe, Sophia Western. The narratives in which these female characters appear all include a visit to the London theatre as a standard novelistic episode, and the audience could laugh at Polly’s deluded interpretations while simultaneously flattering themselves on recognizing references to the fictional characters of bestselling novels and less well-known narratives. The play became a huge literary in-joke for novel readers in mid-century London. The prologue to the play provides the context for

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3 Arthur Murphy, *The Life of David Garrick*, London, 1801, pp. 229-30. Murphy comments that ‘The farce was well received, and Miss Pope, in the part of *Polly Honeycombe*, gained great applause’.
5 Colman, *Polly Honeycombe*, p. 4.
its enthusiastic reception:

But now, the dear delight of later years,
The younger Sister of ROMANCE appears:
Less solemn is her air, her drift the same,
And NOVEL her enchanting, charming name.
Romance might strike our grave Forefathers' pomp,
But NOVEL for our BUCK and lively Romp!
Cassandra's Folios now no longer read,
See, Two Neat Pocket Volumes in their stead!
... 'Tis not alone the Small-Talk and the Smart
'Tis Novel most beguiles the Female Heart.6

The prologue is describing a shift in the literary taste of London's female reading public, away from the improbable, scandalous romance, towards the more bourgeois novel; a large section of the audience was now able to enjoy reading about itself in contemporary fiction.

In this chapter I argue that, like the descriptions of other pleasure haunts in the metropolis, the common and popular depiction of a visit to the theatre helped to confirm the delight that Londoners experienced in seeing themselves reflected in contemporary literature, and, in particular, the novel. The actual configuration of an eighteenth-century theatre audience, composed of novel-readers watching a play about a young reader of contemporary novels, reverses the more common pattern of consumers of fiction reading about visits to the London's playhouses: throughout the century, nearly every romance and novel depicting London life included a visit to the theatre as a standard episode in the representation of the 'urban experience'.7 However, the significance of the success of a piece like Polly Honeycombe lies in its dependence on the dialectical play between the identity of a theatre audience and the central theme of the spectacle they are observing, namely a tongue-in-cheek exposé of the follies and potential moral dangers associated with the contemporary evolving novel. The relationship takes as its premiss the notion that the theatre audience is composed of critics and readers of novels. This suggests the fluidity and permeability of different consumer groups; spectators can only fully appreciate the cultural joke if they are familiar with the object of ridicule. The receptive audience therefore seems

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6 Ibid., Prologue
7 Max Byrd comments that '[t]he theatre appears prominently ... in almost every account of eighteenth-century London. Few novels of the period fail to include an evening at the theatre in their London setting, like those in Tom Jones and Roderick Random', London Transformed, p. 63.
to be the satirical target of its own entertainment. Yet the play also reprises the popular theme involving misreaders of novels – those consumers unable to judge between fiction and reality. This opened up a gap, notionally separating the audience composed of superior novel readers from deluded misreaders like Polly Honeycombe. But the gap between Polly Honeycombe and its audience is a narrow one: what divides the spectators from the misguided heroine is not so much their literary taste but rather, their ability to comprehend the fictional nature of their reading matter. The audience may laugh at the deluded female reader, but the novels that Polly relishes are the same narratives consumed by the audience watching the play.

But the mutual reflection of performance and urban consumer relies on the presence of the audience inside the playhouse; Polly Honeycombe is first and foremost intended for public performance, not primarily to be read in the privacy of domestic space – although the play’s success might later generate a demand for printed copies to be enjoyed, at home. In this chapter I will attempt to locate the persistent anxieties about the instability of urban character firmly within the historical parameters defining the progress of the eighteenth-century London theatre. Any consideration of the city will inevitably make the association between the idea of urban anonymity and its scope for facilitating deception and dissimulation through the adoption of various roles and disguises. But such an analysis also risks lapsing into banal and ahistorical cliché, speciously conveying the impression that the familiar trope of theatrum mundi was a new eighteenth-century phenomenon, instead of the hackneyed metaphor it had become long before the 1700s. Although theatrical terminology is indeed frequently used to convey the ephemerality of easily discarded consecutive city identities, a topographical context will be used to ground the discussion in its historical setting. John Bender makes the perceptive point that, although eighteenth-century writers like Adam Smith used the distinguishing features and mechanisms of the playhouse to convey the principles defining the moral experience of the individual, the conditions governing such a phenomenon were mental, rather than dependent on the material presence of the playhouse:

While Smith’s metaphor for consciousness is theatrical, its mode of

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8 This ‘gap’ between the more discerning judgement of novel readers and the credulous naivety of romance readers was explored in Charlotte Lennox’s The Female Quixote (1752), which was an eighteenth-century feminized variation on Cervantes’ famous Don Quixote (1605; 1615). The tradition of distinguishing intelligent novel readers from more gullible consumers of fiction would receive its most celebrated treatment later, in Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey (first publ. 1818), where Henry Tilney reveals himself to be a keen reader of novels, but a reader who knows where fiction ends and real life begins.
representation is entirely mental. He considers spectatordom as the fundamental condition ordering social life, but the state of being he characterizes as theatrical must always be staged in a nontheatrical mental field that much more closely resembles the transparency of the realist novel than the non-narrative fictions of the theatre.9

Bender is making the distinction between the figurative use of spatial and architectural forms – in this case, the theatre and its associations with spectatorship, which is the defining model for representing the shaping of the individual’s conscience – and the social impact registered by the topographical presence of the playhouse in the city. In doing so, Bender is slightly modifying the argument of Jonas Barish, who comments that Smith’s theatrical metaphor ‘puts the condition of spectatordom at the heart of the moral experience’; similarly, David Marshall has written that the theatre analogy is harnessed by Smith to represent ‘a society where everyone and everything seem motivated by the gaze of spectators’.10 Bender’s shift in emphasis focuses his argument on the real topographical place of the theatre.

While I will be exploring the issues concerning spectatorship and voyeurism which predictably manifest themselves in an exploration of the social context of urban spectacle, the discussion will be predicated on the topographical location and real internal space of the London theatre. It is useful to start by tracing the history of the inward movement of the London theatre from the banished outskirts of the city to its location in the heart of the capital. I will go on to examine the moral and commercial context of the vicious, early-eighteenth-century opposition to the theatre whose presence was considered both a general source of urban corruption and, more specifically, a threat to London’s commercial centre in the City.

The protracted hostilities to the location of the eighteenth-century London stage in different parts of the capital provide the basis for an examination of the proliferation of contemporary anti-theatrical publications. However, as I will show, the focus, in the fiction of the period, on the theatres in the more aristocratic part of Town, conveys a sense of a specific implied readership: namely those who would wish to see or be seen attending performances in Covent Garden and Drury Lane. By deliberately omitting any allusion to

the commercial areas of London protected by the City's aldermen, writers of urban fictions only obliquely convey the problematic history of the development of the City's playhouses in the scandalous narratives and the later, more respectable novel. The unlicensed theatre recedes into the background or disappears altogether, belying its significance throughout this period.

I also examine the common focus of *The Spectator* and early eighteenth-century female scandalous narratives by writers like Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, on the social and sexual implications of the rules of spectatorship governing human relations in the public arena of the playhouse. As the fiction of the period evolves, the literary attitude to the city theatre also slowly changes. The mid-century novel displays a greater ambivalence about the London stage, implying both a simple reflection of current modish venues, but also a deliberate attempt to shape the sensibilities and identity of its readers. I will demonstrate how a writer like Samuel Richardson shifted the focus from the anti-theatrical sentiments expressed in his polemical writings to a more implicit protest, in his novels, against the popular, licensed theatres in Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In this context, it becomes clear that other mid-century fictions also show a concern with the way that the topographical presence of the London theatre creates a sense of London's moral geography: this includes the casting of veiled aspersions on female visitors to the playhouse, and also suggests a connection between the drama being enacted in a designated public arena and the endless charades and endemic deception taking place in the city. The final section deals with the complex relationship between the expressive and demonstrative nature of sentimental fiction and its paradoxical thematic proximity to the drama of the urban playhouse.

**The evolution of the eighteenth-century London playhouse**

The temptation to trace a distinct urban pattern for the location of the different theatres during the eighteenth century is, perhaps, an inevitable corollary of the recent publication of both old- and new-historicist accounts of the marginal yet circumscribed position of the theatre in the unregulated areas, or 'Liberties', of Elizabethan and Jacobean London. In 1576 James Burbage built the first theatre in Shoreditch. Shortly afterwards, a second playhouse, the Curtain, was opened nearby.¹¹ Burbage erected another theatre in

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Blackfriars, which was also outside the jurisdiction of the City authorities, as were the Rose and Globe, situated on the Bankside. Steven Mullaney has described the marginal position of the sixteenth-century theatre and its topographical associations with other undesirable elements of society like the victims of leprosy and the plague, expelled from the limits of the city:

The outskirts of the premodern city were places of a complex and contradictory sort of freedom, ambivalent zones of transition between one realm of authority and another. ... [T]he Liberties of London were an ... ambiguous realm, a borderland whose legal parameters and privileges were open-ended and equivocally defined ... The Liberties were free ‘at liberty’ from manorial rule or obligation to the Crown, and only nominally under the jurisdiction of the lord mayor.12

Mullaney’s new-historicist bias inclines him to construct rigid borders separating permissible and transgressive acts. He writes: ‘It was to the Liberties, according to Stow, that citizens retired to pursue pastimes and pleasures that had no proper place in the community.’13 The metonymic connection between the containment of epidemic and the restraint of entertainment provides a geometric urban pattern where the ‘incontinent pleasure, of license and extravagant liberty’ is clinically expelled from a purified central city zone.14 Although this sharp segregation provides a convenient image of the city’s struggle to maintain internal order and discipline, the distinctions between different London districts were never as absolute as Mullaney’s model suggests: the sites of ribaldry and grubby commercial exchange, the markets and fairs, still infiltrated the main body of the city. Nevertheless, the establishment of a permanent place for the London theatre during this period embodied an attempt by the city to define its attitude to urban pleasure and entertainment. Stephen Orgel writes: ‘All at once, the theatre was an institution, a property, a corporation. It was real in the way that “real estate” is real; it was a location, a building a possession – an established and visible part of society.’15 As the theatre sites became more easily identifiable in relation to the city’s shifting borders, suspicion of, and opposition to,
the unlawful pleasure offered by the new playhouses gained a recognizable topographical location against which the city’s authorities could pitch their objections. The problem with Mullaney’s analysis of urban purification is that it suggests a more autonomous, self-regulating, internal process; the concession to the nominal jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor obscures the authority of the magistrates in early modern London. Anne Barton discusses the role of the guardians of the City’s morals in her study of the relationship between comic drama and the ethos of the City. She describes:

the middle-class ethos of the City, the code which, despite differences of religion (especially at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign), of background, status and wealth, united the men who governed London between 1558 and 1642. ... These men gloried in the City’s wealth, its eminence as the economic capital of Europe, its ancient customs, and the rights and independence it had wrested gradually from the Crown.\(^\text{16}\)

The balance of power shared by Court and City is reflected in the physical location of London’s theatres. Although performances were commissioned by the royal court and took place there, the City’s aldermen also succeeded in maintaining and circumscribing their topographical limits. ‘If no other European city in the Renaissance developed a drama that could rival the Elizabethan’, writes Barton, ‘it was also true that there was no equivalent to London’s intricate system of self-rule, or its ethos of life and work.’\(^\text{17}\) The emerging independence of London’s more commercial sector allowed the development a paradoxically reactionary attitude to the theatre. Separation from Court resulted in an attempt to push display and performance to the outskirts of London: ‘These ... were the men who banished the theatres, as physical structures, from the limits of the City over which they had immediate jurisdiction and who sought continually to close them down in the suburbs as well, although their power there was only indirect.’\(^\text{18}\) The uncertainty of the authority of the City Magistrates outside their defined wards questioned the legitimacy of the marginalized theatres. London’s aldermen could only prohibit the construction of playhouses in areas under their own jurisdiction; their influence over the actual theatres


\(^{17}\) Barton, ‘Comedy and the Ethos of the City’, p. 307.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 307-8.
was more restricted in that they had little control over the kind of entertainment being offered in the city’s Liberties.

The transition from the marginalized situation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London stage to the integration of the Restoration and eighteenth-century playhouse reflects a gradual but definite inward movement towards the centre of the city. The Restoration theatre enjoyed a significant upturn in its fortunes under the patronage of Charles II; this resulted indirectly in the construction of new playhouses both at the edges of London’s defined limits and in Westminster and the City. By the turn of the century, several theatres had appeared around the periphery of London. According to the *London Stage*, most of these playhouses, particularly those in Greenwich, Hampton Court and Richmond, all sites of royal palaces, maintained close links with the London companies for many years.19 By 1700 though, after the anti-theatrical campaigns of the 1690s, only three theatres remained inside London: Drury Lane in Westminster, Lincoln’s Inn Fields to the east of the City, and Dorset Gardens, sometimes known as the Duke’s Theatre, off Fleet Street. This limitation did not discourage individual opportunists from taking advantage of the public enthusiasm for drama and attempting to satisfy and actually to create demand for more theatrical performances in London. The desire for independence that encouraged the City’s elders to establish separate authority from the Crown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, also fostered the entrepreneurial spirit which exploited the aspirations of citizens in eighteenth-century London: Londoners who desired to emulate their social superiors by participating in the same types of urban leisure activities. The new wealth created by investment and speculation in the City’s many potentially lucrative commercial ventures, put many Londoners financially on a par with their, mostly horrified, aristocratic fellow citizens. The entrepreneurs lost no time in attempting to establish permanent new sites for the city’s playgoers. John Summerson writes:

Theatres claimed royal patronage and were licensed under patent but this did not mean that the Crown supplied finance; the London theatres were all speculative adventures by syndicates of shareholders. The municipal theatre was unknown.20

When Henry Giffard took over the management of Goodman’s Fields theatre in 1731 from

Thomas Odell, he was also responsible for raising funds to enable its construction in Leman Street. In order to raise the £1,500 needed to achieve this, Giffard found twenty-three subscribers, a number of whom were City merchants, for what was really as much a commercial venture as an artistic one. Each subscriber had to pay a sum of one hundred pounds, in return for which he was to receive one shilling and sixpence for every day on which a play was performed at the theatre. The support of some of the City’s more eminent and influential figures provided a fitting commercial framework for the founding of a new theatre in London’s commercial heartland.

However, during the first half of the eighteenth century in particular, the development of a fiercely competitive group of London theatres faced strong opposition from both royal and civic quarters. The Lord Chamberlain was endowed with the authority to prohibit the construction of further theatres and to ban specific plays while morally offended citizens objected to the potential damage to local trade and youthful diligence. The history of early eighteenth-century theatre is a combination of legal wranglings, persistent appeals for financial backing by determined entrepreneurs and moral exhortation by self-appointed guardians of the city’s code of conduct.

In the eighteenth-century urban novel, the more marginal playhouse, like Goodman’s-Fields had little immediate significance for the London narrative of confused identity or urban sociability which took place mainly in fashionable Westminster. Instead, external physical location is converted into the internal space of the playhouse as the theatre becomes the setting for narcissistic and reciprocal admiration and obvious social snobbery. The threat to female virtue becomes a more subtle manoeuvring and avoidance of male attention rather than a ‘general Rendezvous of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes’.

Although the excesses of the Restoration interrupted the post-Cromwellian opposition to the London theatre, a residual Puritan prejudice manifested itself during the brief reign of James II (1685-88), and more firmly after the accession of William and Mary in 1688. This resulted in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London theatre suffering a period of intense criticism. This period of denunciation was defined by religious and

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moral objection rather than the later body of writing, published during the 1730s, which based its opposition on topographical considerations.

Among the most rancorous and hostile publications to denounce the influence of the London playhouse during the 1690s were the writings of Jeremy Collier, a non-juring Anglican bishop, whose *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) generated a series of counter-arguments and defences from critics like John Dennis. Collier objected most to the unflattering characterisation of clergymen in English plays by Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh and to the number of profanities masquerading as wit in many dramatic dialogues. These, he declared, were grossly offensive to the female part of the audience, whose amusement, he pointed out also questioned and qualified their virtuous innocence:

Do the Women leave all the Regards to Decency and Conscience behind them, when they come to the *Play-House*? Or does the Place transform their Inclinations, and turn their Aversions into Pleasure? Or were their Pretences to sobriety elsewhere nothing but Hypocrisy and Grimace ... They can't discover their Disgust without disadvantage, no blush without disservice to their Modesty. To appear with any skill in such Cant, looks as if they had fallen upon ill Conversation; or managed their Curiosity amiss.

Jeremy Collier’s rebarbative comments can be seen as an attack on the theatre which succeeds in offending by cultivating the conditions whereby a woman’s modesty is compromised; the female can only indicate her virtue by showing disapproval – the very act which implies an unchaste mind. By staging indecent and suggestive material, the dramatist either affronts female sensibilities with obscene insinuation, or condemns all women of a certain class with the suggestion that they understand and appreciate vulgarisms as much as any member of the audience.

Collier’s claim that the theatre fostered blasphemy, profanity and licentiousness was swiftly challenged. Besides John Dennis’s lengthy *Usefulness of the Stage, To the Happiness of Mankind, To Government, and to Religion* (1698), another pamphlet

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24 A 1730 edition of Collier’s *Short View* also includes *A Defence of the Short View; A Reply To The Short Vindication Of The Relapse and Provoked Wife; A Second Defence Of The Short View; A Farther Vindication Of The Short View*. The most notable response, John Dennis’s reply, *The Usefulness of the Stage, To the Happiness of Mankind, To Government, and to Religion*, appeared in 1698. Collier’s High Church and Tory allegiances helped to strengthen his cause by offsetting any suspicion of Puritan leanings.

attempted to rebut Collier’s argument by reversing the assumption that the theatre was the source of social degeneracy. The writer argues:

For 'tis to your dear Times that we owe the vileness of the Theatre; Those very loose Times, to the Protector wherof you are so constant a Devotee; so that in the Cause depending you are both Plaintiff and Defendant.26

The London theatre was clearly experiencing a period of serious censure, reminiscent of an earlier period of Puritan suppression. The Societies for the Reformation of Manners, a self-appointed group formed with the intent to inculcate an elusive, virtuous model of politeness claimed that their chief objective was:

...to cherish and support Religion, and, by consequence, to take care that it be not treated with any disrespect, particularly, that it be not made the Scorn of any Order or Body of Men, the Common Subjects of profane Playhouses, or the Sport of Buffoons. 27

These publications appear to have had immediate ramifications for the London playhouse, as the number of prosecutions brought against actors for profanity increased significantly in 1698;28 by the turn of the century, London’s theatres were becoming subject to ever increasing moral opprobrium. William Van Lennep describes the tensions existing between the theatre and civic opinion:

So far as the relations between management, on the one hand, and the authorities and segments of the public were concerned, the period from 1690 to 1710 was probably the most critical one for the playhouse, with the possible exception of the Popish Plot, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.29

26 [Anonymous], *The Immorality of the English Pulpit, (or the Pulpit Fool). As Justly Subjected to the Notice of the English Stage, as the Immorality of the STAGE is to that of the Pulpit. In a LETTER to Mr. Collier*, London, 1698, p. 3.

27 *The Societies for the Reformation of Manners*, London, 1701, pp. 94-5. [My italics] The Societies were also subject to satirical criticism, which viewed their publications as a sanctimonious attempt to curb the growth of urban entertainment. The *Female Tatler* promoted its own intentions by condemning the Societies’ precepts: ‘[A]nd when a happiness so long wish’d for, and with such difficulty obtain’d shall, instead of promoting religion, virtue, and sobriety, so far intoxicate men’s minds as to draw ‘em into pride, luxury, and all manners of ridiculous excursions, an ingenious tatler will conduce more to the reformation of mankind than an hypocritical society, who have made a trade of it,’ *The Female Tatler 1709-10*, ed. Fidelis Morgan, (Everyman, 1992), pp. 2-3.

28 See *The London Stage*, vol. 1, p. xxx.

29 Ibid., vol. 1, p. lxv
Although, when put in context, the efforts by Jeremy Collier and the Societies for the Reformation of Manners to censor the stage can be seen to reflect a current outside courtly and literary circles to curb the excesses of an earlier period in London, the arguments themselves offer a curiously ahistorical condemnation of the theatre. The focus on blasphemy and the idea of the theatre as an unsuitable location for women articulates the anti-theatrical concerns of any period in the history of the theatre. It was only later, towards the end of the 1720s and during the 1730s, that opposition to the London stage would explicitly reflect the contemporary topographical anxieties concerning the location of new theatre sites in certain parts of the city. However, William Law’s well-known attack on London’s playhouses, *The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-Entertainment* (1726), provided an exception to this later trend. Like Jeremy Collier, Law fulminates against the dissolute nature of current drama, but the absence of reference to specific pieces or particular playhouses gives his pamphlet a strangely timeless quality. His invective includes conventional anti-theatrical tropes any of which could be taken from a long tradition of diatribes against the stage. Law gestures at a more contemporary context for his tirade, contrasting the current obsession with urban entertainments to earlier Catholic worship of false images: ‘Now it is possible for the present Age to be as much mistaken in their Pleasures, as the former were in their Devotions.’ However, the analogies with satanic servitude also recall the writings of Stephen Gosson, an earlier enemy of the stage. In *The School of Abuse*, (1579), Gosson’s puritan attacks on the theatre had highlighted the way that being seen in the London playhouse seriously compromised female virtue. He writes, ‘Thought is free; you can forbidd no man, that vieweth you, to nowte you and that noateth you, to judge you, for entring to places suspicion.’ A woman could seriously damage her reputation by her mere presence in the theatre. The female spectator was subject to the same visual scrutiny as the actresses on stage and the prostitutes in the gallery, a theme which would be explored by the writers of scandalous narratives in the early part of the eighteenth century.

William Law’s diatribe restates many of Gosson’s themes and concerns. He describes the London Playhouse as a diabolic milieu: it is, ‘the House of the Devil’ and the ‘Pleasure

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of the Devil', while he issues the stern caveat: 'When therefore you are asked to go to a Play, don't think you are only asked to go to a Diversion, but be assured that you are asked to yield to the Devil, to go over to his Party.' Although Law's treatise implicitly notes the moral dangers offered by the actual trip to the theatre, his attention is more closely focused on the content of the plays themselves and its potential, by example, to inspire and incite women to depart from their socially prescribed roles:

But you may as justly think her very ridiculous in her Modesty, who though she dares not to say, or look, or do an immodest Thing her self, should yet give her Money to see Women forget the Modesty of their Sex, and talk impudently in a Publick Play-House.

At the theatre, women are exposed to the spectacle of indecent behaviour and offensive dialogue; consequently, there is an inherent danger that they might learn through drama and disguise an alternative role to that of the conventionally dependent and vulnerable female.

William Law's pamphlet was contemporary with a number of scandalous romances and novellas which were the distinguishing genre of many women writers in early eighteenth-century London. His prophecies of female corruption appear both to feed into, and draw their strength from, the scandalous fictions of the first quarter of the century. These narratives convey a female version of the London theatre which provided an alternative perspective to the male viewpoint in journals like The Spectator.

The London theatre in The Spectator and early eighteenth-century fictions

Addison and Steele's The Spectator provides the most obvious example of writing which exploits the journal's model of hidden observation and subsequent reportage. The first number of The Spectator opens with an adumbration of the methods to be employed by the pseudonymous writer in his vignettes of London life: 'Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species' (Thursday, 1 March 1711). The relation between spectator and spectacle requires distance and the concealment of the

34 Ibid., p. 7.
voyeur from those he is observing. This opening profile of the author’s privileged vantage point identifies the readers of The Spectator as both participants in, and passive readers of, the sketches and anecdotes taken from incidents occurring daily in the city: the reader is made aware of Mr. Spectator’s presence after the event, although the citizen is unaware of his observations at the time. What is implicit in this first number is the model of the playhouse, used to create an effective method of conveying an impression of London which includes urban anonymity as an essential component of its authorial control. Scott Paul Gordon has drawn attention to the way in which the city provides the ideal framework in which the plan drawn up by Mr. Spectator might be achieved. He points out that the attempt by Sir Roger de Coverley (a more accessible and intrusive prototype of Goldsmith’s Sir William Thornhill in The Vicar of Wakefield), in later numbers of The Spectator, to oversee the day-to-day running of the county of Worcestershire through public rebuke and patronage would be ill-suited to The Spectator’s wider, metropolitan orbit: ‘Sir Roger’s visible discipline ... seems absurdly unfit for a sprawling and anonymous city in which no figure could watch all its inhabitants’. However, although the dominant ocular motif in The Spectator encompasses a broader, more general urban experience, the origin of its theatrical model can be traced, in its own pages, to the city’s fashionable playhouses.

Kristina Straub’s work on the specular properties of the playhouse has recently been invoked in discussions concerning the London theatre. Straub draws attention to the popularity in eighteenth-century periodicals of voyeuristic figures like ‘spies, monitors, spectators and observers’. She argues that, although a ‘consciousness that the cator’s gaze is enacted within a power differential between the watcher and the watched is at least

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36 The implications of the active gaze of the spectator and the passivity of those being watched are reminiscent of the hierarchical relationship identified by Laura Mulvey’s in her classic article on the male gaze and the female spectacle in the cinema, although, in this number of The Spectator, gender is not a necessary consideration. See Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Screen 16 (1975), rept. in Visual and other Pleasures, 14-26 (Bloomington, 1989).

37 Scott Paul Gordon, ‘Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle’, 3-23, The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation, 36, (1995) 1, pp. 5-6. Gordon shows how a Benthamite model of Mr. Spectator as a ‘father’ of surveillance can be easily accommodated by recent modish theories of the gaze offered by witters like Mulvey and Foucault. But while he agrees that such theories are useful, he suggests that they fail to offer any means of resistance to such a ‘spectatorial regime’. However, while claiming that his analysis reveals how The Spectator partly anticipates these later theories as well as providing a pre-emptive corrective to them, his own argument seems, to a considerable extent, to be predetermined by Foucauldian and film-theory assumptions.

as old as the seventeenth century', there is something unique about the eighteenth century which makes the unequal relationship between the spectator and spectacle an historically informed phenomenon.39 She writes: ‘Eighteenth-century studies is a particularly fruitful area to continue the work of sorting through the historically local contexts for such constructions as the gender and sexual politics of the gaze.'40 Although Straub’s comments indicate a more general and social discussion of the way strangers interact in the city’s public venues, she locates the source of her argument in the London playhouse, tracing the theatrical metaphor back to its topographical origins.41 While my own discussion is also based on the material presence and movement of the city’s playhouses in the eighteenth century, I am not concerned, as Straub is, with the relationship between spectator and actor; I am more interested in the implications of the sociability fostered by the theatre between different members of the audience, and the blurring of the line dividing spectator and spectacle.

In number 250 of The Spectator (Monday, 17 December 1711), Steele devotes an entire essay to a dissection of the power of the gaze. The piece opens with a paean to the pseudo-platonist ‘first Eye of Consequence (under the invisible Author of all)’ who is the ‘visible Luminary of the Universe’.42 The writer moves from the ‘great Director of Opticks’ to other figures drawn from myth and lore, like Argus and the god Janus, all distinguished by their extraordinary powers of sight. However, the first letter in the essay concludes with a warning about the harmful consequences of the promiscuous gaze. The primary site for such visual offence is the theatre:

But when ’tis forc’d and affected it carries a wanton Design, and in Play-houses and other publick Places this ocular Intimation is often an Assignation for bad Practices: But this Irregularity in Vision, together with such Enormities as tipping the Wink, the circumspective Rowl, the side Peep thro’ a thin Hood or Fan, must be put in the Class of the Heteropticks, as all wrong Notions of Religion are rank’d under the general Name of Heterodox.43

39 [Ibid., p. 5.]
40 [Ibid., p. 19.]
41 Straub writes: “The public promotion of spectatorship as power in the age of empiricism found outlets in a variety of popular genres in the eighteenth century, including discourse about the players and the theatres,” Sexual Suspects, p. 19.
43 [Ibid., vol. 2, p. 472.
The resourceful variations of furtive observation during the performance all fall within the general definition of 'Heteroptick' – a comic nonce-word coined to encompass the heterogeneity of the many different types of specular transgressions. What this passage emphasizes is the deflection of attention from the spectacle taking place on stage to the more social phenomenon of staring at one's fellow spectator; the play, it seems, is only a pretext for an urban gathering which makes the desire to scrutinize other members of the audience only slightly less shameless.

The practice after the Restoration of allowing actresses to take female roles on stage would perhaps indicate that male spectators might be keen to attend the theatre in order to have an unimpeded view of female performance. But literary representation suggests otherwise: it seemed that men preferred to observe the women ostensibly sharing their field of vision. The civic quality of the theatre performance is highlighted by the essay in The Spectator where the writer clearly conveys the way in which the interior architecture and seating arrangements facilitate the visual games which characterize the eighteenth-century playhouse. Moreover, in an earlier piece, Steele had amusingly drawn attention to the manner in which mainly aristocratic male members of the audience, through their exhibitionistic antics, confused the demarcation line traditionally separating performer and spectator. A letter, in Number 240 (Wednesday, December 5, 1711), purporting to be from a 'Charles Easy' recounts in ludicrous detail the behaviour of one particular gentleman:

This was a very lusty Fellow, but withal a sort of Beau, who getting into one of the Side-Boxes on the Stage before the Curtain drew, was disposed to shew the whole Audience his activity by leaping over the Spikes; he pass'd from thence to one of the ent'ring Doors, where he took Snuff with a tolerable good Grace, display'd his fine Cloaths, made two or three feint Passes at the Curtain with his Cane, then faced about and appear'd at t'other Door: Here he affected to survey the whole House, bow'd and smil'd at Random, and then shew'd his Teeth (which were some of them indeed very white): After this he retir'd behind the Curtain, and obliged us with several Views of his Person from every Opening.

During the Time of acting he appear'd frequently in the Prince's Apartment, made one at the Hunting-Match, and was very forward in the Rebellion.44

Apart from being a humorous embellishment of the way in which eighteenth-century performances were increasingly subject to disruption by unwarranted audience participation, this passage also makes the point that the spectator has invaded the space of

the spectacle by actually taking part in the performance. The intruder reverses the conventional visual ordering of the playhouse, rendering the audience the object of his survey. The separation of player and spectator, and actor and citizen begins to blur as the intended one-way view fragments into a series of mutually reflective looks.

The dissipation of the spectator’s gaze into an unremitting exchange of ‘Heteroptick’ glances and stares only implicitly acknowledges the contemporary prophecies of moral dissolution and female depravity penned by writers like Law and Collier. The homiletic tone of their diatribes conveys a view of human, and in particular female, nature as innately and essentially subject to sexual corruption; the theatre is unqualifiably an unchanging malignant urban space which feeds on female vulnerability. The essays in The Spectator acknowledge the visual games taking place in the city’s playhouses, but fail to pursue the possible social and moral consequences.

In a similar way, the roughly contemporary scandalous urban narratives by female writers silently concede the dangers associated with the London playhouse. But they refract the moral perspective so as to make the female ‘victim’ the instigator of her own plot, who uses the city and the topographical location of its theatres to her own advantage. Janet Todd has noted the close identification of female writers with London. Writing about authors like Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker and Eliza Haywood, Todd comments:

> Whether or not they came originally from London ... these highly professionalized women tended to be based there, at least whilst they were writing most successfully. London and the court were very much their spiritual home.45

Many of these writers were also playwrights; and consequently, the playhouse was considered an increasingly appropriate and common setting for some of their self-sufficient and enterprising female protagonists’ most daring intrigues.

In these early eighteenth-century narratives, the theatre is nearly always seen as the ideal urban space in which the ambitious, often disguised female can exploit the playhouse’s internal structure as well as the susceptibilities of its male spectators. Delarivier

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45 Janet Todd, The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800, (London: Virago, 1989), p. 39. Todd suggests that familiarity with the city’s social machinations helped to obviate the feeling of segregation from patriarchal public life. ‘When they wrote on political or scandalous matters, however, the awareness of the capital tended to dull women’s sense of exclusion from the dominant culture. For the early fiction writers, formal learning was not, then, a necessity. Intelligence, worldly wisdom, and knowledge of London life were far more important’, p. 39.
Manley’s *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714), a thinly veiled, semi-autobiographical account of Manley’s own scandalous life, depicts the theatre as an ideal place in which the determined female might employ her charms, in order to attract the attentions of a male spectator with the means to maintain her comfortably as his mistress. The eponymous Rivella tries to warn a young girl in her acting company about the risks of seduction by unscrupulous rakes, but finds her warnings are anticipated by the girl’s unequivocal intentions.

**MEAN Time,** Tim’s Flame for Bella daily increas’d, Rivella call’d her to her, and bid her keep away from her House; for she would not charge her self with the Consequences, Squire Tim being a married Man: The Girl did not scruple to tell her, that her Design of going to the Play-house was in hopes of finding some body to keep her, she had often seen in the Dressing Room, what great Respect Mrs. Barry and the rest, used to pay to Mrs. Alyfe when she used to come thither, and how fine they all liv’d, which she was sure they cou’d not do upon their Pay. Rivella was amaz’d at her Confidence, which she thought no way suitable to a Maid: She then spoke to Tim to give over the Pursuit, since that Girl could not possibly be of any Consequence to a Man like him, and to ruin her, would be an eternal Reproach to the whole Company.46

Although Rivella’s viewpoint commands the reader’s narrative perspective, Bella’s ‘Confidence’ and insistent ‘Design of going to the Playhouse’ denote an attempt by the astute maid to invert the hierarchy that conventionally obtains between the male spectator and the passive female spectacle. Her determination to use the theatre for her own purposes casts her as an active agent in her own fortunes.

Similarly, Jane Barker’s *Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1723), a collection of tales depicting London life, described by Janet Todd as a ‘magazine-like novel’,47 and purportedly based on Barker’s own experiences, depicts a shrewd courtesan using the same tactics in order to secure the loyalty and protection of her ingenuous lover. She sends him a letter recounting how her brother, having heard of her ‘frequenting the Playhouse, and admitting the Courtship of several Lords’, comes to London to persuade her to return

to the countryside, to avoid the ‘Scandal of being a kept Miss, or Left-hand Wife’.48

However, her plans to leave town are thwarted when her brother strangely takes her to the theatre in an attempt to bring her round to his viewpoint. When she catches sight of her lover at the theatre, she claims to be overwhelmed by his presence and therefore cannot leave London: ‘This dash'd in pieces all my Intentions toward the Country: I could not leave my Manly, my beloved Captain: No, I resolved to be Concubine, Strumpet, or whatever the malicious World would call me.’49 She concludes her letter by arranging to meet him as usual, at the playhouse. The lover is allowed to narrate his weakness by way of lamentation:

Thus was I again catch'd faster than ever. I met her according to Appointment; and not to clog your vertuous Ears with what amorous Nonsense pass'd, she told me, she had found a House for our purpose, in a Quarter of the Town where neither of us were known. I gave her a Purse of Gold wherewith to furnish an Appartment and other Necessaries; all which she perform'd with Expedition, and every thing was accomplish'd with Neatness and Conveniency; and thus, vile Adulterer as I was, I establish'd my self with my Harlot.50

The unknown ‘Quarter of the Town’ allows for anonymity and disguise, the same qualities which distinguish the more explicit role-playing at the theatre. The ‘Harlot’ has evidently noted the similarities between the playhouse and hidden parts of the city; that she chooses to lodge so near to the theatre might fuel the ire of those who condemn London’s playhouses, but it also aligns the city itself with images of deception and unstable identity.

Perhaps the most forceful illustration of the theatre’s facilitating freedom of movement for women is Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina: or Love in a Maze (1725). It tells the story of the young heroine, ‘Stranger to the World, and consequently to the Dangers of it’, whose identity is never revealed, even to the reader. The narrative actually opens in a theatre where the unaccompanied young lady observes the attention given to prostitutes in the pit below by several men of quality. She notices that scant regard is given to the play itself, but understands that drama can be more efficaciously employed amongst the audience, rather than on the stage. She resolves, ‘having no Body in Town, at that Time, to whom she was

48 Jane Barker, The Lining of the Patchwork Screen, London, 1723, pp. 20-21. The OED records the term ‘left-hand wife’ as an eighteenth-century variation on the more commonly used ‘morganatic wife’ who, despite having married someone above her own social rank, is not entitled to any part of his title or fortune.
49 Ibid., p. 21.
50 Ibid., p. 22
oblig'd to be accountable for her Actions’, to disguise herself as a prostitute.

She no sooner design'd this Frolick, than she put it in Execution; and muffling her Hoods over her Face, went the next Night into the Gallery-Box, and practising as much as she had observ'd, at that Distance, ... was not long before she found her Disguise had answer'd the Ends she wore it for: - - - - A Crowd of Purchasers of all Degrees and Capacities were in a Moment gather'd about her, each endeavouring to out-bid the other, in offering her a Price for her Embraces.\textsuperscript{51}

Fantomina, as she now chooses to call herself, falls for the charms of the rake, Beauplaisir, whose initial infatuation with her soon wanes. In order to rekindle his desire and to maintain her lover’s interest, she adopts and discards a succession of alluring identities, each of which fool the unobservant Beauplaisir, who falls for each of Fantomina’s seductive disguises. Significantly, she takes lodgings near the theatre, successfully prolonging her lover’s interest in her and in the tantalizing, anonymous court beauty, Fantomina’s most bewitching role.

What these early eighteenth-century fictions convey is the attempt by women to take control of their own stories. However, the model of the theatre both theoretically and practically allows them to claim their own narrative subjectivity. Without trying to reverse the relationship inside the playhouse where the male observer confers an inevitable passivity on the object of his gaze, the wily female actually precipitates this dalliance, making the man the victim of the piece. Yet ironically, it is only a semblance of subjectivity: the fleeting and ever-changing roles preclude the identification of an essential character. It is only in terms of narrative voice that the female can assume a subjectivity, as author of her own fate. These scandalous fictions offer an alternative viewpoint to a female readership also subject to the reprobation of the writings of William Law and Jeremy Collier. Both perspectives offer two versions of the same female theatre experience: that the risks faced by women at the city’s playhouses may also inspire them to depart from their own prescribed and publicly acknowledged identities.

\textbf{Samuel Richardson and the London theatre}

The tendency to analyze London’s playhouses in strictly topographical terms was a common one; it enabled the writer to express his particular message using the vocabulary of

\textsuperscript{51} Eliza Haywood, \textit{Fantomina: or, Love in a Maze}, London, 1725, p. 258.
geography. When political power supported by royal consent manifested itself in the passing of the 1737 Licensing Act, one author, writing about the Irish theatre, underlined the differences between Dublin and London by focusing on the confinement of theatres to the area around Westminster. Written in 1758, the pamphlet, entitled *The Case of the Stage in Ireland*, describes London after the passing of the 1737 Licensing Act, a measure which restricted the number of legitimate theatres to only two: Covent-Garden and Drury-Lane. The writer claims that the Licensing Act ‘does not at all limit the number of play-houses in the metropolis, but only excludes them from the precincts of some particular jurisdictions; as this was done at the request of the body corporate of London’.\(^{52}\) It is clear that the intention is to limit the sites of entertainment to one exclusive area: ‘The court, the nobility and people of fashion all reside in Westminster, which is therefore called the court-end of the town, and is the seat of every kind of *pleasure*.’\(^{53}\) Writing in 1758, the author recalls a time when commercial parvenus tried to usurp or at least share their urban entertainment with their superiors:

> Time out of mind there has not been a licensed theatre in the city of London, or the Borough. Drury-Lane and Covent garden theatres are in Westminster, about a mile from the most contiguous parts of the city, and above three miles from those that are furthest removed; so that, it is a tolerably expensive and troublesome journey, where coach-hire runs very high, for a citizen and his family to go to play, and return home again. From these causes it proceeds, that the citizens of London make but a very inconsiderable part of the audience at either theatre; and the people of Southwark very rarely are seen there.\(^{54}\)

The phrase ‘time out of mind’ creates an illusion of a history of the stage that stretches back well before the writer’s personal experience. In fact, the hostilities surrounding the construction of the new theatre at Goodman’s Fields, the main target of anti-theatrical prejudice, had taken place only a few years before the imposition of the 1737 Licensing Act, in the early years of the decade. The writer refers disparagingly to the ease with which tradesmen and their families were able to frequent their local playhouse. It is:

> a very handsome and commodious theatre at Goodman’s fields, close to that side

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\(^{52}\) Anonymous*The Case of the Stage in Ireland CONTAINING The Reasons for and against a Bill for limiting the Number of Theatres in the City of Dublin*, Dublin, 1758, reprint London, 1758, p. 32.

\(^{53}\) *The Case of the Stage*, p. 29. [My italics]

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 29.
of London, which is farthest removed from Westminster. This was so great a novelty to the lower class of citizens, who never before were within convenient reach of such an entertainment, that every night the house was crowded with their wives, daughters, apprentices, journeymen and servants, who, to secure good places, stole thither at four o'clock in the afternoon, to the great neglect of their trades, and decay of their fortunes.55

The reference to the damage to City trade reiterates the many protests published around the time of the proposal for the building of the new theatre in Goodman’s Fields, in 1731. The writers employ similar phraseology and spatial metaphors whilst placing their objections firmly within distinct boundaries and individual streets, exaggerating the differences between London’s many wards. Unlike the expressions of moral outrage written by Jeremy Collier and William Law, whose pamphlets were preoccupied with religiosity and female virtue, and detached from a specific cityscape, these later publications were fixed firmly to the city’s topography.

The first Goodman’s Fields theatre was opened in 1729, under the management of Thomas Odell. It was situated in Ayliffe Street, adjacent to the City of London – close enough for easy access to it by local tradesmen and manual labourers, but also and more significantly, just beyond the jurisdiction of the Mayor and aldermen.56 At this time, there were already rumblings of opposition from merchants and citizens, concerned about the detrimental effect on trade and the neglect of their business by tradesmen and apprentices tempted to abandon their work in order to frequent the local playhouse. A letter addressed to the mayor of London, Richard Brocas, by ‘a citizen’ later identified as Bishop Francis Hare, drew attention to the location of the theatre:

I flatter my self, it will hardly be objected by any wise or sober Man, that this Play-house does not properly belong to the Cognizance of the City, because it is not in your immediate Jurisdiction, but lies a little (and very little it is) beyond the Liberties. If Goods infected with the Plague had been lodged at a much greater Distance than Goodman’s-Fields, would the Magistrates of the City have been unconcerned about it, and used no Endeavour to have had them immediately

55 Ibid., p. 30.
56 For a full account of the history of the theatre, see Frederick T. Wood, ‘Goodman’s Fields Theatre’. See also London Stage, vol. 2, introduction. Daniel Defoe’s Colonel Jack indicates Goodman’s Fields’ lower social staus when he writes, ‘As we were all Johns, we were all Jacks, and soon came to be call’d so, for at that Part of of the Town, where we had our Breeding, viz. near Goodman’s-fields, the Johns are generally call’d Jack’, The History and Remarkable Life of Colonel Jaque, Commonly Call’d Col. Jack, 1722, ed. Samuel Holt Monk, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 4.
The allusions to the ‘Liberties’ and the ‘plague’ momentarily erase the historical distance between Elizabethan and Georgian London; the eighteenth-century city suddenly resembles an earlier version of itself as the writer evokes images of expulsion and contained disease in an effort to provide a vivid metaphor for a playhouse that threatens the commercial heart of London. Although the author concludes his letter with the apparently frank confession that ‘the proper honest Question is, not where the Play-house stands, but whether it is prejudicial to the Trade, and the Inhabitants of the City of LONDON’, the rest of the letter seems as concerned with the blurring of class boundaries as it is with anxiety about City trade. The writer recommends a tax on urban pleasure in order to exclude impecunious citizens; this would attract ‘Spectators of better Fashion who now stay away, because there is an Audience partly made up of the Dregs of the People, and they are unwilling to mix in so promiscuous a Company’. However, it is the precise identification of different parts of the modern city which makes this treatise specific to the period, distinguishing it from the standard formulae of anti-theatrical protests.

It was the depiction of the threat to trade, principally through the neglect and the idleness of the apprentice which yielded a more detailed and accurate representation of London. In response to Henry Giffard’s plan to transfer Goodman’s Fields theatre from Ayliffe Street to Leman Street, having leased a plot of ground from Sir William Leman for sixty-one years, the writer decries ‘the natural Tendency of frequenting such Entertainments, to a trading or working People’, referring specifically to the new playhouse:

Vast Numbers of such [Merchants and Tradesmen], and some of them very considerable, live within the Reach of this hurtful Project, reckoning only from Thames Street, up to Leaden-Hall Street, and so to Goodman’s Fields; which is a great Space of Ground that contains a great many of the considerable Traders. ...

Your Lordship will please to remember that the Minories, Towerhill, East-Smithfield, Wapping, Whitechappel, and all the populous Suburbs on that side of London, crowded with People employed in the several Manufactures, or what are called Handicrafts of the kingdom, are to be taken into the Account with

58 A Letter To ... Richard Brocas, p. 27.
59 Ibid., p. 6.
Goodman's Fields, Spittle Fields and the Parts adjacent. I must add to this long Catalogue all that large Part of the City, which lies between Aldgate and St. Paul's, which already is, and will be, daily more affected by having the Prentices and Workmen drawn to this new Play-house.60

The meticulous, cartographic listing of the streets surrounding the proposed theatre emphasizes the physical proximity of the playhouse to places associated with trade, singling out apprentices for particular concern. The debate attracted considerable attention in independent publications and the City's various journals, as many citizens felt impelled to articulate their objections in print. Perhaps the most celebrated contributor to this public dispute was Samuel Richardson.

Richardson expressed a largely hostile attitude to the theatre throughout his writing career. However, the motives for his antagonism appear to differ according to the particular genre he is using: disapproval of the theatre manifests itself as a threat to feminine virtue in his literary writing, while his non-fictional publications focus on the issues of class, in particular, the susceptibility of the young, male urban apprentice. In 1733, he published The Apprentice's Vade Mecum, a pocket companion designed to curb the natural intemperance and excesses of youth. Richardson felt that the threat of a City theatre to civic values was sufficient to warrant an entire section devoted to the dangers of the playhouse. In this respect, the stern warnings of The Apprentice's Vade Mecum differ in style from a slightly later anti-theatrical publication latterly attributed to Richardson: A Seasonable Examination of the Pleas and Pretensions Of the Proprietors of, and Subscribers to, Play-Houses, Erected in Defiance of the Royal License (1735).61 This later piece, which quotes liberally from The Apprentice's Vade Mecum, coincided with the proposal in 1735 to erect a new theatre in the City in St. Martin's le Grand.62 After referring to the theatre as a resort for 'Lewd women', the writer, like the author of A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Richard Brocas, provides a recognizable topographical framework which corresponds to the index of listed street names:

This Reason is a very strong one, if we consider what the Play-houses in Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden have done for their adjacent Neighbourhoods. The

60 Ibid., pp. 17; 23.
61 This treatise has been identified as one of Richardson's early publications by Alan D. McKillop, 'Richardson's Early Writings - Another Pamphlet', 73-75, The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 53, (1954).
62 Ibid., p. 74.
Hundreds of Drury, The Covent-Garden Gout, &c. are common Observations, in every One’s Mouth, upon the Iniquities of those Places. Salisbury Court, Fleet-Street, when the Playhouse was there, had hardly a tenement unoccupied by Inhabitants of this Class; and on its Remove, this Sort of Gentry have also removed, and the Place has as reputable Inhabitants as any other Part of the City.63

London is compartmentalized into its various theatres and adjoining neighbourhoods. The author laments the decline of the cluster of streets surrounding the playhouses in Westminster, but at least recognizes them as the true home of urban pleasure; the City theatre, on the other hand, brings nothing but moral and commercial decline.

*The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* is less geographically precise. Although the author objects to the situation of a theatre within reach of most inhabitants of the City, the text lacks the exact topographical detail of *A Seasonable Examination*:

That for a Play-house to be erected in the very midst of the middling sort of Tradesmen, who are to be allur’d also by lower Prices than are taken at others, and but just remov’d out of the Liberties of the City, to avoid the Cognizance of the Magistrates of this excellently well-govern’d Corporation; is such a Nuisance, as to call aloud for a Removal.64

Attention is focused on the indeterminate status of the area surrounding Goodman’s Fields and its proximity to the workplaces of the city’s apprentices.

*The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* is dedicated to the ‘Chamberlain of London’, and Richardson states his intention to take issue with the ‘degeneracy of the Times’. He adduces a number of points concerning the harmful influence of the theatre on the young City apprentices. The playhouse is foremost the haunt of ‘Persons in upper Life’, and therefore appropriate for people of a certain social station, while the frequenting of the city’s drama by tradesmen leads to an unnecessary ‘Loss of Time and Expence of Money’.65 The theatre is also the ‘great Resort of Lewd Women’, whilst the ‘Minds of the young Women (or young Ladies as they are now to be called) will be no less tainted with

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65 *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum*, p. 10.
Vanities they see acted on the Stage’. However, the most caustic criticism is reserved for the malleable and susceptible apprentice. Richardson complains that many of the plays performed at this particular theatre contain plot and dialogue which deliberately mock the ethos of the City’s values. Richardson’s biographers, T. C. D. Eaves and B. D. Kimpel, comment that *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* is typical of ‘the ethical system which provided the background against which Richardson wrote’. The author worries about the irreverent messages being transmitted to the gallery of impressionable apprentices.

Most of our modern Plays, and especially those written in a late licentious Reign, which are reckon’d the best, and are often acted, are so far from being so much as intended for Instruction to a Man of Business, that such Persons are generally made the Dupes and Fools of the Hero of it. To make a Cuckold of a rich Citizen, is a masterly Part of the Plot; and such Persons are always introduced under the meanest and most contemptible Characters.

Granted easy access to the theatre, the apprentices would constitute a sizable part of the audience. The plays being performed offered them a fantasized alternative version of their own lives, where the young worker succeeds in gaining the upper hand over a deflated and ridiculed master, and where drunken wit and debauchery are applauded in preference to the staid and sober code of conduct approved by the City’s aldermen. London’s size allowed for anonymity, while the playhouse offered a variety of roles for the immature and, as yet, undeveloped urban identity of the apprentice. Richardson feared that frequent visits to the theatre by the London apprentice would release a latent desire to rise above his allotted social rank. In the short term, the practical physical conditions governing the actual visit to Goodman’s Fields were of immediate concern. He points out that the timing of the performance would interfere with the routine of City work:

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66 Ibid., pp. 10; 17.
68 *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum*, p. 11.
69 For a brief discussion about the anxiety concerning the inflated aspirations of London’s apprentices in Elizabethan drama, see Anne Barton’s, ‘Comedy and the ethos of the City’; ‘They came from a great variety of social backgrounds, and the masters that they served differed enormously in wealth and status. All of them, however, shared the common experience of being adolescents uprooted from their own homes and uncertain, as yet, of their place in the world. ... They also needed, as individuals, to experiment with different roles’, p. 323. See also Steven R. Smith, ‘The London apprentices as seventeenth-century adolescents’, 149-61, *Past and Present* 61 (November 1973).
Let it be consider'd how little suited to the Circumstance of this Class of Youth, is the *Time* which the seeing of a Play requires. The Play generally begins about Six in the Evening, and the usual Time of an Apprentice's Business holds him (especially if his Master does him Justice, and imploys him as he ought for both their Sakes) till Eight or Nine: About which last Hour, except prolong'd by some of the modern Farce, or wretched Pantomime, the Play generally ends. So here are three Hours in every Day that the young Man goes to the Play, (which is near a *fourth* Part of it) stollen from the Master.70

Richardson’s words evoke associations with the puritan period in London’s history; like Rousseau’s description of Geneva – a work which I will discuss later – the theatre represents the corruption of city morals when its citizens are given too much free time to indulge in frivolous and idle pleasure.

Richardson’s polemic gained approval in the City. Both *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* and *A Seasonable Examination* provoked debate in several London periodicals, some of which reprinted whole sections from Richardson’s conduct books. In December 1733 the *Gentleman’s Magazine* reproduced a column from a recent edition of the *Weekly Miscellany*, No. 52, quoting from the *Vade Mecum* and commenting that:

> for a young *Tradesman*, or much more an Apprentice, to make this his favourite Diversion, and to *haunt* a Play-house, who can bestow his Time much more to the Advantage of his Business, which will probably suffer by it, must be of pernicious Consequence in several Respects.71

Similarly, an article in a January issue of 1734 also based a discussion of the foolishness of tradesmen’s aping their superiors in dress and behaviour on a brief synopsis of the *Vade Mecum*: ‘All the Fopperies and apish Fashions of the Men of Mode of the other End of the Town, must be introduced into the City.’72 An edition of the *London Magazine* in 1735 printed a letter signed by the loyal pseudonymous citizen Tradelove regarding the plan to erect the new theatre in the City in St. Martin’s le Grand. The letter appeared on 8 March, two months before the publication of *A Seasonable Examination*, which has prompted the identification of Tradelove with Richardson himself.73 The writer is disturbed by the idea of allowing the new theatre to impinge on the City’s business and to corrode discipline

70 *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum*, p. 15.
73 McKillop, p. 72.
among citizens aspiring to transcend their immediate circumstances, for ‘With Gentlemen of Estates, whose time may hang heavily on their Hands, and whose Pleasure is their Business, it may do very well; but with us whose Trade is the Support of this opulent City, it must be very detrimental’. The inevitable consequence of encouraging degenerate behaviour is that most heinous of civic crimes, the apprentice’s betrayal of his master’s trust. The apprentice fails his employer by falling into bad company, ‘Orange Women, and such like the Prostitutes of the Town’, and absenting himself for the whole night. This final offence is an allusion to George Lillo’s urban tragedy, The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell, 1731. Richardson mentions the play in The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum as the only suitable drama for the impressionable apprentice:

I know but of one Instance, and that a very late one, where the Stage has condescended to make itself useful to the City-Youth, by a dreadful Example of the Artifices of a lewd Woman, and the Seduction of an unwary young Man; ... I mean, the Play of George Barnwell, which has met with the success that I think it well deserves.

Alan D. McKillop comments that what we have here are ‘Richardson’s own comments on Bourgeois drama’. The play itself tells the story of the unworldly and impressionable apprentice, George Barnwell, who is led astray by the heartless and scheming courtesan, Sarah Millwood. She seduces him and persuades him to neglect his work, to betray the confidence of his master Thorowgood by staying out all night and by embezzling funds and, most tragically, to murder his benevolent uncle. The play ends with a genuinely contrite and sorrowful Barnwell awaiting execution with the unrepentant Millwood. There is nothing subtle about this play. Civic values are advocated in a series of mercantile aphorisms: ‘The Name of Merchant never degrades the Gentleman, so by no means does it exclude him’; ‘The Man of Quality, who chuses to converse with a Gentleman and Merchant of your Worth and Character, may confer Honour by so doing, but he loses none.’ Barnwell’s final monologue is addressed to the apprentices in the audience: ‘Be

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75 Ibid.
76 The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum, p. 16.
77 Ibid., introduction, p. vi.
warn'd ye Youths, who see my sad Despair,/Avoid lewd Women False as they are Fair.’

Lillo’s City tragedy presented in dramatic form the latent anxieties of London’s moral custodians. Its salutary story also inspired adaptations in related cultural fields: Hogarth’s series of twelve prints, *Industry and Idleness* (1747), for example, traces the respective London fortunes of a diligent, temperate apprentice whose assiduousness is rewarded with financial success in the City and his eventual appointment as Lord Mayor of London, while his delinquent counterpart, whose early idleness degenerates into crime and debauchery, is hanged for his sins, at Tyburn.

London’s apprentices formed a significant component of the City’s trading class. Regarded as an embryonic version of the skilled worker, the apprentice’s as yet undefined adult urban character was subject to seriously infantilizing social restrictions. He was discouraged from attending most of London resorts of pleasure and was expected to stay at home during the evening. Jones DeRitter comments that ‘[t]he apprentices’ intense dislike of these programmatic attempts to control their private lives was reflected not only in their often unruly behaviour, but in their literary tastes as well’. London apprentices were only given a few days holiday a year, one of which fell on the Lord Mayor’s Day (29 October). On this date, the London theatres performed plays aimed at the apprentices’ own tastes. Ironically, given the success of *The London Merchant*, the most popular play performed on this occasion, during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, was Edward Ravenscroft’s Restoration farce, *The London Cuckolds* (1681) – an urban distortion of the City’s preferred corrective drama, but a more accurate reflection of the apprentices’ desire for greater social and sexual freedom. However, the performances of these farces were only momentary tokens of appeasement, recreational outlets for a restrictive and childish existence. *The London Merchant* was a better indicator of the level of tolerance borne by the City’s authorities. These moral guardians were still opposed to the presence of

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80 See David Bindman, *Hogarth*, (Thames and Hudson, 1981; 1991), p. 169. Bindman adds that ‘Hogarth’s knowledge of the play is proven, if it needed to be, by the fact that on a preliminary drawing for the series he identified the Idle Apprentice as Barnwell, the name of Lillo’s Villain’, p. 169.
84 The plot, which centres round the cuckolding of three ‘citizen’ husbands by their neglected wives, was a rejoinder to the popular perception of the City’s dry and narrow commercial interests.
a playhouse inside their jurisdiction, and it is perhaps significant that when Henry Giffard took over the management of Goodman's Fields theatre from Thomas Odell in 1731, the first play to be performed there on 27 September was *The London Merchant* — possibly a conciliatory gesture, in an attempt to appease their offended principles.

Richardson's role in the pamphlet war against the institution of a theatre near or inside the City ostensibly aligns his position *vis-à-vis* the London stage with other opponents who felt similarly moved to convey their objections in print. However, Richardson's hostile attitude to Goodman's Fields Theatre does not represent a consistent attitude to London's playhouses. His dual authorial identity as purveyor of the ethics of commerce and writer of popular epistolary fiction renders his position slightly more equivocal. The absence of reference to the City's banned playhouses in his novels is silenced by the treatment instead, of the Town's more popular, legal theatres.

Richardson is a salient example of the partiality displayed by contemporary fiction in its depiction of its readership's urban tastes and aspirations. His exemplary heroines nearly all visit the theatre, but the pleasure is qualified as disapproval shifts from class and civic issues to the contemporary debate concerning female virtue. In 1741 he printed his *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*, which formed the prototype for his hugely successful bestseller *Pamela*. In it, he includes two successive letters relating to the theatre. The female correspondent first relates her impressions of a comedy she has seen. The tone is ambivalent: she is greatly impressed with the magnificence of the physical surroundings but is less happy with the immodest speeches articulated by the female actors: 'How must their virtue (and sure no woman is without virtue at her entrance into the world) be shock'd, to offer themselves for the entertainment of six hundred men.' Moreover, although she finds the performance of *Hamlet* a moving and edifying experience, the afterpiece — a pantomime — offends her sensibilities. Unlike Boswell's praise of the complementary *Lear* and *Polly Honeycombe*, the humorous farce, following on from Shakespeare, serves merely to offend, and even cancels out the pleasure afforded by the preceding performance of moving drama: 'But the low scenes of Harlequinery that were exhibited afterwards, fill'd me with high disgust, insomuch that I could, for their sake, have wish'd I had not seen the other.' The pantomime as afterpiece was an immensely popular feature of eighteenth-century London theatre, in particular at Covent Garden, whose manager John

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86 Ibid., p. 215.
Rich was responsible for promoting it, thereby encouraging its rival Drury Lane to follow suit.\textsuperscript{87} It also became increasingly common for playgoers to demonstrate their superior taste by registering their disapproval of the pantomime as vulgar, crass and garish entertainment for the masses. One writer, referring to a recent riot at Drury Lane, protested at the plan to rescind the tradition of reduced prices for those admitted after the third act in time for the afterpiece: 'What they were, they have determined themselves, by the exclusion of every thing, beyond their own comprehension, and declaring in favour only of pantomime, for the understanding of which, no more being necessary than a pair of open eyes.'\textsuperscript{88} The absurdity of the popular preference for farce over serious drama is illustrated in Oliver Goldsmith's \textit{The Citizen of the World}. The ingenuous Lien Chi Altangi is baffled by the burst of applause following an unexpected interruption of the play:

> [M]y attention was engrossed by a new object; a man came in balancing a straw upon his nose, and the audience were clapping their hands in all the raptures of applause. To what purpose, cried I, does this unmeaning figure make his appearance; is he part of the plot? Unmeaning do you call him, replied my friend in black ... nothing pleases the people more than seeing a straw balanced ... and a fellow possessed of talents like these is sure of making his fortune.\textsuperscript{89}

In Henry Mackenzie's \textit{The Man of the World} (1773), the virtuous Harriet demonstrates her refinement by refusing to stay for the farce, after she has been coerced into attending the playhouse.\textsuperscript{90} A young lady's attitude to the theatre is an indication of her social sensibilities. Apart from commenting on the actual content of the play, Richardson's female writer in the \textit{Familiar Letters} also designates the theatre as an undesirable environment for the sensitive female.

Not that I think it advisable for women to go alone to the playhouse; for the complaisance, so fashionable at present, affords a sort of occasion for laying them under such seeming obligations as cannot be returned, and ought therefore


\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Theatrical Disquisitions or A Review of the late RIOT at DRURY-LANE Theatre, on the 25th and 26th of January, London,1763}, p. 23. See also \textit{Three Original Letters to a Friend in the Country on the CAUSE and MANNER of the late RIOT at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane}, London, 1763.


The London theatre is a milieu with its own particular ambience, and the eighteenth-century urban novel develops into a locus where the evolution of the city's attitude to the playhouse is traced and played out. A visit to a public venue like the theatre evoked specific connotations that differed from private forms of entertainment like reading, which was more closely associated with feminine domesticity. Lawrence Stone has described how the consequences of literacy ‘generated private reading and correspondence, and the substitution of the novel of reading for that of adventure ... the product of demand from a growing mass of educated and leisured women’.\(^\text{92}\) As domestic duties amongst the middle and upper classes of society were passed onto household staff, wives ‘increasingly became idle drones ... “languishing in listlessness”’.\(^\text{93}\) Roger Chartier speculates on the association of reading with femininity. ‘[E]ighteenth-century men imagined the act of reading by women, which by then had become the quintessence of private activity’.\(^\text{94}\) Chartier argues that eighteenth-century iconography represented reading as a faintly disreputable and shameful activity. He discusses Pierre-Antoine Baudoin’s painting, *Reading*, which depicts a young lady in her private boudoir, surrounded by various objects and holding a novel; Chartier suggests that it is, ‘a highly eroticized representation [of] a young woman in a state of total abandonment’ and comments on the association between ‘female reading and idleness, sensual pleasure, and secret intimacy’.\(^\text{95}\)

Naomi Tadmor has recently taken issue with this analysis of reading in the eighteenth century.\(^\text{96}\) She argues that reading was not necessarily a private experience, but one which formed an integral part of domestic sociability; reading aloud was a popular pastime, performed both amongst the family and before company. Samuel Richardson particularly enjoyed many evenings reading aloud, at length, both from his own novels and from the

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\(^{91}\) Richardson, *Familiar Letters*, p. 214.


\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 396.


\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 147.

works of others. One female correspondent thanked Richardson for providing her with a domestic alternative to public appearance:

The piety, order, decorum, and strict regularity that prevailed in his family, were of infinite use to train the mind to good habits, and to depend upon its own resources. It has been one of the means which, under the blessing of God, has enabled me to dispense with the enjoyment of what the world calls pleasures, such as found in crowds, and actually relish and prefer the calm delight of retirement and books.97

Reading obviated the exposure to the moral corruption attendant on excursions into the public sphere. Richardson, in correspondence, recommended the restriction of opportunities for visiting public places of entertainment in London: ‘once, twice, thrice in the season; and not so often as thrice if I saw that they were likely to be drawn from domestic usefulness by the indulgence’.98 Although both reading and the playhouse could be classed as sociable activities, the latter presented a far greater threat to female virtue.

Richardson’s asseverations on the playhouse are reiterated in his fiction. In the sequel to the original successful novel, Pamela, who is now married to her former master Mr B., expounds at length on London’s sites of pleasure. As an upwardly mobile heroine, Pamela’s path to success strangely enacts the social trajectory condemned by Richardson when he attempted to curb the ambitions of the London apprentice. Pamela discards her previous identity of maid and embraces her new position in society.99 The focus of concern in the sequel to Pamela, published in 1741, is the opportunity for intrigue fostered by the metropolis’s numerous places of leisure.

In a series of letters to Lady Davers, Pamela gives a detailed report on her stay in London where she embarks on a trio of visits to the theatre, the opera and the masquerade. Terry Castle has already identified the masquerade as the one diverting episode in an otherwise dreary sequel.100 Castle also points out that Pamela’s ‘journey into urbanity’

99 It is interesting that Henry Giffard’s adaptation of James Dance’s dramatic translation of Richardson’s novel for the stage in 1741 was mainly performed in Goodman’s Fields theatre, also replicating Pamela’s objection to the epilogue as a standard feature in the theatre.
actually instigates the semblance of plot.\textsuperscript{101} Her occasional forays into the town’s fashionable resorts of pleasure represent a progressive threat to female virtue. ‘[T]he heroine is carried to three diversions’, writes Castle, ‘– theatre, opera, and masquerade... these events represent an intensification of danger and transformation energy: Pamela finds each more upsetting and chaotic than the last.’\textsuperscript{102} As the first in the unholy trinity of urban outings, Pamela’s trip to the theatre is a more morally ambiguous affair than the episode involving the masquerade. If the latter is transgression in its purest form, an occasion for absolute deviation from one’s usual or familiar identity, the theatre offers a more equivocal experience, as the opportunity for moral enrichment and instruction is modified by the promiscuity inherent in the playhouse’s organization. Pamela’s remarks on the physical surroundings of the opera house accord with her appreciation of the ambience of the theatre: ‘But what can I say when I have mentioned what you so well know, the fine scenes, the genteel and splendid company, the charming voices, and delightful music.’\textsuperscript{103}

Her critique of London’s theatre, however, opens with a qualified appraisal:

\begin{quote}
We have been at the playhouse several times; and give me leave to say, madam (for I have now read as well as seen several), that I think the stage, by proper regulations, might be made a profitable amusement. But nothing more convinces one of the truth of the common observation, that the best things, corrupted, prove the worst, than these representations.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

Pamela’s assessment of the tragedy, \textit{The Distressed Mother}, takes the form of an extended plot summary. The one salient observation concerns the epilogue, whose \textit{double-entendres} she is in the dubious position of understanding. Its crude insinuations prompt her to reflect on the erotic \textit{frisson} of complicit comprehension which runs through the audience:

\begin{quote}
The pleasure with which this was received by the men was equally barbarous and insulting; every one turning himself to the boxes, pit and galleries, where the ladies were, to see how they looked, and how they stood an emphatical and too well pronounced ridicule, not only upon the play in general, but upon the part of Andromache in particular, which had been so well sustained by an excellent
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 154. "Pamela’s London narrative will somehow have the power to make the familiar new. Suffice it to say that when Pamela and B. arrive in the city (Letter 43), a novel discourse does begin'.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 157.


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., vol. 4, p. 45.
Pamela is distressed at the synchronized turn by the men present in the theatre to observe the reactions of the ladies; it is not so much the lines spoken by the actors which cause the greatest discomfiture, but the mutual thrill at recognizing sly innuendos in mixed company. The virtuous young lady has the difficult task of displaying her modesty in such an environment. Frances Burney’s Evelina later faces the same predicament when she visits Drury Lane for a performance of William Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1695), a play singled out by Jeremy Collier in 1698 for particular censure. It contains sufficient bawdy material to allow it to function as means of filtering the virtuous from the uncouth. Evelina writes: ‘[T]ho’ it is fraught with wit and entertainment, I hope I shall never see it represented again; for it is extremely indelicate, – to use the softest word I can, that Miss Mirvan and I were perpetually out of countenance.’ In a public arena like the playhouse, the female can only broadcast her virtue and purity of mind through negative responses. Even an ordinary phrase like ‘out of countenance’ takes on a more deliberate and purposeful meaning in this context: the suitably adjusted, disapproving, facial expression confers the appropriate identity on the would-be respectable female theatregoer; being ‘out of countenance’ is, so to speak, being ‘in character’, the visible means of showing that one knows how to act and react in public spaces. Lord Orville tacitly acknowledges their display of delicacy and communicates his masculine sympathy by using a similarly oblique gallant code: ‘“I should have ventured to answer for the Ladies,” said Lord Orville, “since I am sure this is not a play that can be honoured with their approbation.”’, all of which works in his favour.

Pamela’s appreciation of drama has previously been cultivated by familiarizing herself with particular plays at home: ‘I have now read as well as seen several’; reading is a safer substitute for actual, physical attendance at the London playhouse. In fact, consumption of printed plays increased steadily during the eighteenth century. Writing about the contemporary commercialization of leisure, J. H. Plumb comments that this period ‘witnessed not only the rapid growth of fiction but also of theatrical publications, which

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105 Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 61-2.
107 Ibid., p. 80.
were second only to novels in the demands made on the circulating libraries'.

The growing availability of London’s plays in printed form meant that drama was no longer dependent on public consumption: the private (and virtuous) reader could circumvent the compromises demanded by London’s public resorts of pleasure through the vicarious consumption of dramatic publications.

In a letter to Anna Howe, Clarissa Harlowe, Richardson’s celebrated model of virtue, also displays her refined tastes by alluding to the number of plays she has read. After Lovelace has succeeded in persuading her to attend a performance of Otway’s Venice Preserved, she recalls ‘my remarks upon it, in the little book you made me write upon the principal acting plays’. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with drama itself if it contains no improper material, as it can provide moral instruction without the danger of exposure to the public gaze. It is, rather, the particular ambience in which it is performed which provokes the charges of licentiousness and promiscuity. Clarissa’s external impressions of London’s topography are both severely restricted and in many cases deliberately confused. Through her limited perspective, the reader is presented with a series of interiors, of which the theatre is only one example; a public social milieu is made the myopic private viewpoint of her own subjective narrative. She appears to be almost unaware of the internal moral code of the London playhouse and the implications of being seen with a certain kind of person. Lovelace sends Clarissa to see a tragedy, commenting dryly that, ‘For my own part, I loved not tragedies; though she did, for the sake of the instruction, the warning, and the example given in them.’ As in the Familiar Letters, tragedy is a much more suitable genre than comedy because the virtuous spectator is chastened by the experience rather than temporarily diverted by comic frivolities. Lovelace explains that he hopes the pathos of the performance will enable Clarissa to understand that ‘there have been, and may be, much deeper distresses than she can possibly know’. He reserves an exclusive gallery green-box, near the stage and with

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108 McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, (London: Europa, 1982), p. 272. Plumb adds that these statistics ‘are, of course, associated closely with other leisure activities which were absorbing more and more capital’.


112 Eaves and Kimpel comment that Richardson ‘had seen enough comedy to know that he disapproved’, *Samuel Richardson*, p. 582.
private access to the green-room behind the auditorium. However, Lovelace must also somehow bypass the vexing problem that Clarissa’s companion, the prostitute Polly Horton, might be recognized by members of the audience, thereby alerting Clarissa to the true nature of her circumstances. He achieves this by instructing Polly in the playhouse’s etiquette which will also double as an effective means of concealing her identity. ‘I have directed her where to weep – and this not only to show her humanity (a weeping eye indicates a gentle heart), but to have a pretence to hide her face with her fan or handkerchief; yet Polly is far from being every man’s girl’. Through the accepted code of urbane behaviour, Polly easily switches from harlot to young woman of sensibility, adapting her identity to a particular urban environment.

Polly’s public roleplaying is exposed for the evident imposturing it is – an attempt to pass herself off as an eminently suitable theatre companion. Yet her dissimulation, which renders her a willing accomplice to Lovelace’s scheming, seems emphasized because it takes place in the theatre. The playacting which constitutes public identity is considered in the novel as a more natural urban phenomenon. Earlier in the novel, in her first letter to Anna Howe, Clarissa reflects on the way in which female disguise and impersonation are inevitable consequences of the social role demanded of them by men:

[F]or what can any young creature in the like circumstances say, when she is not sure but a too ready consent may subject her to the slights of a sex that generally values a blessing either more or less as it is obtained with difficulty or ease? Miss Biddulph’s answer to a copy of verses from a gentleman, reproaching our sex as acting in disguise, is not a bad one, although you perhaps may think it too acknowledging for the female character.

Ungen’rous sex! – To scorn us, if we’re kind
And yet upbraid us, if we seem severe!
Do You, t’encourage us to tell our mind,
Yourselves put off disguise, and be sincere.
YOU talk of coquetry! – your own false hearts
Compel our sex to act dissembling parts.113

Clarissa deflects the charges made against her sex of adopting chameleon-like, fluctuating identities as natural reactions to the public gender roles required of them by their male suitors. Yet it is an equivocal response: Clarissa uses the poem as a justification and to

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113 Clarissa, ed. Ross, p. 44. [1st edition]
indicate helpless resignation, rather than fully to endorse its message. Women are forced to comply with parts allotted to them, but this also means losing any sense of an integral, essential identity.

This ambivalence concerning female performance develops into an unremittingly critical opposition to the theatre as a public venue intended to cultivate dramatic display. In the conclusion to the first edition of *Clarissa*, Richardson, through Lovelace’s reformed friend Belford, gives a brief report on the fate of many of the novel’s minor characters. In particular, he focuses on the miserable end of the lives of Polly Horton and of Sally Martin, the two accomplices to Clarissa’s incarceration and subsequent rape. In the first edition (1747-8), Sally Martin dies shortly after Clarissa’s death from a ‘fever and surfeit got by a debauch’; Polly Horton also perishes after contracting a ‘violent cold, occasioned through carelessness in a salivation’. However, in the third edition, published in 1751, Richardson elaborates considerably on his previous account of the two prostitutes, concentrating on the history of their early lives. Polly Horton is brought up by an over-indulgent mother, a young widow, who feeds her daughter a heady mixture of romances and novels and frivolous entertainment: ‘In short, ... miss grew up under the influences of such a directress, and of books so light and frothy, with the inflaming additions of music, concerts, operas, plays and assemblies, balls, drums, routs, and the rest of the rabble of the amusements of modern life.’ Sally Martin is likewise spoilt by her family of mercers. She is granted all her material wants and is encouraged to attend public places of entertainment where she soon becomes a familiar face. Richardson singles out the theatre as a particular favourite arena for narcissistic display:

> At all public diversions, she was the leader, instead of the led, of all her female kindred and acquaintance; though they were a third older than herself. She would bustle herself into a place, and make room for her more bashful companions, through the frowns of the first possessors, at a crowded theatre; leaving every one near her amazed at her self-consequence, wondering she had no servant to keep place for her; whisperingly inquiring who she was; and then sitting down admiring her fortitude.

> She officiously made herself of consequence to the most noted players; who, as one of their patronesses, applied to her for her interest, on their benefit nights. She knew the Christian, as well as surname of every pretty fellow who

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Eaves and Kimpel comment that, ‘Richardson referred to the stage enough to show that he had attended a fair number of performances, though during the latter part of his life ... he went rarely if at all’, which might help to explain the more critical attitude to the theatre in his later revisions. Certainly this extended critique, in the heavily revised third edition, of the perils of public social performances suggests an increasingly hostile attitude to the London theatre. Sally Martin’s ubiquity in London’s public social spaces precipitates her eventually fading star, but it is the playhouse which is singled out as the arena most fitting for her self-promotion. The play is not mentioned, and instead, all attention appears to be focussed on Sally’s front-row visibility.

Richardson seems to be implying that, although the licensed theatres in Covent Garden and Drury Lane are not to be unequivocally condemned like the playhouses in the City, their existence still poses a threat to the already eroded moral principles of those who frequent the Town’s places of leisure. Adopting a critical stance which recalls the passionate opposition of Law and Collier, Richardson’s fiction chooses to focus on the way a visit to the theatre compromises a woman’s virtue to varying degrees. The City apprentice is absent from this alternative urban perspective; instead, Richardson’s mid-century novels convey a London whose entertainments are a symptom of a more general social malaise. But, more importantly, his fiction counters the freedom that a more fluid identity, offered by the playhouse and identified by female writers in the first quarter of the century, could offer. Richardson’s epistolary narratives reassert the masculine perspective; not the male gaze of *The Spectator*, but the more thunderous warning of moral dissipation by self-appointed moral commentators.

However, although Richardson’s views on London’s playhouses appeared increasingly to focus on human virtue, his literary depictions avoid generalized ahistorical condemnation. His polemical pamphlets directly address the material presence of the theatre in the heart of the City, but his fiction also refers to the popular theatrical sites in the West End, and, by alluding to the practice of reading rather than viewing plays, he succeeds in conveying the notion that reading could offer a more edifying form of private entertainment. But it is only reading of a particular kind: like the later Polly Honeycombe,

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116 Ibid. p. 537.
117 Eaves and Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, p. 582.
Richardson’s own Polly Horton has her head turned by ‘light and frothy’ novels and Romances which seem to encourage her to seek out London’s promiscuous round of endless pleasures.

**The London theatre and the mid-century novel**

The connection that Richardson makes between dangerous reading and the moral compromises demanded by London’s resorts of leisure is, however, not necessarily made by other, contemporary writers of novels. If Richardson occupied an exclusive authorial position, straddling the topographical boundaries separating the City from the Town in his polemical writings and his epistolary works, other mid-century writers also contemplated the social ramifications generated by the theatre’s presence in the city. But they seemed to invest their treatment of the London playhouse with a greater tolerance, and even approval, of the theatre as an urban institution.

The confusion of play-acting on the stage and the impostures fostered by the sheer size and structure of the metropolis is contemplated at length by Henry Fielding in a chapter entitled ‘A Comparison between the World and the Stage’, in *Tom Jones* (1749). Fielding considers the metaphor of *theatrum mundi* initially by acknowledging its current status as literary cliché:

The World has often been compared to the Theatre ... This Thought has been carried so far, and is become so general, that some Words proper to the Theatre, and which were, at first, metaphorically applied to the World, are now indiscriminately and literally spoken of both: Thus Stage and Scene are by common Use grown as familiar to us, when we speak of Life in general, as when we confine ourselves to dramatic Performances.  

He quotes the lines from *Macbeth*, ‘Life’s a poor Player/ That struts and frets his Hour upon the Stage/ And then is heard no more’, only to dismiss them as a hackneyed quotation. Fielding is more interested in giving a banal commonplace a modern

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119 Fielding, *Tom Jones*, vol. 1, p. 324. It is interesting that ten years later, Henry Fielding’s sister, Sarah Fielding, included this quotation, without any self-consciousness or irony, in her novel, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759). She draws a comparison between actors and people who frequently appear in the public sphere: ‘Players who perform their Parts to deceive themselves only: They differ indeed widely, in some Circumstances, from their brother Comedians on the Theatres of Covent-garden and Drury-lane; both exert themselves to excite Laughter in their spectators; but these are so generous as to bestow all their Labour gratis’, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, 2 vols, 1759, vol. 1, pp. 133-34.
relevance by situating it in the context of contemporary London. One is more likely to witness a faultless performance or impersonation on London’s streets and cultural centres than in its theatres: ‘When Transactions behind the Curtain are mentioned, St. James’s is more likely to occur to our Thoughts than Drury-Lane.’

Fielding’s own definition of the citizen as actor has moral ramifications, implying the idea of man’s abdication of personal and civic responsibility – an attitude which recalls the implicit message of the early scandalous fiction of Manley and Haywood. He writes: ‘Life mostly exactly resembles the Stage, since it is often the same Person who represents the Villain and the Hero... A single bad Act no more constitutes a Villain in Life, than a single bad Part upon the Stage.’ The citizen is defined by whatever role he chooses to play at a particular time; depth and essence are replaced by a series of different parts; urban man’s identity is determined by surface rather than continuity.

The metaphor of the stage for urban identity was, perhaps, a natural one for Fielding. A former playwright himself, he ceased writing for the stage after the passing of the 1737 Licensing Act, which severely censored the output of new plays and limited the number of licensed playhouses to two, in Covent Garden and Drury Lane, in London’s fashionable Westminster. A decade later, the influence of current developments concerning the theatre on social theory could be seen in another city, Rousseau’s Geneva.

In 1536 Calvin had situated the headquarters of his particular form of Protestantism in Geneva, which by the eighteenth century still declared its Puritan ancestry in its uncompromising attitude to public places of leisure, in particular to the theatre. When the philosopher d’Alembert composed an entry on the city of Geneva for the French Encyclopédie some time between 1755 and 1757 he noted that it had no playhouse. He acknowledged the Calvinist attitude to ‘adornment, dissipation, and libertinism which the actors’ troops disseminate among the young’, but suggested that the theatre might be employed to demonstrate in incomparable dramatic form, the complexities of human virtue. In 1758, Rousseau responded with the famous Letter to M. D’Alembert, in which he conflated his condemnation of the theatre with the idea of the metropolis itself. He

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120 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 323-4.  
121 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 327-8.  
saw the playhouse as a variation on the role of the citizen who constantly reinvented himself in a succession of different guises, by virtue of the fact that in the city nobody knew his personal history; relationships were therefore established on the basis of sociability – pleasurable, often chance, meetings in public places where one was recognized only by one’s visible persona. Identity is only appearance:

in a big city, full of scheming, idle people without religion or principle, whose imagination, depraved by sloth, inactivity, the love of pleasure, and great needs, engenders only monsters and inspires only crimes; in a big city, where moeurs and honour are nothing because each easily hides his conduct from the public eye, shows himself only by his reputation.  

Such social interaction means that the citizen is reliant on others for a sense of identity; reciprocal admiration creates a series of mutually dependent selves, where contingency replaces autonomy. Moreover, urban pleasure also opposed the Protestant ideal where the work ethic allows no time for leisure, thereby preventing lapses into vice and degeneracy. Metropolitan sociability obstructs the notion of a true and virtuous self. Richard Sennett comments that for Rousseau, ‘the theatre rather than licentious books or pictures, is a dangerous art form because it promotes the vices of men and women who do not have to struggle to survive. It is the agent of loss of self’.  

The blurring of play-acting and social behaviour had been depicted in extreme terms, earlier in the century, in Charles Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721). In letter 28, the ingenuous tourist Rica finds his attention diverted from the stage to the audience where he believes he is observing another, more intriguing set of performances.

In this box, you see a love-afflicted lady portraying her ailment. There, a more animated woman devours her lover with her eyes, and he returns her gaze; every passion shows on their faces and is expressed with an eloquence even more intense because it is mute. These actresses appear only from the waist up, and ordinarily cover their arms modestly with a muff. Down below, there is a swarm of people who ridicule those above them, who in turn laugh at those below.  

125 Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 117.  
 Rica’s mistake makes explicit the nature of social relations. The humorous device of using an alien perspective to underline the absurdities of metropolitan life was repeated later, in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World*, first published as a book in 1762, in a series of letters purportedly written by a Chinese philosopher, Lien Chi Altangi. The writer visits a London theatre and observes the spectators, recounting how ‘I could not avoid considering them as acting parts in dumb show, not a curtsey, or nod, that was not the result of art; not a look nor a smile that was not designed for murder’. Fielding’s extended metaphor and Rousseau’s fears are literalized: city playgoers are depicted as accomplished social actors, deceiving and dissimulating with every flirtatious gesture.

Tom Jones’s trip to the theatre with his companion Partridge, to see a performance of *Hamlet*, is one of the novel’s most comic episodes. During one memorable scene, the simple schoolmaster, mistaking fiction for fact, trembles with Hamlet at the spectre of the prince’s father’s ghost. However, as Partridge explains, it is not that he believed the ghost really existed, but that ‘when I saw the little Man so frightned himself, it was that which took Hold of me’. During the remainder of the performance, Partridge continues to make similar spectatorial gaffes, much to the amusement of his companions. Amid the comedy, though, the discerning reader would have recognized the implicit tribute to the dramatic talents of David Garrick, whose natural style famously set him apart from his peers. During the eighteenth century, Garrick became a major attraction for visitors to the playhouse. Perhaps for the first time, playgoers had cause to visit the theatre because they wanted personally to witness the acclaimed performances of an actor, rather than seeking an urban pretext for public sociability. Trips to see Garrick on stage became familiar episodes in novels like *Tom Jones* and *Evelina*, and are clearly recorded in the diaries and journals of writers like Boswell and Burney. John Brewer has recently described how Garrick’s tried to bring about a greater respectability for the London theatre, where he sought to set himself up as ‘a model of polite affability and modern refinement’. However, in the local context in which Garrick is invoked in *Tom Jones*, the focus is on the ambivalent consequences of a perfect dramatic performance. The actor’s

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129 Garrick is named in the novel as the actor taking the part of Hamlet: ‘Partridge gave that credit to Mr Garrick, which he had denied to Jones, and fell into so violent a trembling, that his knees knocked into each other’, *Tom Jones*, vol. 2, p. 853.
verisimilitude confuses the untutored eye: like the anonymous citizen, the actor’s impersonation passes for reality. The difference, of course, is that the theatre is a demarcated urban space, announcing itself as an arena which encloses publicly acknowledged performance; Partridge’s error is amusing because he misconstrues that which is openly recognized as acting. However, Fielding’s earlier comments on the comparison between the world and the stage subtly qualify the apparently obvious comic gap between Partridge’s limited comprehension and the superior perspective of the spectator and the novel’s readers. The narrator points out, with obvious omniscient advantage, that the streets of the metropolis, particularly those in Westminster, afford more notable examples of deception and hypocrisy than the London Stage; the spectator and the reader may laugh at Partridge’s confusion, but they are equally subject to the deceptions, the ‘Transactions behind the Curtains’, enacted daily in the city. The comic moment is diffused into a hesitant, more sophisticated joke that appears to target the ingenuous spectator in the playhouse, but which equally mocks the citizen, and by implication, the reader who might attend the theatre.

The visit to the theatre in *Tom Jones* also draws attention to the familiar social phenomenon of going to ‘see and be seen’. Tom is spotted by the appreciative Mrs Fitzpatrick in the gallery, where he is being observed watching his friend Partridge watching a performance of *Hamlet*:

> While Mrs Miller was thus engaged in Conversation with Partridge, a lady came to Mr Jones, whom he immediately knew to be Mrs Fitzpatrick. She said, she had seen him from the other Part of the Gallery, and had taken that Opportunity of speaking to him, as she had something to say.  

The narcissism of London’s citizens was not a new social phenomenon, but the theatre managers and architects tried to cultivate an environment in which spectators could enjoy the reciprocal gaze of both familiar and unknown admirers. It became popular, for example, to take a seat in the new boxes which were situated on the stage itself. This way, spectator and spectacle merged in the eyes of other playgoers. Furthermore, the privileged occupant of the stage box could attract the attention of similarly advantaged socialites. When the managers eventually abolished the practice of allowing restless visitors access to the area behind the stage, as wandering beaux obscured the sound and vision of the serious

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spectator, a series of riots took place in protest at this obstacle to public sociability. The common sight of spectators greeting each other across the theatre and interrupting the performance was often noted. One writer remarked:

An old dry Gentleman, who sat by me the other Night in the Pit, was proposing a Scheme to exclude these pretty Fellows from the Scenes, and with their own Consent: He was saying, that if you wou'd fix up a Looking-glass in every Box, it wou'd certainly draw 'em to that Part of the House; for the double Pleasure of seeing themselves, and being seen and admir'd by the Ladies there, wou'd be preferrable to that, of being seen only, and not admir'd, on the Stage.132

The writer highlights the careful attention given to the design of the playhouses; the narcissism implicit in the many descriptions of observers basking in mutual admiration is made concrete, with a wry suggestion that the architect might add mirrors in order to facilitate the reciprocal gaze.

The initiative taken by Mrs Fitzpatrick reverses the more conventional pattern of the male prompted to engage a female visitor to the theatre in conversation. Similarly, Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) includes an incident depicting the idiocy which public appearances at the theatre could induce. Seated in the front row of the boxes, traditionally the women's area, given its capacity to grant maximum exposure to the occupant, Random describes the thrill of being observed, as well as the paranoia generated by a heightened self-consciousness:

I saw a good deal of company, and had vanity enough to make me believe, that I was observed with an uncommon degree of attention and applause. This silly conceit intoxicated me so much that I was guilty of a thousand ridiculous coquetries ... - I got up and sat down, covered and uncovered my head twenty times between the acts; pulled out my watch, clapped it to my ear, wound it up, set it, gave it the hearing again; - displayed my snuff-box, affected to take snuff, that I might have an opportunity of shewing my brilliant, and wiped my nose with a perfumed handkerchief; - then dangled my cane, and adjusted my sword-knot, and acted many more fooleries of the same kind, in hopes of obtaining the character of a pretty fellow.133


The passive spectacle turns to shameless exhibitionism in a display reminiscent of number 240 of *The Spectator*, published thirty years earlier. In the earlier essay, the spectator invaded the space of the stage while in *Roderick Random* the performance takes place in the theatre box. In both incidents, however, the viewer deflects attention away from the play, substituting his own antics for the drama of the stage. By evoking associations with an earlier literary vignette, Smollett shows how the unknown visitor to London unwittingly succeeds in passing himself off as an equally buffoonish fop, who inverts his designated role as passive spectator into social actor.

Richardson aside, it appeared that mid-century writers were intent on conveying a more lighthearted attitude to the London playhouse than early eighteenth-century critics: the emphasis on male performance in novels like *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random* obscures the vulnerability of women as passive spectators and their susceptibility to sexual impropriety in the environs of the theatre. Although Sophia returns early from the theatre as a result of a serious riot, the circumstances are dismissed within a few words while the focus in the narrative is on how Sophia has interrupted a tryst between Jones and Lady Bellaston. While Richardson aligned his views more closely with those of writers like Law and Collier, the novels of Fielding and Smollett offered a more indulgent attitude. Fielding’s previous incarnation as one of London’s foremost playwrights before the imposition of the 1737 Licensing Act can explain his inclusion of a good-humoured account of a visit to the theatre. However, other narratives dealing with mid-century London by male authors also seem to offer a more benign view of the London stage by setting sexual misconduct firmly in the earlier part of the eighteenth century.

Francis Coventry’s *The History of Pompey the Little*, published in 1751, the same year as the third edition of *Clarissa*, mitigates Richardson’s criticism. The novel recounts a series of adventures of Pompey, a lapdog, in eighteenth-century London. In a letter to her daughter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu declared *Pompey the Little* ‘a real and exact representation of Life as it is now acted in London’; the telling verb ‘acted’ comprehends the theatrical nature of fashionable urban existence. Pompey experiences a gradual decline in his fortunes as his successive owners descend further down the social scale. He is forced to endure tedium in the company of an ‘old Maid’ after ‘shining

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conspicuous in the Side boxes of the Opera and Play-House'. But the narrative also includes an account of the life of a respectable London milliner, whose youth was influenced and shaped by the playhouse. Born to a country Gentleman, the milliner suffers a gradual downturn in her social circumstances, owing to pride and snobbery. After taking a position as a ‘Waiting-Gentlewoman’ in a family where ‘all was pleasure’, the young girl has her head turned by ‘Plays, Novels, Romances and the like’. She decides to become an actress in Drury-Lane theatre, but after securing a number of very minor roles, she discovers that she can earn security by different means:

But tho’ she could not make a Fortune by her Genius, her Beauty was more successful, and she had the Luck to make a Conquest of one of those pretty Gentlemen, who appear in laced Frocks behind the Scenes, or more properly on the middle of the Stage. He attended her in the Green-Room every Evening, and at last made her the Offer of a Settlement, if she could be contented to sacrifice her Ambition to Love. She was at first a little unwilling to leave the Theatre, where she foresaw such Advantages from her Genius; but thinking her Merit not enough regarded, and despairing of better Treatment (for she had not yet been permitted to play Lady Townly) she resigned herself to the Proposals of her Gallant, and set out with him immediately for the Country.

Her devoted husband dies shortly afterwards, bequeathing his wife a modest sum of money, and the young woman establishes herself as a respectable milliner when she returns to London.

Like Richardson’s Polly Horton, the milliner has imbibed a heady mixture of ‘Plays, Novels, Romances and the like’. Her literary consumption is evidently considered a significant factor in the skewing of her moral perspective; her reading matter denotes ethical compromise and distortion. Yet the narrative’s temporal structure qualifies the comparison between Coventry’s tale and Richardson’s Clarissa, as well as earlier amatory fictions: although the story of the milliner, in effect, replicates the intrigues of the tales of Delarivier Manley and the early Eliza Haywood, the episode is set firmly in the past, as if to establish a new period of moral decency in the 1750s. Richardson’s extended epilogue in his 1751 revision of Clarissa also offered a late insight into the formative years of Polly

136 Ibid., pp. 134-5.
137 Ibid., p. 137.
Horton and Sally Martin, making their eventual demise an inevitable consequence of their wayward and exposed youth, retroactively justifying moral retribution. But Coventry's novel, also published in 1751, offers a redemptive and more optimistic alternative ending: early mistakes are, albeit with financial assistance, regretted and rectified.

In a way, the story of the milliner's vicissitudes resembles the career of Eliza Haywood: a scandalous reputation is transformed into urban respectability. Although in the final 1743 version of *The Dunciad*, Haywood was still traduced as a vindictive female satirist, by the late 1740s she had emerged as the respectable author of *The Female Spectator* (1744-6), a periodical designed for the instruction of the young lady in contemporary society. The creator of Fantomina still defends the theatre, but she qualifies her approval. She opens her remarks by asserting, 'my spectatorial Capacity will permit me to approve of no other entertainments, which are paid for, and which all People, without Distinction, have an equal Privilege for their Money, than those which are exhibited on the Theatres'. Yet Haywood adds a cautionary note when she refers to the presence of prostitutes: in the past, she argues, these women were made recognizable by masks or black hoods; now, however, she deplores the idea that 'that Vice has dared to appear barefaced at the Theatres'. Haywood's main concern seems to be the substitution of one kind of anonymity for another, more insidious type, where virtue and depravity become almost indistinguishable, with the assistance of disguise and imposture—a favourite device of her earlier female protagonists. Despite her reservations though, Haywood still justifies the visit to the theatre, where 'pleasure and instruction are blended'.

In 1751, she published *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, the story of a foolish and coquettish young girl who enjoys a series of flirtations, marries unwisely and finally, after the fortuitous death of her husband, weds her faithful admirer Trueworth. The playhouse features prominently in the narrative and Betsy's fickleness is established through the revelation of the company she keeps. Recognizing her fondness for the stage, Trueworth invites her to accompany him to the theatre but finds that she has a prior engagement at Lincoln's Inn Fields, whose dubious legal status implies an improper

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139 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 214.
140 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 214.
When Betsy rejects his offer, he appears to disapprove of her first choice of company:

'With all my heart,' answered she, 'none of the gentlemen of my acquaintance know any thing of my going, so could not offer to gallant me, and there is only one lady goes with me.' - 'Miss Mabel, I guess,' cried Mr Trueworth. - 'No,' answered Miss Betsy, 'she is engaged to the other house tonight, so I sent to desire the favour of that lady, you saw me with last night, to give me her company.'

'You will have more if you have her's, I doubt not,' said he; 'but sure, madam, you cannot think of being seen with a woman of her fame, in a place so public as the playhouse.'

Trueworth follows Betsy to the theatre in the hope of seeing her, placing himself 'in a part of the middle gallery, which had the full command of half the boxes'. When he finally spies her, he is shocked by his beloved's behaviour.

[H]e saw Miss Forward earnest in discourse with a gentleman that sat behind her, and Miss Betsy receiving fruit from another, with the same freedom and gaiety of deportment she could have done, if presented by himself; - he saw the nods, - the winks, - and the grimaces, which several in the pit made to each other, when looking towards these two ladies, - every moment brought with it some fresh matter for his mortification.

Trueworth despairs of winning Betsy's attentions and tries to win her affections by pressing her to visit her favourite haunts with him. When she pronounces 'I look upon a good play as one of the most improving, as well as agreeable entertainments' and expresses her fondness for opera, Trueworth responds impressively, 'Then, Madam, ... there are two of the pleasures of London, which are so happy to receive your approbation'. Despite being ostensibly the principled voice of respectability in the novel, Trueworth's

141 After the passing of the 1737 Licensing Act, Lincolns Inn Fields was technically an illegal theatre. Its position abutting on the eastern side of Westminster also placed it apart from the centre of fashionable pleasures. Nevertheless, it continued to prove an immensely popular playhouse, often disguising its main performance between two acts of a concert, or even as entertainment to be taken with a ‘dish of tea’.
143 Ibid., p. 209.
145 Ibid., pp. 275-76.
disapproval of Betsy's behaviour at the playhouse does not cast her in the role of fallen woman. Unlike Richardson's Sally Martin and Polly Horton, Betsy Thoughtless is finally redeemed, by marrying and becoming Betsy Trueworth. Haywood's growing respectability is palpable but not absolute; she may now obliquely chide her heroines for behaving unwisely at the theatre, but she does not recommend renunciation either. Haywood's mid-century stance thus conveys an attempt by a female author to rewrite the experience of visiting the London theatre, from a female point of view. No longer the scandalous episode that it had represented in earlier amatory fictions, Haywood's later writings allow the female visitor to the London playhouse greater purity of intent. By describing this growing respectability in both her journalism and her fiction Haywood was able to feminize an urban phenomenon gradually made more acceptable by contemporary male writers like Fielding and Smollett.

Writing a few years before Haywood's The Female Spectator and Betsy Thoughtless, Sarah Fielding's The Adventures of David Simple (1744) had also attempted to depict the London theatre. It focuses on a riot at Covent Garden playhouse, an episode which challenges the sentimental hero's view of the world; the relish for violence and ruthless criticism inhibits his quest to find the perfect loyal friend. The narrative avoids addressing the question of whether women should be attending the theatre by making the protagonist male: although David Simple displays extremes of emotion and sensitivity, the fact that he is not a woman, precludes the emphasis placed on conventional sexual morals when he attends the theatre. Janet Todd comments that Simple's gender allows 'a picaresque plot without turning the hero into a knowing rogue or predator', like one of Manley's or Haywood's female heroines.146 Sarah Fielding's circumventions thus shifted the focus of the narrative perspective away from the inflammatory issue of whether a woman visiting the mid-century London playhouse risked compromising her reputation and, by contemporary synonymous extension, her virtue. Fielding's writing ignored rather than risked breaking the common thread linking the scandalous tales by female authors of the first part of the century with the more reactionary depictions of the 1750. Her depictions of the theatre dealt mainly with ideas about urban identity rather than explicitly female issues. Fanny Burney's later novels, however, maintain a stance which, perhaps surprisingly, reaffirms Haywood's insistence that the woman who attends the theatre is no longer the predatory female depicted in earlier fictions. The perspective moves from a focus on sexual

146 Todd, The Sign of Angellica, p. 165.
danger to encompass the more subtle and complex interplay between different economic classes.

The *locus classicus* for the illustration of the sociability enjoyed by eighteenth-century theatre-goers is *Evelina* (1778). Narrated through the perspective of a young girl new to London, the various excursions to the city's fashionable playhouses place a traditional emphasis on seeing and being seen in public. In fact, much of Lord Orville's successful wooing takes place in the theatre which guarantees an enclosed space, designed for exposure to the gaze of others. Evelina reports how at one point she is confronted by a succession of admirers who have glimpsed her in her theatre-box.

Our places were in the front row of a side-box. Sir Clement Willoughby, who knew our intention, was at the door of the Theatre ... We had not been seated five minutes, ere Lord Orville, who we saw in the stage-box, came to us; and he honoured us with his company all the evening ... When the play was over, I flattered myself I should be able to look about me with less restraint, as we intended to stay the Farce; but the curtain had hardly dropped when the box-door opened, and in came Mr. Lovel.147

Evelina's trip to the theatre risks degenerating into its own scenes of farce. By taking a seat in the front row, rather like Smollett's Roderick Random, she exposes herself to the gaze of her male admirers, who choose to reveal themselves in a series of entrances and introductions at different doors. The mild absurdity of the scene diffuses the gravity that pervades Clarissa's visit to the theatre with Polly Horton. Whatever thrill Evelina may experience as a consequence of all this masculine attention, it is allowed to remain a private, although mutually recognized moment. Instead of externalizing the *frisson*, transmuting it into a clumsier and more obvious occasion for moral rebuke, the facilitation of social interplay renders the element of sexual attraction a more subtle, and therefore more respectable, public phenomenon.

Similarly, in Burney's *Cecilia* (1782), the beleaguered heroine is disconcerted by the way in which the playhouse is used as a pretext for the pleasure of social mingling: 'And here Cecilia found rather the appearance of a brilliant assembly of ladies and gentlemen, collected merely to see and entertain one another, than of distinct and casual parties, mixing

147 Burney, *Evelina*, p. 78.
solely from necessity.' 148 Cecilia also experiences the concentration of a collective gaze focused on her:

Some of the ladies, and most of the gentlemen, upon various pretences, returned into the pit merely to look at her, and in a few minutes the report was current that the young lady who had been the occasion of the quarrel, was dying with love for Sir Robert Floyer. 149

Rather than representing the natural prerogative of the male gaze, the ‘Heteropticks’ of Burney’s theatre fractures the male gaze, rendering the collective scrutiny a case of social curiosity, an opportunity for greater public sociability.

Burney is concerned not so much with licentiousness and depravity as with exploring both the development of urban consciousness and the class structure inherent in the theatre. The playhouse admitted a far broader band of spectators than the London opera house which I will discuss in the next chapter. Although her heroines are made vulnerable by their exposure to flirtatious fops and the material of certain plays, there is no overt disapproval or moral comment. She translates spatial arrangement into social stratification. Spectatorship is defined by the social layering effected by the differentiated and discriminating admission fees.

Burney’s shift of emphasis maintains the more sympathetic and tolerant attitude to the theatre portrayed by mid-century female authors like Fielding and Haywood, which slightly qualified the earlier appropriation of women’s association with the theatre in the first quarter of the century. Yet the fictional treatment of the London theatre does not necessarily mirror a general approval by women in contemporary London. Indeed, these literary portrayals may only reflect of the relatively independent spirit of these particular female writers. However, it does indicate a more or less continuous tradition, written and reaffirmed by women authors. Early fictions aimed to exploit the early predatory figure of the female visitor for their own purposes by choosing a narrative perspective which conveyed approval of the female who played her allotted role to her own advantage. The detectable reactionary tendency of mid-century women writers against this earlier tradition conferred greater respectability on the playhouse than contemporary male authors, and Fanny Burney’s later novels confirmed this favourable stance. Although Richardson railed

149 Ibid., p. 139.
against the pernicious effect of plays, novels and romances on young, impressionable female minds and was supported, albeit in humourous ways, by Fancis Coventry and George Colman, these women writers had similarly identified the consumers of their fictions. Their literary representations of the theatre imparted fewer moral warnings, reflecting and re-shaping the tastes of their readers.

This is not to say that later male writers were not also continuously revising and moderating their responses to the fluctuating fortunes of the London theatre. Richard Graves’s picaresque, anti-methodist novel, *The Spiritual Quixote, or the Summer Rambles of Geoffry Wildgoose* (1773) interpolates the tale of a Mrs Rivers, narrated by her husband, who recounts the early experiences of his wife in London after they had eloped, and confirms the hazards of appearing in the public arena of the theatre. As an attractive female, the young Mrs Rivers finds that her presence in the side-boxes results in ‘several glasses leveled at her from different parts of the theatre’. At first, nobody penetrates her disguise and she is ‘distinguished by nothing, but by her attention to the interesting scenes on the stage, from one that had been all her lifetime in public places’. One night, however, she appears in Drury Lane theatre and mistakenly occupies a seat in ‘an improper part of the theatre’, whereupon, much like Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina fifty years earlier, she attracts the attentions of the rakish gentlemen in the pit. She is recognized by a country neighbour of her father, a Mr. Fitz-Patrick who, having heard of her elopement with Mr. Rivers, mistakenly assumes from her position in that ignominious part of the play-house that she has been abandoned and fallen into dissolution and moral depravity, and resolves to rescue her from further ignominy. Unlike Fantomina’s adventures, however, the episode concerning the beautiful Mrs Rivers is framed by moral comment. Rivers’s interlocutor, the eponymous Methodist Geoffry Wildgoose, interrupts, with the observation: “I cannot but think every situation improper in that temple of Satan, the play-house.”

Wildgoose’s religious hyperbole – ‘that temple of Satan’ – looks back to the admonitions of Law, Collier and even Stephen Gosson who had all damned the playhouse as a diabolic urban venue. However, the satirical framework of the novel makes

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151 Ibid., p. 212.
152 Ibid., p. 213.
153 Ibid., p. 213.
Wildgoose's overstated objections an easy target of ridicule. Like other eighteenth-century imitations of Cervantes' deluded knight, the 'spiritual Quixote', has read widely, particularly in the field of moral exhortation, but his subsequent exaggerated responses to all that the world thrusts in his way are held up to comic appreciation. All this seems to suggest a gradual convergence of viewpoints in the later eighteenth-century novel regarding the London theatre; a common perspective which had moved away from earlier ambivalence and achieved a united approval. However, this selective line of literary heritage ignores the response evoked by the London stage in the sentimental novel.

Rousseau's *Letter to M. D'Alembert* warned against Geneva allowing the construction of a theatre because of its noxious effect on the morals of its citizens. However, his assault on the urban playhouse focuses not on the power of drama to arouse unseemly passions in its spectators, but on the potential corruption of the finer, more rarefied, feelings of Sensibility: 'The harm for which the theatre is reproached is not precisely that of inspiring criminal passions but of disposing the soul to feelings which are too tender and which are later satisfied at the expense of virtue.' The point being made here is that although sensibility may be a virtuous quality if feelings are directed to noble sentiments and actions, an excess of emotion induced by theatrical drama will render feeling itself ineffectual and ultimately self-pleasing. Rousseau believed that Genevans possessed 'naturally an exquisite sensibility', but feared that a theatre would corrupt their innate refined sensibilities. His letter of 1758 therefore constituted an early example of criticism made by writers of sentimental literature: that the playhouse was a dangerous urban arena ultimately to be condemned for its exploitation of man's natural, sentimental response to emotional ostentation. What we see, however, is the paradoxical position adopted by sentimental fiction, where explicit acting and dissimulation are deplored while frequent extravagant displays of sentiment and feeling are deemed praiseworthy.

In Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765-70), the naive hero, the fool of quality, Harry Clinton, witnesses a real murder behind the scenes of a performance of *Othello*, or *The Moor of Venice* as it is referred to in the novel. In the fourth act, an inebriated Lord Mohun enters one of the stage boxes and insults the player performing the part of Desdemona, by uttering a series of obscene suggestions. The actress's guardian, Montfort, attempts to defend the honour of his charge, thereby enraging Mohun who takes up a sword and runs it through the body of Montfort, killing him. Chaos ensues:

The Women instantly uttered Shriek after Shriek, and, falling on the Body, sent forth repeated Cries of the bitterest Lamentation. The Audience were then in an Uproar, and called aloud to know the Meaning of the Disturbance: when an Actor hastily advanced to the Front of the Stage, and, with wringing Hands, informed them of what had happened.\footnote{Henry Brooke, \textit{The Fool of Quality}, 1765-70, 4 vols, Dublin, 1749, vol. 4, p. 262. Interestingly, this violent episode is absent from later, revised 5-volume editions, presumably because it risked offending the refined sensibilities of its readers. Further citings from \textit{The Fool of Quality} will be from a later 5-volume edition from 1770, printed in London.}

The audience is confronted with the extreme consequences of the blurring of the boundaries between performance and real life. The metaphor of \textit{theatrum mundi} is literalized, as the unworldly protagonist ponders the perilous consequences of attending public spectacles in the city. He decides he has seen ‘whatever London could exhibit of elegant, curious, or pleasing’ and chooses the sobering environment of the General Hospital as an antidote to the metropolitan excesses he has recently experienced.\footnote{Brooke, \textit{The Fool of Quality}, London, 1770, vol. 5, p. 207.} Later, in Versailles, Clinton receives a forceful reminder of the dangers of appearing at public resorts of pleasure. Upon leaving the city’s theatre, after a performance of one of Racine’s tragedies, he unwittingly steps into the carriage and is brought to the luxurious living quarters of a wealthy princess, who is determined to seduce the young ingénu. The royal temptress wastes no time in explaining her actions: ‘You alone were expected, you alone are desired, All Others are forbidden. In short, I have seen you often at the Public Walks and Theatres. You did more than strike my Fancy, you laid hold on my Heart.’\footnote{Ibid., vol. 5, p. 254.} In a reversal of sexual roles, the young man find his virtue threatened by the advances of a determined seductress who uses the city playhouse as the arena for identifying and ensnaring her male prey. An alarmed Clinton resists her solicitations and flees yet again from the repercussions of a trip to the theatre. The sentimental hero learns to mistrust the urban playhouse.

Similarly, in Henry Mackenzie’s sentimental novel, \textit{The Man of the World} (1773), the virtuous and principled Harriet Wilkins manifests her modesty and propriety by showing extreme reluctance to visit the theatre. She is persuaded to attend the playhouse by the dissolute aristocrat Sindall, whose raison d’être, it seems, is the destruction of the virtuous Annesly family, who, significantly, have retreated to the countryside, away from the
Sindall observed to Harriet, how little she possessed the curiosity her sex was charged with, who had never once thought of seeing any thing in London that strangers were most solicitous to see; and proposed that very night to conduct her to the playhouse, where the royal family were to be present, at the representation of a new comedy.

Harriet turned a melancholy look towards her brother, and made answer, that she could not think of any amusement that should subject him to hours of solitude in a prison.

Upon this, Annesly was earnest in pressing her to accept Sir Thomas's invitation; he said she knew how often he chose to be alone, at times when he could most command society; and that he should find an additional pleasure in theirs, when they returned to him, fraught with the intelligence of the play.

'But there is something unbecoming in it, said Harriet, in the eyes of others.'

'As to that objection, replied Sindall, it will be easily removed; we shall go accompanied by Mrs. Eldridge to the gallery, where people who have even many acquaintances in town, are dressed so much in the incognito-way, as never to be discovered.'

Harriet recognizes that a visit to the playhouse entails public inspection by other spectators; her fear that she will be seen at the theatre demonstrates her understanding that in the city identity is constituted by the impressions of others. When Sindall suggests that disguise is a common means of circumventing the problem of appearing in a questionable environment, he is confirming Harriet's anxieties: by appearing as oneself at the theatre, one lays oneself open to false aspersions and a blemished reputation. If however, a spectator chooses to conceal him or herself in the gallery, a good name might be preserved.

Virtue becomes dependent on pretence and self-concealment, thereby undermining the objections to the stage expressed in the literature of sensibility. Whereas Fielding had drawn attention to the humour inherent in the discrepancy between the different levels of awareness in the citizen on the street who might consider himself a sophisticated theatre spectator, but who fails to discern the mundane deceptions taking place in the city every day, the literature of sensiblity seems to ignore this paradox. It condemns the notion of deceit, and illustrates it with examples of its naive protagonists suffering various misadventures as a consequence of ill-chosen trips to the playhouse. But while drama is

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158 John Mullan comments: 'the city ... is not a place for sentiment. Mackenzie's The Man of the World is explicit about the loss of fellow-feeling with which it is associated,' Sentiment and Sociability, p. 130.
condemned, the means of publicly broadcasting one's virtuous and refined qualities is laid bare, in the theatre itself, as a sham. Sociability and sensibility, it seems, are linked by their dependence, to some degree at least, on acting out a chosen role. The irony then, is that a genre concerned with the exaggerated manifestation of sympathy and compassion should denounce a milieu which fostered simulation and charade both on the stage and amongst its audience.

Yet, in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), the sentimental narrator openly acknowledges the acting which forms an integral part of urban communication. Yorick makes explicit the connection between the city of London and its cultivation of a type of street drama that passes ordinarily for the language of sociability demanded by urban anonymity. Yorick declares whimsically:

> When I walk the streets of London, I go translating all the way; and have more than once stood behind in a circle, where not three words have been said, and have brought off twenty different dialogues with me, which I could have fairly wrote down and sworn to.\(^{160}\)

Yorick's sentient powers of empathy convert action into language; yet, in a city where performance constructs identity the ability to discern true intent and integrity becomes questionable.

But Sterne's street-actors are also urban consumers: of London's drama and of its fictional representations. The consumption of urban novels as well as those that included brief episodes in London meant that readers could enjoy reading about experiences familiar to them. Like the periodicals which reproduced entire conversations spoken in the city's coffee-houses, both city-dwellers and visitors to London saw themselves as citizens engaged in the common pastime of watching themselves being observed in the pursuit of pleasure. The direction of influence may not be only one-way. It is possible that the number of popular novels which included a visit to the theatre as a significant episode, whether to propel the plot forward or to underline a moral point, also helped to shape the attitude to, and the demeanour inside, the playhouse during the eighteenth century. It might also go some way to explaining why *Polly Honeycombe*, a 'dramatick novel in one act', delighted James Boswell and other theatre-goers so much: the pleasure of seeing the more sedentary pastime of novel reading represented in a public place of pleasure — the

playhouse – confirmed the narcissism of many Londoners, and guaranteed that a play about the reading matter which, in turn, reflected their conduct in the public sphere, would triumph in eighteenth-century London.
From ‘Sound and Senselessness’ to Sensibility: Italian Opera in London

In Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), the unworldly female protagonist records her first impressions of a visit to the opera at the Haymarket. She enjoys the experience and writes to her guardian:

> The music and the singing were charming; they soothed me into a pleasure the most grateful, the best suited to my disposition in the world ... I wish the opera was every night. It is, of all entertainments, the sweetest, and most delightful. Some of the songs seemed to melt my soul. It was what they call a *serious* opera, as the comic first singer was ill.¹

Evelina’s rhapsodic praise suggests that *opera seria*, as opposed to its comic rival, is, like tragic drama, a suitable cultural form for the delicate and refined sensibilities of a virtuous heroine. The ‘sweetest’ and ‘most delightful’ arias are a musical counterpart to the inarticulate sympathy typically expressed by characters in contemporary sentimental fiction.² Like the most acute and extended moments of exquisite feeling described in the novels of sensibility, the pathos aroused by Italian opera seem to ‘melt the soul’.

Evelina’s delight seems to confirm the relationship between music and sympathy identified two years earlier by James Beattie in his *Essays* (1776). In his ‘Remarks on Music’, Beattie writes: ‘I allow it to be a fine art, and to have great influence on the human soul’, asserting that ‘the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all music instruments, is the human voice’.³ Beattie’s comments on the emotive power of music, and in particular the human voice; both of which are followed immediately by a section entitled ‘Of Sympathy’; both are incorporated within the long ‘Essay on Poetry and Music as they Affect the Mind’. He writes that the representation of ‘sympathy’ in poetry and various fictions ‘may certainly be useful in a moral view, by cherishing passions that, while they improve the heart, can hardly be indulged to excess’.⁴

¹ Burney, *Evelina*, pp. 36-7.
² For an acknowledgement of the distinction between *Evelina* and the more typical novel of sensibility, see p. 147 in this thesis.
All of which suggests that a virtuoso performance of an aria from Italian opera would inspire and arouse the human mind to the noblest thoughts and most sublime passion. But Beattie strikes a sudden discordant note in his reflections on poetry and music when he writes:

I deny not, that the preternatural screams of an Italian singer may occasion surprise, and momentary amusement: but those screams are not music; they are admired, not for their propriety or pathos, but, like rope-dancing, and the eating of fire, merely because they are uncommon or difficult. Besides, the end of all genuine music is, to introduce into the human mind certain affections, or susceptibilities of affection.5

Within the space of a few sentences, Italian opera is detached from the impassioned sound of native oratorio and other examples of more conventional music, and demoted to a freakish display of vocal technique. For Beattie, Italian opera is not ‘genuine music’; it belongs, instead, to the more popular category of vulgar urban entertainments, together with the spectacles of fire-eating and rope-dancing.

Beattie’s pronouncements disrupt the neat relationship between Italian opera and the emerging culture of refined sensibility, suggested by Burney’s roughly contemporary Evelina. Beattie’s dismissal of opera is, in fact, a more conventional and familiar position than Burney’s. In the midst of his meditations on the relationship between music, poetry and sympathy, Beattie’s evokes a popular tradition of anti-opera sentiment, which had been established by satirists earlier in the century. But he was not alone in expressing reservations about late eighteenth-century Italian opera as a form of popular metropolitan urban entertainment. In his Life of John Hughes (1779), Samuel Johnson famously defined Italian opera as ‘an exotic and irrational entertainment which has always been combated, and always has prevailed’.6 In this declaration, Johnson condenses the hostility displayed by earlier antagonists to Italian opera and confluates it with an affirmation of its persistence and ultimate acceptance in the fiction being published at the end of the 1770s. Johnson seems aware that Italian opera has been reconfigured by contemporary literature to articulate the refined feelings of its sentimental protagonists. Johnson’s pithy and hostile truism, however, obscures the gradual transformation of the fictional depiction of Italian

5 Ibid., p. 443.

opera during the eighteenth century. In this chapter I will demonstrate that a change in cultural sensibilities, from urbane, male satire to a more bourgeois feminine sentimentalism is articulated through the shifting literary representation of Italian opera in eighteenth-century London.

The attempt to transform Italian opera into a more respectable form of metropolitan pleasure was, to a certain extent, made easier by its location in the western part of London, in the Town. If the London theatre, as a cultural institution, lacked a topographical nucleus, as its playhouses were distributed throughout the city, under varying degrees of licensed approval, the opera house in the Haymarket operated in a more circumscribed and exclusive urban setting. Whereas fictional treatment of drama tended to focus on the officially sanctioned playhouses in Covent Garden and Drury Lane, deliberately neglecting the renegade outposts, both in the City and beyond London's legal parameters, Italian opera was bound from the start by its confinement within the more aristocratic part of London. Its location conferred a temporary, polite identity on its visitors and devotees. Opera's location at the edge of the fashionable Town, in close proximity to political and legal power but removed from the financial affairs of the City, avoided the charges levelled against the theatre, namely that a more popular cultural form was generating undesirable imitations in more puritan, commercial areas of London. Moreover, as John Brewer points out, music itself, as a branch of the public arts 'defined the social realm of those elites. Music-making was a badge of gentility'.

Literary depictions of Italian opera, therefore, did not have to be as topographically selective as fictional portraits of the London theatre. Nevertheless, as I will show, later novelistic representations of *opera seria* differ significantly from contemporary historical

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7 In this sense, the London opera house had a different topographical significance from its later European counterparts. Penelope Woolf, for example, discusses the significance of the nineteenth-century Paris Opera House in terms of its geographical location in, 'Cultural Politics and the Paris Opera House', 214-235, in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, (Cambridge University Press, 1988). She examines the relationship between the cityscape and its architecture. Nineteenth-century Paris was redesigned by Haussman as 'a network of of focal points and radiating arteries'. p. 223. By locating the opera-house at the centre of this network, 'at the centre of a district that was itself the heart of Paris, just as Paris was the artistic capital of France ... the imaginative power of the monument would rest on layers and layers of symbolic meaning', p. 223. Although eighteenth-century London could be considered an urban precursor of nineteenth-century Paris as the 'capital of pleasure', the situation of its opera house, in the Haymarket, isolated it from the rest of the city, making it an exclusive, and almost prohibitive social space, in a privileged part of London.

8 Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 535. Brewer goes on to describe the provinciality of much music composition during the eighteenth century, focusing on the life of the amateur gentleman composer, John Marsh, see pp. 531-72. Although this chapter deals with the public performances of Italian opera in London, its associations with smaller, provincial musical circles will become apparent in this chapter.
records. The latter suggests, for example that comic opera was replacing tragic opera in the second half of the eighteenth century; fiction, on the other hand, chooses to focus on tragic opera for its own sentimental purposes. I will start by discussing the censorious and acerbic treatment by early satirists – an area of research which has already received considerable critical attention. But I will attempt to show that many of the terms deployed by these writers to condemn Italian opera as a perverted form of urban entertainment share a vocabulary with the writings levelled against the growing commercialization of London itself. The discussion will concentrate more closely on the way in which the evolving mid-century novel recorded a more ambivalent and equivocal attitude towards opera, leading subsequently to an exploration of the more sympathetic reception and integration of Italian opera in the later literature of sensibility.

The history of Italian opera in London from 1700 to 1742

The first appearance of Italian opera in London is commonly given as 16 January 1705, the date on which Thomas Clayton’s Arsinoe, an Italian-style opera with a translated English libretto, was first performed in Drury Lane theatre. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Clayton, formerly a violinist in the Royal Band of William and Mary, brought back a selection of arias and librettos from Italy after a visit to the Continent. The decision to attempt to transfer an Italian cultural phenomenon to the London stage was inspired by his recognition of the primary position that opera occupied in the itinerary of the young nobleman’s ‘Grand Tour’ towards the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the 1700s. Jeremy Black comments: ‘so far as comparisons are possible, [opera] attracted more interest, for most tourists, than architecture’. Clayton anticipated the attraction that Italian opera’s exotic associations would have for a London audience,

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11 Black, The British Abroad, p. 205.
and he facilitated its transference from Italy to London by implicitly defining it as another luxurious import for the city’s nobility.

In reality, the vogue for musical performances had begun to make inroads into London some time before this. Towards the end of the Interregnum in the previous century, a few wily operators succeeded in circumventing the Puritan ban on the staging of public dramatic spectacles by confining them to private houses and featuring musical accompaniment throughout. This established English ‘dramatic opera’ as a recognizable genre. After 1660, when the need for entirely musical performances no longer existed and the choric component became more intermittent, the notion of continuous singing was all but abandoned, and until the end of the seventeenth century, opera was understood to be semi-opera of the sort created and composed by John Dryden and Henry Purcell. The introduction of all-sung Italian opera, however, began to challenge the dominance of native English dramatic opera. The foreign nature of Italian opera aligned it with other exotic pleasures gradually infiltrating different levels of London’s increasingly popular venues; it offered a less familiar, and therefore more alluring, variation on an already established domestic cultural form. Although critics have recently taken issue with traditional accounts of the progress of Italian opera, arguing that it did not enjoy instant success, its proven distinction among the young tourists of the nobility indicated that it would be warmly received by a native London audience, and Clayton was thus well-placed to exploit an untapped market in a more exclusive part of the city.

With a potential audience for Italian opera thus identified, the dramatist and architect John Vanbrugh sought to bracket off this group and concentrate it inside an exclusive city location with his plans, in 1703, to build a new playhouse — the Queen’s (later the King’s) Theatre — in the Haymarket. Vanbrugh’s attempt to determine topographically the location of London’s performance of Italian opera were initially frustrated when early problems with the Queen’s Theatre in the Haymarket meant that the race to present the first Italian-

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13 See Robert D. Hume, ‘Opera in London, 1695-1706,’ in British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny, (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1984), 67-91. Hume tries to explode the cliché that the death of Purcell in 1695 marked the start of an operatic absence until the arrival of Italian opera in 1705. He argues that the more traditional, native British forms of English opera and the ‘masque’, in particular, prevailed well into the eighteenth century. He suggests that the eventual success of all-sung Italian opera was a ‘more or less inevitable result of the importation of foreign stars’, p. 88.

14 Price, Milhous and Hume refer to the Haymarket as ‘little Italy’, Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, p. 1.
style opera in London was won by the playhouse in Drury Lane, with the première of Clayton’s *Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus* in January 1705.

The success of Clayton’s musical score was due to the role played by the French Huguenot immigrant, Peter Anthony Motteux, in translating the libretto of *Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus* – a previously obscure Italian work – into English, in 1705. Motteux was also empowered in his role as cultivator of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century popular urban taste by his position as editor of the periodical, *The Gentleman’s Journal* (1692-4). In the first number, Motteux engaged in a form of journalistic manoeuvring and manipulation by writing a piece promoting the cause of Italian opera, hoping subtly to shift the current preference for semi-opera to the Italian all-sung variety, thereby presaging the direct part he would later play in securing opera’s initial success with *Arsinoe*, in Drury Lane.

Vanbrugh soon retaliated with an English version of Giacomo Greber’s *The Loves of Ergasto*, which proved, however, to be only moderately successful, while a second triumph at Drury Lane with Bononcini’s *Camilla*, in 1706, seemed to confirm, at first, that the Queen’s Theatre was losing the battle for establishing a successful monopoly of Italian opera in London. Indeed, during the season 1706-7, *Thomyris*, the first opera to feature an Italian castrato, was performed at Drury Lane whilst only plays were shown at the Queen’s theatre. Vanbrugh sought to redress the situation by soliciting the Lord Chamberlain for a topographical separation of the two genres of opera and drama. On 31 December 1707, his campaigning achieved this generic split when the Lord Chamberlain ordered that from 10 January 1708 all spoken plays would be confined to the theatres in Dorset Gardens and Drury Lane and ‘all Operas and other Musical presentments would be shown at the Queen’s Theatre’. Although the ruling lapsed occasionally during the next few years – both plays and operas were performed at Drury Lane in 1709 – the 1707 order marked an important point in determining the geographical layout of London’s most popular

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15 Lucyle Hook writes that, ‘although a minor figure in the annals of drama, Motteux played an important part in the changing world of English theatrical and musical life ... an entrepreneur in the transition of theatrical public taste.’ See ‘Motteux and the Classical Masque,’ 105-115, in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, p. 106.

16 Much of the following information concerning the rivalry between Drury Lane and the Queen’s Theatre in the Haymarket, during the first decade of Italian opera in London, is taken from Fiske’s *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 33-41.

spectacles; it also precipitated the evolution of the Haymarket from a new playhouse in the western part of the city, into a recognized locale for London's social élite. Carole Taylor writes that, 'the significance of a particular venue for the Italian repertory in London derived further from the need for England to establish cultural and diplomatic parity with continental practices'. Although the Queen's Theatre was a far more modest and unimposing edifice than its European counterparts, its Continental associations bestowed on it a cultural prestige that other London theatres simply could not match.

Vanbrugh's success in securing a virtual monopoly of the staging of Italian opera in the Queen's Theatre did not, however, lead to instant financial reward, as the import of this foreign entertainment generated expenses on an almost unprecedented scale. The main factor in this was the immense popularity of the opera's singing stars. Although London's Italian opera started to use European singers in 1706, it was not until 1708, with the introduction of the castrato Nicolo Grimaldi, or Nicolini, as he was better known, that the salaries demanded by these new metropolitan celebrities began to reach excessive heights. By 1710, he encountered little opposition to his demand for 800 guineas per annum. This amount and similar unparalleled sums were explained and justified by the fact that Nicolini's presence was able to guarantee the enthusiasm and attendance of the London audience. Nicolini's performances in Italian heralded a short period of bilingual opera where the audience was unable to comprehend half of the entertainment sung by the castrato, whilst the anglicised component made a mockery of the original libretto. The artistic casualties suffered by Italian opera in London will be discussed later in the context of the literary treatment of opera in the early part of the eighteenth century. The first performance of an opera entirely in Italian was Bononcini's *Almahide*, first staged on 10 January 1710. With the arrival of Handel on the London music scene, and with the triumph on 11 February 1711, of his first Italian opera *Rinaldo*, which ran for 15 consecutive

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19 Price, Milhous and Hume comment, that, whilst Continental opera houses represented a type of 'civic temple', the theatre in the Haymarket 'was cramped, utilitarian, practically invisible from the outside, and altogether lacking the grandeur and sweep of what was being built on the Continent', *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, p. 44.
20 Angus Herriot suggests, in *The Castrati in Opera*, (New York, 1975), that, were it not for Nicolini, 'it is probable that the Italian opera would have proved no more than a passing vogue ... and would have succumbed before a combination of national prejudice and the fact that it was in a language incomprehensible to the majority of the audience', p. 125.
21 Price, Milhous and Hume *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, p. 3.

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nights, the cultural success of Italian opera in London was assured.22

However, the great expenses incurred by the inflated salary demands of the celebrated singers, the lavish costumes and extravagant scenery, not to mention the cost of constantly travelling to the Continent to discover fresh talent, consumed any profit that might have accrued as a result of the high admission fees charged by the opera house.23 During the second decade of the eighteenth century Italian opera survived, as a much sought-after form of urban entertainment, but crippled by various debts accumulated over a number of seasons. Unlike the system on the Continent, where royal patronage and subsidy were accepted ways of helping to defray the cost of mounting a series of grand spectacles, London Italian opera was expected to absorb the exorbitant expense almost entirely alone. Vanbrugh attempted to alleviate the financial deficit early in the century by introducing subscriptions for George Granville’s *The British Enchanters*, Thomas D’Urfey’s *Wonders in the Sun*, and Motteux’s *The Temple of Love* in 1706.24 However, it became evident that opera needed regular patronage and in 1719, with an initial £1000 subsidy per annum from George I, the Royal Academy of Music was set up with a view to ‘restor[ing] Italian opera to London as a recreation for the nobility and gentry’.25

The Royal Academy was established as a joint-stock company with a twenty-one year royal charter. It aimed to attract subscribers by predicting considerable financial profit with only a minimum call on the investors’ capital. Although the involvement of financial operators working within a recognizable commercial framework inevitably implicated the project in City practices, the list of subscribers consisted of a collection of investors, drawn mainly from the gentry and nobility. In 1721, a scheme was introduced whereby season tickets, which allowed the purchaser free access to all performances, were sold for 20 guineas each.26 More common, however, was the ‘call’ on the subscribers for about 5 per cent of their original pledge of £1000 pounds. Although the promise of dividends from any

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22 See Paul Henry Lang’s *George Frederic Handel*, (New York, 1966) for still the most detailed biographical and contextual information concerning the composer.

23 In *Evelina*, the nouveau-riche Mr Branghton expresses shock at opera-house prices: it costs half a guinea to sit in the pit and five shillings for a seat in the lower gallery. The three-shilling gallery is clearly for the lower social classes; the younger Mr Branghton compares it to the twelvepenny gallery at Drury Lane, thus underlining the social differences separating the theatre from the London opera-house. Needless to say, Evelina is mortified to be seen in the three-penny gallery. See *Evelina*, pp. 89-91.


25 Price, Milhous and Hume *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, p. 4.

profit remained a theoretical possibility, the reality was that the cost of mounting the opera precluded the chance of any financial return on the original investment. Patronage of opera was, it seemed, almost solely governed by the desire to achieve social prestige – the wish to be seen to be supporting a noble and fashionable form of urban entertainment.

Significantly, City merchants and speculators were absent from the subscription lists.27 Perhaps they believed that no money was to be made from investing in a venture whose cultural appeal was restricted both topographically and by rank. But it was evident that the aristocratic tradition of artistic patronage was moving into the hitherto socially remote realm of commerce, adopting the roles of speculator and investor traditionally occupied by traders and stockjobbers.

The irony of setting up the Royal Academy of Music at the same time that the South Sea Bubble burst did not escape contemporary commentators, and in particular the satirists, whose criticisms I will discuss later. One newspaper, in March, 1723, drew a clear parallel between the two financial débâcles:

The new opera tickets are very high, and like to continue so long as Mrs Cotzani [the soprano Cuzzoni] is so much admired. They are traded in at the other End of the Town, as much as the Lottery Tickets are in Exchange-Alley.28

The interchangeability of the much satirized credit and paper money of Exchange-Alley and exclusive opera tickets is demarcated through London’s geography: the traditional separation between the aristocratic West End and the City is deliberately blurred and dissolved as commercial practice infiltrates the fashionable pleasures of the nobility, in the Haymarket.

During the 1720s, the star singers continued to demand the crippling fees that seriously restricted financial profit.29 Support for the two female singers Cuzzoni and Faustina developed into serious faction within the London beau monde, and the widely reported

27 Carole Taylor gives a detailed and extended analysis of the subscription lists for Italian opera in the first decades of the eighteenth century. She writes: ‘[T]he middle classes of London were not opera subscribers in any more than the most minimal extent. Rich merchants and city men who subscribed in 1719 did not stay on,’ ‘Italian Operagoing in London, 1700-45’ p. 78. However, the ‘commercialization’ of opera and its audience did have a latent influence on the seating arrangements inside the opera house, where, ‘later in the century the aristocracy got round this by barricading themselves away in boxes to a greater extent than was customary in the earlier period’. pp. 78-9.
28 Cited in Rogers, Literature and Popular Culture, p. 49.
29 In 1720, the celebrated castrato Senesino earned 2,000 guineas; the temperamental sopranos Cuzzoni and Faustina matched these figures in 1722 and 1726, respectively.
incident in 1727 in which both women were hissed and cat-called by rival admirers was widely seen to contribute to the temporary degeneration of Italian opera in London. This decline was compounded by the unqualified success of John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera,* first performed in 1728. Amongst other things it represented an urban parody of the many absurdities and pretensions of Italian opera. Both Faustina and Cuzzoni as well as Senesino returned to Italy in the same year, and no operas were performed during the following 1728-9 season. Italian opera did enjoy a fluctuating revival during the 1730s. In 1733, Handel was still working at the King’s Theatre which was being managed by Heidegger; but the opera was gradually moving out of aristocratic hands and slowly being replaced by the operations of the impresario. During this period, the theatre in Covent Garden was being built, and in the season 1733-4 opponents of Handel split off from the company at the Haymarket, taking with them many of the latter’s subscribers. At first, this new renegade group housed itself at the peripheral venue of the Lincoln’s Inn Fields theatre, naming itself the Opera of the Nobility; the title reflected the considerable social cachet still afforded by association with Italian opera. In 1734-5 the Opera of the Nobility supplanted Handel’s company at the King’s Theatre and was responsible for bringing over the immensely popular castrato Farinelli, whilst Handel was forced to decamp to the new playhouse in Covent Garden. In 1737-8, however, the two rival companies ceased their rivalries and merged, consolidating the monopolization of Italian opera by a single exclusive establishment in the Haymarket.

But the changing fortunes of the Italian opera during this time had taken their toll on the popularity and success of this form of entertainment in London. Handel moved to the Lincoln’s Inn Fields theatre for the 1739-40 season, but by then he had all but abandoned opera and had begun to turn his attention to composing oratorio. By 1742, the year in which the final and heavily revised version of Pope’s famous satirical portrayal of Italian opera in *The Dunciad* – the ‘Harlot form’ – appeared, the height of enthusiasm for opera, and the worst of its economic wranglings and political involutions were over.

**Italian opera and the city**

In the most successful of his novels *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), Tobias Smollett’s curmudgeonly correspondent, Matthew Bramble, dispatches a letter to

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his physician, entertaining him with his typically splenetic impressions of London.
Concluding that the city is a ‘mishapen [sic] and monstrous capital, without head or tail, members or proportion’, he chooses the commonplace, corporeal metaphor, familiar to eighteenth-century readers, of a deformed and visceral entity, a perversion of metropolitan integration and coordination. However, its critical vocabulary also draws an implicit connection between the city itself and Italian opera. While Bramble’s jaundiced perspective prompts the expression of this urban cliché, he is echoing a response to the city’s growth evoked by earlier authors writing about eighteenth-century London. In 1724, Defoe offered the following comparison between London and ancient Rome:

It is the Disaster of London, as to the Beauty of its Figure, that it is thus stretched out in Buildings, just at the Pleasure of every Builder, or Undertaker of Buildings ... and this has spread the Face of it in a most straggling, confus’d Manner, out of all Shape, uncompact, and unequal; neither long or broad or square; whereas the City of Rome, though a Monster for its greatness, yet was, in a manner, round, with very few Irregularities in its Shape.

Rome is only monstrous in terms of its sheer size; London, on the other hand, is a distorted concatenation of arbitrary streets and buildings.

But descriptions of London’s deformity extend further than alarmist critiques of its burgeoning size. The perception of the capital as a grotesque and malformed organism creates a metaphorical connection between the corrupted city and Italian opera as a commonly invoked example of the monstrous consequences of London’s own dissolution: its inhabitants’ and visitors’ passion for Italian opera. In 1767 an English translation of the original Italian Essay on the Opera by Count Algarotti appeared, lamenting that opera had...
‘dwindled into a languid, badly connected, improbable grotesque, and monstrous aggregate’,\textsuperscript{35} an image which echoed the pejorative descriptions of the city as a swollen sequence of public urban spaces. But Algarotti’s description of the decline of opera, after its deracination from its native Italian soil was also reiterating the earlier indictment of the critic and supporter of English theatre, John Dennis, who complained in 1706, ‘that tho the Opera in \textit{Italy} is a Monster, ’tis a beautiful harmonious Monster, but here in \textit{England} ’tis an ugly howling one’.\textsuperscript{36} In one sense, this metaphorical relationship between the city and Italian opera creates a convenient link, a mere rhetorical congruence, generated by those opposed to the expansion of London and the consequent growth of commerce and taste for luxury commodities. However, the connection between the characterization of Italian opera in eighteenth-century fiction and the attempt to assign a permanent identity based on historical precedent for London, goes further than coincident imagery. Contemporary visual representation of opera reinforced the notion of opera as essentially an urban phenomenon.

In Hogarth’s famous print and engraving, \textit{Masquerades and Operas} (1724), separate London venues are curiously realigned. Jenny Uglow describes how Hogarth ‘brought key London buildings together in a telling triangle, like the painted flats of a huge stage set, just as he had with the Guildhall, the Monument and St. Paul’s in the \textit{South Sea Scheme}. This time though, they were all connected with culture’.\textsuperscript{37} By reorganizing the location of these distinct centres of pleasure and contriving their coincidence in false proximity to each other, Hogarth seems to be suggesting an underlying link between money, the influence of the court, and the masquerades and opera which took place in the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket. The more exclusive King’s Theatre is situated on the left while the popular Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre, where lowbrow pantomime was performed, is located on the right. Social distinction is represented spatially as the London crowd is divided both by taste and class affiliation according to the particular venues they choose to frequent. In the background of the picture, at the apex of the cultural triangle, stands the Palladian gateway.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{An Essay on the Opera written in Italian by Count Algarotti F.R.S. F.S.A ETC}, London 1767, p. 4.
to Burlington House. The Earl of Burlington, famously eulogized in Pope’s *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), had visited Italy as a young man and, like Inigo Jones in the previous century, had become an admirer of the sixteenth-century architect Andrea Palladio, whose revival of the formal classical rules of architecture inspired an attempt to convert England to its principles. Burlington’s status as *arbiter elegantiarum* made his buildings synonymous with good taste: the positioning of his residence at the top of the print *Masquerades and Operas* comments obliquely on more vulgar preferences by looking down on those who attend masquerades, pantomimes and opera. However, Burlington House also serves in the picture as a neoclassical hinge to which the two theatres are attached; although ostensibly culturally distinct, the link implies a shared provenance as the inferior cultural entertainments indicate a falling away from the classical ideal. In this sense, it would seem that all three kinds of entertainment represented here are implicitly contrasted unfavourably with a more noble classical past. However, Italian opera’s native associations with ancient Rome is perhaps more subject to comparisons with the classical model of Rome.

The attempt to contrast London with the ideals of the ancient city was not a new one in the eighteenth century. The idea of the capital as Troy-novant, an urban reincarnation of the values of the ancient world, was already a dated concept by the 1700s. However, a more recent development was the perceived affinity with and subsequent deviation from the identity of ancient Rome. According to Douglas Chambers, in the seventeenth century, the culture of Italy ‘became the text to be translated into English, whether on the ground (in gardens and buildings), in the visual arts (in painting and sculpture), or in literary texts ... incorporating both literal and figurative transpositions of Italian sources’. However, only the modern manifestations of ancient values were to receive official approval; unprecedented spectacles like Italian opera would be treated with suspicion.

After the Fire of London in 1666, plans to remodel the city included a design by Christopher Wren and John Evelyn proposing the rebuilding of London based on the *imperium* of ancient Rome. According to Douglas Chambers, they saw London as ‘a *tabula rasa* upon which an orderly baroque geometrical plan could be inscribed, “for the honour of our imperial city”’. However, while the architectural source of inspiration was ancient Rome, it was not to be associated with Papal authority. Instead, the city would be regulated

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39 Ibid., p. 34. Evelyn was actually writing here in his work on engraving, *Sculptura* (1662), discussing an earlier plan for London in 1660 by Hollar. But the idea of classical Rome serving as a model for post-Fire London provided a similar impetus for both Wren and Evelyn in 1667.
and supported by commerce, increased sanitation and order, along the lines of Defoe’s H. F.’s plans in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Wren’s and Evelyn’s plans were rejected, however. Perhaps while the orderly precepts and ethos of ancient Rome were advocated, its simultaneous connotations with Catholic dominion and the wariness of the excesses of the religion of Rome disqualified it from serious consideration. Catholicism, it seems, was collectively regarded with suspicion by the safeguarders of London’s identity as a potential perversion of ancient, classical order and a threat to Protestant values; Italian opera, with its intimations of Catholic grandiosity was conceivably linked with this source of religious corruption.

As a recent fashionable import, it was perhaps unsurprising that Italian opera’s enthusiastic reception in London would also incite comparisons with the degeneration of Italian culture into garish, popular appeal. The condemnation of Italian opera during the first four decades of the eighteenth century exploited its association, in the public imagination, with Italian decadence, highlighting the threat to London’s civic identity. In choosing to oppose modern Italy to England’s capital, these writers were attempting to create an unvarying distinctiveness for contemporary London by implying that the city had an intrinsic superiority. The notion of London’s pristine identity is preserved through constant recourse to comparison with ancient Rome and contrasting it with its inferior cultural derivative – modern Italy.

In 1705 Richard Steele included an epilogue to his comedy *The Tender Husband*, excoriating the very recent arrival of Italian opera in London. Perhaps in his role as playwright, Steele was anxious about the possible substitution of opera for drama on the London stage. In the prologue, he raises some of the issues that were later to dominate anti-opera writing. The relation between patriotism and xenophobia is highlighted as Steele contrasts the English literary tradition with Italian decadence:

*Britons, who constant War, with factious Rage,*  
*For Liberty against each other wage,*  
*From Foreign Insult save this English Stage.*

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40 See Chambers, p. 34. Defoe’s urban tale obviously purports to take place in 1664-5.
41 Chambers points out that Satan’s Pandemonium in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), is clearly modelled on Papal and ancient Rome: ‘Built like a temple, where pilasters round / Were set and Doric pillars overlaid.’ (l. 713-15).
42 Although Swift was later to alienate himself from Steele’s social milieu and politics, at this point in London he liked to regard himself as part of this coterie. See also his *Journal to Stella* (1710-11) for his growing disaffection with Addison and Steele’s polite urban circle.
No more th’ Italian squaling Tribe admit,
In Tongues unknown; ’tis Popery in Wit,
The Songs (their selves confess) from Rome they bring;

....
Passive, with an affected Joy to sit,
Suspend their native Taste of Manly Wit
Neglect their Comic Humour, Tragic Rage,
For known Defects of Nature, and of Age.
Arise for shame, ye Conqu’ring Britons, rise,
Such unadorn’d Effeminacy despise.43

As a dramatist, Steele’s hostility to Italian opera, strategically placed at the end of a play, is a logical response to the supplanting of native London drama by a foreign genre. Opposition is also articulated in gendered terms: ‘unadorn’d Effeminacy’ is countered with native ‘Manly Wit’, while the celebrated castrati, — those ‘Defects of Nature’ — are further proof of the sexual deviance associated with Italian opera. But Steele also endorses the reading of worthy Roman classical works, arguing for an injunction against supporting the perversions of culture originating from modern Italy: ‘Admire (if you will dote on Foreign Wit) / Not what Italians Sing, but what Romans Writ’. The implication is that the ancient works of Rome constitute an admirable model of masculine valour and loyalty to one’s country, while their modern counterparts perform the opposite task. Moreover, the denunciation of ‘Popery in Wit’ reinforces fears that Papal authority was infiltrating and debasing native British writing.

Steele’s depiction of Italian opera in terms of degenerate patriotism and emasculating wit is one of the earliest expressions of literary opposition. It anticipates many of the issues and anxieties that would be taken up by other contemporary writers. In the following year, 1706, the critic and fierce defender of British drama, John Dennis, weighed in with a savage attack on Italian opera. In practical terms, this assault was intended to safeguard the London stage from unwelcome competition; as an impassioned piece of polemic, Dennis’s Essay on the Operas reprises and expands on the sentiments expressed in Steele’s epilogue. Dennis also voices concern at the threat to patriotism: he appeals to ‘any lover of his country’, to support ‘Endeavours to promote the real Good of their Country’, and to the

‘Honour and Interest of one’s Country.’44 The degeneration of Italy from its noble, classical past is stressed:

The modern *Italians* have the very same Sun and Soil which the antient *Romans* had, yet are their Manners directly opposite ... 'Tis impossible to give any reason of so great a Difference between the antient *Romans*, and the modern *Italians*, but only Luxury; and the reigning Luxury of modern *Italy*, is that soft and effeminate Musick which abounds in the *Italian Opera*.45

Dennis voices an atavistic wish to reverse the present degeneration of Roman culture from noble provenance into a perversion of its former self, exemplified in the ‘reigning Luxury of modern Italy’.

The historian J. G. A. Pocock has examined the connection between the growing commercialization of Britain and the invocation of a classical past in contemporary writing. He draws attention to the way in which the degeneration of a patriotic ideal that relied on independent ownership of land was considered a natural consequence of the increasingly transitory relations realized through commercial transactions. Pocock locates a general desire to appeal to an idealized time whose ‘principles of antiquity’ provide a vocabulary and set of social and political rules which might guide modern Britain.46 He draws on the writings of the seventeenth-century political commentator, James Harrington, who claimed that, ‘there were no organizing principles immanent in the English past’; what he called ‘ancient prudence’ was Spartan and Roman, a commonwealth of armed freeholders which had been corrupted and feudalized by emperors and their ‘Gothic mercenaries’.47 Pocock terms this model, ‘the process of classicization’, whereby the ‘civic virtue’ of an independent, landowning patriot located its origin ‘in the past as a source of legitimacy’.48

The terms and models recovered by Pocock to evoke a sense of how seventeenth-and early eighteenth-century thinkers reconstructed the past as a source of authority have a

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47 Pocock, ‘Modes of Political and Historical Time’, p. 96. Although this model was slightly altered by replacing a classical anteriority with a ‘Gothic and Parliamentary past’ in which a ‘stable commonwealth of armed freeholders’ established themselves, they considered that the task of the present was to preserve those principles against any form of corruption, p. 97.
48 Ibid., p. 97.
certain resonance in Dennis’s attack on Italian opera. In the Essay on the Opera’s, Dennis claims that ‘there is something in the Italian Opera, which is barbarous and Gothick’. In other words, Italian opera, according to Dennis, is anathema to the principles of classical order and decorum. Significantly, Pocock also makes the point that, for an individual to be virtuous, ‘he must live in a virtuous city; in a corrupt city, the individual himself must be corrupted.’ This concept is touched on in Dennis’s later treatise An Essay on Publick Spirit, 1711, which elaborates the idea of the taste for luxury as a cause of civic perversion. In this essay, opera is symptomatic, rather than the cause, of a wider, social problem, a synecdoche of the political and cultural degeneration of London life; the city, in turn, is regarded as part of a larger pattern of decadence – ‘bare-fac’d Luxury’, which is ‘the greatest Extinguisher of Publick Spirit’. London is ‘[t]his over-grown Town ... a visible Proof of the Growth of the British Luxury’. Dennis suggests that one way of expelling this corruption from the Town is by removing Italian opera from the public arena: ‘If they are so fond of the Italian Musick, why do they not take it from the Hay-Market to their Houses, and hug it like their secret Sins there?’ For Dennis, London is now a corrupted city, alienated from the classic ideals of ancient Rome and more akin to the devalued principles of its modern-day manifestation.

Dennis’s comparison between ‘antient Romans’ and the decadence of modern London had become a recognized urban trope by the early eighteenth century. Although London contained traces of its own Roman history, it seemed that writers preferred to locate a more noble past in ancient Rome itself. In 1724 Defoe marvelled at the growth of the city in his Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain at the same time as registering alarm at the capital’s ‘monstrous’ expansion, drawing parallels with classical Rome.

New Squares, and new Streets rising up every Day to such a Prodigy of Buildings, that nothing in the World does, or ever did, equal it, except old Rome in Trajan’s Time, when the Walls were Fifty Miles in Compass, and the Number

49 Dennis, An Essay on the Opera’s, p. 391.
50 Ibid., p. 97 [my italics].
51 John Dennis, An Essay on the Publick Spirit; Being a Satyr in Prose Upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times, the Chief Sources of our present Parties and Diversions London, 1711, Preface, pp.v-vi.
52 Ibid., p. 11.
As I noted above, Defoe goes on to qualify this comparison by contrasting the ‘Disaster of London’ and the ‘straggling, confus’d Manner’ with the self-containment and regular shape, ‘though a Monster for its greatness’, of the latter. John Dennis avers that, although opera itself is ‘monstrous’, it is not so ‘prodigiously unnatural, that it could take its beginning from no Country, but that which is renown’d throughout the World, for preferring monstrous abominable Pleasures to those which are according to Nature’. These monstrosities are covert references to the sexual deviancy, and part of the general decadence apparently inherent in the social identity of modern Italy. But the main idea, that London opera has a definite point of origin in contemporary Italian culture, and that both opera seria and modern Italy can, in turn, be contrasted unfavourably with a superior past, is reminiscent of the way the mock epic works: like the satirical imitation of the epic poem, the contrast between eighteenth-century London culture and ancient Rome is to the detriment of the former. In this diachronic model, both modern Italy and London are depicted as corruptions of a classical past. Modern London, however, is portrayed as modelling itself on a Continental counterpart which has also suffered an ignominious descent from its past glories.

Henri Lefebvre’s exhaustive philosophical analysis of the concept of space includes a consideration of the way historical time always leaves a residual invisible trace in any specific location:

The historical and its consequences ... the ‘etymology’ of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it – all of this becomes inscribed in space. The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.

London is a city whose urban landmarks and written history is always ‘inscribed’ in the demarcated yet ever-changing space inhabited by eighteenth-century Londoners. Indeed, the idea of ascribing a recognizable identity to London is partially dependent on the

55 Daniel Defoe, A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain, vol. 1, p. 316.
56 Ibid.
57 Dennis, An Essay on the Opera’s, p. 392.
superimposing and multi-layering of representations from different time periods. That London can be considered as an aggregate of its historical representations supports Lefebvre's idea that a 'present place ... an immediate whole' is always infused with, even dependent on, its previous identities and depictions. What the mock epic does, on the other hand, is accentuate the difference between two different periods by invoking a distant idealized past, sometimes based on historical truth but mostly drawn from the lofty heights of epic superlatives. It compares an inferior present, in this case, a London preoccupied with luxury and pleasure, with a culture that is not its own. The idea of the simultaneity of different histories in topographical space is slightly qualified in mock epic terms by the suppression of London's native past as it is held up instead and unfavourably contrasted with the city of Rome.

Yet Dennis also compresses historical time, conveying the threat posed by Italian opera to native literature as a collapsing of the mock epic structure which relies on temporal distance for its efficacy. He offers the caveat that Italian opera is known for its detrimental effect on the worthier art of poetry:

[1]In whatever Countries Operas have been establish'd after the manner of Italy, they have driven out Poetry from among that People. 'Tis now more than a hundred Years since the very Species of Poets had disappear'd in Italy and at present there is not so much as one Poet in so vast a Kingdom as France, allowing Boileau to be superannuated.59

Dennis goes on to claim that English poetry has eclipsed its Italian rival, reversing the popular notion that modern British writers cannot hope to compete with Roman culture. Instead, however, opera has 'in so short a time ... made the old British Wit a Jest', and, more seriously, 'emasculated the Minds of Men'.60 The degeneracy of an inferior, parallel eighteenth-century Italian culture can only be combated with native, 'masculine' literature, whose superiority is slowly being undermined and overtaken by a feminizing, Italian invasion.

This last charge, of the effeminacy of Italian opera, became a common form of abuse in the early part of the eighteenth century, narrowing a wider, more general xenophobic prejudice down to an attack on the sexual identity of Italian culture and the threat it posed to

59 Ibid., p. 386.
60 Dennis, An Essay on the Publick Spirit; p. 22.
London life in particular. Dennis complains that opera is 'that soft and effeminate Musick', and that 'Men are enervated and emasculated by the Softness of Italian Musick'.

Moreover, he asserts, '[w]e have Men that are more soft, more languid, and more passive than Women.' The insinuations and innuendoes generated by references to the unmanly cultural practices, implied by the performance of Italian opera, provided an ironic contrast with the subject matter of the opera seria; as Thomas McGeary points out in his examination of the connection between the castrato and the subterranean gay culture of eighteenth-century London, Italian opera was, 'a genre whose principal characters are heroic Roman statesman and soldiers caught in conflicts between love and duty or honour'. Following Dennis's line of attack, subsequent denunciations of Italian opera chose to ignore the component which celebrated the honourable and courageous behaviour of its chief protagonists; 'civic virtue', it seemed, was not to be identified as a theme in Italian opera, nor, as a consequence of its pernicious influence, could it be located in the city in which it was being performed. As a result of this partial critique, a distinctive body of criticism focusing on the languorous, feminizing properties of opera -- the conditions governing its performances rather than the plot or storyline -- gradually evolved. In 1711, Steele reprised the earlier sentiments conveyed in the epilogue to The Tender Husband in which he had enjoined his compatriots to resist the effete qualities and influence of Italian opera - the request that, 'ye Conqu'ring Britons, rise, / Such unadorn'd Effeminacy despise'. In Number 14 of The Spectator, he pointed out the ludicrous and incongruous phenomenon of the hero's part being performed by one of the famous castrati; he observes that by the 'Squeak of their Voices the Heroes ... are Eunuchs.' 'Squeaking', as Terry Castle points out in the context of disguise in the eighteenth-century masquerade, 'mystified gender. For men the use of a masquerade falsetto suggested comic emasculation:

61 Dennis, An Essay on the Opera's, pp. 384, 392.
63 McGeary, "Warbling Eunuchs", p. 1. For more extended studies of eighteenth-century London homosexual subculture, see Randolph Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites: Homosexual behaviour and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century,' 1-34, in Journal of Social History, 11 (1977) 1; Lawrence Stone, The Family Sex and Marriage 1500 - 1800, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977): 'It was generally believed to be a rare occurrence in England, but very prevalent in Italy, which was the reason why parents thought that that country should be avoided by the young traveller on the Grand Tour.' p. 492. See also, Alan Bray's Homosexuality in Renaissance England, (The Gay Men's Press, 1982; 1988), for evidence of earlier anti-Italian prejudice, where homosexuality, 'according to Thomas Browne was the national character of the Italians', p. 75.
the ambiguous figure of the castrato. However, whereas adopting a falsetto tone in masquerade was a humorous imitation of the indeterminate gender of the castrato in Italian opera, Steele’s anxiety was that the popular singers themselves represented a more sinister blurring of masculine and female roles.

Concern about the huge public acclaim and enthusiasm for the figure of the castrato and attendant anxieties about the confusion of sexual identity were reiterated by other writers. In 1728, Swift wrote an essay for The Intelligencer (no. 3) supporting his friend John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera, which had received severe criticism in some quarters on account of its apparent vindication of a life of crime. Swift defends Gay’s play on many counts, the most forceful of which is his assertion that The Beggar’s Opera should be praised for its satirical subversion of the conventions of Italian opera.

This Comedy likewise exposeth with great Justice, that unnatural Taste for Italian Musick among us, which is wholly unsuitable to our Northern Climat, and the genius of the People, whereby we are overrun with Italian-Effeminacy, and Italian Nonsense. An old Gentleman said to me, that many Years ago, when the practice of an unnatural Vice grew so frequent in London, that many were prosecuted for it, he was sure it would be a Fore-runner of Italian-Opera’s, and Singers; and then we should want nothing but Stabbing or Poysoning, to make us perfect Italians.

The tone of defence of Gay’s mock-opera shifts from milder and more guileless remarks concerning the effeminacy of Italian ‘nonsense’ to a more malevolent and vindictive attack on the link between the presence of the Italian castrato in London and the spread of homosexuality. Italian opera is almost synonymous with an already discernible gay subculture; in Swift’s eyes, it represents an aestheticized, almost sublimated version of a previously concealed homosexual urban actuality, rendered acceptable through its appearance on the London stage.

The city itself was seen as the prime locus for cultivating the perversion of acceptable social behaviour. Randolph Trumbach traces this to Italian urban culture: ‘The visiting Italians were accustomed, as all the rest of Europe knew, to considerable tolerance of

65 Castle, Masquerade and Civilization, p. 36.
66 Jonathan Swift and Thomas Sheridan, The Intelligencer, 1728, ed. James Woolley, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 65. Although Swift had left London a year earlier in 1727 and never saw a performance of The Beggar’s Opera, the vehemence of this piece appears to have been inspired both by loyalty to his friend and his consistent hostility to the presence of Italian opera in London.
homosexual sub-cultures in their own cities. It was probably Italy's urban sophistication which had long produced such a situation.\(^{67}\) A complex chain of associations was therefore established in early eighteenth-century London: the corrupting growth of a new consumer society created a taste and demand for lavish and exotic imports; Italian opera belonged to this category, and its enthusiastic reception in London classified it as another commodity, another public arena in which socially aspiring citizens sought to be seen. But London's craving for luxury seemed to be corroding the nation's very moral fibre. It deflected attention away from matters of state, loyalty to one's country, abandoning masculine, patriotic values and embracing instead, the idle existence of the effeminate urban fop who preferred to expend his energies pursuing his interest in Italian opera. The 'monstrous' castrati, those hybrid creatures who seemed to embody both genders, brought these associations full circle: the ludicrous inflated salaries demanded by singers like Nicolini and Farinelli reflected and reciprocated a process of commercialization and insatiable craving for luxury demanded by London's pleasure-seekers. The sexual confusion both instigated by, and mirrored in, the performances of the castrati was therefore seen as a natural consequence of the overgrowth of the city's demand for extravagant, conspicuous consumption, but also as a vital, contributing factor to its degeneration.

**Italian opera and satire 1700-1737**

In 1740, Colley Cibber, best known as the butt of Pope's *Dunciad*, retrospectively recounted the insidious introduction of Italian opera into British, and particularly London, culture.

The *Italian* opera began first to steal into *England*; but in as rude a disguise and unlike itself, as possible; in a lame, hobling Translation, into our own Language, with false Quantities, or Metre out of Measure, to its original Notes, sung by our own unskilful voices, with Graces misapply'd to almost every sentiment, and with Action lifeless and unmeaning through every Character.\(^{68}\)

Cibber's status as actor and theatre manager partly explains his hostility to a rival public

\(^{67}\) Randolph Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites', p. 10.

cultural form which appeared to threaten the hitherto dominant status of London’s playhouses. The significance, however, of Cibber’s disparaging account of opera’s provenance and stumbling progress is in its chronology; he is looking back at four decades of intense literary opposition to the invasion of London by Italian opera, just as opera itself is beginning to gain a greater respectability in London in the 1740s. Although Pope’s final 1743 version of *The Dunciad* has almost irreparably damaged any professional credibility Cibber may have once enjoyed, his opposition to Italian opera echoed the earlier combative reactions of antagonistic writers and poets like Addison, Steele, Pope and Swift, which coloured the initial reception of this new foreign genre. His ridiculing of the inadequate rendering of the more expressive Italian language into mismatched English sound and idiom was a theme that had been fully exploited by satirical writers in the early part of the eighteenth century.

Depictions of the dissonance and disharmony of Italian opera were not so much concerned with the pernicious influence of opera on the identity of the city itself as intent on impeding the threat posed by Italian opera to England’s literary heritage. But this was not the sole source of disquiet: in seeking to convey the disruptive force of Italian opera, satirical portrayals located the source of its subversive status in the intriguing and unsettling figure of the castrato. The castrato’s sexual ambiguity and exotic associations confused the boundaries of gender in the same way that English adaptations and translations of Italian opera clouded the notion of England’s native literary prowess. Yet while providing an almost limitless source of literary inspiration, the castrato precipitated a nervous kind of satire; it was both a target of abuse and a cause of deep anxiety. Moreover, as I will show, the very terms used to debate the indeterminate gender of the castrato were implicitly linked with attempts to define the gender of satire itself.

During a short stay in London in 1709, Jonathan Swift wrote to Robert Hunter, reporting the increasing vogue for Italian opera: ‘We are here nine times madder after Opera’s than ever, and have gott a new castrato from Italy called Nicolini who exceeds Valentini...’\(^{69}\) This was followed two months later by an attack on the Town for succumbing so evidently to the new fad:

The Town is run mad after a new Opera. Poetry and good Sense are dwindling like echo into Repetition and Voice. Critick Dennis vows to G—

these Opera's will be the ruin of the Nation and brings Examples from Antiquity to prove it. A good old Lady five miles out Town, askt me the other day, what these Uproars were that her Daughter was always going to.\textsuperscript{70}

Swift's complaints, in particular the substitution of sound for sense, echo the anxieties of other critics of Italian opera, and he responded to a seemingly insatiable demand for opera by calling for a concerted effort by fellow writers to put an end to its domination of London's cultural scene: 'The Vogue of Operas holdeth up wonderfully, altho' we have had them a Year; but I design to set up a Party among the Wits to run them down by next Winter, if true English Caprice doth not interpose to save us the Labour.'\textsuperscript{71} Swift's seemingly puzzling remark, that London has only played host to Italian opera for a year, is perhaps an acknowledgement of the Lord Chamberlain's ruling in 1708, that the Queen's Theatre would henceforth be the sole venue for the more fashionable opera. However, Swift's explicit point here is that although he would prefer it if native English sense were to end Italian opera's run naturally, if enthusiasm were to continue unabated, the intercession of satirical censors would become a matter of necessity. This is an assertion and confirmation of the deliberate intentions of his fellow 'Wits'. The comments typify the intolerance of Italian opera shared by contemporary writers of different political and social affiliations.

Much of the satirical opposition to Italian opera focused on the reciprocal relationship between urban luxury and the feminization of London's citizens. This was perhaps best illustrated in the satirical writing of a minor poet of the early eighteenth century, Henry Carey, a 'butterfly figure of charm but little substance', according to one critic,\textsuperscript{72} but whose poems, lampooning the supremacy of Italian opera in early eighteenth-century London were nevertheless popular at the time.\textsuperscript{73} Carey mixed in Whig circles, was an admirer of Addison and Steele, and a frequenter of Button's coffee-house. His association with the cultivators of London's polite society perhaps provided the impetus for his thoughts on the link between new wealth created by the City and the aristocratic entertainment of Italian opera. Nevertheless, his poems drew heavily on the prejudices of

\textsuperscript{70} Letter to Ambrose Philips, 8 March 1709, in \textit{The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift}, vol. 1, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{71} Letter to Robert Hunter, 22 March 1709, in \textit{The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift}, vol. 1, p. 133.


\textsuperscript{73} See the introduction to \textit{The Poems of Henry Carey}, 1729, ed. Frederick T. Wood, (London: The Scholaritis Press, n. d.), Paradoxically, given the chronology, Carey was also producer, in 1732, of two operas \textit{after the Italian Manner}, \textit{Amelia and Teraminta}, neither of which were notable successes. See introduction, p. 17.
his better-known fellow satirists, elaborating on the connection between London’s wealth and the feminization of native culture. His ‘Satire on the Luxury and Effeminacy of the Age’, published with a group of poems in 1729, reprises and extends certain themes identified by writers like Dennis, Addison, Steele, Swift and Gay. He appeals to the British citizen to loosen his embrace of Italian opera and to learn to appreciate ‘manly’ wit and patriotic loyalty.

Britons! for shame, give all this folly o’er
Your ancient nobleness restore:
Learn to be manly, learn to be sincere,
And let the world a Briton’s name revere.
...
Where is the noble race of British youth
Whose ornaments were wisdom, learning, truth?
Who, e’er they travell’d, laid a good foundation
Of lib’ral arts, of manly education;
Nor went, as some go now, a scandle to their nation
Who travel only to corrupt the mind,
Import the bad, and leave the good behind.74

Carey singles out the Grand Tour as a major factor responsible for the corruption of the masculine naivety of the young British traveller. The process of defining a pure British identity by means of constructing an equally circumscribed opposition, against which, a superior, native identity might be created, is demonstrated clearly by Carey, who alerts the reader to the neat exchange of Italian and British culture, to the detriment of the latter.

Carey’s poem draws attention to the substitution of opera for concern with the City’s commercial practices: ‘Nor care they whether credit rise or fall; / The opera with them is all in all’. Significantly, Bernard Mandeville’s The Fable of the Bees, a treatise advocating and encouraging the pursuit of luxury, was published in the same year, and commended opera, ‘[w]here the powerful Harmony between the engaging Sounds and speaking Gestures invades the Heart, and forcibly inspires us with those noble Sentiments, which to entertain us the most expressive Words can only attempt to persuade us’.75 But Carey’s most

74 Henry Carey, in The Poems of Henry Carey, 1729, p. 97.
75 Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Menaces, 1714, 1723, ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) vol. 2, p. 38. Although the speaker’s interlocutor suggests that opera is merely a popular diversion that all people of fashion wish to be seen attending, the argument in favour of opera, nevertheless, prevails.
impassioned appeal is made against the assault on the English language and the corruption of sound and sense by the castrato.

I hate this singing in an unknown tongue;
It does our reason and our senses wrong;
When words instruct and music cheers the mind,
Then is the art of service to mankind;
But when a castrate wretch of monst’rous size
Squeaks out a treble, shrill as infant’s cries,
I curse the unintelligible ass,
Who may, for aught I know, be singing Mass.

For Carey, as for other satirists, the figure of the castrato represents the feminization of London society. ‘A Satire on the Luxury and Effeminacy of the Age’ is followed in the 1729 collection by ‘The Beau’s Lamentation for the loss of Farinelli’, marking the departure of the celebrated singer from London to return home to Italy. The poet recounts how he met a young fop, ‘a sparkish young fellow ... making his moan; / Oh, he cried like a child that had newly been stripp’d’.

Tell me, gentle hobby de hoy,
Art thou girl, or art thou boy?
For thy features and thy dress
Such contraries do express.
I stand amaz’d, and at a loss to know
To what new species thou thy form dost owe.

Like the castrati, the ‘new species’ of effeminate men seem to blur the line separating the two sexes. However, the difference is that London women, who have also fallen prey to the fashion for Italian opera, are represented as being intensely attracted to the male singers, spurning the men from their own city. In Carey’s ‘Blundrella, or the Impertinent’, the frivolous heroine, clearly modelled on Pope’s Belinda in The Rape of the Lock, and who

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76 The Poems of Henry Carey, p. 110.
77 Ibid., p. 111. Although ‘The Effeminate’ is not overtly concerned with Italian opera, its insertion within a series of poems openly satirizing opera’s association with urban decadence and perversion, seems a deliberate reference to the beau and to the castrato.
talks 'of singers and composers / Of their admirers and opposers', asserts that 'The English were not fit to teach / Italians were the only men'. The fact that Italian men are depicted as unmanly and effete serves only to make them more seductive in the eyes of the Town's fashionable young females.

The castrato played a significant role in the eighteenth-century public and literary imagination. Thomas McGeary writes that, 'the castrato stood metonymically for all they found reprehensible about opera: its foreign nature; its origin in a corrupt, luxurious Italy with its arbitrary governments and idolatrous, superstitious Catholic church'. In 1718, Edmund Curll published an English translation of Charles Ancillon's *Eunuchism Display'd*. On the title page, he explained the circumstances which gave rise to this particular incident: 'Occasion'd by a young Lady's falling in Love with Nicolini, who sung in the Opera at the Hay-Market, and to whom she had liked to have been Married.' In 1724, Aaron Hill included a letter in his *Plain Dealer* from a young lady, Fidelio, who describes her near undoing at the hands of a castrato; she is only saved by the fact that she cannot speak Italian.

Oh! Sir!
Wou’d to Heaven, ... you had warn’d us, against Opera! you had sav’d an Undone Woman! and One, who, for ought I see, is still likely to be Undone; for, thinking no Harm, where, I had heard, there was no Danger, I am fallen desperately in Love, with Signior — , the Italian, What dy'e call it ? ... I thought, I cou'd have sworn, I had been Proof against Man: But, alas! - he is not Man! - He is a Being more refin’d:
and I am wretched, without Remedy!

A number of publications, similarly dealing with the issue of the peculiar weakness of fashionable young women for the unfamiliar and almost unmentionable sexuality of the 'What dy’ e call it', conveyed the fear of the threat to conventional masculine identity which the singers represented. Rather than objecting to the subject-matter of the performance, or the company shared at the theatre – concerns which explained the hostility to women’s

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78 McGeary, ‘Warbling Eunuchs’, p. 10. He lists a number of prurient publications disseminated in the early part of the eighteenth century which narrate various, improbable, lascivious accounts of innocent young females falling for the famous opera singers. A poem written in 1711, entitled *The Signior in Fashion: Or the Fair Maid’s Conveniency*, tells the sorry tale of the ‘Fair Chloe’ who is seduced by the charms of Nicolini, p. 11.
79 In *Apollo: or a Poetical Definition of the Three Sister Arts* (1729), pp. 19-26.
attendance at the London playhouse – anxiety appeared to be predicated on the sexual confusion embodied in the strange, barrel-chested, knock-kneed castrato.

A lone voice considering the issue of female presence at the London opera house at this time was that of Bernard Mandeville, who, in The Fable of the Bees, asserted that at the opera house, a woman had nothing to fear, either aesthetically or socially:

The Place itself is a Security to Peace, as well as every one’s Honour, and it is impossible to name another, where blooming Innocence and irresistible Beauty stand in so little need of Guardians. Here we are sure never to meet with Petulancy or ill Manners, and to be free from immodest Ribaldry, Libertine Wit, and detestable Satyr ... Believe me, Madam, there is no Place, where both Sexes have such Opportunities of imbibing exalted Sentiments, and raising themselves above the Vulgar, as they have at the Opera; and there is no other sort of Diversion or Assembly from the frequenting of which young Persons of Quality can have equal Hopes of forming their Manners, and contracting a strong and lasting Habit of Virtue.81

Mandeville’s approval of the individual’s pursuit of luxury struck a discordant note amongst arbiters of politeness and taste during the early eighteenth century; it was only later, in mid-century urban novels where the relation of the female with public space became a common theme, and the readers’ taste for the city’s pleasures was represented in a less critical manner, that Mandeville’s originally satirical but untypical position was absorbed into the general representation of London life.

At the time of writing, Mandeville’s The Fable of the Bees was unusual and provocative in encouraging the increasing commercialization of London society. Polite opinion tended toward disapproval and outright condemnation of the increasing demand for the luxuries which London increasingly offered its citizens. The exclusivity and extravagance of Italian opera provided a perfect medium through which to articulate fears of the commercialization of the city and the feminizing of its inhabitants as a consequence of this degeneration; the dissolution of fixed gender roles, in turn, found a perfect embodiment in the figure of the castrato itself.

The castrato has been used by critics as a starting point for a discussion of the presence of a gay culture in eighteenth-century London, its role in defining contemporary attitudes to femininity and the more general unfixing of rigid gender roles. Jill Campbell’s analysis of

the inversion of male and female parts in Henry Fielding's plays, examines the castrato's symbolic status in its social context. She writes: 'the Italian castrato singers ... served widely as a cultural occasion through which the ambivalences and pressure of the period's sexual ideology could be played out, in the form both of a tremendous popular vogue and of a tireless, satiric abuse.' Both Campbell's and McGeary's arguments use the castrato as a means of discussing broader issues: McGeary explores contemporary homophobic attitudes through his reading of representations of the eunuch as a symbol of eighteenth-century social prejudice; Campbell's survey of Fielding's dramatic output during the 1730s offers a still wider agenda: in the figure of the castrato/eunuch, she locates a popular paradigm for exposing and subverting the patriarchal and heterosexual structure of early eighteenth-century social norms. My own focus is narrower than both of these surveys. I am concerned with the way in which the many satirical literary and polemical publications dealing with Italian opera, especially the arias sung by the castrati, shared the complaint that opera's success represented a triumph for 'sound over sense'. This common refrain targeted the inadequacy of English renderings of original libretti. The translations appeared to be infecting and corrupting the native, masculine English language. The castrate's ambiguous gender, its disturbing effeminacy, embodied the confusion of sense instigated by almost impossible translations from Italian into English.

In 1711, an essay by Addison, in The Spectator, marked the start of an intermittent campaign waged against the translation and adaptation — the anglicizing — of Italian opera in London. It followed an earlier piece in The Tatler, in which Steele had criticized a performance of Pyrrus and Demetrius at the Haymarket for 'being given up to the shallow satisfaction of the Eyes and Ears only'. In Number 5 of The Spectator, Addison continues the focus on the assault on common sense by the overwhelming excess of ostentatious display and spectacle.

An Opera may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its Decorations, as its only Design is to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience. Common Sense however requires, that there should be nothing in the

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83 [Steele] The Tatler, 1709-11, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 39. Steele goes on to describe how a critic present at the performance registered his anguish at the collapsing of national and linguistic boundaries as a consequence of the way sound overwhelmed: '... not only Time and Place, but Languages and Nations confused in the most incorrigible Manner.'
Scenes and Machines which may appear Childish and Absurd. How would the Wits of King Charles's Time have laughed to see Nicolini exposed to a Tempest in Robes of Ermin, and sailing in an open Boat upon a Sea of Paste-Board.84

In this essay, Addison opposes common sense to excessive sensation. The ludicrous parade of spectacular artifice evokes indignation at the lack of taste rather than the disintegration of patriotic virtue singled out by Dennis. The Spectator is less passionate than Dennis in its criticism but regrets the violation of polite urban society by the overwhelming sensationalism of Italian opera, and maintains a consistently mocking stance throughout its series of publications;85 commentary on opera seria appeared in numbers 13, 14, 18, 29 and 31. Although these essays tended to target different aspects of the opera for ridicule, the recurring theme is that of the substitution of sound and sensation for sense.

In number 18, Steele steps up the attack by focusing on the effect of the mismatch of poor English translations of the Italian libretti on the London audience. Some lines are so badly rendered into English that it produces the opposite intent: if translated correctly, the Italian original would read: ‘Barbarous Woman, yes, I know your Meaning’, but it is hopelessly off-target with the English lament, ‘Frail are a Lover’s Hopes, &c’.86 Steele describes the absurdity of an exclusive, though uncomprehending audience’s acceptance of vocal nonsense:

And it was pleasant enough to see the most refined Persons of the British Nation dying away and languishing to Notes that were filled with a Spirit of Rage and Indignation. It happened also very frequently, where the Sense was rightly translated, the necessary Transportation of Words which were drawn out of the Phrase of one Tongue into that of another, made the Musick appear very absurd in one Tongue that was very natural in the other.87

Soft notes fall on to English words expressing rage, while definite articles and ordinary conjunctions such as ‘And’ are forced to bear the emotional freight of a particular line’s passion. The London audience is, of course, totally oblivious to these incongruities; Steele even goes so far as to suggest that the Italian performers privately enjoy heaping insults on

84 The Spectator, vol. 1, pp. 22-3.
85 It is interesting to note that while The Spectator continued to deride Italian opera as a genre, advertisements during the twenty-two months of its publication record eleven separate operas and ninety performances. See The Spectator, vol. 1 pp. 22-3 n. 1.
87 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 80.

an unsuspecting public, ‘chattering in the Vehemence of Action, that they have been calling us Names, and abusing us among themselves’.88

In Number 29, Addison humorously reflects on how the suitability of recitativo to the Italian language becomes nonsensical in English. The recitativo carries the narrative of the opera forward, but whereas the natural musicality of the Italian language corresponds to the half-sung nature of the continuing story, the English language is ill suited to it and merely jars, offering discord instead. Addison does not disapprove of the idea of recitative; indeed, he considers it ‘more natural than the passing from a Song to plain and ordinary Speaking, which was the common Method in Purcell’s Opera’s’89; the only problem he has with it is the ‘present practice’ of ‘making use of Italian Recitativo with English Words’. The natural cadences of the English language are flatter and less dramatic than the regular tones of the Italian vernacular:

Thus the Notes of Interrogation, or Admiration, in the Italian Musick ... which resemble their Accents in Discourse on such Occasions, are not unlike the ordinary Tones of an English Voice when we are angry; insomuch that I have often seen our Audience extreamly mistaken as to what he has been doing upon the Stage, and expecting to see the Hero knock down his Messenger, when he has been asking him a Question; or fancying that he quarrels with his Friend, when he bids him Good-morrow.90

Opera is not universally condemned: in an ambiguous expression of praise, Addison asserts that Italy is well suited to the melodrama and passion of operaseria: ‘their whole Opera wonderfully favours the Genius of such a gay and airy People’.91 But by confining the genre to a foreign culture, Addison implicitly dissociates the London stage from this alien import. He appeals to the English composer to ‘accommodate himself to an English Audience’.92 Inside the city’s opera-house, the audience witnesses and listens to a cultural struggle in which rival traditions compete for the appreciation of a fashion-conscious public.

In 1720, Steele wrote a piece for his periodical, The Theatre (1 March, no. 18) in

88Ibid., vol. 1, p. 81.
89 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 120.
90 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 121.
91 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 122.
92 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 121.
which he reprised some of the sentiments articulated a decade earlier in *The Spectator*. He points out the incongruities of English translations of Italian originals. With a flash of sarcasm, he suggests that anything resembling a song that makes sense is to be abjured: 'The Author of this performance was encourag’d to present to the Board a Song with something like Sense in it; but that was thought dangerous, and rejected, as what might introduce an Inundation of more Sense and impertinence.'93 Once again, the triumph of sound over sense is identified as the main offence of modern Italian opera. Steele even offers the reader his own version of the nonsensical libretti:

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So notwithstanding heretofore
Strait forward by and by
Now everlastingly therefore
Too low and eke too high

Then for almost and also why
Not thus when less so near
Oh! for hereafter quite so nigh
But greatly ever here.94
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Intelligibility is made subservient to sound, and Steele has no doubts, ‘but this Piece will meet with Applause; for it gives no Disturbance to the Head, but merely serves to be added to Sounds proper for the Syllables’.

However, Steele further qualifies the idea of pure sound by relating it back to the effeminacy so closely identified with it in his own play *The Tender Husband* in 1705 and in John Dennis’s anti-opera essays. He associates sound with soft pleasures: ‘As Pleasure of late Years improv’d to a most exquisite Softness, and the Delight of Sound has prevail’d over the Pain of Sense’.95 This reiterates Dennis’s comments in 1706, that ‘Musick has caus’d so great a Change in our Writers’; he laments that sound had triumphed over reason explaining that, ‘Musick, that is not subservient to Reason, especially if it be soft and effeminate is a mere Delight of the Senses’.96 It is part of the Town’s fascination with all things pleasurable. ‘Man naturally pursues Pleasure, and flies from Pain’, while ‘the

94 Ibid., p. 79.
95 Ibid., p. 79.
Entertainment which we have from our Operas is a mere sensula Pleasure’. 97 The obsession that Londoners have with Italian opera conforms to the city’s preoccupation with luxury and urban pleasure.

The literary consequences of Italian opera are best examined by looking at the satirical pieces so closely identified with anti-opera writing. Apart from constructing a literary representation of a hostile Italian cultural threat, satire itself, the genre most closely associated with this intense antagonism in the early part of the century, appeared to reinforce its own strength from the effeminacy and general ambiguity and confusion relating to Italian opera.

Felicity Nussbaum has identified a tradition of satire predicated on the notion of the ambivalent sexual role imposed on the figure of the female in early eighteenth-century literature: she represents either frail, innocent femininity or conversely, possesses predatory, maenadic, sometimes masculine, qualities. Nussbaum writes:

The most interesting exploitations of the tradition employ its assumptions - that women are unruly monsters, that women are valued principally for beauty, that masculinized women are perverse - and turn away from the most flagrant extremes. 98

The idea of women as ‘masculinized’ monsters can be seen as the obverse of the effeminate urban beau and castrated opera singer of anti-opera satire; a concurrent, parallel tradition that also has as its premiss the instability of gender categories. And if the satirical voice framing women within prescribed roles and representations is clearly masculine, the same could be said for the ‘voice of satire’ in anti-opera discourse.

In 1734, the epilogue to Henry Fielding’s The Intriguing Chambermaid conveyed the by then familiar disdain for Italian opera in particular the magnetic pulling power of the castrato. Ironically, Fielding chooses to praise the female section of the audience’s adoration of the eunuch:

– But though our angry poets rail in spite,
Ladies, I own, I think your judgments right:
Satire, perhaps, may wound some pretty thing;

97 Ibid., pp. 387-88.
98 Felicity Nussbaum, The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750, (The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 159.
Those soft Italian warblers have no sting.\(^9\)

Fielding's lines seem, at first, to endorse good-humouredly the female audience's fascination with the castrato, praising the benign social consequences of the physical defects of these singers. However, the 'stingless' eunuch is, by metaphorical association, exposed as the weaker, feminine mode of expression, inferior to satire which has, at least, the potential to inflict a piercing jab, 'to wound some pretty thing'.

The conflict between satire as a masculine genre, defined by its opposition to effeminate Italian opera was reinforced three years later by the scandalous courtesan Teresia Constantia Phillips. In 1735, Con Phillips composed an open letter praising the celebrated and simultaneously derided singer Farinelli:

\begin{quote}
Man, like his brother Brute, the shaggy Bear,
Where he attempts to stroke, is sure to tear ....
Discord and Thunder, mingle when he speaks,
And stunning Noise the Ears this Membrane breaks.
How fit for Dalliance and for soft Embrace,
Is Man, that carries Terror in his Face? ...
Can we with Pleasure, what we dread enjoy,
That very Dread does love itself destroy.
How much do those display their want of Sense,
Who scoff at Eunuchs, and dislike a Thing,
For being but disburthen'd of its Sting?\(^1\)
\end{quote}

Jill Campbell has commented on this pamphlet, focusing on the sexual undertones of the 'violation' of the female ear by the masculine voice of satirical attack.\(^2\) Phillips empathises with the stingless 'Thing', echoing the title designated by Fielding, rejecting male attention for empathy with the unmasculine Farinelli. Although satire is often perceived as a razor-sharp genre, mercilessly exposing social and moral corruption, Con Phillips's reading of it, taking a cue from Fielding's definition, confers on it a more brutal,

\(^1\) Teresia Constantia Phillips, *The Happy Courtezan: Or, the Prude Demolish'd. AN EPISTLE From the Celebrated Mrs. C-- P--. TO THE Angelick Signior Far--n--LL* (London: J. Roberts, 1735), pp. 3; 7.
\(^2\) Campbell, 'When Women Turn', p. 69. Campbell writes that, "Discord" and "Noise" stand in for the phallus, deflowering the female ear'. Whilst I agree with Campbell's identification of the female empathy with the castrato as a means of rejecting the brutality of both cultural and social male dominance, her use of terms such as 'phallic satire', even in its broadest cultural sense, reduces the clash of competing genres to a conflict between male and female desire, defined by a narrow, biologically determined difference. My own focus is on the *literary* consequences of defining satire and Italian opera in gendered terms.
clumsy sense: 'Brother Brute, the shaggy Bear, / Where he attempts to stroke, is sure to tear'. The male satirist is redefined by the retaliatory, discerning wit of the female writer who confirms that the female audience in London does indeed identify with, and prefer Italian opera to, the satirical burlesques of a writer like Fielding; the masculine writer is, by process of being associated with 'Discord and Thunder', paradoxically linked with the very terms used by the satirists to define the dissonant noise of opera itself.

Anti-opera satire and the sense of audience

The apparent conflict between competing genres played out on the London stage implied a sense of the London audience: Fielding's dramatic representations of Italian opera showed an awareness of the taste of the Town, and he sought, through the London stage, to ridicule the public's predilections for fashionable extravagance. In this sense, Fielding was more subtly identifying his cultural position with the satirical works of Hogarth and John Gay. Hogarth's visual satire Masquerades and Operas had originally been entitled The Bad Taste of the Town. Similarly, John Gay concluded his overwhelmingly popular burlesque The Beggar's Opera (1728), with the player's explanation: 'All this we must do, to comply with the taste of the town.' This line is actually a salvo for the highwayman Macheath's ridiculous reprieve at the end of the opera. But the idea, though, that one of the most distinctive features of Italian opera was its numerous concessions to popular taste and mood conformed to the general anti-opera tenor of the play itself. Unlike most of his fellow satirists, Gay's mock opera approached its Italian original not through a direct assault on its associations with social decadence but by using London's geography to exaggerate and invert the social identity of Italian opera. A late eighteenth-century estimation of the impact of The Beggar's Opera defined its influence in topographical terms:

Gay must be allowed the praise of having attempted to stem Italia's liquid

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102 See Rogers, Literature and Popular Culture, p. 40.
104 Gay was not essentially opposed to opera in the way that his 'more doctrinaire neoclassical contemporaries' were. See Lewis, 'The Beggar's Opera as Anti-opera, p. 83. He had even written the libretto for Handel's Acis and Galatea about ten years before he wrote The Beggar's Opera. His satire seems almost solely directed towards ridiculing the 'taste of the Town'. In a letter to Swift (February 3, 1723), he wrote: 'As for the reigning Amusement of the town, 'tis entirely Musick,' cited in Lewis, p. 83. Bertrand H. Bronson claims that, 'Everything considered, The Beggar's Opera may more properly be regarded as a testimonial to the strength of opera's appeal to John Gay's imagination than as a deliberate attempt to ridicule it out of existence', in 'The Beggar's Opera', in Facets of the Enlightenment, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 77.
stream which at that time meandered thru' every alley, street and square in the metropolis, — the honour of having almost silenced the effeminate song of that absurd exotic Italian opera.105

The prison scene, which, as Peter Lewis has pointed out, 'was almost a sine qua non in an Italian opera' is extended so as to occupy at least half of the play.106 The prison is not a remote, romantic location: it is the familiar Newgate, situated in the heart of London. John Bender writes that '[e]veryone was familiar with Newgate's location neither inside nor outside the City, but actually in and part of its walls.'107 Gay makes explicit, through specific location, the paradoxical association of high opera and City finance. Although Gay also makes The Beggar's Opera conform, in other respects, thematically and structurally to the conventions of Italian opera, he grounds his play firmly in places instantly identifiable to a London audience. He 'inverts Italian opera, with its classical, mythological or similarly elevated narratives and its exotic atmosphere, by setting the Beggar's Opera ... in the criminal underworld of contemporary London'.108 By incorporating the city's ordinary topography into his mock opera, Gay set his work apart from other satirical portraits. His use of recognizable locations implicitly acknowledged the identity of the London audience whose tastes he was lampooning though inversion on stage.109 Hogarth's subsequent pictorial interpretation of The Beggar's Opera shows that he understood that the implied audience is as much a target of Gay's satire as opera itself; as in the case of Polly Honeycombe, the audience seemed to enjoy laughing at the reflection of its own fashionable tastes and predilections. Even in the earliest versions of the painting, the spectators are included within the dramatic scene, caricatures of an inattentive, narcissistic social group, while the real action takes place on stage. In later adaptations, Hogarth actually shows the audience interacting with the players as both dramatic characters and the real London crowd are depicted as prone to the follies and weaknesses of urban existence.

Hogarth and Gay were distinctive in the early eighteenth century for their incorporation of London within their satires and, significantly, representations of the audience of Italian

106 Peter Lewis, 'The Beggar's Opera as Opera and Anti-opera,' p. 86.
107 Bender, Imagining the Penitentiary, p. 94.
108 Peter Lewis, 'The Beggar's Opera as Opera and Anti-opera,' p. 87.
109 John Bender remarks that Gay's 'realism is actually part of a system of exchange in which heroic situation, dress and language are in communication with their social opposites', Imagining the Penitentiary, p. 95.
opera. As a dramatist during the 1730s, Fielding more subtly implied the identity of his audience in his plays by offering them a reflection of their frivolous tastes on stage. Fielding wrote a number of satirical farces during the 1730s before provoking the imposition of the 1737 Licensing Act which aimed to curb the output of anti-establishment sentiments of writers like him on the London stage; many of these featured Italian opera as an object of cultural ridicule – unsurprising, perhaps, for a playwright who keenly felt the adverse effects of the success of a rival genre on the reception of his own works. In *The Grub Street Opera* (1731), Scriblerus remarks in the introduction that, ‘[A]s for plot, sir, I had writ an admirable one; but having observed that the plot of our English operas have had no good effect on our audiences, so I have e’en left it out’. The semblance of a sophisticated plot is beyond the scope of a London audience more attuned to the senseless spectacle of Italian opera. In *The Historical Register For the Year 1736*, published in 1737, a group of town ladies gather to discuss in lascivious detail the attraction of the singer Farinelli:

ALL LADIES. Was you at the Opera, madam last, night?
SECOND LADY. Who can miss an opera while Farinelli stays?
THIRD LADY. Sure he is the charminest creature!
FOURTH LADY. He’s everything in the world one could wish!
FIRST LADY. Almost everything one could wish!
SECOND LADY. They say there’s a lady in the city has a child by him.

(II, 6-11)111

This scene offers the audience, specifically the female component, a mirror-image of its proclivities: the prurient suggestiveness and insinuations indicate the motives for attending the opera; the spectre of Farinelli on the stage offers a vicarious transgressive pleasure, a frisson that simply cannot be matched by more conventional actors in other playhouses. Addressed to a theatre audience, Fielding’s drama both chides and mocks the group susceptible to opera’s attractions, while ostensibly implying that his immediate audience is above such vulgar spectacle and entertainment as it applauds the playwright’s discerning wit. Fielding is lambasting a public seduced by lavish spectacle and female decadence that threatens to disrupt the more familiar heterosexual model of male pursuit and female

acquiescence. But he also risks insulting the taste of the very group which pays to see his own threatened drama, a group whose individuals either attend or at least aspire to visit Italian opera being performed at the more exclusive King’s Theatre.

Fielding’s theatre audience was a more visible and therefore more easily targeted section of London society. The mid-century novel, however, implied a less easily identifiable readership. The evolution and gradual modification of the novel’s attitude towards opera suggested both a shift in cultural sensibility and an ability to shape the tastes of readers of eighteenth-century novels.

**Italian opera and early eighteenth-century narratives**

Perhaps the depiction of opera most significant for evaluating its status among other literary genres occurs in Fielding’s *The Author’s Farce* (1730), written just two years after *The Beggar's Opera*. In an episode imitative of Pope’s procession of Dullness in *The Dunciad*, first published in 1728, Fielding arranges a sequence of different cultural genres competing for the attentions of the Goddess of Nonsense. One after another, Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical Comick, Signior Opera and Monsieur Pantomime – loosely based on the impresario John Rich – present their case. The Goddess Nonsense falls, predictably perhaps, for the charms of Signior Opera and chooses him as the dunce-laureate of her underworld. She makes plans to marry him until the arrival of Mrs. Novel – a figure parodying the early eighteenth-century female writer, Eliza Haywood. Mrs. Novel objects to the Goddess’s choice, claiming that she had a previous relationship with Signior Opera, announcing finally: ‘he knows I died for love; for I died in childbed’ (III. i. 390). At first Signior Opera responds with a mournful aria, lamenting the ghostly resurrection of his wife.

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I was told in my life
Death forever
Did dissever
Men from every mortal strife,
And that greatest plague, a wife.
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Eventually, though, Signior Opera recovers a sense of duty and is lovingly reconciled with

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110 Ibid. p. 58.
his wife, Mrs. Novel, while the Goddess of Nonsense withdraws in disgust.

Although not overtly concerned with the competition between the different literary genres available to a London public, *The Author’s Farce* presages the representation of the status of Italian opera in relation to fiction in the 1740s. In its portrayal of the intermittent relationship between Signior Opera and Mrs. Novel, and the ambiguous position of the Goddess of Nonsense, it seemed to be addressing two separate groups: the London audience which enjoyed both drama and Italian opera, and, perhaps more significantly, the growing readership of the emerging and constantly evolving novel. Yet, as it is represented in Fielding’s drama, the extended scene of burlesque implies an intersection of these two consumer categories, as the lines separating the theatre audience, operagoer and novel reader begin to blur.

By the 1740s London’s mania for *opera seria* had passed its peak, but Pope’s depiction of it in the 1743 edition of *The Dunciad*, and Richardson’s *Pamela*’s qualified repudiation of it a couple of year’s earlier, both contain the residual prejudices of earlier modes of criticism. Yet while one genre looks back to an older tradition of satire, the other implies, in its presentation, the changing tastes and proclivities of the mid-eighteenth-century London reading public.

The portrayal of Italian opera in Pope’s final version of *The Dunciad* has received greater critical interest in recent years. Although Pope briefly referred to opera in Book Three of the earlier 1728 edition, the same year that Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* was first performed, he nevertheless expanded and added an extended treatment of it in the fourth book he included for the 1743 revision. In Book III, opera is seen as the harbinger of the dissonant chaos Pope depicts later in the poem:

Already Opera prepares the way,
The sure fore-runner of her gentle sway:
Let her thy heart, next Drabs and Dice, engage,
The third mad passion of thy doting age.
Teach thou the warbling Polypheme to roar,
And scream thyself as none e’er scream’d before.

(III. 301-306)


Pope's treatment of opera here is more perfunctory than the later passage to which he attaches a number of footnotes. In Book Four, Italian opera steps forward before the Goddess of Dullness:

When lo! a Harlot form soft sliding by,  
With mincing step, small voice, and languid eye;  
Foreign her air, her robe's discordant pride  
In patch-work flutt'ring, and her head aside.  
By singing Peers up-held on either hand,  
She tripp'd and laugh'd, too pretty much to stand;  
Cast on the prostrate Nine a scornful look,  
Then thus in a quaint Recitativo spoke. (IV. 45-52)

The 'mincing steps', 'small step' and 'languid pride' are, of course, evocative of the popular depiction of the castrato, although in this case, it is opera itself which is personified and feminized as a 'harlot'. Pope offers a typically pedantic footnote providing an explanation for the degeneration of opera into a patchwork of almost arbitrarily connected musical sequences: 'The Attitude given to this Phantom represents the nature and genius of the Italian Opera; its affected airs, its effeminate sounds, and the practice of patching up these Operas with favourite Songs, incoherently put together.' In the light of the preceding decades' literary and critical attention to savaging the effeminacy of opera, Pope's lines seem to be the culmination of, perhaps the triumphant conclusion to, an already established anti-opera satirical tradition in early eighteenth-century London. Pat Rogers has noted that Pope's references to musical discord in later lines are emblematic of 'literary folly' as well as a timely reference to the disintegration of relations between management, singers and composers: 'The “discordant pride” of opera is ... turned directly to Dulness in action ... Pope uses the fierce and noisy contention as an image of nonsense at large.' Handel escapes censure here, even though he was jointly responsible for promoting the cause of Italian opera in London. Pope explains how Handel was forced to withdraw from the capital and flee to Ireland because his music 'prov'd so much too manly for the fine Gentlemen of his age'. These lines recall Dennis's earlier claim that opera is 'incompatible with Music, especially in so masculine a Language as ours', and Pope isolates Handel from the other composers, pronouncing: 'If Music meanly borrows aid from Sense:

113 Rogers, 'The Critique of Opera in the Dunciad,' p. 114.
Strong in new Arms, lo! Giant Handel stands' (IV. 64-5).115

My relatively cursory treatment of *The Dunciad* in this chapter is not an attempt to detract from the significance and skill of Pope’s satirical portrait; rather, it reflects my interest in locating it within a broader literary context. Handel’s departure from the London scene of Italian opera after 1741, makes Pope’s references to the composer, and the derision of opera itself, appear strictly contemporaneous, as well as confirming its decline in fortune at the time. However, its inclusion in a satirical epic poem gives it a backward-looking affinity with an earlier kind of writing. The fact that the final four-book version of *The Dunciad*, completed in 1742 and published in 1743, coincided almost chronologically with both volumes of Samuel Richardson’s best-seller, *Pamela* (1740-41), reveals much about the evolving literary tastes of the London public. It also implicitly indicates the social and cultural status of those who were attending Italian opera at the Haymarket in mid-century.

Opera seems to have made little impact on the depiction of London in early eighteenth-century narratives by female authors. Perhaps the most significant fact concerning the appearance of Italian opera is the paucity of its representation in these scandalous fictions. The few references to opera are often subsumed under a general listing of cultural, urban entertainments. In Delarivier Manley’s *The New Atalantis* (1709), the ‘Diversions of the Opera, Gallantry and Love’, are followed by a litany of ‘Balls, Assemblies, Opera’s, Comedies, Cards, and Visits’.116 In Mary Davys’s more didactic *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1724), ‘Publick Places’, include, ‘the Drawing-Room, the Park, the Mall, the Opera, the Basset-Table, the Play-House, and everywhere’.117 The Dedication sets the narrative in contemporary London, ‘when the Town is so full of Masquerades, Opera’s, New Play’s, Conjurers, Monsters, and feign’d Devils’.118 Similarly, in Jane Barker’s *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726), snippets of dialogue and overheard conversation report.

115 Deborah J. Knuth has put this apparently incongruous praise of Handel in contemporary context by directing Pope’s admiration to the oratorios that the composer gave his attention to after abandoning Italian opera, disillusioned, following the 1740-41 season. Knuth, ‘Pope, Handel, and the *Dunciad*’ 22-28. Knuth also counters the prevalent notion that Pope was generally insensitive to music by citing an early letter written to Martha Blount in 1716, in which ‘Pope describes Lord Burlington’s music, which was then under Handel’s direction as “ravishing”’ , p. 22.
116 Manley, *Novels*, vol. 1, pp. 327; 333.
118 Davys, *The Reform’d Coquet*, p. 3.
'some talking of the Opera, some of the Play', while Town entertainment is a constant round of 'Court, Comedies, Opera's, Balls, Masques, and all sorts of Diversion'.

Eliza Haywood's narrative about urban disguise, Fantomina (1725), also syntactically levels London's various resorts of pleasure: 'the Royal Chapel, the Palace Gardens, Drawing-Room, Opera, or Play.' Unlike contemporary satirical portrayals by male writers, these early narrative fictions make Italian opera almost synonymous with other public forms of urban entertainment; little distinction is made in these fictions between the theatre as an arena for play-acting and dissimulation and the opera house as a more fashionable and exclusive resort in the western part of the Town. Although Janet Todd points out that, '[w]hether or not they came originally from London ... these highly professionalised women tended to be based there, at least while they were writing most successfully', it seems that they did not generally frequent the opera house; at least, it is not to be inferred from the details of their narratives. Perhaps the high prices deterred them, for unlike the familiar inclusion of an episode taking place inside the London playhouse, there are scarcely any extended references to opera in these early fictions. The contemporary furious debate concerning the feminization of London society is reflected in the method of characterization: popular clichés of Italian opera's effete qualities are deployed by women writers in order to delineate an unmasculine attention to fashion. A male character humming a popular opera tune is instantly identifiable as a foppish slave to current fads, while a female caught doing the same thing is immediately typecast as a vain coquette. Delarivier Manley's Berintha in The New Atalantis, is one such example:

The Coquet had what she wanted, and did not care, upon second Thoughts, to be made a Confident, for fear it might be some sort of a Tie upon her not to blaze abroad the Secret ... she got up (singing a Tune in the new Opera) to adjust herself at a Glass; but when she saw what a Figure she was, how tumbled and disorder'd, she burst out in a loud Laughter, tho' not able to draw the Lady from her Cogitations. When she had compos'd her Dress, repeating the same Opera-Air, she went out of the Banqueting-House, and left her to herself.

121 Todd, The Sign of Angellica, p. 39.
122 Manley, Novels, vol. 1, p. 393. The narcissism implicit in this vignette was adopted by later writers, like Frances Brooke in her sentimental novel Lady Julia Mandeville (1763) where the dandy Fondville, 'full of the idea of his irresistibility', advances 'in a minuet step, humming an opera tune, and casting a side glance at every looking glass in his way'. Frances Brooke, Lady Julia Mandeville, (London 1763), p. 70.
The self-regarding fascination of London’s fashionable crowds is here depicted in its most extreme form, in connection with the most extravagant kind of urban entertainment.

Such cursory treatment of Italian opera by female authors writing in the early part of the eighteenth century contrasts with the extensive coverage of it by contemporary male satirists. London-based women authors seem to consider it more or less as a means of sketching a sharp portrait of an urban type. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Town Eclogues* (1715), a series of six poems satirizing the trifling preoccupations of the Town’s fashionable female populace, uses the opera to expose the regret of Roxana, who laments how she ‘[l]eft Opera, and [had] run to filthy Plays’, after lapsing from a life of prudish reserve.123

In these narratives, opera confers an implicit city identity on its attendants. It provides a moral signpost for the discerning reader, rather than an independent subject for analysis and condemnation. As a distinct topographical place, the opera-house in the Haymarket is merely another fashionable arena, an urban focal point for parading oneself and one’s assets before the public gaze. In *The New Atalantis*, one mother ‘carries her pretty Daughters to the Opera-Market and Prado, for Husbands’.124 Little reference is made to the performances themselves in this part of the century by women writers, and it is difficult to ascertain whether or not they were ever present at the opera.

**Italian opera and the mid-century novel**

The literary representation of Italian opera undergoes a gradual transition in the constantly modulating novel as mid-century fictions appear to provide a more suitable medium and context for the discussion of opera than the earlier scandalous narratives by female writers. Yet the instances of more extended considerations of opera are less frequent in these later works than the references to London’s theatres. The relative scarcity of allusions to opera defines it both as an exclusive form of urban pleasure less familiar to an implied middle-class readership than the city’s playhouses, and, at the same time, offers an intriguing insight for readers into a more privileged urban social space. However, the few episodes concerning opera seem curiously to take the form of disquisitions extracted from earlier, satirical literary treatments and transmuted into more staid set-pieces. Like the earlier satires, the novels use opera to comment on contemporary urban morals and


manners. Yet these episodes lack the satirical bite of their literary sources; commentary on Italian opera is restrained, flattened almost, as references to this particular cultural form look backward to recover the force of opposition to it in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. Whereas the inclusion or even lack of reference to Italian opera may not provide much in terms of instigating plot, in the way that the masquerade does for example, in narrative terms, it provides an oblique view of the mid-century reading habits of real consumers of novels as well as the fictional readers of London within the novels themselves.

Richardson’s reflections on Italian opera in the sequel to the first part of *Pamela* are among the few sources to offer a more extended discussion of Italian opera as a dubious source of urban pleasure. Pamela’s generally disapproving account of her trip to the theatre is followed immediately in the next letter by her thoughts on opera. Although the more exclusive opera house is an arena better suited to the refined sensibilities of its female visitors, Pamela implicitly describes the specifically public nature of Italian opera in contrast to the popular pastime of reading plays in private. She praises the social calibre of the audience, echoing, surprisingly perhaps, Mandeville’s earlier assessment of ‘the company’ as ‘splendid and genteel’.

Yet the opening remarks are more disparaging, criticizing the ephemeral nature of opera performance:

> If, madam, one were all ear, and lost to every sense but that of harmony, surely the Italian opera would be a transporting thing! — But when one finds good sense, and instruction, and propriety, sacrific’d to the charms of sound, what an unedifying, what a mere temporary delight does it afford! For what does one carry home, but the remembrance of having been pleas’d so many hours by the mere vibration of air, which being but sound, you cannot bring away with you; and must therefore enter the time passed in such a diversion, into the account of those blank hours, from which one has not reap’d so much as one improving lesson?

At first, this comment seems merely to suggest that a trip to the opera house is, in retrospect, a waste of time — the familiar complaint that transitory pleasure provides no important residual value. However, the significant implication is that Italian opera, as with other forms of public musical entertainment, is severely limited by its utter dependency on public performance. Unlike the theatre, whose plays could be re-read in privacy, in the

125 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, vol. 1, p. 75.
126 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 73.
luxury of domestic leisure time, one had to venture out into the more fashionable areas of London in order to savour the pleasure of London opera. In his study of musicology, Edward Said has drawn attention to the way in which the performance of music is both defined and restricted by the fact that it must always constitute a public occasion.

But it is, I think, accurate to say that we can regard the public nature of musical performance ... as a way of bridging the gap between the social and cultural spheres on the one hand, and music’s reclusiveness on the other. Performance is thus an inflected and highly determined point of convergence where the specific and the general come together; music as the most specialized of aesthetics with a discipline entirely specific to it, performance as the general, socially available form of its cultural presentation ... The result is an extreme occasion, something beyond the everyday, something irreducibly and temporally not repeatable, something whose core is precisely what can be experienced only under relatively severe and unyielding conditions.127

Although Said’s remarks are concerned, in this specific instance, with modern musical performance, the wider context confirms the point that music or opera requires the public attendance of its devotees, a factor which contrasts with the private enjoyment experienced by each individual member of the audience. The allusions to music as ‘reclusive’ and ‘specialized’ will have greater resonance later, when I discuss the depiction of Italian opera in the literature of sensibility. But the notion that opera, like any musical performance, is a cultural form which is ‘irreducibly and temporally not repeatable’, implies more than the obvious point that each performance is a unique occasion; for Pamela, its significance lies in the fact that Italian opera is essentially a public, urban form of entertainment. Although she acknowledges that the company is more socially acceptable and civilized, she expresses reservations. The juxtaposition of this letter with her condemnation of the scandalous, public nature of the theatre, confirms Richardson’s disapproval in his other writings, of women encouraged to spend too much time outside the home. In this way, opera is condemned, not on account of its Italian origins, but as tempting the virtuous female to stray too often from her natural domestic space.

Yet although the contemporary concern with female virtue appeared to precipitate fresh anxieties about Italian opera, the critical comments conveyed by Pamela in her letter look back and reiterate attitudes from the earlier writings of Addison and Steele. Without the

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savage fulminations of John Dennis’s criticism, Pamela focuses on the femininity of opera.

I speak this with the regard to myself, who know nothing of the Italian language: but yet I may not be very unhappy, that I do not, if I may form my opinion of the sentiments, by the enervating softness of the sound, and the unmanly attitudes and gestures made use of to express the passions of the men-performers, and from the amorous complainings of the women; as visible in the soft, the too-soft, action of each.\(^\text{128}\)

The familiar frames of reference: ‘enervating softness’, ‘unmanly attitudes’, ‘soft, the too-soft, action’ all recall the vitriolic diatribes articulated in gendered terms by earlier scourges of Italian opera. But articulated by the virtuous heroine, these critical remarks offer only an echo of the original explicit, almost obscene, condemnation of opera. Pamela’s words are closer to the sentiments expressed in the prologue to Richard Steele’s comedy, *The Tender Husband* (1705), a play she had reviewed as an example of the harmful influence of London theatre on its audience: ‘It looked to me, in short, as if the author had forgot the moral all the way ... And truly, I should imagine ... that the play was begun with a design to draw more amiable characters, answering to the title *The Tender Husband*.\(^\text{129}\) The letter discussing Italian opera opens by moving away from plays to opera: ‘Altho’ I cannot tell how you receiv’d my observations on the tragedy of *The Distress’d Mother*, and the comedy of *The Tender Husband*; yet will I proceed to give your ladyship my opinion of the opera I was at last night.’\(^\text{130}\) Recalling the attitude to opera of Steele’s epilogue which aims to defend the country’s native identity by exhorting the audience to despise its ‘unadorn’d effeminacy’, Pamela’s words form an ambivalent commentary on her own reading habits. As she readily admits, she often prefers to read plays than attend a public performance at one of London’s theatres. But although she may claim to recoil from the uncouth sentiments of Steele’s play, it is clear that she has either been an attentive spectator or a conscientious reader: her reflections on the opera reiterate other earlier, antagonistic points of criticism made by Steele in *The Tender Husband*. Where his epilogue decried ‘Foreign Insult’, urging the audience to prefer the ‘native Taste of Manly Wit’, and to choose what ‘Romans Writ’, rather than ‘what Italians Sing’, Pamela, too, conveys her reservations about opera in similar gendered and patriotic terms. She ridicules the incongruity of Julius

\(^{128}\) Richardson, *Pamela*, vol. 4, p. 73.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., vol. 4, p. 72.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., vol. 4, p. 73.
Caesar being made to ‘warbl[e] out his achievements in war’ and, deferring to her husband’s critical appraisal, remarks:

Every nation, Mr. B. says, has its peculiar excellence: the French taste is comedy and harlequinry; the Italian, music and opera; the English, masculine and nervous sense, whether in music or tragedy. Why cannot one, methinks, keep to one’s own particular national excellence, and let others retain theirs. 131

An English tradition is constructed in opposition to French and Italian cultural forms. Paradoxically perhaps, the conflation of its ‘masculine’ and ‘nervous’ constituents merge to produce a superior native genre: tragedy, as I showed in the first chapter, is posited by Richardson as the only acceptable kind of drama on the London stage. But this tradition can only be established through the expulsion of the effeminacy of foreign forms like Italian opera. However, like Addison and Steele’s essays in *The Spectator*, Mr. B. does not condemn opera outright; rather, as in the arguments put forward by the earlier essayists, he suggests that opera works well in Italy, but does not translate successfully on to the London stage:

Operas, said he, are very poor things in England, to what they are in Italy; and the translations given of them abominable ... Every nation ... has its excellencies; and you say well, that ours should not quit the manly nervous sense, which is the distinction of the English drama. One play of our celebrated Shakespeare will give infinitely more pleasure to a sensible mind, than a dozen English-Italian operas. But, my dear, in Italy they are quite another thing. 132

The ‘manly nervous sense’ more closely identified by critics of eighteenth-century fiction with the language of sensibility, is here invoked as the essence of successful English drama; Shakespeare, in particular, is cited as the father of English theatre, an idea reiterated by Harriet Byron in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754):

And now, Lucy, will you not repeat your wishes, that I return to you with a sound heart? And are you not afraid that I shall become a modern fine Lady? As to the latter fear, I will tell you when you shall suspect me - If you find that I prefer the highest of these entertainments, or the Opera itself, well as I love music, to a good Play of our favourite Shakespeare, then, my Lucy, let your heart

131 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 74.
132 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 76.
ake for your Harriet: Then, be apprehensive that she is laid hold on by levity; that she is captivated by the Eye and the Ear; that her heart is infected by the modern taste; and that she will carry down with her an appetite to pernicious gaming; and, in order to support her extravagance, will think of punishing some honest man in marriage.\footnote{Samuel, Richardson, \textit{The History of Sir Charles Grandison}, 1753-4, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 22-3.}

As the only one of Richardson’s novels to be set in wealthy and aristocratic society, Harriet’s rejection of opera sets her apart from her peers as her personal taste reveals a patriotic inclination for Shakespeare rather than Italian opera. A fondness for the latter connotes ‘infection’ by modern taste and a propensity for frivolous behaviour.

Harriet Byron’s repudiation of Italian opera is more absolute than in \textit{Pamela}. In the earlier work, the criticism takes the form of the familiar lament for the invasion of the London stage by a genre only suitable for performance in its original vernacular. The appended commentary to Pamela’s letter by Mr. B. offers further reflection on the problematic nature of Italian opera in London, and once again, the arguments seem to be lifted almost point for point from the earlier \textit{Spectator}, as the dominance of sound over sense and the dismissal of ‘incongruous nonsense’ serve to repeat Addison and Steele’s previous criticism.

Although Pamela and her husband are forthcoming in their comments on Italian opera, there is little sense that either of them has actually attended any performance. Their impressions seem curiously literary as they appear to be reading the London opera house through earlier satirical portraits. Pamela garners most of her ideas from the epilogue of Richard Steele’s play, \textit{The Tender Husband}, a piece she has earlier denounced as indecent and of negligible moral value; Mr. B. draws on the slightly later pages of the urbane \textit{Spectator}. Their opinions on Italian opera throw more light on their reading habits: although in the first volume of her adventures, Pamela often refers to fables she has been reading, the lives of martyrs, and, at one point, recommends the acquisition of ‘a Family Bible, a Common Prayer, a Whole Duty of Man’ as ideal reading material,\footnote{Richardson, \textit{Pamela}, vol. 2, p. 287-88.} it is clear, that in the sequel to her early experiences, more modern and fashionable works have found their way into her collection. Mr. B. reveals himself to be a man who, like James Boswell, appears to model his tastes on the vignettes sketched out in the earlier \textit{Spectator}. At the
same time, Richardson provides an insight into his own literary sources through Mr. B.,
who seems to be fashioning himself a slightly outmoded urban identity as a whiggish
member of polite London circles.

Mr B.’s thoughts on opera also share common imagery with other popular,
contemporary publications: his regret at the way in which the English practice has been to
‘patch up a drama in Italian, in order to introduce favourite airs, selected from different
authors’ echoes, or perhaps even anticipates Pope’s note in Book Four of The Dunciad
published in 1742, that the Harlot Opera’s ‘patch-work’ apparel refers to ‘the practice of
patching up these Operas with favourite songs, incoherently put together’. Whether Mr
B. is familiar with Pope’s satire on Dullness, or, if conversely, Pope has read the sequel to
the first part of Pamela, is chronologically unclear, but the common metaphor shared by
two different literary genres, in the early 1740s, contrasts with the way that the location
of London’s theatres had an evident influence on the fictional narratives depicting them. There
is little sense of actual topography in Richardson’s mid-century representations of the
staging of Italian opera in London; the opera house has geographically receded and been all
but replaced with a cultural debate based on literary portrayal – itself a variation on the
‘patching up’ from ‘different authors’.

The waning of Italian opera’s popularity during the 1740s and the defection of Handel
to oratorio perhaps goes some way to explaining why contemporary, fictional treatment of
the subject seems both derivative and curiously non-partisan despite its reconstituting of
earlier positions. Political and cultural polemic evolves, and at times, even seems to
dissipate into oblique commentary on city manners, as opera is transformed into a cultural
referent, a means of reflecting and constructing the tastes both of Londoners and of a
developing contemporary reading public. The depiction of Italian opera in Henry Fielding’s

135 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 77.
136 Pope, The Dunciad, Book Four, p. 769.
137 Pope certainly read and enjoyed the first instalment of Pamela. Maynard Mack writes that Pope ‘seems
to have retained to the end of his life a capacity to react warmly and intelligently to excellence in areas quite
foreign to his own skills and experience’. When the novel first appeared in 1740, Pope asked his friend, Dr.
George Cheyne, to convey his ‘warm compliments’ to Richardson, ‘having read the book “with great
Kimpel write that Richardson’s opinion of Pope was mostly unfavourable, and that ‘even Pope’s praise of
Pamela did not raise him permanently in Richardson’s esteem’, Samuel Richardson: A Biography, (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 574. Initially, after receiving Pope’s compliments, Richardson referred to him as
‘the first genius of the Age’, but he soon changed his mind, criticizing the poet for the ignoble subject-
matter of his verse. In 1743, he found Aaron Hill’s Fanciad superior to the Dunciad, and in the following
year, ‘wrote that he was tired of buying new editions of Pope, citing the new version of the Dunciad’.
Samuel Richardson, pp. 576-77.
mid-century fictions offers a far more anodyne treatment than the overt hostility manifested in his earlier plays. Without the challenge which opera had represented to his stage productions, Fielding’s portrayal of opera in his novels achieves a similar reconciliation and marriage of sorts that the puppets Signior Opera and Mrs. Novel realise at the end of The Author’s Farce.

In Joseph Andrews (1742), the protagonist cuts a swathe in London circles by adopting the latest sartorial fashions and attending the most socially elevated public urban entertainments:

No sooner was young Andrews arrived at London, than he began to scrape an Acquaintance with his party-colour’d Brethren, who endeavour’d to make him despise his former Course of Life. His Hair was cut after the newest Fashion, and became his chief Care. He went abroad with it all the Morning in Papers, and drest it out in the Afternoon; they could not however teach him to game, swear, drink, nor any other genteele Vice the Town abounded with. He applied most of his leisure Hours to Music, in which he greatly improved himself, and became so perfect a Connoisseur in that Art, that he led the Opinion of all the other Footmen at an Opera, and they never condemned or applauded a single Song contrary to his Approbation or Dislike. 138

Fielding is careful to point out that Andrews does not succumb to any recognized ‘genteele vice’. In this context, therefore, opera is seen as a frivolous, yet ultimately harmless form of entertainment. Fielding’s earlier vitriolic attacks on the castrati, whose threat to stable gender positions and undermining of loyal patriotism generated an identifiable body of anti-opera literature, are replaced with a humorous dig at the hero’s weakness for the amusements of the Town. Similarly, the specifically targeted singers are referred to only in passing as familiar and useful modes of references: when Joseph spurns his mistress’s advances, her subsequent spurious attack on his promiscuity is met by her housekeeper with a typically Fieldingesque contempt for the idea of male chastity:

‘I am sorry for it,’ cries Slipslop; ‘and if I had known you would have punished the poor Lad so severely, you should never have heard a Particle of the Matter. Here’s a Fuss indeed, about nothing.’ ‘Nothing!’ returned my Lady; ‘Do you think I will countenance Lewdness in my House?’ ‘If you will turn away every Footman,’ said Slipslop, ‘that is a lover of the Sport, you must soon open the Coach-Door yourself, or get a Sett of Mophrodites to wait upon you; and I am

sure I hated the Sight of them even singing in an Opera.'

Masculinity is approved of and reinforced through its opposition to the castrato; but the ‘Mophrodite’ is merely a convenient, fashionable and figure on which to project despised effeminacy rather than a specific target in itself.

In *Tom Jones* (1749), Sophia indicates her virtue by reluctantly attending the opera, although its public nature precludes any possibility of improper conduct:

Another Misfortune which befel poor *Sophia*, was the Company of Lord *Fellamar*, whom she met at the Opera, and who attended the Drum. And though both Places were too publick to admit of any Particularities, and she was further relieved by the Music at the one Place, and by the Cards at the other, she could not however enjoy herself in his Company: for there is something of Delicacy in Women, which will not suffer them to be even in the Presence of a Man whom they know to have Pretensions to them, which they are disinclined to favour.

The opera-house is just one of many public venues, and while the openness of such an arena impedes the immediate threat to virtue to be found in other, more secluded urban settings such as London’s pleasure gardens, the facilitation of social mingling seems here to compromise slightly a young lady’s virtue.

Richardson’s roughly contemporary *Clarissa* (1747-48) modifies his more detailed and ambivalent attitude to opera and designates it as a favoured resort of rakes and prostitutes. In the first edition, there are only three references to opera and only Lovelace attends them. In the third edition however, the opera-house is placed in the same category as the London playhouse: in the epilogue, Richardson locates Polly Horton’s fateful first encounter with Lovelace at the King’s theatre in the Haymarket.

For, at the Opera, a diversion at which neither she nor her Mother ever missed to be present, she beheld the specious Lovelace; beheld him invested with all the airs of heroic insult, resenting a slight affront offered to his Sally Martin. The gallantry of this action drawing every bystander on the side of the Hero, O the brave man! cried Polly Horton aloud, to her Mother, in a kind of rapture, How needful the protection of the Brave to the Fair! with a softness in her voice,

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139 Ibid., pp. 42-3.
140 Similarly, in the interpolated tale of Leonora and Horatio, the French suitor is characterized as an urban fop through his familiarity with the latest opera tune: *Bellarmine rose from his Chair, traversed the Room in a Minuet Step, and hummed an opera Tune*, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 113.
which she had taught herself, to suit her fansied high condition of life.

A speech so much in his favour, could not but take the notice of a man who was but too sensible of the advantages which his fine person, and noble air, gave him over the gentler hearts, who was always watching every female eye, and who had his ear continually turned to every affected voice.\textsuperscript{142}

In the first edition of \textit{Clarissa}, the playhouse, where even Clarissa is permitted to enjoy the performance of tragedy, is distinguished from the opera house which is depicted strictly as a dangerous public arena – a threat to female virtue. However, in the 1751 revision, the opera-house is brought closer to the theatre as a location for social mingling: no reference is made to the actual performance or to the peculiarity of the figure of the castrato; attention appears to be focused solely on the moral dangers that women face in mid eighteenth-century London. Cultural performances are defined in terms of the public urban spaces they occupy rather than the content or subject-matter of the entertainment.

In the same year that the third edition of \textit{Clarissa} was published, three other narratives featuring Italian opera appeared: Smollett’s \textit{The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle}, Francis Coventry’s \textit{The History of Pompey the Little} and Eliza Haywood’s \textit{The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless}. Although different in intention and scope from Richardson’s narrative, \textit{Peregrine Pickle} nevertheless implicitly conveys a similar attitude to the opera house. The protagonist, wishing to win the affections of the beautiful Emilia, solicits her attentions and arranges to meet her at the Haymarket. Like the playhouse, the performance is all but forgotten as Pickle takes the opportunity afforded by the more elite company to be found at the opera house to posture and to enjoy the admiring glances of his exalted company.

Here it was that our hero enjoyed a double triumph; he was vain of this opportunity to enhance his reputation for gallantry among the ladies of fashion, who knew him, and proud of an occasion to display his quality-acquaintance to Emilia, that she might entertain the greater idea of the conquest she had made, and pay the more reverence to his importance in the sequel of his addresses. That he might profit as much as possible by this situation, he went up and accosted every person in the pit, with whom he ever had the least communication, whispered and laughed with an affected air of familiarity, and even bowed at a distance to some of the nobility, on the slender foundation of having stood near them at court, or presented them with a pinch of Rappee at White’s chocolate-house.

This ridiculous ostentation, though now practised with a view of promoting his design, was a weakness that, in some degree, infected the whole of his behaviour; for nothing gave him so much joy in conversation, as an opportunity

of giving the company to understand, how well he was with persons of distinguished rank and character. 143

This passage is notable for its similarity to the depiction of Roderick Random’s ridiculous antics in the theatre. Although Smollett points out that more salubrious company is to be found at the opera house in the Haymarket, the role that both play in the construction of an ideal urban identity is almost indistinguishable in each narrative. Yet, the incongruous insertion of Lady Vane’s scandalous memoirs within the narrative confers an sense of transgression on the representation of Italian opera. After a brief account of her early life, the speaker reveals that her social descent is initiated and precipitated in the opera house, where, flattered by the collective gaze of the audience, she falls for the charms of her future husband.

Next day, being at the opera, I was agreeably surprised with the appearance of this amiable stranger, who no sooner saw me enter, than he approached so near to the place where I sat, that I overheard what he said to his companions; and was so happy as to find myself the subject of his discourse, which abounded with rapturous expressions of love and admiration.

I could not listen to these transports without emotion; my colour changed, my heart throbbed with unusual violence, and mine eyes betrayed my inclinations in sundry favourable glances, which he seemed to interpret aright, though he could not then avail himself of his success, so far as to communicate his sentiments by speech, because we were strangers to each other. 144

The sexual frisson aroused by the complicit glances and overheard flattery affirms the contemporary aspersions cast on any female’s presence at London’s numerous public pleasure resorts, while the hint of transgression provides a backward-looking reference to earlier literary depictions of opera. Francis Coventry’s Pompey the Little represents Italian opera in similar terms. It sets out by introducing the subject of the narrative, a lapdog, ‘born 1735 at Bologna in Italy, a Place famous for Lap-Dogs and Sausages’. 145 The depiction of Italian triviality—lapdogs, as depicted in Pope’s The Rape of the Lock (1714), for example, were stock literary companions for their frivolous and idle owners—with acute observations on Town manners appears to conflate different cultural positions from

144 Ibid., p. 435.
145 Coventry, Pompey the Little, p. 6.
earlier and later parts of the century. Coventry chooses to convey the worst instances of social decadence through a cultural frame of reference familiar to his readers. A scandalous dalliance is indicated by the risqué topic of London tattle.

Among the many Visitors that favour'd Hillario with their Company in a Morning, a Lady of Quality, who had buried her Husband, and was thereby at liberty to pursue her own Inclinations, was one Day drinking Chocolate with him. They were engaged in a very interesting Conversation on the Italian Opera, which they declared to be the most sublime Entertainment in Life. 146

The social and sexual independence so evidently enjoyed by the 'Lady of Quality' links her with Smollett's similarly titled scandalous autobiographer. The Lady and the 'English Hillario' indicate their sophisticated urbanity through their shared passion for Italian opera. After a brief digression concerning the circumstances surrounding Hillario's acquisition of Pompey, the conversation begins to deteriorate beyond the bounds of literary decency but within the confines of the language of the city.

From this time the Conversation began to grow much too loose to be reported in this Work: They congratulated each other on the Felicity of living in an Age, that allows such Indulgence to Women, and gives them leave to break loose from their Husbands, whenever they grow morose and disagreeable, or attempt to interrupt their Pleasures. They laughed at Constancy in Marriage as the most ridiculous thing in Nature, exploded the very Notion of matrimonial Happiness, and were most fashionably pleasant in decrying every thing that is serious, virtuous and religious. From hence they relapsed again into a Discourse on the Italian Opera, and thence made a quick Transition to Ladies Painting. 147

Scandalous and improper topics of conversation are filtered through the narrator's coy reported speech, knowingly reflecting a current, prurient fascination for urban transgression which can only be obliquely suggested; the implied virtuous reader is guided by the familiar signposting of Italian opera. The rapid progression from one fashionable subject to the next includes the opera within a recognizable inventory of London’s popular entertainments. Through its earlier dubious reputation, opera independently represents urban decadence at its worst, but it also falls within a mid-century tendency to disapprove of most forms of public entertainment.

146 Ibid., p. 17.
147 Ibid., p. 21.
An exception to the mainly critical stance taken by novels at this time to the social repercussions of attending Italian opera is Eliza Haywood’s contemporary *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. In contrast to the earlier transgressive tales *Betsy Thoughtless* retroactively casts Haywood as the eventually reformed *demi-mondaine* writer, as her free-spirited heroine is tamed by her patient and successful suitor, Mr. Trueworth. Janet Todd comments: ‘the novel focuses not only on woman but on the reputation or the sign of womanhood acting in society’. Yet, while this seems to imply that the way in which a woman conducts herself in public is vital to the definition of feminine virtue, Haywood’s relatively tolerant attitude to public venues departs from the common suspicion with which they were regarded, and consequently portrayed, in contemporary mid-century fictions. Todd discusses the ‘middle-class’ preoccupations of *Betsy Thoughtless*; however, the censure of London’s cultural scene, present in, and in some respects integral to, other literary works of the time, is muted in comparison with, and occasionally even inverted in, this novel. As with her concessions to London’s playhouses, Haywood’s position *vis-à-vis* opera is one of qualified approval. When the persistent but principled Truewit proposes an excursion to the modish part of town, the theatre and opera house are posited as equally acceptable social venues:

‘It must be owned, madam,’ said Mr Trueworth, ‘that your sentiments on both these subjects are extremely just, but you can have no such objection against a play, or opera.’ — ‘No, sir,’ answered she, ‘I look upon a good play as one of the most improving, as well as agreeable entertainments, a thinking mind can take: — and as for an opera,’ — ‘Aye sister,’ cried Sir Basild, interrupting her, ‘the opera, — take care what you say of the opera; — my friend here is a passionate lover of musick, and if you utter one syllable against his favourite science, you will certainly pass in his opinion for a stoic,’ — ‘I should deserve it,’ said she, ‘and be in reality as insensible as that sect of philosophers affect to be, if I were not capable of being touched by the charms of harmony.’

‘Then, madam,’ said Mr Trueworth, there are two of the pleasures of London, which are so happy to receive your approbation.’

In this context, opera offers a worthy, alternative form of urban pleasure to the theatre. But the significance of this fulsome commendation lies not only in its social respectability but

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149 Todd, p. 149.
150 Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless*, pp. 275-76.
also in the way in which opera appears here to express an early, emergent awareness of the more refined experiences and manifestations of feelings of ‘sensibility’. Rather than affecting a passion for an acknowledged and familiar city fashion, Betsy’s vocabulary rejects the unfeeling tendencies of insensible stoics by claiming that opera has the power to ‘touch’ its audience with its ‘charms of harmony’. She also gestures to the contemporary concern with public performances by women with the claim to enjoy both the charms of the theatre and the opera in private: “...I am, indeed, a very great admirer of both, yet can find ways to make myself easy, without being present at either, and, at the distance of a hundred miles, enjoy in theory all the satisfaction the representation could afford”. 151 She reveals how she is able to enjoy vicariously the pleasures of the playhouse and the opera to varying degrees:

‘...as for the plays, – I have a very good collection of the old ones by me, and have all the new ones sent down to me as they come out ... and thus, whilst I am reading any play, am enabled to judge pretty near how it shews in representation. – I have, indeed, somewhat more difficulty in bringing the opera home to me, yet I am so happy, as to be able to procure a shadow of it at least; – we have two or three gentlemen in the neighbourhood, who play to great perfection on the violin, and several ladies, who have very pretty voices, and some skill in music. 152

For Betsy Thoughtless, the public nature of London’s performances is merely an inconvenience to be circumvented through recourse to other cultural media, rather than a threat to feminine virtue to be avoided. Reading in the privacy of domestic space provides a satisfactory substitute for the theatre, while private concerts offer a glimpse, at least, of the more extravagant nature of Italian opera performed on a grand scale on the London stage. The line between public and private entertainment is blurred while the enthusiasm for drama, and perhaps more significantly opera displayed by Thoughtless and Truewit is almost unqualified. The ‘passionate lover of musick’ is one who cannot help but be ‘touched by the charms of harmony’. But the wider implication in Betsy Thoughtless seems to be that fashionable and popular urban pleasures no longer reside exclusively in London and that some of them are slowly being drawn from the public arena and adapted to more private venues. The city’s traditional position as the country’s capital of pleasure is slowly being challenged and undermined.

151 Ibid., p. 276.
152 Ibid., p. 276.
Haywood's mid-century London is a city less fraught with scandal and intrigue than the one depicted both in her earlier narratives and the fictions of her contemporary male authors. Her evocation of reformed female coquettishness identifies a latent sensitivity and susceptibility to the passion of opera and sentimental drama, which makes Betsy Thoughtless's eventual reform a more convincing and natural consequence of her previous generous high spirits. Haywood's writing seems to hint at a sensibility more natural to a narrative concerned with the depiction of urban femininity.

The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless indicates an early example of how human sensibility manifested itself in its attitude to London's cultural forms, and more specifically, Italian opera. A slightly later work, Thomas Amory's The Life and Opinions of John Buncle (2 vols, 1756, 1766), a narrative, distinguished by its numerous digressions, inserts the tale of a reformed coquette, Mrs Tench, who underlines her moral correction by rejecting her former urban haunts:

'When you saw me at CURRL's, I had no taste for anything but the comedy, the opera, and a tale of La Fontaine; but you found me with a volume of Tillotson in my hand, under that aged and beautiful cedar, near the road; and in those sermons I now find more delight, in the solemn shade of one of those fine trees, than I ever enjoyed in the gayest scenes of the world.'

Opera is implicated with comedy as the entertainment of the frivolous and idle, while the salacious contes of La Fontaine are also renounced. The city is contrasted unfavourably, in time-honoured tradition, with the country, and opera itself is evoked in the context of its earlier unsavoury reputation; yet, its citation as cultural antithesis of the volume-in-hand of Tillotson's writings makes the point that Italian opera was still regarded as a disreputable extravagance. Tillotson's Latitudinarian sermons advocated tolerance and approved a natural disposition to feelings of fellowship — sentiments which were to have wider, social implications beyond their original, religious context. But clearly there is no intention here to ponder the connection with the sociability to be found at the King's theatre in the Haymarket, whose performances seemed increasingly to induce and cultivate a sentimental response amongst its audience in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The transformation of opera later in the century

The fortunes of Italian opera later in the century were mixed. On the one hand, opera enjoyed greater cultural distinction than its earlier reputation did. One critic writes: ‘The city’s Italian opera establishment was one of the most active in Europe during the last half of the eighteenth century; it was without peer in non-Italian speaking countries, and superior to many establishments in Italy itself.’ Yet, at certain times, it also appeared to be in serious decline, particularly at the turn of the 1760s. The death of Handel in 1759 was followed by that of George II, the most important patron of opera at this time, in 1760. In the same year, Horace Walpole wrote to a British envoy at Florence that, ‘operas are more in their decline than ever’. Other writers also regretted the apparent demise of opera in London. In 1759, Oliver Goldsmith wrote:

Some years ago the Italian opera was the only fashionable amusement among our nobility. The managers of the playhouses dreaded it as a mortal enemy, and our very poets listed themselves in the opposition; at the present the house seems deserted, the castrati sing to empty benches ...

When such is the case, it is not to be wondered if the Opera is pretty much neglected: the lower orders of people have neither taste nor fortune to relish such an entertainment; they would find more satisfaction in the Roast Beef of Old England than in the final closes of an eunuch, they sleep amidst all the agony of recitative: On the other hand, people of fortune or taste can hardly be pleased where there is a visible poverty in the decorations, and an entire want of taste in the compositions...

[U]pon the whole, I know not whether ever operas can be kept up in England; they seem to be entirely exotic, and require the nicest management and care.

Goldsmith’s assessment of the current languishing state of Italian opera recalls the earlier opposition of ‘our very poets’, the Scriblerian hostility to a corrupting, subversive threat, and one which sought to compete with London’s native culture. Goldsmith’s language re-establishes an atavistic antagonism to opera, maintaining its cultural status as ‘entirely exotic’ ‘other’. Yet the decadent commercialism traditionally linked to the performance of opera in London is undermined and exposed as the opera house is shown to be in shabby

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155 Horace Walpole, Correspondence. Ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven, 1941 + ) vol. 21, p. 363. Cited in Petty, p. 23. Walpole frequented the King’s theatre and even had a box (no.12) there.
decline; the retrospective account of the vicissitudes of opera during the eighteenth century is brought up to date with the apparent failure of the opera house to match the extravagant tastes of modern operagoers.

Yet, within a few years, public commentators were celebrating the recovery of opera’s fortunes. One writer remarked in 1767:

What a strange fate is that which attends the Italian opera ... laughed at and ridiculed in every country making the chief entertainment of the great, wealthy, and elegant! How have the wits of England exercised their pens against it from the days of Nicolini, and what has been the consequence? The Italian opera is upon a better footing in England this day than ever it was since the King’s Theatre has been confined to that sort of musical performance.  

The endurance of Italian opera’s popularity has often been explained as owing to its aristocratic associations. Frederick Petty remarks: ‘The King’s Theatre was able to survive these periods of financial instability and managerial ineptitude for one important reason: Italian opera, notwithstanding occasional brief periods of decline, was an indispensable commodity in the beau monde of eighteenth-century London.’ However, the continuing social cachet held by the Italian tradition of opera seria only partly accounts for its survival; it does not fully explain the sudden upturn in its fortunes during the 1760s. A consideration of the intersection of emerging cultural, literary and new operatic trends throws more light on the rejuvenation of opera in the Haymarket.

Perhaps the most significant innovation with regard to opera during the 1760s was the gradual popularization of the newer genre: opera buffa – a comic alternative to the more familiar tragic and hitherto dominant opera seria. Comic opera, like its more serious rival, originated in Italy but only came to prominence in the mid-century. It developed from the split between the tragic material enacted by upper-class dramatic characters and the comic sub-plot taken by the lower-class characters in serious opera. The popularity of farcical scenes indicated that there was a potential audience for pure comic opera. Consequently, the more burlesque opera buffa began to emerge as a genre in its own right. It was distinguished by its focus on believable, human emotions and situations and

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159 The following information is taken from The New Grove Dictionary of Music, vol. 13, pp. 559 & 598.
distanced itself from the lofty ideals and grand plots of opera seria. Comic opera thus came to be associated with more familiar, mundane, bourgeois characters and themes – increasingly salient features of the mid-century novel.

Opera buffa first arrived in London in 1748. Although comic opera had always been regarded by the intellectual elite as a crude, inferior genre, its appearance in the mid-century was met with greater approbation. There was renewed appreciation for the more naturalistic elements of comic opera which contrasted with the extravagant exhibitionism of opera seria. As the century progressed, opera buffa appeared to absorb disparate but recognizable elements of related cultural, particularly literary, trends reflecting the developing reading and viewing tastes of the London public. Its plots were drawn from sentimental dramas and best-selling literature such as Richardson's Pamela and the more fantastic tales from The Arabian Nights.

All this seems to suggest that opera, especially in its comic form, was embracing and adapting to the realism of the emerging novel and other features of popular culture. Certainly, it appeared that the London public was responding favourably to this new kind of opera: 'Audiences welcomed the modern plots, real-life characters, and dramatic ensembles.' However, despite the historical evidence pointing to a shift in taste from the more noble, classic ideals of opera seria to the more naturalistic plots and settings of opera buffa, the fictional representation of opera continued to focus on serious opera for its own purposes.

Serious opera had developed in Italy as a reaction against the excesses of seventeenth-century Baroque opera. Surprisingly perhaps, opera seria was an attempt to force opera to adopt the neoclassical rules governing drama rather than the extravagances that the idea of tragic opera might imply. As opera had no classical precedent on which to model itself, the actual process of 'classicization' seemed more a case of making it conform to the genre of tragedy. These 'tragic' plots featured, in true eighteenth-century style, the ultimate reformation of the despotic tyrant and the last-minute reprieve in the vein of Tate's rewriting of the ending of King Lear, rather than the truly distressing finale. However, what made these ultimately well-ordered, essentially optimistic dramas, which maintained a strict, social hierarchy in any recognizable sense, tragic was the threat of impending doom, before the final averting of potential disaster. Furthermore, individual arias represented extended, frozen moments of heightened pathos where the audience's emotions were

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aroused and manipulated and held in tearful paralysis. Opera seria therefore contained tragic elements rather than being shaped by predetermined, teleological, tragic plots.

The figure associated most closely with the increasing popularity of opera seria among the literary elite was the Italian dramatist Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782). Metastasio’s libretti featured heroes and heroines from history rather than from myth and fable, caught up in intrigues and made to face difficult moral dilemmas. It was Metastasio’s contribution which appeared to mark a revival of critical interest in serious opera concurrent with the rise of opera buffa in mid-century. In 1756, the polite arbiter of taste Lord Chesterfield, who had previously denounced Italian opera as foolish nonsense, claimed that it was ‘necessary to choose Metastasio for the poet, upon whose single merit the species of drama must stand or fall’. In 1759, Thomas Wilkes, who devoted a whole chapter of his General View of the English Stage to a stinging attack on Italian opera, singled out Metastasio for praise: ‘To him we owe a variety of Operas, that prove him a glory to his country; and we know not whether to give the preference to his judicious choice of subject, the sublimity of his language, the strength of his characters, the turn of his sentiments, the use he makes of and his power over the passions, the beauty of his images.’

The contradictory situation of persisting criticism of Italian opera, the increasing popularity of opera buffa and the warm acclaim for the libretti of Metastasio perhaps goes some way to explaining the ambivalence that mid-century writers displayed towards opera: traditional prejudice still manifested itself in narratives of the 1750s, while comic opera slowly began to make inroads into the repertoire of the London stage. The fulsome praise of Metastasio’s contribution provided the sole saving feature of opera seria so that by the end of the 1750s, although opera’s fortunes were still languishing, they began to recover and assert a stronger cultural position in London during the 1760s.

The reason for this reversal of fortune can be surmised from a comparison between the historically recorded facts, such as audience figures for the times, with contemporary literary representation. Although opera buffa did indeed enjoy greater popular and critical acclaim during the 1760s, this is scarcely reflected in the fiction of the time. It is also tempting to draw the easy conclusion that comic opera coincided with the rise and continuing success of the realist novel. However, the relationship between historical trends and literary depictions is not simply one of mutual reflection. The opera recorded and

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161 *The World*, no. 171 (April 8, 1756).
considered by narratives of the 1760s and 1770s is almost exclusively opera seria rather than a mixture of tragic and comic plots, and the inclusion of recognizable operas in literary works tended to allude to Metastasio as the genius of the entertainment, indicating a more emotionally wrought piece than the domestic bourgeois plotings of comic opera. Such feelings and extreme emotions were all familiar features of the sentimental novel, and the apparent change of attitude to opera in contemporary fiction seems to indicate a harnessing of opera for literary purposes. In the novels of the latter half of the eighteenth century, it seemed that new attitudes to London's exclusive spaces of urban pleasure were being shaped by the fictions that portrayed them.

This is not to say that that literary attitudes to opera changed synchronically in reaction to a new cultural and intellectual shift in sensibility. Imitations of Richardson's enormously successful novels persisted during the 1750s and beyond. It was not only the epistolary format that continued to be copied; the attitude and response to contemporary ethical dilemmas intermittently prevailed too. One such fictional example was the anonymous *The History of Miss Harriot Fitzroy, and Miss Emelia Spencer* (1766), an epistolary novel clearly modelled on Richardson's *Clarissa*. The heroine, Emilia, escapes cruel treatment at the hands of her mother by fleeing to London where she writes to her friend Harriot about the city's fashionable venues.

Lady Lucy was here this morning, and engaged me to go to the opera in the evening. This will be the first I have ever seen, yet I cannot say I expect any violent happiness from this entertainment. I fancy I shall have but little relish for mere empty sound without sense. I remember this couplet in the universal passion,

An opera, like the pill'ry, may be said
To nail our ears down, but expose our head.

Lady Lucy, however, were her opinion to be relied on, would persuade me that I shall be in raptures with that fashionable amusement, which, alone, had it no other merit, would be sufficient to recommend it to her. O 'tis the most heavenly place! the sweetest entertainment! cried she, so fit for people of quality, so much above the vulgar taste, that I am sure it will enchant you. So it might perhaps, returned I, had I the same advantage that you, no doubt, have of understanding Italian. 'Nay, for that matter, cried she, tho' I learned that language I don't remember a syllable of it - but who minds that? Tis not the words, or indeed the music, for few people of taste attend either, but there is a certain je ne sais quoi, something so infinitely charming in being at the opera, that let me die if I know
As the narrative is mostly filtered through the virtuous Emilia's perspective, the implication is that opera is still to be regarded as a questionable form of entertainment. The familiar repudiation of opera as 'empty sound without sense', and the identification of the opera house as a location to be avoided if female virtue is to be safeguarded, are demonstrated through the reported prattle of those who wish to see and be seen – the resort of the fashion-conscious section of the London public.

Aside from the formal imitation of the epistolary model, the disapproval of female attendance at particular venues, lingering on into the mid-1760s, is evidence of the residual, moral influence of Richardson's writing on subsequent novelists during the next two decades. However, an alternative, more sympathetic, position regarding opera began to emerge in the body of fiction identified as 'the literature of sensibility'; it indicated a changing attitude both to the music itself and to the social conditions governing the gathering of a privileged band of visitors to the opera house in the King's theatre in the Haymarket.

**Italian opera and sentiment**

Although Richardson's fiction is critically included within the category of sentimental literature on account of its power to evoke powerful emotional responses in its readers, it does not contain the same self-conscious, stylized sentimental set-pieces that appear in later examples of the genre.164 These later, consciously styled sentimental fictions include scenes of tremulous passion and febrile sensitivity which detect the minutiae of barely perceptible shifts in heightened emotion and expand them into extended tableaux of extreme sensibility. John Mullan has made the fine but crucial distinction between the adjective 'sentimental' and the quality of 'sensibility':

'Sensibility' had originally referred to bodily sensitivities, began to stand for emotional responsiveness in the early eighteenth century, and came to designate a laudable delicacy in the second half of the century ... 'Sentimental', by becoming

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163 The History of Miss Harriot Fitzroy, and Miss Emelia Spencer 2 vols, London 1767, quoted from a review of the work in London Chronicle XXI (Jan-June 1767) 4 (Dec 30 [1766]-Jan 1).

a word for a type of text, promises an occasion for fine feeling.\textsuperscript{165}

In this context, the representation of Italian opera in the sentimental novels finds an ideal medium. For in some of these later sentimental fictions, the performance and nature of opera itself offer an occasion for the display of feelings of sensibility; yet at the same time, the public arena provided by the opera house itself in London, provides an occasion for indulging in an exclusive form of urban sociability.\textsuperscript{166}

Henry Brooke’s \textit{The Fool of Quality} (1764-70) is an early example of the more excessive extreme of sentimental fiction. The child-hero, Harry Clinton, is guided by his uncle and mentor Mr Fenton, who supervises and directs his protegé’s pedagogic and emotional education. In this lachrymose narrative, the opera both as genre and public social venue makes more than one appearance. On the first occasion, Harry conveys his sensibility through his aesthetic and emotional response: ‘That Evening they went to the Opera, where Harry was so captivated by the sentimental Meltings and varied Harmony of the Airs, that he requested Mr. Fenton to permit him to be instructed on some Instrument.’\textsuperscript{167} Mr Fenton responds by discouraging him from embarking on any practice in which he could not become an expert, for fear of producing instead, ‘discordant and grateing’ sound. Later in the narrative, an account of a visit to the opera house in Paris provides the occasion for an extravagant display of sensibility:

One Night, as I sat alone in a side Box at the Opera, intently gazing and hungering around for some Similitude of my Louisa; there entered One of the loveliest young Fellows I ever beheld. He carelessly threw himself beside me, looked around; withdrew his Eyes; and then looked at me with such a long and piercing Inquisition as alarmed me, and gave me Cause to think I was discovered.

...[H]e seemed at once backward and desirous of accosting me. At length he entered upon Converse touching the Drama and the Music, and spoke with Judgment and Elegance superior to the Matter;

...Between the Acts, he turned and cast his Eye suddenly on me. Sir, says he, do you believe that there is such a Thing as Sympathy? Occasionally, Sir, I think it may have its Effect, though I can’t credit all the Wonders that are reported of it. I am sorry for that, said he, as I ardently wish that your Feelings were the same as mine at this Instant. I never saw you before, Sir, I have no Knowledge of you,

\textsuperscript{165} Mullan, ‘Sentimental Novels,’ p. 238.


\textsuperscript{167} Henry Brooke, \textit{The Fool of Quality}, London, 1770, vol. 4, p. 225
and yet I declare that, were I to choose an Advocate in Love, a Second in Combat, or a Friend in Extremity, You, You are the very Man upon whom I would pitch.\textsuperscript{168}

The discussion of the opera's aesthetic qualities subsequently elicits the ardent expression of loyalty and brotherhood, in a manner reminiscent of Eve Sedgwick's definition of male homosocial behaviour.\textsuperscript{169} In this episode, the fierce declarations of loyalty and military devotion correspond with the traditional subject of opera; there is no reference to 'sound without sense', and any critical imputations of effeminacy are dissipated and seemingly projected onto the praiseworthy feminine qualities of a powerful sentimental response to the emotion evoked by the opera itself, and the sentimental behaviour occasioned by the more respectable sort of sociability to be found at the opera house.

Although this last narrative example takes place in Paris, its social and literary implications would not have been lost on the London reading public. Similarly, Sterne's \textit{A Sentimental Journey} (1768) includes several references to the Paris opera. Perhaps one of the most memorable sentimental encounters is in the fragment entitled 'The Pulse', where Yorick is shown luxuriating in the subtle, sentient movements of nerve-endings and fibres as he grasps the hand of the beautiful shopkeeper after requesting directions to the opera. The grissette is obliged to repeat her instructions as her interlocutor is distracted by her beauty and sympathetic gaze. The sentimental narrator praises her patient benevolence:

\begin{quote}
Any one may do a casual act of good nature, but a continuation of them shews it is part of the temperature; and certainly, added I, if it is the same blood which comes from the heart, which descends to the extremes (touching the wrist) I am sure you must have one of the best pulses of any woman in the world.\textsuperscript{170}
\end{quote}

Although the focus of this particular episode is the physical expression and manifestation of extreme sensibility, the sub-textual implication is, perhaps, that the opera is a fitting cultural form for a sentimental hero.

Whilst an appreciation of opera and the social benefits offered by its exclusive, public company can be inferred from these two sentimental narratives from the 1760s, the next

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 163-64.  
\textsuperscript{169} Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, \textit{Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire}, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Sedgwick's model, which locates the female figure as a pretext for strengthened male bonding is particularly pertinent to this passage.  
\end{footnotesize}
decade recovers opera itself from Paris and reproduces it as a native form of cultural expression. In the fiction of the 1770s, Italian opera is represented as a still slightly quirky, but ultimately respectable form of entertainment in London. Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) includes the opera house as an urban venue distinct from other spaces of pleasure. Evelina writes to her guardian, excitedly anticipating a visit to the Haymarket: ‘To-night we go to the opera, where I expect very great pleasure. We shall have the same party as at the play.’171 To her horror though, she discovers that her shopkeeper relatives, the Branghtons, are to come too. Their insistence on joining her party is articulated in topographical terms: ‘Why, we came all out of the city on purpose.’172 The Branghtons have emerged from their commercial sphere and threaten to encroach on the refined arena of the opera house in the more fashionable, western part of London. In *Evelina*, the opera house is transformed from the interchangeable nature of all public spaces in early female scandalous narratives and mid-century novels which pose a threat to feminine virtue, into a distinct and recognizable place in London. In perhaps the most overt display of social snobbery in the novel, Evelina mocks the Branghtons’ confusion of opera etiquette with that of the theatre thereby implying her greater social discrimination:

If I had not been so chagrined to laugh, I should have been extremely diverted at their ignorance of whatever belongs to an opera ... [T]hey were unwilling to suppose that their country cousin, as they were pleased to call me, should be better acquainted with any London public place than themselves.173

Evelina has learned to distinguish between the different social modulations that characterize London’s pleasure venues. In a sense, her response to the opera addresses the issue of sociability, which in this narrative has implications for the considerations of class: Burney seems more concerned here with the idea of the public manifestation of sympathy which is restricted to an élite urban sphere. Evelina is contemptuous of her cousins’ outrage over the higher price of entry tickets, and is amused by their ignorance of sartorial conventions in the opera house. But perhaps the most significant aspect of the recording of the varying responses to the opera is the way in which the more uncouth and unsophisticated Branghtons appear to echo the opinions of the anti-opera arbiters of public taste from the early part of the century. When Mr Branghton addresses the virtuous heroine with the

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172 Ibid., p. 84.
173 Ibid., p. 89.
snee: 'you’re quite in fashion, I see; so you like the Opera’s? Well, I’m not so polite; I can’t like nonsense',\textsuperscript{174} he is recapitulating some of the main charges of writers like Steele, Pope and Swift. He goes on to complain that, ‘there isn’t one ounce of sense in the whole Opera, nothing but the continued squeaking and squalling from beginning to end’. The accusations of ‘nonsense’, lack of ‘sense’ and ‘squeaking and squalling’ are all familiar complaints, but these frames of reference are socially inverted so as to become indicators of those who are unable to read London correctly. The blustering Captain Mirvan exposes his social ignorance by reiterating the patriotic claim that native drama is the superior genre: ‘“Why, a play is the only thing left now-a-days, that has a grain of sense in it; for as to all the rest of your public places, d’ye see, if they were all put together, I wouldn’t give thatt for ’em!” snapping his fingers.’\textsuperscript{175} It is Evelina, who, with Mrs Mirvan, implies her natural good taste by expressing admiration for the opera: ‘We both, and with eagerness, declared that we had received as much, if not more pleasure, at the opera than anywhere.’ Opera has seemingly shaken off its earlier vulgar associations and become a gauge for measuring and defining urban taste.

Burney has often been labelled as a polite precursor of Jane Austen; a writer who rejects emotional excess in favour of more detached judgment and cool appraisal of contemporary trends and conventions. Her depiction of Evelina’s undisguised enthusiasm for opera perhaps belies the author’s implied criticism of her heroine’s delight in all things fashionable. \textit{Evelina} is by no means a sentimental narrative, but as a percipient recorder of the follies of the \textit{bon ton} in late eighteenth-century London, it is attuned to the endlessly modulating tastes of polite society. And the cult of sensibility was, as its title implies, nothing if not an important, albeit temporary, fashion adopted by those who wished to be seen to possess delicate and refined sensibilities. As a new visitor to London, Evelina is not immune to the desire to be observed conducting herself according to the dictates of what is currently in mode. The opera house, in turn, provides her with the perfect public locus for displaying her sensitivity to the emotional intensity of \textit{opera seria}.

Fanny Burney herself enjoyed opera immensely, and her journals record numerous instances of attendances at the Haymarket, as well as private meetings with individual celebrated singers. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace has suggested, through a reading of early diary accounts, that Burney was intrigued by the physical appearance of the singers,

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., p. 93.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p. 108.
expressing both a fascination for, and revulsion at, their apparent deformities.\textsuperscript{176}

However, in \textit{Evelina}, Kowaleski-Wallace suggests, the power of the human voice allows the heroine to transcend all class considerations: ‘the opera was a symbolic space in which anxieties about the public display of the body were foregrounded and potentially resolved. Burney’s novel presents the opera as the “natural” location for an elevated consciousness’.\textsuperscript{177} She draws a line of connection between \textit{Evelina} and the \textit{Diaries} concluding that in the latter, ‘the assertion of a transcendent art facilitated Burney’s own belief in a refined artistic sphere where class differences – and the body that denotes these differences – would cease to matter to the artist and audience alike’.\textsuperscript{178}

However, I disagree with Kowaleski-Wallace’s claim that opera transcends material considerations. I suggest that Evelina’s reading of opera conveys a distinct sense of topographical place, a location with identified cultural appurtenances and associations, rather than abstract, public space; one has the impression that her approval is linked to the specific social realm it occupies, rather than the rejection and transcendence of the ‘bodily’ hierarchy of class. Her enthusiasm for opera seems to have as much to do with the desire to be seen to belong to the social group connected with this particular genre as a wholly autonomous, aesthetic admiration for it.

It is in Burney’s second novel, \textit{Cecilia} (1782), that opera succeeds in encompassing the distinct qualities of sociability located in the environs of the opera house and the sensibility evoked by the spectacle and reception of opera itself as an art form. Although \textit{Cecilia}, like \textit{Evelina}, cannot be defined as a sentimental novel, its depiction of the uncertainty surrounding her identity, the scenes in which she wanders hysterically through the menacing, anonymous London streets, the shocking suicide of Mr Harrel and the various duels, all contrive to confound any attempt to identify a uniform tone for the shifting narrative. I agree with Terry Castle, who, focusing on the significance of the masquerade in \textit{Cecilia}, suggests that the problem ‘with the view of \textit{Cecilia} as a comedy [of manners] – is that it is insufficient, finally to explain the psychic complexities of Burney’s often

\textsuperscript{176} Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, ‘A Night at the Opera: The Body, Class, and Art in \textit{Evelina} and Frances Burney’s Early Diaries’, 141-158, in \textit{History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature} ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994) Kowaleski-Wallace draws attention to an early episode in Burney’s life when she met the singer Algujari, who, as a result of having been mauled by a pig, was both lame and reputed to have a ‘silver side’. She writes: ‘[E]verything about Algujari’s self-representation signals an excessive physicality’. p. 145. However, when Burney hears her sing, her physical deformities are allowed to recede as the singer ‘transcends the physical body with a sublime voice.’

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., p. 142.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., p. 154.
painfully articulated fictional world ... The emotional tone of the work is unpredictable'.

Castle also refers to the ‘current of uneasiness and melancholia that eddies through the book’. This is not to imply that Cecilia is to be identified as a work of melodrama: the mostly coolly articulated narrative precludes any attempt to reduce the plot to simple proto-Gothic popular appeal. However, the intermittent episodes of heightened drama align the novel, at times, with the excesses of opera. Indeed, the prevailing mood of Cecilia has even been described as evocative of the ‘lurid mise-en-scène of nineteenth-century opera’, while its protagonist is periodically plunged into ‘a state of operatic uncertainty’. Although the adjective ‘operatic’ is intended here to describe the exaggerations and occasional garishness of a sometimes over-dramatized story, the intensity of emotion and air of hysteria likens it in tone to the pervasive human sensitivities of the contemporary sentimental novel.

Cecilia first visits the Haymarket to hear a rehearsal of a performance to be given by the famous castrato Pacchierotti. Like Betsy Thoughtless, she is familiar with a smaller scale, ‘shadow’ of opera: ‘This was the first Opera she had ever heard, yet she was not wholly a stranger to Italian compositions, having assiduously studied music from a natural love of the art, attended all the best concerts her neighbourhood afforded, and regularly received from London the works of the best masters.’ The cultural pleasures, hitherto concentrated in the metropolis, have, by this time, inspired a diluted, lesser series of imitations in different parts of the country; the capital, it seems, is no longer the sole provider of popular entertainment although it is still the most impressive.

Cecilia avidly attends to Pacchierotti’s performance, startled but pleasurably surprised by the ‘strength of those emotions’ excited by the singer. Her response to the opera itself, Artaserse, a new production of which was performed in January 1779, is expressed in the ‘language of sensibility’:

[T]he pleasure she received from the music was much augmented by her previous acquaintance with that interesting drama; yet, as to all noviciates in science,
whatever is least complicated is most pleasing, she found herself by nothing so
deeply impressed, as by the plaintive and beautiful simplicity with which
Pacchierotti uttered the affecting repetition of *sono innocente*! his voice, always
either sweet or impassioned, delivered those words in a tone of softness, pathos,
and sensibility, that struck her with a sensation not more new than delightful.\(^{185}\)

John Mullan has written that ‘sentiment lives at the edges of speech; it is felt most when
words stop’.\(^{186}\) The impression made on the delicate refined feelings of the sensitive
heroine is evoked by the ‘softness, pathos, and sensibility’ of Pacchierotti’s emotional
singing. It is the impassioned sound he produces rather than the words themselves that
induces the sentimental response in Cecilia. Whereas the notion of ‘sound over sense’ had
previously conveyed pejorative associations, the inaccessibility of the Italian language
extracts sound from the mundaneness of speech and distils it into a purer form of
expression. The earlier imputation of senseless noise is transmuted into foreign sound
which has the emotional force to affect the listener and arouse feelings of pathos and
sentiment.

But it is not only the direct response to opera by the sensitive heroine which associates
it with other examples of sentimental fiction; the silent observation of another’s reaction to
the performance is also sufficient to evoke expression of feelings of sensibility in the
person watching. In a quintessential urban scene, where an anonymous observer is
unknowingly being watched by another hidden onlooker, Cecilia finds her attention drawn
to an old gentleman apparently absorbed in listening to the singing: ‘during the songs of
Pacchierotti he sighed so deeply that Cecilia, struck by his uncommon sensibility to the
power of music, involuntarily watched him, whenever her mind was sufficiently at liberty
to attend to any emotions but its own’.\(^{187}\)

What follows as a consequence of this private moment reads as a blueprint for defining
the essential properties of sentimental fiction. A few days after the rehearsal, the very same
gentleman arrives at Cecilia’s door with a letter telling a woeful tale of personal misfortune
and grinding poverty. Cecilia responds by bestowing a generous financial gift: ‘Cecilia,
“open as day to melting charity,” having hastily perused it, took out her purse, and offering
to him three guineas, said, “You must direct me, Sir, what to give if this is

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\(^{185}\) Ibid., p. 65.


\(^{187}\) Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 65.
insufficient.” 188 One of the distinguishing features of a genuine sentimental character is the predisposition to acts of charity: ‘Benevolent remedying of misfortune is invariably the activity of the sentimental protagonist, drawn “to afford succour to distress from the tender motives of humanity.”’ 189 From this single act of charity, Cecilia determines to isolate herself from the trivialities of the beau monde and ‘by the assistance of her new and very singular monitor, to extend her practice of doing good, by enlarging her knowledge of the poor’. 190 Social benevolence, it seems, is incompatible with the sociability demanded by the constant round of urban pleasure, and although, at first, private acts of charity provide considerable satisfaction, the self-abnegation begins to pall:

And thus, in acts of goodness and charity, passed undisturbed another week in the life of Cecilia: but when the fervour of self-approbation lost its novelty, the pleasure with which her new plan was begun first subsided into tranquility, and then sunk into languor. To a heart formed for friendship and affection the charms of solitude are very short-lived; and though she had sickened of the turbulence of perpetual company, she now wearied of passing all her time by herself, and sighed for the company of society. 191

At the heart of Cecilia’s social and ethical dilemma lies the inherent contradiction between private acts of benevolence and sensitivity fostered by a more secluded and quiet existence, and the natural sociability generated by the ‘endless succession of diversions, the continual notation of assemblies, the numerousness of splendid engagements’. 192 John Mullan makes the point that the logic of sentimentalism is that ‘the capacity for sympathy could only be realized in the most private experiences’, and that, in a way, the failure of sentimentalism is the inability of its protagonists to find a ‘social space in which their sympathies can operate’. 193 In this sense, Cecilia’s conscious decision to mix sociability with continual acts of benevolence is an effort to overcome seemingly irreconcilable opposites and to maintain an unbroken continuum between private sentiment and public sociability:

188 Ibid., p. 129.
189 Mullan, ‘Sentimental Novels’, p. 244.
190 Burney, Cecilia, p. 65.
191 Ibid., p. 130.
192 Ibid., p. 131.
Yet finding ... that a rigid seclusion from company was productive of a lassitude as little favourable to active virtue as dissipation itself, she resolved to soften her plan, and by mingling amusement with benevolence, to try, at least, to approach that golden mean.

... For this purpose she desired to attend Mrs. Harrel to the next opera that should be presented. 194

In *Cecilia*, Burney attempts to locate the ‘golden mean’ between the potential excesses of urban sociability and the virtue associated with human charity, instead of the narrower definition of female chastity. That she chooses the opera house as the ideal London venue to test this ‘sentimental compromise’ is significant in that this formerly criticized locus now offers the chance to redeem the city from accusations of commercial corruption and promiscuous social mingling. The opera house is now represented as a partially approved urban space where the heroine can exercise and express her natural, sensible impulses through an appreciation of opera itself.

But, realistically, the ideal ‘golden mean’ is never achieved in Burney’s fiction, which perhaps sets it apart from more typical and representative sentimental narratives. When Cecilia arrives at the Haymarket, she is unable, at first, to find her companion. When she finally meets Mrs Harrel, the latter announces breathlessly: “You are quite in luck to-night, I assure you; it’s the best Opera we have had this season: there’s such a monstrous crowd there’s no stirring. We shan’t get in this half hour.” 195 Opera is in the enviable cultural position of commanding overwhelming popularity where demand outstrips supply: a change from its languishing fortunes in the previous decade. But the significant modulation is in the terminology employed by Mrs Harrel: while opera enjoys greater social and critical approbation, it is now the London crowd which is deemed ‘monstrous’. The pejorative adjective has been displaced from the phenomenon of Italian opera, to define the identity of popular metropolitan gatherings.

In this, Burney is not alone. Smollett’s irascible, although ultimately, and significantly, benevolent Matthew Bramble provides a counterbalance, perhaps a corrective, to the excesses of sentimentalism in the 1770s. Bramble detests opera, particularly the virtuoso performances of the castrato, Tenducci, at Ranelagh pleasure gardens, where, for the performers of ‘vocal music’, it is well that they ‘cannot be overheard distinctly’. 196

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194 Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 131.
195 Ibid., p. 131.
views oppose those of his niece, Lydia, who is transported by the divine ‘thing from Italy’. But in Bramble’s eyes, Lydia’s delight represents an ‘urban perversion of the senses’. Bramble’s misgivings constitute a solitary complaint in a social climate currently more favourably disposed to Italian opera; its reputation in literature had gradually changed from one capable of provoking vitriolic, abusive satire in the early part of the century, through to ambivalent tolerance in mid-century London, finally finding approval in some sentimental novels of the 1770s. However, the transference of epithet from opera to its devotees is still shared by many writers: Bramble describes the London crowd, ‘this incongruous monster, called the public’. Significantly, the ‘monstrous’ crowd associated, metaphorically at least, with the city, and present in narratives as different as Humphry Clinker and Cecilia coincides with the reading public.

But by the second half of the eighteenth century, the novel itself had become a more acceptable medium for representing the tastes of contemporary London. In 1748, Richardson wrote to Lady Bradshaigh that Clarissa had appeared ‘in the humble Guise of a Novel only by way of Accommodation to the manners and taste of an Age overwhelmed with a Torrent of Luxury, and abandoned to Sound and senselessness’. The implication was that the mid-century novel should be considered a concession to the garish tastes of Londoners, exposed to the desensitizing sight and sound of such popular spectacles as Italian opera. Yet, by the 1770s, the sentimental novel appears to have aligned its sensitivities and sympathies with the emotional force of opera. Both genres were able to enjoy greater critical approval: the target of abuse had shifted from the medium itself to the increasing number of those who chose not only to attend but also to read about London’s entertainments. The consumers who aspired to appear at the opera house could now read about their favourite urban pleasure haunts, recognizing themselves, perhaps, in the private act of reading about familiar exclusive public places in late eighteenth-century London.

197 Ibid., p. 92.
198 See James P. Carson, ‘Commodification and the Figure of the castrato in Smollett’s Humphry Clinker 24-46, in The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation, 33 (1992) 1, p. 31.
Our Hearts leaped for Joy, and I said unto my self, see now, what mighty Pleasures may be purchased for a Shilling.

_The Evening Lessons, Being the First and Second Chapters of the Book of Entertainments, 1742_

In 1720, John Strype produced a revised version of John Stow’s _Survey of London_, a work which first appeared in 1598. Strype offered the reader a curiously modified tour of London, a new edition of a familiar urban text. His recension updated Stow’s _Survey_, which had provided its original readers with a peripatetic description of Elizabethan London. By interpolating descriptions and sketches of changes to the city’s borders and landmarks, which had taken place in the interim, Strype made the _Survey_ a more flexible record of the shifting cityscape. The parameters of Stow’s document were coterminous with the limits of individual memory and experience, a personal phenomenology of the city’s topography. Strype’s revisions changed the tenor of the work, from a more subjective account of the metropolis to a more impersonal document, liable to the fluctuations and changes of history. A later editor of Stow’s _Survey_ criticized Strype’s revisionary methods, emphasizing that, ‘though he preserved for the most part the original text, he embedded it in such a mass of new, if valuable, matter as often to conceal its identity and obscure its meaning’.¹ Strype’s amendments recast the Elizabethan capital in the context of early eighteenth-century London, producing, in effect, an impossible city, a strange, anachronistic composite of urban sites from different periods.

Although this approach implies a rather cavalier attitude to the process of updating London’s chorographical listings, Strype indicated a more selective method to his revisions, in his introduction. While claiming that his edition ‘corrected, improved, and very much enlarged’ his predecessor’s work, Strype’s new tour concentrated on the city’s suburbs, focusing mainly on the construction of new churches and other similarly worthy edifices.² For the most part, Strype favoured the registering of official buildings and

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monuments. Like Stow, he preferred the implicit permanence and moral equilibrium of publicly approved constructions to the evanescence of London’s spaces of pleasure. A notable example of his selective and exclusionary method is in his description of Lambeth, where he omits any reference to its most popular venue – Vauxhall Gardens – at the time, also its greatest claim to notoriety. In 1754 however, a sixth edition of Stow’s Survey appeared, purporting to be by Strype but actually modified by ‘several hands’, taking a cue from the previous editor, and continuing the tradition of anonymous and apparently unsolicited revision. In this later version, the editors silently included Johann Sebastian Muller’s famous engraving of 1751: *A General Prospect of Vaux Hall Gardens,* a pictorial representation of Vauxhall’s mid-century refinement, an open perspective which conveyed visually the neat avenues and ordered vistas of the Gardens. It was the first time that Vauxhall had been acknowledged in an eighteenth-century revision of Stow’s original Survey.

The inclusion of Vauxhall Gardens in an authoritative civic text like the Survey reflected the emergence and growing acceptance, even approbation, of the pleasure-grounds. The tacit admission of a familiar feature of London’s urban landscape, which had been frequented by citizens and visitors to the capital for almost a century, conveyed a significant shift in London’s moral geography. It reflected the evolution of Vauxhall from an urban space notorious for playing host to an assortment of risqué encounters and wayward meanderings, to a more socially acceptable London venue. In 1742, the opening of the more respectable Ranelagh, a rival to Vauxhall, also implied a deliberate attempt by entrepreneurs responsible for management of the Gardens, to refashion the layout of the grounds and to cultivate a greater respectability. By the 1750s, the topography of Vauxhall Gardens had been modified and restructured so that its mid-century visitors were literally, in words of one critic, ‘all but compelled to walk on the straight and narrow’.

In this chapter, I trace the literary representation of, and response to, the gradual change in the reputation of Vauxhall and Ranelagh during the eighteenth century. Although other pleasure grounds like Marylebone, Cupers Garden and Bagnigge Wells were equally

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frequented and their popularity well-documented, I focus on Vauxhall and Ranelagh as the more exclusive grounds for the purposes of my discussion. As the acknowledged fashionable resorts of the beau monde, Vauxhall and Ranelagh held a greater social cachet than the other less exclusive venues, and the manner of their representation in the literature of the time attests to their significance for an implied middle-class readership. I examine descriptions of Vauxhall in periodicals of the first part of the eighteenth century, focusing on its lingering association, in the popular imagination, with scandal and disrepute, as well as its links with images of the Orient and the Near East. I suggest that the latter can be traced to the appearance, in 1706, of the first Grub-Street translation into English of *The Arabian Nights*. What the persistent evocation of Oriental scenes inside the grounds at Vauxhall and Ranelagh indicated was the influence exerted by popular literature – namely a popular translation of *The Arabian Nights* – on the places frequented by its readers. The intrigue and exoticism associated with the Orient and perpetuated by the tales were reflected in the paintings displayed inside the gardens. The aesthetic and literary import of these tableaux were then reabsorbed into contemporary fictional portraits of London. In a similar discussion, I will examine the moral ambiguities implicit in a series of paintings exhibited at Vauxhall in 1742, in which episodes from Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), depicting the attempted seduction of the heroine by her master in the Gardens, are exposed to the public gaze. The representation of recognizable scenes from Richardson’s intentionally reformative novel in an urban space previously known for scandal and notoriety, suggests an attempt by the Gardens’ proprietors to exploit a contemporary fictional vogue to refine the moral tone of the pleasure gardens. Yet, although literature seems, at times, to collude with the effort to make the Gardens more respectable and acceptable to an implied polite public, it does not always seem fully to endorse this message. In this chapter I will show how fictional representations of London’s more exclusive pleasure-grounds frequently construct a different urban social code from the one pursued by the Gardens’ various managers and entrepreneurs.

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5 Warwick Wroth splits the London pleasure gardens into three groups. He asserts that the first is the resort ‘of the Vauxhall type, beginning with the four great London Gardens – Cuper’s Gardens, The Marylebone Gardens, Ranelagh, and Vauxhall itself’. The other two are medical spas and the more down-market teagardens. *See The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century*, (Hamden, Connecticut, 1896, 1979), pp. 4-5. Although I agree with Wroth that more than two social bands separated the different gardens, literary portraits tended mostly to focus on the two most exclusive pleasure-grounds at Vauxhall and Ranelagh, probably because they were more exclusive and polite venues than Cuper’s and Marylebone Gardens, which receive relatively little treatment in contemporary fiction.
The history and representation of Vauxhall until 1728

The history of Vauxhall Gardens begins in the early years of the Restoration, when Sir Samuel Morland decided to open the grounds of his estate to the general public. During the seventeenth century, Vauxhall - known also as Spring Gardens - allowed Londoners to enjoy semi-rural walks in the suburbs of the metropolis. Later in the century, the property was expanded to include a series of avenues whose straight edges and sharp angles incorporated less regulated spaces known as 'wildernesses'. David Solkin comments that '[t]he overall effect would not have been unlike that of the most fashionable of contemporary aristocratic gardens, planned in accordance with French models - though at Vauxhall the public was anything but exclusive'. The irregular paths encouraged the social improprieties and secret assignations which took place in the Gardens' hidden spaces. In 1667 Samuel Pepys recorded an evening's excursion to the Spring Gardens:

[By water to Fox-hall and there walked to Spring garden; a great deal of company, and the weather and garden pleasant; that it is very pleasant and cheap going thither, for a man may go to spend what he will, or nothing, all as one - but to hear the nightingale and other birds, and here fiddles, and there a harp, and here a Jews trump, and here laughing, and there fine people walking, is mighty divertising. Among others, there were two pretty women alone, that walked a great while: which [being] discovered by some idle gentlemen, they would needs take them up; but to see the poor ladies, how they were put to it to run from them, and they after them: and sometimes the ladies put themselves along with other company, then the others drew back; at last, the ladies did get off out of the house and took boat and away.]

From this passage it seems that in its early years, Vauxhall was an unsupervised urban space where unbridled passions were encouraged and cultivated. There is no indication of the administration of any admission charge to discriminate between different social groups; a visitor was free to 'go to spend what he will, or nothing'. Likewise, the mediocre entertainment provided by itinerant musicians points more to amateur opportunists than organized orchestration. The lightweight amusements and diversions connote the moral  

6 Much of the information concerning the background and history of Vauxhall Gardens is taken from T. J. Edelstein, Vauxhall Gardens, with essays by the author and Brian Allen, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale center for British Art, 1983), and Solkin, Painting for Money, pp. 106-56.
7 Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 106.
laxness which characterized the Gardens, and the assault on female virtue described in this passage anticipated future literary representations of Vauxhall. London's pleasure gardens were spaces on the map which women had to learn to avoid; they directed the virtuous female away from its entrance, while simultaneously enticing her through the same intimation of transgression.

The passage also implicitly comments on the geographical location of the pleasure-gounds. Pepys's narration of events has a curiously symmetrical structure: in the centre of the account, economic latitude parallels the sexual liberties taken in the Gardens. But more significant is the circularity of the episode: the trip starts and ends with a journey across the water. Pepys crosses the river in anticipation of an evening of 'pleasantness'; the beleaguered women are forced to take to a boat to escape their tormentors. What separates Vauxhall from the Town and City is the Thames, which is situated on the periphery of this account. Like Ranelagh, which opened in Chelsea in 1742, Vauxhall lay on the fringes of London. Later in the century, Smollet's splenetic Matthew Bramble in Humphry Clinker (1771) castigated the proprietors of Vauxhall, Ranelagh and its inferior imitations, located in 'the skirts of the Metropolis'. This phrase – 'the skirts of the Metropolis' – with its marginal associations, emphasized the situation of the pleasure-gounds in the hinterlands of London's fashionable orbit, suggesting the social limits of urban pleasure. Given the moral significance ascribed to the inward movement of London's theatres at the start of the eighteenth century, from the liminal zone in the city's 'Liberties' to the more fashionable environs of the Town, the respective locations of Vauxhall and Ranelagh convey the idea of a more ambiguous and indeterminate urban space. If the Liberties occupied an area whose 'legal parameters and privileges were open-ended and equivocally defined', then the relative remoteness of a place which, until the completion of Westminster Bridge in 1750, was cut off from the Town by the river, provoked similar ambivalent connotations.

The popular associations of the Vauxhall Gardens with the outer limits of London's pleasures was demonstrated in 1700 by the hack writer, Thomas Brown, in his Amusements, Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London, a loquacious guide to the more pleasurable areas of the capital. In the Amusements, Brown composed a description of Vauxhall Gardens, illustrating the geographical and moral divagations which characterized the Gardens, in the early eighteenth century:

10 Mullaney, The Place of the Stage, p. 21.
We have divers sort of Walks about London; in some you go to see and be seen, in others neither to see nor be seen, but, like a Noun Substantive, to be felt, heard, and understood. The Ladies that have an Inclination to be Private, take Delight in the close Walks of Spring-Gardens, where both sexes meet, and mutually serve one another as Guides to lose their Way, and the Windings and Turnings in the little Wildernesses are so intricate, that the most experienc'd Mothers, have often lost themselves in looking for their Daughters.¹¹

Brown demonstrates how certain urban venues and their habitués are regulated by an internal urban grammar: the young lady starts her excursion as both active and passive verb: she aims both to see and be seen.¹² She is simultaneously active watcher and passively observed object. In other places, the 'independent' female visitor is subjected to male prodding and gropings. In the logic of Brown's social grammar, this renders her a 'noun substantive': although the young female visitor seeks a degree of autonomy by straying from her prescribed social role,¹³ the independent woman, the 'noun substantive', escapes contingency only to be reinflected as pure substance. She occupies a paradoxical position: the distinction between autonomy and being cast socially adrift is blurred, while her function as 'noun substantive' involves a degree of tactility and corporeality which can be 'felt, heard, and understood'. In Vauxhall Gardens, however, a different form of collective social expression is at work. The tangible interaction is initially absent, and the specular games are less blatant as a more subtle and shadowy process of visual subterfuge takes over. The sexual improprieties associated with Vauxhall Gardens in Pepys' Diary are reiterated in this passage. But whereas the earlier account focused on the dangers confronting respectable female visitors to the Gardens, Brown implies that the young ladies deliberately contrive and choreograph their encounters with interested male parties. By eluding maternal supervision, recalcitrant daughters seek to pursue an autonomous path, whose 'Turnings and Wildernesses' parody their social lapses. But the assertion of


¹² Cf. Roland Barthes remark on the 'grammar' of the Eiffel Tower: '[it] is an object which sees, a glance which is seen; it is a complete verb, both active and passive, in which no function, no voice...is defective'. 'The Eiffel Tower', in A Barthes Reader, 236-50, ed. Susan Sontag, (Vintage, 1982, 1993), p. 238.

¹³ Later in the century, Laetitia Pilkington defined her social and financial independence and destitution in similar terms: 'But, alas! poor I have been for many years a noun substantive, obliged to stand alone, which ... I have done, notwithstanding the various efforts of my enemies to destroy me'. Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington, 1712-50, written by herself, first published, (1748-54), ed. Iris Barry (London: George Routledge and Sons, rpt. 1928), p. 162.
subjectivity is undercut by the subsequent loss of character which accompanies such meanderings. Independence is qualified by an improper liaison, which, typically, compromises only female reputation.

Most early accounts of Vauxhall focused, to a certain degree, on Vauxhall's scandalous reputation. One of the most popular descriptions of Vauxhall appeared in The Spectator in 1712. In no. 383, Joseph Addison's account of Sir Roger de Coverley's visit to Vauxhall - 'A Visit to Spring-Garden with Sir Roger' - provides the prototype for many subsequent treatments of the gardens. Mr. Spectator is struck by the paradisiacal nature of the gardens.

We were now arrived at Spring-Garden, which is exquisitely pleasant at this Time of Year. When I considered the Fragrancy of the Walks and Boweres, with the Choirs of Birds that sung upon the Trees, and the loose Tribe of People that walked under their Shades, I could not but look upon the Place as a kind of Mahometan Paradise. Sir Roger told me it put him in the Mind of a little Coppice by his House in the Country, which his Chaplain used to call an Aviary of Nightingales. 'You must understand,' says the Knight, 'that there is nothing in the World that pleases a Man in Love so much as your Nightingale. Ah, Mr Spectator, the many Moon-lights that I have walked by myself, and thought on the Widow by the Music of the Nightingale!' He here fetched a deep sigh, and was falling into a fit of Musing, when a Mask, who came behind him, gave him a gentle Tap on the Shoulder, and asked him if he would drink a Bottle of Mead with her? But the Knight being startled at so unexpected a Familiarity, and displeased to be interrupted in his Thoughts of the Widow, told her 'she was wanton Baggage'; and bid her go about her Business...

As we were going out of the Garden, my old Friend thinking himself obliged, as a Member of the Quorum, to animadvert upon the moral of the Place, told the Mistress of the House, who sat at the Bar, that he should be a better Customer to her Garden if there were more Nightingales, and fewer Strumpets. 14

The bucolic innocence evoked by the nightingales, fragrant walks and bowers is disturbed by the 'loose Tribe of People' wandering among the leafy shades; urban transgression invades the pastoral space of the Gardens. This is confirmed by the final disapproving observation, that the moral tone of Spring-Gardens would be eminently improved were the disruptive and intrusive 'Strumpets' to be permanently removed from the grounds. The interruption, by a 'Mask', of the knight's contemplation of the Widow further complicates the idyll. As Terry Castle has exhaustively and persuasively demonstrated, the eighteenth-century masquerade provided a useful social vocabulary to describe the contemporary

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confusion of taxonomies of class and gender;\textsuperscript{15} the disguised female could be a common prostitute, but she could equally be a member of a higher social class, exploiting the anonymity afforded by the mask in a public venue. This equivocation confirms the precarious nature of the Gardens’ reputation. The opprobrium cast on the Spring Gardens by Sir Roger reflects the project of moral refinement pursued in the pages of \textit{The Spectator}. The recommendation that greater social discrimination be exercised in the Gardens differs from the earlier descriptions of Vauxhall by Pepys and Brown, whose moral disinterestedness portrayed events without adding further social comment. Like the treatment of London’s coffee-houses in \textit{The Tatler} and \textit{The Spectator}, which I will examine in the next chapter, the attempt to construct a polite version of the metropolis through a particular depiction of Vauxhall involved the expulsion of uncivilized elements of social behaviour.

But the note of disapproval with which \textit{The Spectator} concludes its piece does not work absolutely to override the impressions of rustic pleasure and otherworldliness educed from the passage’s opening description of Vauxhall Gardens. The rural shades and the warbling of the nightingales elicit the encomium that the Gardens are a veritable ‘\textit{Mahometan} Paradise’; a place of urban degeneracy, but also a garden of Oriental delights. Suspended between moral censure and an appreciation of the exotic intrigue associated with Eastern culture, this ambivalence bequeaths later literary representations a dual heritage, a conflicting perspective of London’s pleasure gardens: they are both a prime urban locus for accusations of moral decadence and a place which reflects and cultivates a climate of pleasure associated with the culture of the Orient.

Edward Said’s seminal study of \textit{Orientalism} identifies the late eighteenth century as a period distinguished by looser exotic associations prior to the start of Orientalism as an academic discipline. He notes: ‘[s]ensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy: the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pretechnical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleonlike quality called (adjectivally) “Oriental”’.\textsuperscript{16} The term ‘Oriental’ here, denotes a cultural referent which can be indiscriminately attributed to any experience or phenomenon that arouses or stimulates the senses; ‘pre-Romantic’ and ‘pretechnical’ Orientalism, it seems, are fairly loose terms for describing both the heightened sensations of terror and the sublime, and more subdued

\textsuperscript{15}Castle, \textit{Masquerade and Civilization}.

sensuous and languid pleasures. But, given the allusion to the ‘Mahometan Paradise’ in
*The Spectator*, an image that was copied and persisted in literary portraits of London’s
pleasure gardens throughout the century, Orientalism seems to have a more particular
contemporary application. Although Said begins his study at the end of the eighteenth
century, his comments could, in the context of London’s pleasure gardens, equally pertain
to the early 1700s. In a footnote, he comments that the study of Orientalism in the
eighteenth century is ‘a too-little-investigated subject’, noting that among the few surveys
to cover this area is Martha P. Conant’s early *The Oriental Tale in England in the
Eighteenth Century* (1908).17 Said draws attention to the cultural influence exerted by
Oriental literature on contemporary culture in the first part of the century – the period in
which the first English translation of *The Arabian Nights* appeared. Said remarks near the
beginning of his study that, ‘[t]he Orient is an integral part of European material
civilization and culture’.18 In other words, the Occident owes much of its own cultural
heritage to what it has borrowed and translated from the Near East. Similarly, what Europe
recognizes and defines as ‘Oriental’ is, paradoxically, the physical, ‘material’ interpretation
of Eastern culture.19 London’s eighteenth-century pleasure gardens cultivated an Oriental
ambience, which seemed consciously to reproduce the impressions recorded by *The
Spectator* after 1711. But Mr. Spectator’s analogy also owes much to the contemporary
popularity of literary representations of the Orient, such as *The Arabian Nights*, generating
both a literal and cultural English translation of Oriental literature.

In the period between 1704 and 1717 Antoine Galland produced the first partial
translation of *The Arabian Nights* into French.20 The first Grub Street translation appeared
in 1706, enjoying immediate critical and popular acclaim.21 In 1709 Charles Gildon
dedicated his *Golden Spy: or a Political Journal of British Nights’ Entertainment* to Swift,
writing that ‘The Arabian and Turkish Tales were owing to your Tale of a Tub. In 1735

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19 See Said’s comment: ‘Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a
tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.
The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other*, *Orientalism*, p. 5.
20 Much of the following information is taken from *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in
the Reception of The Thousand and One Nights into British Culture*, ed. Peter L. Caracciolo (Houndmills:
Pope was considering the idea of 'writing a Persian Fable in which I should have given a full loose to description and imagination'. By 1715 it had already reached its third edition. In 1723 the London News, a thrice-weekly newspaper, began a serialization of The Arabian Nights, which ran for three years, in 445 instalments. Later in the century, the Nights was enjoyed and praised by writers including Reynolds, Sterne, Blair, Warton, Hawkseworth and Beattie.

Not everyone was as enthusiastic. Henry Fielding dismissed the Arabian Nights along with other 'immense Romances, or the modern Novel', whose authors 'without any Assistance from Nature and History, record Persons who never were, or will be, and Facts which never did nor possibly can happen'. But Fielding was an exception. For most writers and ordinary readers, the accretion of fantastic stories from the Orient depicted a world of enchantment which interrupted the mundane, quotidian mode of urban realism. According to Roy Porter and George Rousseau, the Arabian Nights 'afford[ed] a moral “time out”, a local habitation and a name for a fantasy world where all the normal rules – of decorum, taste, narrative, plausibility, and cause-and-effect – could legitimately be suspended'. The imaginary realm of the exotic occupies a cultural position which displaces the prosaic and unremarkable representation of ordinary city life: ‘[t]he very charm of the Thousand and One Nights and of the French tale ... lies in the trick whereby their prima facie implausibility becomes the token of their authenticity: the normal rules of time, character and psychology are, of course, suspended in the geographical and mental heartlands of the exotic.’

27 Ibid., p. 15.
for the European interpretation of the Orient. This, as I will discuss, became apparent in the changing design and depiction of London’s pleasure gardens.

The narrative of *The Arabian Nights* is propelled endlessly forward by the resourceful, calculating deferral of violence by the female storyteller. The framework of the tales – the warding off of masculine violence – corresponds to the depiction of female experience in the amorous fictions by writers like Manley and Haywood in the early part of the century. Indeed, the exotic, unfamiliar cities and luxuriant gardens of the *Nights* evoke associations with these early female narratives. Infinitely receding modulations of similar scenes and motifs featuring cities and idyllic gardens characterize the Oriental tales:

I came to a large Town well inhabited, and situated so much the more advantageously, that it was surrounded with several rivers, so that it enjoyed a perpetual Spring. The Pleasant Objects which then presented themselves to my View, afforded me some Joys.28

The ‘large Town’ situated on the river and enjoying perpetual Spring recall the disguised London of Manley’s and Haywood’s fictions. But the descriptions also put the eighteenth-century reader in mind of the risqué pleasure-grounds at Vauxhall. Similarly, the portrayal of the private gardens resonate with contemporary urban associations:

I opened the first Door, and came into an Orchard, which I believe the Universe could not equal. I could not imagine that anything could surpass it ... the symmetry, the neatness, the admirable order of the Trees, the abundance and diversity of Thousand sorts of unknown Fruits.29

This genuine ‘Mahometan Paradise’ recalls the rhapsodic commendation of Sir Roger de Coverley in the roughly contemporary *Spectator*. But it is not only the polite periodicals which create literary connections. The more scandalous fictions by female authors abound with references to, and descriptions of, vast anonymous cities and the intriguing, illicit encounters in the hidden recesses of private gardens. In fact, the scandalous reputation of these female narratives suggests that the notoriety of Vauxhall Gardens in the first quarter of the eighteenth century would have made the London’s pleasure-grounds a prime locale for the setting of many illicit encounters. Indeed, the improper dalliances observed and noted by Pepys in his *Diary* and Addison in *The Spectator* are commonplace in the

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29 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 110.
literature of Manley and Haywood. But neither Vauxhall nor even the less-celebrated
grounds like Marylebone and Cupers Gardens appear in the works of these early women
writers. At first, this seems like a notable omission, not least because the city is a favoured
setting for the anonymity and disguise associated with the concealed intimacies and secret
entanglements of urban liaisons. Moreover, other familiar London locations like the
playhouse and, to a lesser extent, the opera-house provided popular and fitting literary
venues for the impermanent and fickle liaisons instigated and abandoned in London in these
narratives. Vauxhall Gardens, with its reputation for clandestine meetings, and its literary
associations with the gardens described in the more exotic and Oriental tales of The Arabian
Nights, is absent from early scandal fictions.

The most obvious reason for this omission is that Vauxhall Gardens was a venue with
an acknowledged name and location; it could be precisely identified on the map. Unlike the
theatre or the opera-house, which were unspecified urban sites and thus easily
accommodated within the unfamiliar, imaginary settings, Vauxhall Gardens was a proper
noun, unsuited to the coded system of the roman à clef.\(^{30}\) However, even in disguised
form, London's pleasure gardens make surprisingly few appearances. In Delarivier
Manley's Memoirs of Europe (1710), the pleasure-grounds located on 'the Asian Side' of
the city are described in opulent and lavish detail:

Dissolv'd in more substantial Joys, the more forward Lovers tread the conscious
adjoining Groves, enlighten'd as their Charmers Eyes, with thousands of Lamps
blazing an artificial Day, which checker'd with the brown Shade beneath, cast
from the lofty Trees, and mingling Branches, makes that Silvan Scene vie with
the most Elizian for Delight, the perpetually falling Blossoms furnishing the
fragrant Couch. Distant Music, the best the East affords, is plac'd to advantage,
with Airs languishing, enchanting, melting, which ravishes the Ear, and fills the
Vacancies of Mind (if any) that Love has left un-employ'd.\(^{31}\)

The 'forward Lovers', 'adjoining Groves' and 'lofty Trees' all anticipate The Spectator's
description of Spring Gardens, although the fragrant 'Walks and Bowers' are promenaded
by 'wanton Baggage' rather than Manley's unrestrained Lovers. The reference to 'Elizian'

\(^{30}\) See, for example, Ros Ballaster's analysis of the works of Behn, Manley and Haywood 'in the context of
late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century party politics', Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction
specific and personal satire in her "key" novels. Nearly every character in her novels has his or her
correlative in the "real" world of political intrigue,' Seductive Forms, p. 117.

delight conveys a paradisal encomium of sorts, while the enchanting music, which is 'the best the East affords' connotes a 'Mahometan Paradise'. The 'perpetually falling Blossoms' is redolent of the 'perpetual Spring' of *The Arabian Nights*, and the 'Silvan Scene' recalls its 'admirable order of the Trees'. The literary tropes employed to evoke scenes of Oriental idyll and urban pleasure gardens fuse distinctive cultural referents. Manley seems to be echoing descriptions from the contemporary translation of *The Arabian Nights*, but this also brings her portrayal of the Turkish pleasure groves close to popular perceptions of Spring Gardens at Vauxhall. If Vauxhall and Ranelagh could be said to be situated at the 'Skirts of the City', Manley's earlier, oblique allusion to Spring Gardens located it on the 'Asian Side' of London, south of the Thames.

This is not to say that gardens did not feature in early amatory fictions. In fact, secluded bowers and aromatic groves were conventional backdrops to the salacious tales of seduction and amorous intrigue. April London offers an illuminating analysis of the role of the gardens in early eighteenth-century narratives, by female writers. She writes: 'Both amatory and pious narratives employ metaphors informed by the myth of the garden and directed toward ratifying the source and significance of power.' It is not only the more scandalous stories which use gardens to convey topographically the lascivious nature of the tales; wooded enclaves are also strategically deployed in more religious and devout narratives by Jane Barker and Penelope Aubin. However, the important fact to note about these gardens is that they are private, enclosed spaces: they belong to the tradition of the *hortus conclusus* of earlier romances. The public sphere, of which Vauxhall, Marylebone, Cupers Gardens and later, Ranelagh, were significant components, dislodged the amorous garden from the private estate and reconstructed it in a more open urban space, where London's populace could re-enact, in a more public setting, a less idyllic form of female seduction.

For the most part, the early *chronique scandaleuse* ignored London's contemporary public pleasure-grounds. In the second volume of Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709), the reader is figured as the voyeur of a scene in which the beautiful Diana de

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33 April London points out that although Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719) was set in France, and *The British Recluse* (1722) in London, her later tales move further away to Venice and then to Persia and various desert islands. The garden, therefore, becomes less a recognizable urban scene and reconstitutes itself as a locus for the more fantastic world of the romance. London, 'Placing the Female', p. 111.
Bedamore unwittingly displays her physical charms in a secluded garden:

It was the Evening of an excessive hot Day, she got into a shade of Orange Flowers and Jessamine, the Blossoms that were fallen cover'd all beneath with a profusion of Sweets. A Canal run by, which made the retreat as delightful as 'twas fragrant. Diana, full of the uneasiness of Mind that Love occasion'd, threw her self under the pleasing Canopy, apprehensive of no Acteon to invade with forbidden Curiosity, her as numerous perfect Beauties, as had the Goddess. Supinely laid on that Repose of Sweets, the dazling Lustre of her Bosom stood reveal'd, her polished Limbs all careless and extended, showed the Artful work of Nature.\textsuperscript{34}

April London comments on the 'tacit association between the features of the garden and a kind of physical and psychological laxness'.\textsuperscript{35} The languid, objectified female is enclosed within the arboreal shade; her semi-concealment forces the comparison between her gradually revealed appearance and the 'Artful work of Nature. Similar examples can be found in the works of Manley, and also the slightly later Eliza Haywood. In the latter's most successful work, \textit{Love in Excess; or the Fatal Inquiry} (1719), the Count d'Elmont, the eldest of two brothers whose adventures in love are recounted in this tale, tries to seduce the beautiful Amena Sanseverin, enticing her into the adjoining private grounds: 'all Nature seemed to favour his Design. The Pleasantness of the Pace, the Silence of the Night, the sweetness of the Air, perfum'd with a thousand various Odours wafted by gentle Breezes from adjacent Gardens.'\textsuperscript{36} Needless, to say, the young Amena soon yields to the embraces of the ardent lover. Similarly, in an anonymous work, \textit{The Generous Rivals} (1716), the beguiling Dorinda is drawn into a 'very recluse Part of the Garden' by the young Lord Phylopones, who entreats her: 'Come then, Madam, cease these irksome Thoughts; this pleasing Recess seems purely made for Love.'\textsuperscript{37} The scene of sexual transgression is clearly not a public one. Dorinda succumbs to Phylopones' solicitations partly, it seems, through his implicit reassurances of privacy and seclusion: she is lured to a 'pleasing Recess' in a 'very recluse Part of the Garden'.

What seems to be a common feature of these early literary gardens is the semi-privacy granted by the confinement within the grounds of private estates. Erotic intrigue is played

\textsuperscript{34} Manley, \textit{Novels}, vol. 1, pp. 759-60.
\textsuperscript{35} London, 'Placing the Female', p. 104.
\textsuperscript{36} Eliza Haywood, \textit{Love in Excess; or the Fatal Inquiry, A Novel}, 3 vols, London 1719-20, vol. 1, p. 28.
out within an enclosed space. More pious writers like Penelope Aubin and Jane Barker tried to transform the susceptible female into a more defiant and unyielding Christian heroine by making the garden more emblematic of social restraint and regulation. April London comments that for Barker, ‘[d]istance and discrimination are the controlling principles: in the garden, the geometric shapes, rigid construction, and distinct boundaries; in the language, dramatic gesture, stilted speech, and the oddly impersonal declaration of love’. Barker’s narratives seek to make the restrained garden emblematic of the human potential to curb ignoble natural impulses. There are no scenes of wanton abandon and sylvan enticement in her stories. The emphasis is on subjugating the excesses of nature. However, despite the very different moral agendas of writers like Manley and Haywood and the more devout Barker and Aubin, the gardens described by these female writers do not offer the public access granted by Vauxhall and its various imitations in contemporary London.

The movement of London’s pleasure-grounds away from private estates to a more commercial form of public consumption is significant for an examination of the development of Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Lewis Mumford describes the role that the royal palace played in the pleasure pursuits of the seventeenth century. He writes: ‘[p]re-eminently, it was on the side of pleasure and recreation, of theatrical display and showmanship, that the influence of the palace was the most potent.’ But Mumford notes a gradual change in the next century and identifies London’s pleasure-grounds as epitomizing a new, independent public sphere of urban pleasure: ‘The pleasure garden, such as Ranelagh Gardens in London in the seventeenth century, and Vauxhall ... in the eighteenth ... were attempts to supply the more lascivious pleasures of the court to the commonalty at a reasonable price per head.’ Although Mumford confuses the chronology of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, the more general point he makes is an important one: Vauxhall and Ranelagh, unlike their royal and more noble precursors, were commercial ventures.

39 April London points out that in The New Atalantis, Manley chose to include the Badminton estate of Henry, Duke of Beaufort, to whom she dedicated the volume. But, significantly, she changed its topographical layout to accommodate her own literary purposes: ‘Beaufort’s property at Badminton was organized around “twenty radial avenues stretching far into the country.” Its fictional counterpart emphasizes not the illusion of spatial extension, but the enclosed or “labyrinthine” aspects, shrinking prospective view to contained garden.’, ‘Placing the Female’, p. 106.
41 Ibid., p. 433.
aimed at exploiting the developing leisure tastes of Londoners and visitors to the capital.

But by the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Vauxhall Gardens had all but fallen into disrepute. It seemed destined to be irremediably consigned to a more permissive age of wanton indulgence and almost irrevocably associated with social transgression in the popular and literary imagination. In 1728 the entrepreneur Jonathan Tyers, taking a cue from The Spectator's call for greater social refinement at Vauxhall, embarked on a scheme to reconstruct its public image. It was an 'unashamedly commercial exploitation of a garden tradition hitherto available only to a select few, adapted and democratized by Tyers' entrepreneurial talents to cater to the same middle-class market that frequented the play houses north of the river'.42 As I discussed in the first chapter, the London theatre audience comprised a significant number of novel readers; in a similar way, the same 'middle-class market' which Tyers targeted as visitors to the Gardens, was able to read about Vauxhall in the novels it consumed. But this is not to say that Vauxhall's earlier notoriety did not influence contemporary literature. Earlier descriptions of the social promiscuity endemic to Spring Gardens were to persist both in later fictional portrayals of Vauxhall, as well as Ranelagh.

The social refinement of Vauxhall

Jonathan Tyers acquired the lease to Vauxhall Gardens in 1728. His mission was a commercially inspired plan to rescue the Gardens from its earlier, dubious reputation and convert it into a more respectable form of public urban entertainment. Four years later, on 7 June 1732, Vauxhall was reopened as a polite pleasure resort for a more discerning public.

The new, reformed Vauxhall absorbed, to some degree at least, the urban politeness advocated earlier in the century by The Spectator. A notable example was one of the earliest supper-box pictures: Two Mahometans Gazing in Wonder and Astonishment at the Many Beauties of the Place (1732). These supper-box paintings were situated directly behind visitors enjoying a meal in the Gardens, and allowed those inclined to social voyeurism to enjoy an unobstructed view both of the picture and any comely figure sharing its particular perspective. However, the significance of the early picture of the Two Mahometans lies in its title. David Solkin points out that 'the exotic figured in and around Vauxhall in a number of forms apart from the architectural' and identifies Hayman's early painting as part

42 Edelstein, Vauxhall Gardens, p. 17.
of ‘the trend [which] began with Addison’. The painting indicated Oriental, particularly Turkish, influence on the construction of the new Vauxhall Gardens. But the source of this exotic design was not directly the popular tales from the Orient but rather, the ‘Mahometan Paradise’ taken from the polite pages of a London periodical, describing Sir Roger de Coverley’s trip to the Spring Gardens; eastern provenance is filtered and reinterpreted through the urbane views of Mr Spectator. What this painting comprehended was the fusion of politeness and more than a hint of social transgression, which characterized Vauxhall Gardens after Tyers took over management of the pleasure grounds. Solkin perceptively notes that ‘[n]o one was more aware than Tyers himself that he was trying to market an ethically dubious commodity; and doubtless he knew full well that a slight air of impropriety formed a significant component of Vauxhall’s allure’. Tyers’ commercial success was predicated on the fine line separating polite, refined urban pleasures from the frisson associated with intimations of social transgression. The gradual transformation of Vauxhall Gardens and the more respectable design of the later Ranelagh reflect an attempt by the proprietors and managers to sustain this delicate equilibrium. The corresponding literary representation of the pleasure gardens after 1740 is also shaped by the tension between older and more recent competing traditions of London’s pleasure-grounds.

Although Tyers worked hard to establish a precarious balance between propriety and transgression at Vauxhall, he was anxious to create an air of implied respectability through the entry requirements imposed on visitors to the pleasure-grounds. At first, a subscription scheme was introduced, by which only those issued with special tickets were permitted to enter through a supervised gateway into the Gardens, which were also surrounded by a high wall. However, abuse of the system through various means, including bribery of Tyers’ own employees, led, in 1736, to the substitution of a flat admission charge of one shilling instead of the hitherto required ticket. Tyers publicized his new scheme in a newspaper announcement:

As the Master of the SPRING GARDENS at VAUX-HALL has always been ambitious of obliging the Polite and Worthy Part of the Town, by doing every thing in his Power that may contribute to their Ease and Pleasure; he for that

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43 Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 287. n. 54. Solkin suggests that Hayman’s picture may have inspired Samuel Wale’s later The Triumphal Arches, Mr Handel’s Statue &c. in the South Walk of Vauxhall Gardens. 1751, which featured two beturbaned easterners in the foreground.
44 Ibid., p. 108.
45 Tyers’ servants also provoked this change by reissuing new tickets, at a discount, at the entrance to the grounds, to a lower class of visitor. See Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 111.
reason was induced to give out Tickets, but in no other View than to keep away such as are not fit to intermix with those Persons of Quality, Ladies, Gentlemen, and others, who should honour him with their Company. This Method he has already tried; and the Publick having been so indulgent as to approve of his constant Endeavours to serve them; 'tis with the utmost Regret he finds himself obliged to make a change.46

The implied, desirable visitors to Vauxhall were 'Persons of Quality, Ladies, Gentlemen'. Although the original subscription scheme was designed to keep out 'such as are not fit to intermix with those Persons of Quality', Tyers is impelled to instate an admission charge, which, he suggests, will be beneficial to the 'Polite and Worthy Part of the Town'; they will no longer be forced to fraternize with those below their social station.

In reality, the company at Vauxhall remained just as mixed as ever. The charge of one shilling was far lower than admission fees charged for other forms of urban entertainment such as the opera, the theatre and the masquerade.47 David Solkin comments: 'Eighteenth-century London offered very few other places where the different classes could mix more freely at such close quarters; and ... this was a freedom which members of the Gardens’ more distinguished clientele were at least on occasion quite happy to embrace'.48 Tyers' gesture of seemingly restricting the class of visitor also allowed the self-fashioning, polite individual a licensed thrill to enjoy the transgression of both social and sexual boundaries, while, superficially at least, allowing Tyers to project a show of respectability.

To visit Vauxhall after Tyers introduced his reforms was to take advantage of the construction of a new veneer of polite sociability. But although Tyers' ideal visitor seemed to be a 'Polite and Worthy' member of the beau monde, the crowd at Vauxhall embraced a far greater social range than the newspaper advertisement indicated; it was a mélange of aristocrats, City types and members of the 'inferior' classes.

Even if Tyers' public announcement was part of a cynical ploy to entice greater

46 Clipping from VAUXHALL GARDENS [A collection of tickets, bills of performance pamphlets, Ms. notes, engravings, and extracts and cuttings from books and periodicals relating to Vauxhall Gardens], 1709-1874, ed. Warwick Wroth, (British Library shelf-mark: CUP. 401.K.7.)

47 Terry Castle notes that although the price of the average masquerade ticket, in the first part of the century, was roughly five shillings - five times the entrance fee of the more exclusive kind of pleasure garden - it was not too costly to discourage the lower class of visitor: '[t]he general availability of tickets gave the lie to the myth of exclusivity', Masquerade and Civilization, p. 29. Castle's comments imply that Tyers' decision to replace the admission ticket with a one shilling entrance fee is either an indicator of a desire for a broader social band of visitors, or a ruse - by creating an illusion of exclusivity - to attract more people to the grounds.

numbers of visitors to the pleasure gardens – the attraction of a popular urban venue which
now held greater social prestige – the overarching design involved the construction of a
greater politeness and respectability. An anonymous poem entitled The Turkish Paradise or
Vaux-Hall Gardens, published in 1741, made a point of emphasizing Vauxhall’s earlier
scandalous reputation, but implied that it was to be consigned to a more infamous past.

In Times, not yet forgot, this Ground was trod
By Lust and Folly, this was their Abode;
The Evening Shade that fell but serv’d to hide
The Shame of Drunkards, or the Harlot’s Pride.
Here lost the Beau the Gold the Merchant won,
The Gamester finish’d what the fool begun.
HOGARTH, with Ease had hither trac’d his Rake,
And seen him sink whole Thousands at a Stake,
Feign’d Sighs, and purchas’d Vows were current there,
And Imprecations struck the peaceful Air.
Scandal who kept the Gate, and dress’d like Fame,
Grew soon familiar with the Guests that came,
Invited all who passed to enter in,
So tempted first, and then divulged the Sin;
The vicious Scene was set to publick View,
Known, censur’d, rail’d at, yet wink’d at too,
Till with its Weight of Infamy it fell,
And underwent a Change the Muse shall tell.49

The early Spring Gardens, which had played host to scenes of seduction and scandal, ‘Lust
and Folly’ in Pepys’ and Thomas Brown’s writings, is evoked, almost nostalgically, as an
outdated picture of what Vauxhall had once been – a decadent relic of a bygone age. The
poet mobilizes older, traditional literary devices: the allegorical figures of Lust and Folly
which have infiltrated the grounds and Scandal who ‘kept the Gate’ seems like distorted
variations of the thirteenth-century allegorical romance, the Roman de la Rose; an urban
inversion of the courtly hortus conclusus, which traditionally enclosed and safeguarded the
pure love virtuous lady. But the poem also echoes more contemporary literary influences.
The title, The Turkish Paradise, is redolent of Oriental tales in general, but more
specifically, it also deliberately recalls The Spectator’s depiction of a ‘Mahometan

49 [Anonymous] The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens. Wrote at Vaux-Hall last Summer. The Prince
and Princess of Wales, with many Persons of Quality and Distinction being in the Gardens, London, 1741,
p. 4.
Paradise'. The important point is that the poem's full title *The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens* represents the approved, reformed Vauxhall; the echo of Addison's essay, rather than the explicit reference to contemporary tales from the Orient, confers a certain respectability and politeness on the Vauxhall of the 1740s. The poet also alludes wryly to the rich source of human vice and folly that runs the gamut of urban transgression – most notably embodied in the Town rake – for a satirist like Hogarth. But the verse switches tenses – 'And underwent a change the Muse shall tell' – ushering in, as the poem would have it, a period of greater respectability for Vauxhall Gardens.

The poet draws attention to the theatrical nature of the Gardens, genially pointing out the delight with which visitors can easily switch or adopt temporary identities in such a public urban setting:

To this attracting Theatre resort  
The finish'd Beauties of the Town and Court;  
This Stage, how can it fail to move the Heart,  
Where all who see the play perform a Part.  
All chuse their own, what they can act with please  
And every one is please, and strives to please.51

Rather than conforming to the familiar anti-theatrical stance, criticizing the dissimulation of individuals in a public urban setting, the poet fondly recounts the pleasure to be had in acting out chosen roles in a new, respectable setting. The Vauxhall described in 1741 is presented as a different one from the Vauxhall satirized in verses only a few years earlier. In 1737 for instance, the pseudonymous 'Hercules Mac-Sturdy, of the County of Tipperary' penned a vicious attack on the excessive corporeal pleasures indulged in by visitors to the Gardens. Although it was contemporaneous with Tyers' proclamation that Vauxhall would henceforth only admit a more selective group of fashionable patrons, the poem opens with the speaker in the company of two prostitutes. It cursorily describes its main topographical features and attractions – 'the Walks, Orchestra, Colonades; The Lamps and Trees', – before moving on to the 'motly Croud' assembled there:

The Young, the Old, the Splenetic and Gay:  
The Fop emasculate, the rugged Brave,
All jumbled here, as in the common Grave.
Here sat a group of 'Prentices, and there
The awkard [sic] Daughters of a late Lord Mayor;
Next to them a Country Bumpkin and his Cousin,
And, stuck about, Red-Ribbon'd Knights a Dozen;
Like ruddy Pinks, or Gilly-flowers in Pots;
'Mongst Bawds, and Rakes, and Sempstresses and Sots.52

This earlier poem wallows in the social and sexual promiscuity of its urban subjects. The clumsy postures indicate the social incongruity of such a disparate assortment of ages, economic status and even gender: the Town fop, like the castrato, represents a distinct gender from the ‘rugged Brave’.

_The Turkish Paradise_ of 1741 distances itself from such familiar bawdy impressions, and announces a new era of decency for Vauxhall Gardens. Its Janus-faced detailed rejection of the Gardens’ past iniquities, and the heralding of a more respectable period of polite, urban sociability, in some ways recall the changing attitude to, and mediation of, Italian Opera in the early 1740s. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Pope’s treatment of Opera in _The Dunciad_ looked back to a more satirical mode of expression while Richardson’s contemporaneous _Pamela_ offered a new novelistic discourse on the subject. _The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens_ implies a similar moral transformation. It satirizes the pleasure-ground’s earlier scandalous reputation, insinuating its démodé status by casting previous visitors in an older, allegorical literary style. The new respectability of the outwardly reformed Vauxhall, on the other hand, is conveyed through a more naturalistic account of the Gardens’ genteel pleasures. Even the beautiful young ladies being transported down river, ‘Who add a Lustre to the Face of Thames / And dazzle from afar’, are spared the satirical treatment of a Belinda on her way to Hampton Court.53

All of which does not necessarily imply that Vauxhall had undergone a complete social conversion. There remained more than an undertow of the Gardens’ scandalous history. A pertinent example of this moral ambivalence is one of approximately fifty paintings produced by Francis Hayman and his studio between 1741 and 1742, commissioned by Tyers, and displayed in the grounds. Although a detailed description of the significance of these paintings is beyond the scope of this chapter, I want to focus briefly on the

53 _The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens_, p. 5.
appearance of a series of tableaux illustrating various scenes from Richardson’s contemporary, bestseller, Pamela. The variety of pictures exhibited at Vauxhall did not remain static throughout the century; contemporary events, fashions and even the characters from popular narratives came and went, reflecting and shaping current cultural trends. Using flimsy scenery and pasteboard, Vauxhall and Ranelagh exploited contemporary theatrical techniques and innovations, creating a two-dimensional version of London’s constantly metamorphosing preoccupations. Amongst the sketches of rural simplicity and patriotic heroism, episodes from Pamela were displayed in Vauxhall, reminding the potentially erring female of the implicit dangers involved in deviating from the straight and narrow illuminated pathways. Among the scenes represented pictorially at the Gardens were A Story in Pamela, Who Reveals to the Housekeeper Her Wishes of Returning Home, and Pamela ... Flying to the Coach ... While Lady Davers Sends Two of Her Footmen to Stop Her.

But the moral import of these painted scenes belied a more complex relationship between the contemporary novel and its pictorial representation. It seems significant that Mr B. first tries to assault Pamela in the small, enclosed garden of the estate. In Letter XI, Pamela writes to her parents in a distressed state, recounting how her master had attempted to seduce her in the summer house. She reproduces the assault in detail, describing how she ‘struggled and trembled, and was so benumbed with terror’, as ‘I found myself in his arms, quite void of strength, and he kissed me two or three times with frightful eagerness.’ Nancy Armstrong has commented on the way that the unambiguous description of sexual assault in the novel vitiates the moral tone of the conduct-book, which provided the original textual model and impetus for Richardson’s novel. She draws attention to the ‘struggle for possession of the female body in scene after scene of seduction, which is elaborated in minute detail’. Removed from its moral framework, the cumulative reportage of each physical and verbal encounter with Mr B. acquires a certain

54 For a full discussion of the paintings displayed at Vauxhall at different times during the eighteenth century, see Edelstein, Vauxhall Gardens, Brian Allen, Francis Hayman, (New Haven and London, 1987) and Solkin, Painting for Money, pp. 106-56.
55 These are two of the Pamela paintings mentioned in Brian Allen’s Francis Hayman, p. 181. Allen also notes that Hayman shared the task of illustrating the sixth edition of Pamela with Hubery Gravelot in 1742. There were twelve full plates, many of them depicting the heroine’s attempt to escape Mr B.’s assaults, pp. 187-88.
56 Richardson, Pamela, vol. 1, p. 18.
erotic quality. Armstrong stresses the structural and thematic contradiction contained within
the narrative: ‘By having Pamela gain the power of self-presentation, Richardson enclosed
the tale of her seduction within a framework that, like the conduct book, redirected male
desire at a woman who embodied the domestic virtues.’ Put another way, it seems that
although Richardson’s overarching moral narrative deflects Mr B.’s initial sexual threat
towards the more respectable end of matrimony, the actual details of his unsuccessful
assault have an independent sexual charge. It is this contradiction, between narrative
structure and content, which is exploited by artist and manager in Vauxhall Gardens.
Hayman faithfully reproduced scenes from Pamela, taking advantage of a current literary
trend to create a distinctly contemporary ambience for the Gardens’ visitors, significantly
assuming that they would, for the most part, be familiar with the popular novel.

Stripped of the governing moral framework of Richardson’s immediate authorship,
episodes from Pamela had an erotic resonance. Displaced from the surrounding and
concluding pious commentary, the narrative sequence acquires a more static, emblematic
quality. The pictorial representation of the attempt to seduce Pamela in the garden installed
in the public setting of an urban pleasure garden made the heroine’s experiences more
reminiscent of the scandals represented in the gardens of earlier amatory fictions.
Wandering past representations of Pamela attempting to escape Mr B.’s household, or
flying from Lady Davers, the young female visitor could enjoy the paradoxical and
equivocal status of the Vauxhall Gardens at the beginning of the 1740s.

What becomes apparent is a particular interpretation and deployment of literature in the
urban public sphere. In the same way that the painting, Two Mahometans Gazing in
Wonder and Astonishment evoked both the exoticism associated with the Orient and the
urbane politeness of The Spectator, the Pamela paintings conveyed a similar ambivalence:
they reflected the broad literary tastes of visitors to the Gardens, implying at the same
time that the ideal social band would have read or at least have been familiar with the novel’s
plot. Yet the identification of the polite reader was qualified by the slightly risqué
presentation of the pictures in an urban space previously known for scandal and disrepute.
The installation of the paintings reverses the more familiar pattern of the way that fiction
depicts geography; instead, here, it is urban space which mediates contemporary fiction.
But there also seems to be a dialectical relationship at work: strategically placed inside the

59 It is significant, in this context, to remember that that charges of impropriety concerning the first edition
of Pamela led Richardson to publish the considerably revised second edition.
Gardens, Hayman's illustrations suggest a less facile moral translation of the novel; not Fielding's exposure of sham virtue, but an uneasy mixture of Richardson's intentions alongside the insinuations of a deliberate misreading of the novel. At the same time, the paintings silently confirm the dubious status of Vauxhall itself. Neither genre - painting or novel - acts as a transparent medium for the other; rather, one can detect a reciprocity, which serves to uncover mutual cultural and moral ambiguities at the heart of each enterprise.

Significantly perhaps, Richardson's prototypical *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*, published in 1741, includes a visit to Vauxhall as part of the itinerary of the female correspondent. In a section entitled 'Diversions of Vauxhall Described', she recounts to her aunt how she 'went on Monday last to Vauxhall Gardens; whither everybody must go, or appear a sort of Monster in polite Company'. The adjective 'polite' is used at the beginning and conclusion of the letter, and registers a cynical tone: to refuse a visit to Vauxhall is to risk appearing socially illiterate and freakishly unfashionable amongst the kind of crowd that Tyers wished to attract to the Gardens. The correspondence is useful in conveying a contemporary topographical impression of, and attitudes to, the grounds, and is worth quoting at length. The writer describes her arrival at the grounds:

The Passage from Somerset Stairs, where we took Water, was pleasant enough; the Thames at High-water being a most beautiful River, especially above Westminster, where the green Banks, and the open Country, afford a very agreeable Prospect. The Place we landed at was crouded with Boats, and from the Water-side to the Gardens we walk'd thro' a double Line of gaping Watermen, Footmen, old Beggar-women, and Children. As soon as we entered the Walks, I was pleased with a sort of Stage, or Scaffold, raised at the Entrance, for the Servants of the Company to sit out of their Masters way, and yet within Call of the Waiters.

The excursion opens conventionally with a pleasant ride down river, but a discordant note is struck when the young lady is confronted with the envious and curious stares of beggars, footmen and other members of the serving class. Tyers' efforts to partition off the more socially elevated from their inferiors is endorsed by Richardson's narrator, who applauds the various constructions which obscure the servants' presence.

The letter goes on to give quite a detailed description of the interior of the gardens,
The Walks are well enough, but in viron'd with paltry wooden Boards, where I expected at least a good Brick-wall. One Part of the Whole is thrown into Walks only; the other is on the Sides filled with Seats or Arbours, with painted Backs; on each of which is represented some Scene of our most common Plays, or the youthful Representation of the Infant Games, &c. I happened to have at my Back honest Hob, come dripping wet out of the Well; and the young Fellows, under colour of shewing their Taste in observing the Beauties of the Piece, were so perpetually staring in our Faces, that Cousin Bet and I had little Pleasure in our Supper. Perhaps you will wonder at our Supping in so open a Place; but I assure you, Madam, no Lady is too tender for so fashionable a Repast. My Uncle treated us very chearfully; but I could not help grudging the Expence he was at; for when the Reckoning was paid, it amounted to no less than Ten Shillings a Head; which I think too dear, as the Entrance-money must be sufficient to defray the House and Music. But as the Whole is devoted to Pleasure, the Expence seems rather to create Satisfaction, than Distaste, as it gives an Opportunity to gallant People to oblige those they love, or pretend to love, in order, most of them, to pay themselves again with large Interest.62

The flimsy, gimcrack backdrop is revealed as insubstantial, shoddy stage scenery, underlining the theatrical nature of the place. Initially ignoring the walks, the writer draws attention to the voyeuristic function of Hayman’s supper-box paintings: using the disconcerting excuse of scrutinizing the paintings, the young men put the females off their food by ‘perpetually staring in our faces’. The visual games which took place at the theatre, on the vague pretext of watching the play, are brought more sharply into focus here, as the playhouse’s dual lines of perspective – the play and individuals in the audience – converge in a single view: the interested spectator can enjoy a felicitous, unimpeded view of both the paintings and the female occupants of the boxes in front of them.

The expenses incurred inside the grounds are explained as an opportunity for the display of conspicuous consumption, more commonly associated with the *nouveau riche* or City merchants than aristocrats; Tyers’ strategies are shown here to attract both old and new wealth. The writer also alludes, rather dismissively it seems, to the presence of music in the Gardens:

The Figure of Mr. Handel, a great Master of Music, stands on one Side the Gardens, and looks pretty enough: The Music plays from Five to Ten, about three Tunes (I believe I should have said Pieces) in an Hour. They are all reported to be

62 Ibid., pp. 203-204.
the best Performers who assist here: But my rough Ears cannot distinguish.63

In order to avoid the charged epithet of 'polite' pleasures, the young girl signals her rustic innocence through her cultural ignorance. To appreciate the orchestration, it seems, one must possess a sophistication that indicates that one belongs to a more urbane circle – one from which the writer seems at pains to distance herself. But the reference to the statue of Handel was a topical one. In 1738 a full-length seated statue of the composer, who, as I discussed in the previous chapter, was beginning to dissociate himself from Italian Opera in favour of the more English and patriotic oratorio, was unveiled to great acclaim. It had been commissioned by Tyers and was sculpted by Louis Frances Roubiliac. David Solkin calls this ‘key monument’ ‘the first major example of visual art to be placed in the Gardens’, installed before Hayman’s paintings.64 Its significance for the construction of a more polite Vauxhall was emphasized by John Lockman, Tyers’ prolific Grub Street spokesman-poet, when he described the satisfaction ‘on seeing lend Women refused Admittance into Vaux-Hall Garden, after than an Orchestra had been introduced into it’.65 Although it took Italian Opera slightly longer to gain a more respectable reputation, Handel’s presence was greeted as a benign, even reformative, presence, for a self-fashioning polite public.

The writer then alludes briefly to the previously infamous walks, which had earned Vauxhall such a damning reputation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries:

About Ten o’Clock, many People think of Home: But the Votaries of Cupid, I am told, about that Time, visit the remotest Walks, and sigh out the soft Passion in Accents that may possibly be improved by the melting Sweetness of the Music – I would not have you from hence conclude any Rudeness can be offered; for at the Termination of every Walk, thro’ the whole Garden, is placed a Man, to protect the Company from all manner of Insult.66

Curiously perhaps, the Gardens’ reputation for improper liaisons and various forms of social irregularity is underplayed in this passage. Richardson’s female correspondent seems to confirm the moral reforms implemented by Tyers: although she acknowledges the shady associations of Vauxhall’s walks, she insists that the presence of appointed guardians at the

63 Ibid., p. 204.
64 Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 111.
65 Cited in Ibid., p. 111.
66 Richardson, Familiar Letters, p. 204.
end of each avenue deflects any criticism of her visiting the grounds in the first place. A more psychological reading of the text might suggest that this is just an epistolary tactic to obscure what the writer really sees, but, given Richardson’s overt moral and improving intentions, it seems that the author is willing to accept Tyers’ insistence that Vauxhall is a far more respectable urban venue in the early 1740s than it was earlier in the century. In this sense, Richardson appears to be granting Tyers an unintentional favour. To be sure, the letter is not a fulsome recommendation of a visit to the place, but neither does it represent an absolute repudiation of it. The letter ends rather peevishly with the reiteration: ‘For I see more and more, that, do what I will, Nature never designed me to be polite; and I can sincerely declare, that I take more Satisfaction in an Evening-walk with you up the West-grove ... than in the enchanting Shades of the so much celebrated Vaux-hall’.67

Despite the pious declaration of a preference for more edifying outdoor walks, and the dismissive repetition of ‘politeness’ which Richardson appears to regard as a synonym for indulgence in excessive pleasure, the overall impression is of curiosity and interest, rather than outright condemnation.

Biographically and chronologically speaking, this seems to tally with Richardson’s contemporary treatment of the theatre and the Opera House, which, earlier in his writing career are accepted as customary, even if not ideal, urban pursuits. And like his depictions of other forms of entertainment, Richardson’s gradual but definite disenchantment seems to run counter to the changing popular attitude to London’s public spaces of pleasure in other works of fiction. When he starts writing novels at the beginning of the 1740s, fashionable urban resorts are tolerable places for virtuous young ladies, only becoming subject to more serious censure in his later works.

The challenge of Ranelagh

The ambivalence about Vauxhall’s respectability, the tension between its transformation into a polite urban venue and residual prejudices from its earlier reputation, was highlighted by the opening of Ranelagh in 1742, after the death of Lord Ranelagh, on the opposite bank of the Thames, in Chelsea. Purchased by an investment syndicate, Ranelagh was designed from the start as a more respectable alternative to Vauxhall. Whereas the latter’s attraction and dubiousness were the lingering associations with its early history, Ranelagh was recognized as a less morally uncertain venue. In contrast to Vauxhall’s famous walks

67 Ibid., p. 205.
and avenues, paintings, false scenery, statues, outdoor musical performances and generally constantly changing topography, Ranelagh’s main feature was a vast rotunda in the rococo style, 150 feet in diameter, which contained forty-eight supper boxes on the ground floor and a gallery level above, on the first floor.\textsuperscript{68} It also included an orchestra as well as booths for taking wine and tea. Like Vauxhall, although not to the same extent, the grounds featured paintings, sculptures and lighting effects. But the domination of the rotunda meant that Ranelagh also had the advantage of being more of an indoor venue than Vauxhall, particularly in view of the fickleness of the English weather. The admission charge was set at half a crown, and on firework nights, five shillings. It cost a further shilling to enter the rotunda, and it was this higher entrance fee, which implied, in contradistinction to Tyers’ tactics, that Ranelagh was realistically aiming to attract a more élite group of visitors.

As Vauxhall’s most significant competitor in London, Ranelagh received a mixed reaction when it opened. Horace Walpole – urban pleasure-seeker \textit{par excellence} and lover of kitsch – was initially unimpressed. On 22 April he described an early visit to the grounds: ‘I have been breakfasting this morning at Ranelagh Garden. They have built an immense amphitheatre, with balconies full of little ale-houses: ’tis in rivalry to Vauxhall and costs above twelve thousand pounds.’\textsuperscript{69} But he has reservations about the new venue. He thinks Vauxhall is ‘a little better: for the garden is pleasanter, and one goes by water’.\textsuperscript{70} Within two years, however, he was converted, and announced that he was attending Ranelagh ‘every night constantly … which has totally beat Vauxhall … My Lord Chesterfield is so fond of it, that he say he has ordered all his letters to be directed there’.\textsuperscript{71} Ranelagh is attracting a better class of people, who are prepared to conduct business and social correspondences in its comfortable environs.

Walpole’s switch of allegiance was not echoed by everyone, though. In 1742, two articles appeared in the June and August editions of the \textit{Champion}, reprinted in the same

\textsuperscript{68} See Edelstein, \textit{Vauxhall Gardens}, p. 18. There are fewer sources dealing with the history of Ranelagh than there are with Vauxhall; possibly because Ranelagh opened much later, in 1742, thereby coming second in the public’s imagination. It is also possible due to Ranelagh’s design remaining essentially the same, as opposed to Vauxhall, which was constantly changing its layout and metamorphosing, in response to new cultural trends.


\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

month, in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. Both essays are attributed to Henry Fielding,\(^72\) and what they amount to, in essence, is a defence of Vauxhall at the expense of Ranelagh. However, the exact target of Fielding’s disapproval is difficult to pinpoint: his concluding comments in favour of Vauxhall are reached via a circuitous argument. He encompasses other social criticisms along the way, shifting from a condemnation of the infiltration of London’s lower classes into the more exclusive grounds at Vauxhall, to a conventional attack on avarice and commerce. In both pieces, the writer masquerades as an ‘Ingenious Foreigner’, whose expectations of England are shattered by the implications of the nature of London’s urban leisure resorts, in particular its pleasure gardens.

In the first article, Fielding adopts an almost Richardsonian approach to the moral dangers of the City’s wanton indulgence in excessive pleasure:

> I have already had sufficient Opportunity to discover, that the Gross of their Artizans, or Mechanics, are as idle as they are dissolute: That they never work but when Necessity obliges them to do it; and lay it down the very Moment they have wherewithal to gratify their Vices.

> That many of their Merchants divide the Week between their Pleasures and their Business, and what they gather with one Hand scatter with the other ... 

> That Money is the universal Idol of all Ranks and Degrees of People; being look’d upon as omnipotent; like Charity covering a multitude of Sins ... 

> That Patriotism and Public Spirit are held but as beautiful Phantoms, set up only to facilitate the Designs of the Great, and amuse and deceive the Vulgar.\(^73\)

There are curious echoes of Richardson’s warnings, in *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum*, that an inappropriate participation in London’s pleasures by City merchants and their lowly employees will have an adverse effect on trade. An eagerness by this section of the urban populace to take part is a sign of idleness, dissolution and a worrying desire ‘to gratify their vices’. But Fielding’s argument seems less unambiguous than Richardson’s. In the second letter, entitled ‘*Of the Luxury of the English; and a Description of Ranelagh Gardens and Vaux-hall, in a Letter from a Foreigner to his Friend at Paris*’, Fielding’s argument takes on a more distinctly civic humanist character. Just as the opponents of Italian opera inveighed against the commercial erosion of civic values represented by that particular form of metropolitan entertainment, Fielding sees in London’s pleasure gardens

\(^{72}\) For a discussion of the essay and of its attribution to Fielding, see Brian Allen, ‘The Landscape’, in Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 18.

evidence of the same kind of social corruption at work:

Every Thing here is venal; Money is esteem’d an Equivalent for all Things; and this Lust of Lucre is founded on an inordinate Love of Pleasure: The Pleasure of the Sense? Those of the Mind being esteem’d scarce worth coveting, much less purchasing.

... Money contributed to the Publick is parted with grudgingly; to answer just Debts impatiently; and in Works of Beneficence, Generosity, and Charity, as to a Thief, who is gratified rather thro’ Terror than Love: But when any Vanity is to be gratify’d, when any Frolic is in View, or when Appetite, or perhaps Vice, is to be indulg’d, Riches have literally Wings, and fly away ... All are the Children of Luxury, and all must have their Appetites flatter’d as well as fed.74

Indulgence in urban pleasures is shown here to be the source of civic decadence; the ‘Lust of Lucre is founded on an inordinate Love of Pleasure’. Money for public causes is squandered on private pleasures, and when the individual is finally moved to make generous donations, it is through force and terror rather than private generous impulses. London is a corrupt city, and its citizens are the ‘Children of Luxury’.

But this standard deployment of the case against the corrupting energies of commerce is complicated by the sudden focus on the depravity of the lower orders:

Those very Outcasts of Fortune, who hunger daily for Bread, have here, therefore, their Places of Resort, where for a few Pence, their whole Estate, they find wherewith to tickle their Palates, and quaff down both Joy and Forgetfulness, tho’ sure to wake in the Arms of Wretchedness.

... [E]very Village, of which there are Numbers in the Neighbourhood of this huge, overgrown City, is half peopled with Publicans, who have Gardens, Walks cover’d with Trees, which retain an admirable Verdure all the Summer long, and are permitted the farther Advantage of certain rustic Games to draw in Customers, and inflame a Reckoning.75

Fielding makes a clear distinction between the spaces of urban pleasure frequented by members of the higher social classes and the ‘Places of Resort’ of the lower orders. The gardens and walks which the writer regards as the natural metropolitan habitat of these classes are inferior variations of pleasure gardens to be found in Sadler’s and Bagnigge

75 Ibid., p. 419.
Wells, Spa Fields and Bermondsey. He also goes on to describe the seasonal fairs held at Charlton, Greenwich and other places at the edge of the city. These are: ‘certain Places, resembling perhaps what Theatres were in their Origin ... open’d at the Extremities of the Town.’

In these more marginal urban spaces, Londoners take part in illicit, vulgar entertainments: ‘a Medley of Vaulting, Tumbling, Rope-dancing, Singing, and sometimes Farces.’ Significantly, the traditional urban associations between the theatre and the illegitimate hinterlands of London gives way, in the eighteenth century, to the impolite vulgar pleasures of the lower classes. Fielding, it seems, is making a clear topographical separation between this more decadent sort of pleasure and the polite and respectable resorts of the socially superior. And it is at this point that he begins to mount a defence of Vauxhall Gardens against the competition of the recently opened Ranelagh.

At Ranelagh, the foreign correspondent finds an ‘enchanted Palace’, which entices the visitor into its environs; it offers ‘elegant Retreats, whither Pleasure seem’d to beckon her wanton Followers’. But the initial attraction soon palls: ‘In five Minutes I was familiar with the whole and every Part, in the 5 next Indifference took Place, in 5 more my Eyes grew dazzled, my Head grew giddy, and all Night I dreamt of Vanity Fair.’ This weariness, however, does not extend to Vauxhall Gardens. In that place, the writer enjoys a greater variety of visual and musical delights:

In a word, Architecture, such as Greece would not be ashamed of, and Drapery, far beyond the Imaginations of the East, are here united in a Taste that, I believe, never was equall’d, nor can be exceede ... And the whole together, with so many Groupes of happy People, gratified in almost every Sense at once, underneath it, make me fancy that another Armida was the Goddess of the Place, and had exhausted all that Art and Nature had to boast of, in order to rival Paradise itself and render us frail Creatures thoughtless of an Hereafter.

I must avow, I found my whole Soul, as it were, dissolv’d in Pleasure ... My whole Discourse, while there, was a Rhapsody of Joy and Wonder. Assure yourself such an Assemblage of Beauties never, but in the Dream of Poets, ever met before – and I scarce yet believe the Scene was real.

As a depiction of Vauxhall Gardens, this passage offers a fairly standard, even bland, assessment of the grounds. Fielding’s superlatives recall the encomia from descriptions

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76 Ibid., p. 419.
77 Ibid., p. 420.
78 Ibid., p. 420.
composed earlier in the century: the reference to 'Imaginations of the East' reiterates the perennial resort to exotic comparisons; likewise, the insistence that the Gardens eclipse 'Paradise itself' is yet another echo of Addison's original analogy in *The Spectator*.

But it is not the mode of expression deployed by Fielding in his description of Vauxhall Gardens which jars, so much as the context in which it occurs. It is an incongruous conclusion to a line of thought which has already undergone several changes within the two articles. What began as a pungent attack on the wanton indulgence of the labouring classes, who attempt to rise above their social station by indulging in urban pleasures ill-befitting their rank, gradually evolves, in the second essay, into a more general assault on the corruption generated by the relentless progress of commerce - a common criticism levelled against other forms of metropolitan entertainment. Fielding then moves away from an economic argument by returning to his original social complaint. He makes a similar shift nine years later in his *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1749), in which he spares Vauxhall and Ranelagh from the excoriating criticism he reserves for diversions enjoyed by the lower classes. Stephen Copley comments that what we see here is the tension between a humanist and economic account of the social order. It is not so much that new information or data are being adduced in the course of the argument, but rather, that changing rhetorical strategies and points of emphasis are used at different stages. What starts as criticism of City leisure pursuits broadens into a more general attack on civic values. But returning to the entertainments of the lower classes, Fielding transforms the mode of rhetoric from trade and commerce to one of topography. He is at pains to distinguish between the urban spaces occupied by the 'Outcasts of Fortune', which are situated at the 'Extremities of the Town', from the more polite geographical locations at Vauxhall and Ranelagh. It is an attempt at a form of urban distillation, separating the polite from the vulgar and popular through the city's different spaces of pleasure. Fielding is anxious to stress that different social groups can be unequivocally assigned to different parts of London.

Of course this is a rhetorical pose: as I have already noted, the shilling admission charge meant that a significant section of the lower orders would at times be able to gain entry to the grounds. Even the term 'Extremities of the Town', intended to signal the liminal space of these inferior pleasure, anticipates Matthew Bramble's location of Vauxhall

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and Ranelagh, in *Humphry Clinker*, in the ‘Skirts of the Metropolis’. Varying written accounts confuse the demarcation line separating popular and polite forms of urban pleasure. It seems slightly incongruous, then, that, after making the effort to discriminate between London’s different levels of entertainment, Fielding should, after comparing the two pleasure gardens at Ranelagh and Vauxhall, come out unambiguously in favour of the latter: the less polite of the two in the popular imagination.

Fielding’s bias in favour of Vauxhall Gardens has a personal resonance in his later novel, *Amelia* (1751), which I will discuss later. But the force of his support for Tyers’ commercial enterprise in 1742 did not go unnoticed. In a humorous publication attributed to Horace Walpole, entitled, *The Evening Lessons, Being the First and Second Chapters of the Book of Entertainments*, the writer figures Jonathan Tyers as the presiding deity of the Gardens. Employing pseudo-Biblical rhetoric, he prophesies:

In Condemnation of *Ranelagh* shall he dream, and in Praise of *Vaux-hall* shall he dream, and I will print his *Dreamings* in the *Champion*.

So he did even as he had said, and the Dreamer dreamed, and the *Champion* printed, and the Readers at the Coffee-house interpreted the Dream.\(^80\)

The author’s clairvoyance implies the leverage that Tyers exercised in promoting Vauxhall. Fielding, it is suggested, speaks on behalf of the Gardens’ manager; the articles in *The Champion* and *The Gentleman’s Magazine* would be discussed in the city’s coffee-house, thereby generating the publicity that Tyers was so adept at organizing.

The publication also caricatures the distinctive features of the respective pleasure gardens. Referring to the famous rotunda at Ranelagh, Walpole writes: ‘Now when I had walks the Circle of *Ranelagh* many Times, and had beheld the same *Faces* many Times and the same *Laces* many Times, A sudden weariness came upon me, and I began to moralize, and I said, *such* also is the *Circle of Life*.\(^81\) The ridiculous posturing performed inside the interior of the rotunda is evoked here in an almost existential mode, a mock-religious loathing for the fatiguing predictability and repetitive nature of urban pleasure. But the writer also tries to level any preference for either place. He intones blasphemously: ‘For as there is a Time to eat, and a Time to drink, and a Time for neither: Even so, there is a Time for *Ranelagh*, and a Time for *Vaux-hall*: Is there not also a Time for neither? God

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\(^81\) Ibid., p. 10.
forbid! Both pleasure gardens boast their exclusive attractions, which, it is made clear, must not be missed by the London public.

Ranelagh continued to command a more sober reputation in the public imagination for a few years after it opened. In The Female Spectator, Eliza Haywood underlines the popular distinction made between Ranelagh and Vauxhall. She devotes an early number to the story of the attempted seduction of a young girl in the grounds of Vauxhall:

I cannot say our summer evenings public entertainment, of which I think Vauxhall not only the most pleasant, but also most frequented by the great world, are liable to fetch such unlucky accidents. —

Every-one there appears with the same face which nature gave him, and if intrigues are carried on, it must, at least, be with the consent of both parties; yet here are dangerous excitements, — music, flattery, delightful groves, and sweet recesses, to lull asleep the guardians of honour. — A certain well-known gentleman, whose acquaintances bodes no good to the young and beautiful of our sex, has often boasted that Vauxhall was the temple of Flora, of which he has long been constituted high priest.

In many ways, this passage is not not an untypical scene from Haywood's writing. The 'flattery' and 'delightful groves' could easily be taken from her earlier, more scandalous fiction. The opening caveat is that this story will concern the 'unlucky accidents' which characteristically take place in the metropolis. But what sets this fiction apart from Haywood's previous writing is the contemporary context in which it occurs. In view of the recent reforms imposed by Tyers and his attempt to create a more respectable ambience in the grounds, Haywood's paper seems almost to be an aberration; a deliberate invocation of the Gardens' early history. Indeed, the author's deliberate naming of her heroine - 'Flavia, for so I shall call her' — as well as the hero, Florio, casts the Vauxhall of the mid-1740s in the image of the scandalous romance from the beginning of the century. Whereas Haywood paid little attention to Vauxhall in her earlier works, her later, more respectable writings still contains residual traces of her previous amatory fictions. Her evocation of Vauxhall runs counter to Tyers' reformative strategy; she ignores the veneer of politeness and constructs a story of a scheming lover's plans to seduce a young girl, using Vauxhall Gardens as the perfect backdrop.

But this early paper is not necessarily representative of Haywood's views on London's
pleasure gardens. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, in association with the London playhouse and Italian Opera, Haywood’s later career is an ambivalent combination of a new tentative respectability and a backward-looking hint of scandal. In a slightly later piece, *The Female Spectator* features a letter purportedly written by Sarah Oldfashion, the pseudonymous, collective voice of polite public opinion. She writes:

Some of our modern diversion-mongers think it not enough to be every day contriving new entertainments for our evening amusement; the morning too must be taken up in them, as tho’ we were born for nothing but recreation: *Vaux-hall, Cupers*, and all those numerous placed rendezvous except *Ranelagh-Gardens*, content themselves indeed with engrossing the part of our own time in which business gives way to pleasure.\(^8^4\)

In this passage, Ranelagh is distinguished from the more scandalous Vauxhall as a more appropriate urban venue for a virtuous young girl; it is the only place, according to the writer, where pleasure does not utterly dominate the proceedings. However, the mild defence of Ranelagh gives way to the anxiety that even this more acceptable pleasure resort is improperly consuming too much of Miss Biddy’s time:

[N]othing seems worthy to her regard but how to appear in the genteelest deshabille at *Ranelagh*: — every morning my house is crowded with young ladies to call miss *Biddy* to go with them to breakfast at *Ranelagh*; nothing is talked of at their return but what was said and done at *Ranelagh*, and in what dresses they shall appear at night again in that charming place; so that the whole day is entirely taken up with it.\(^8^5\)

What started as approval for Ranelagh as a foil for other, more decadent forms of urban pleasures gives way to a lamentation for the ways in which even a more polite venue can harm a young girl’s innocence, by distracting her from more appropriate occupations.

The response to the letter from *The Female Spectator* is mainly unsympathetic. It starts by defending most forms of London’s entertainments before going on to identify the reason why Ranelagh draws such large crowds:

\[T\]o such persons, who by their large offices in the state, or attendance at court, are obliged to keep much in town, such places of relaxation are both necessary and agreeable: it must be acknowledged that they are so, and it would be the

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\(^8^4\) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 217.
\(^8^5\) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 218.
highest injustice, as well as arrogance in the *Spectator*, to pass any censure on the
great world for amusements, which seems calculated chiefly for them; and which
are indeed prejudicial to the people of an inferior condition only by being indulged
to an excess.

... it is not the fine prospect that *Ranelagh* is happy in, the pleasant walks, the
magnificent amphitheatre, nor the melodious sounds that issue from the orchestra,
that makes the assembly there so numerous, but the vanity one has of joining
company, as it were, with their superiors; of having it within their power to
boast, when they come home, of the notice taken of them by such a lord, or such
a great lady.86

The appeal of Ranelagh is explained as the allure of any urban venue which attracts
members of the *bon ton* to its grounds. The social excitement associated with ‘seeing and
being seen’ replaces the more common moral reasoning that Ranelagh is a favoured resort
because of its superior air of respectability. *The Female Spectator* emphasizes the point by
claiming that by prohibiting the young lady from visiting the pleasure-grounds, this action
would have the perverse effect of sharpening the memory of pleasure rather than banishing
thoughts of it from her mind:

> If *Mrs Oldfashion* would, therefore, wean Miss *Biddy* from the ... delights she
> has taken at present in *Ranelagh-Gardens*, and the company who frequent that
> place, it might be right to vary the scene; but in my opinion altogether the reverse,
> to change it to one where only dismal objects offering to the view, should render
> the past more pleasing an idea, than they were even in enjoyment.87

An experiential, rather than vicarious or imaginary enjoyment of Ranelagh is ultimately a
safer moral bet for the young urban female than sequestering her away from the public
sphere. Haywood adjudicates between the arguments for and against London’s spaces of
pleasure: she records polite opinion within her journal, but respectfully rejects the more
stringent comments concerning the perils of allowing a young girl to venture out in public.
She recommends moderation, thereby mitigating the prudish demands of Sarah Oldfashion.
Her response anticipates the tone of her later novel *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), where a
more uniformly principled narrative occasionally echoes her earlier career.

If Samuel Richardson’s growing antipathy to public urban entertainment was evidence
of a personal trajectory which ran counter to the change in polite opinion and other literary

86 Ibid., p. 221.
87 Ibid., pp. 236.
representation of London, Eliza Haywood's gradual transformation into a more respectable female writer was, perhaps, a reflection of the times in which she was writing. But the equivocation shown in *The Female Spectator*, in 1744, implied a shrewd reaction to the current moral climate as well as a more personal hesitation in fully renouncing the indulgence in urban pleasures. This ambivalence also typified the uncertainty underlying both literary and more official representations of Vauxhall and Ranelagh during the 1740s. By the end of the decade, a more concerted effort was being made to consolidate an actual, rather than illusory, respectability in London's more fashionable pleasure gardens.

**The further refinement of Vauxhall and Ranelagh**

Towards the end of the 1740s Tyers embarked on a project for a major rebuilding and refinement of Vauxhall Gardens. To put his plans into effect, he employed the aid of writers and visual artists to construct a more definite air of respectability than the one he had attempted to introduce in the 1730s. David Solkin identifies two significant periods in which all but one of the engravings which were exhibited at Vauxhall were produced: from c.1736 to 1741, and from 1751 onwards.88 In the first category, Solkin explains, 'we are dealing with a rather motley group of nine images ... and they are on the whole remarkable for their lack of artistic pretensions'.89 The second group consists of 'two uniform series of much finer engravings – five after designs by Samuel Wale, and four after Antonio Canaletto ... showing the fruits of the major rebuilding programme which had started at Vauxhall by the end of the 1740s'. It is probable that Tyers had a hand in commissioning the second category of paintings, if not the former, too.

It seems significant that 1751 chronologically marks the start of a distinctly more refined period in the visual representation of Vauxhall. I suggest that literary references to pleasure gardens in a number of novels published at this time show evidence of a similar, even if not identical, tendency towards a greater social respectability. Although these fictions are not as idealized as the engravings and do not fully endorse the social function of the city's pleasure-grounds suggested by pictorial images, they share a concern with their role in London's marriage market, providing a more polite variation on the tradition of illicit liaisons which had hitherto characterized their portrayal in eighteenth-century literature.

David Solkin notes that one new feature of the engravings dating from c.1751 was the

89 Ibid., p. 125.
frequent inclusion of family groups’. Although Vauxhall had never advertized itself as an appropriate resort for children, the gradual appearance of families rather than pairs of lovers appeared to be an attempt to ‘endow the site’s well-known erotic character with an enhanced air of respectability’. An anonymous satirical publication made a similar point, albeit intended cynically to draw attention to the practical social purposes of London’s pleasure gardens. In a public letter, to which the signatures ‘Dames Ranelagh, Vauxhall and Marylebone’ were fixed, the correspondents remark that flirting has been diverted from inappropriate urban locations to their own more suitable environs:

We have the honour to be not only the common sewers of your private habitations, but also of your churches; by sucking in and intercepting, all that druff of belles and beaux, which were formerly a nuisance to those sacred places. For where else could they go, to see and be seen; to exchange wanton glances and whispers, and make their amorous assignations? But now they can have recourse, every day of the week, to one or other of us, the churches are become, in a manner, unnecessary.

London’s pleasure gardens perform a kind of metropolitan purification. Unseemly behaviour is banished to the outskirts of the city, simultaneously rendering the churches urban casualties of London’s excessive indulgence in specular pleasures. But the letter goes on to offer a cynical explanation for the importance of a gentleman frequenting the grounds and silently witnessing the proceedings.

Such young gentlemen as have an inclination to venture on the voyage of matrimony, by standing them in the same stead as a sea chart, which points out all the rocks and eddies by which they are to fail? So that by taking notice where the rocks lie, that is, who those fair-ones are that frequent us often, ... they may learn to decline them, as unworthy of their choice.

By learning to navigate the mazes and dark avenues of the pleasure gardens, the eligible bachelor can covertly seek out a prospective wife, silently disregarding unsuitable

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90 Ibid., p. 133.
91 Ibid., p. 133.
92 Significantly, Marylebone Gardens, which had previously been considered socially inferior to Vauxhall and Ranelagh is now included within the same social band as the other two pleasure gardens.
candidates within the grounds. In this way, the gardens serve as an aid to moral distillation: a female’s absence from such a party indicates her worthiness for marriage.

Samuel Richardson’s treatment of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, in his later literary works, bears out this development to some extent. In the revised third edition of Clarissa (1751), the extended epilogue uses a telling urban analogy to point out Sally Martin’s waywardness. Sally ridicules domestic employment such as needlework and other ‘fine works’, which used to keep ‘at home ... the women of the last age, when there were no Vauxhalls, Ranelaghs, Marybones ... to dress out for and gad after’.95 Richardson seems to be erasing Vauxhall’s early history, preferring to present London’s pleasure gardens as an unfortunate recent urban development; proof that contemporary social mores were set on an inexorable downward trajectory. Later in the epilogue, Richardson remarks that the reader would not be able ‘to look for Clarissa’s among the constant frequenters of Ranelagh and Vaux-hall ... If we do, the character of our heroine may then indeed be justly thought not only improbable, but unattainable’.96 All this signals an increasingly familiar pattern in Richardson’s fiction: a growing disaffection with London’s public resorts of pleasure, even for those of a higher social class. Interestingly, though, in his last novel, Sir Charles Grandison (1754) the city’s pleasure gardens receive slightly more subtle and complex treatment. Early in the book, the virtuous Harriet Byron writes to Lucy Selby, informing her:

I am to be carried by her to a Masquerade, to a Ridotto; when the season comes, to Ranelagh and Vauxhall: In the mean time, to Balls, Routs, Drums, and so-forth; and to qualify me for these latter, I am to be taught all the fashionable Games. Did my dear Grandmamma, twenty or thirty years ago, think she should live to be told, That to the Dancing-master, the Singing or Music-master, the high mode would require the Gaming-master to be added for the completing of the female education?97

Harriet’s resignation to urban pleasure seems, at first, in keeping with Richardson’s attitude to London’s sites of leisure: the litany of entertainments on offer in the capital are evidence of a modern propensity for frivolity and empty pleasures. The thought that her grandmother would not have had the opportunity to take part in some of the pursuits

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95 Clarissa, 1751, 3rd edn., vol. 4, p. 538.
96 Ibid., pp. 564-5.
97 Richardson, Charles Grandison, vol. 1, p. 22.
currently on offer in London corresponds to the claim, in *Clarissa*, that Sally Martin’s moral decline was partly precipitated by her exposure to the many city’s diversions. But this conventional display of reluctance to participate – the sign of a true heroine – is slightly complicated by the fact that Harriet is to visit these places, particularly the pleasure gardens, at all. Clarissa’s virtue is proved, if it needed to be, by her absence from such venues. Harriet’s reluctance to visit certain sites of urban entertainment may be a sign of her virtue, communicated and mediated by her attitude to London’s resorts of pleasure, but it is not an absolute refusal to attend. Perhaps Harriet’s more elevated social position – *Sir Charles Grandison* is the only novel of Richardson’s be set in aristocratic society – allows her greater freedom to visit such public places, but references to Vauxhall and Ranelagh later in the novel display a similar hesitation in offering unremitting disapproval.

Harriet relates an incident in which a young girl’s true love is thwarted by a tyrannical father who offers to find her a husband elsewhere:

> And what cries the girl for? Why, Caroline, you shall have a husband, I tell you. I will hasten with you to the London market. Will you be offer’d at Ranelagh market first? the concert or breakfasting? - Or shall I shew you at the opera, or at the play? Ha, ha, hah! - Hold up your head, my amorous girl! You shall stick some of your mother's jewels in your hair, and in your bosom, to draw the eyes of fellows. You must strike at once, while your face is new; or you will be mingled with the herd of women, who prostitute their faces at every polite place. Sweet impatient soul!98

Ranelagh is held up as place of public exhibition, where a young lady must go to be seen in order to capture the attentions of an eligible bachelor. The only risk seems to be of appearing once too often, becoming too familiar a sight to remain bewitchingly mysterious and enigmatic – a state that the vast city allows only for a while. Prostitution is mentioned only in its metaphorical sense; the real whores and strumpets are concealed or repressed in this scene. The focus is on the convenience with which young men are able to assess the ladies present as suitable candidates for marriage. This seems to be confirmed later in the novel, when Harriet receives a letter from Sir Charles’ sister, Charlotte, a similarly principled but also headstrong woman, who laments the shameless exhibitionism which take place at Vauxhall and Ranelagh for the supposedly more respectable purposes of matrimony:

98 Ibid., vol 1, pp. 340-41.
Never, never, unless a woman has as much prudence as your Charlotte, let her wed a man who has less understanding than herself. But women marry not so much now-a-days for Love, or fitness of tempers, as for the liberty of gadding abroad, with less censure, and less controul — And yet, now I think of it, we need only to take a survey of the flocks of single women which croud to Ranelagh and Vaux-hall markets, dressed out to be cheapened, not purchased, to be convinced that the maids are as much above either shame or controul, as the wives. But were not fathers desirous to get the drugs off their hands (to express myself in young Danby’s saucy stile) these freedoms would not be permitted. As for mothers, many of them are for escorting their daughters to public places, because they themselves like racketing.99

Vauxhall and Ranelagh have become marriage markets, where mothers collude in the ‘racket’ which takes place at these venues. Married women are condemned for acting improperly for their conjugal status, while single women are criticized for immodestly displaying themselves in an effort to be noticed. Both groups blatantly cheapen or deny the respectable state of marriage.

Ian Watt notes that Sir Charles Grandison was published in the same year that the Marriage Bill, which had been drawn up in 1753, was passed into law, in 1754.100 The main purpose of the Marriage Bill was ‘to end the confusion about what constituted a legal marriage, and to effect this it laid down in unequivocal terms that a valid marriage, except under certain and specified and very exceptional circumstances, could only be performed by a minister of the Church of England in the parish church after public reading of banns on three consecutive Sundays, and with an official license’.101 The Bill was designed to put an end to clandestine marriages, and its legal status was intended to stop the kind of false marriages which were so popular in Restoration comedy. Its attempt to make marriage a more respectable institution was reflected in the corresponding depiction in contemporary fiction. In the same year, John Shebbeare published his novel, The Marriage Act, which was the ‘first work of fiction arising out of a piece of legislation’.102 In Sir Charles Grandison, the main characters are frequently occupied with thoughts of matrimony.

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101 Ibid., p. 149.
102 Ibid., p. 150.
Grandison asserts: ‘I am for having every-body marry’. Harriet complains: ‘I believe there are more bachelors in England, by many thousands, than there were a few years ago: and, probably, the numbers of them (and of single women, of course) will every year increase.’ It seems significant, then, that places like Vauxhall and Ranelagh, which were previously locations associated with illicit liaisons and scandalous behaviour, are now discussed in relation to marriage, rather than absolute transgression. Fiction articulates a social preoccupation and a current legal issue through its particular presentation and interpretation of geography: London’s spaces of pleasure are used to comment on contemporary moral issues.

Richardson was not the only novelist to make a point this way. In 1753, the same year that the Marriage Bill was first presented, Eliza Haywood published her last novel, The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy. Jemmy is the son of a landed gentleman and his cousin Jenny, the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Their parents plan for the two of them to marry but Jenny and Jemmy are orphaned before their union can be sealed. For a while they indulge in the delights of London, but they become disillusioned with the idea of matrimony, after seeing numerous examples of bad marriages. They decide to delay their wedding until they have become wiser and more aware of their own feelings through a greater experience of the world. Early in the novel, Jemmy comes across some documents showing evidence of his father’s plans for himself and Jenny to marry:

On looking over his father’s papers he had found marriage articles between him and Jenny, with a deed of settlement on her by way of dower, which the old gentleman had caused to be drawn up some time before his death; these writings he now put into his pocket and carried them to her, in order for her approbation.

‘What are these? cry’d she, when he presented her with the packet: - They are what concern you as nearly as myself, - replied he, - therefore, I would have you examine the contents at some leisure hour, and let me know if you think there is any thing in them that requires alteration or amendment.

‘They ought to be things of great consequence, indeed, by their bulk,’ - said she smiling, and beginning to unfold the parchment, - ‘You know,’ - resumed he with the same gay air, - ‘for what we are design’d by both our fathers; - and I suppose mine, as being your guardian also, thought himself the most proper person to decide the terms on which we should come together.

103 Richardson, Charles Grandison, vol. 1, p. 428.
104 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 231. See Watt, The Rise of the Novel, for a contextual background to anxieties concerning the rise in the number of unmarried men, pp. 146-47.
‘I have no reason, - answered she, - to suspect either his justice or good will towards me; - however, I will take the first opportunity of seeing what he has done for me on this score;’ - in speaking this she lock’d the writings he had brought in an escutore that was plac’d just behind her; - then turning hastily to him, - ‘but, my dear Jemmy, - continued she, - you must excuse me for this evening; - you must know I have promised some company to go to Ranelagh, and I believe they are already beginning to expect me. - It happens very luckily, - said he, - for there are three or four young fellows of us, who have promised to give some ladies the music on the river to night, - and I could not have stay’d above three minutes longer with you; for they depend upon me to see the hands all ready, - so, my dear Jenny, I will not detain you; - farewel. - Farewel Jemmy,’ rejoined she, - and with these words both ran down stairs together; - he went into one chair and she into another, to fulfil their several engagements.106

Haywood’s deployment of Ranelagh in this passage is relevant to the novel’s theme of marriage. Jemmy gives Jenny the papers to peruse, but when she gets an inkling of the content of the documents she hastily puts them aside, insisting she has a prior engagement at Ranelagh; Jemmy, sensing her unease, similarly denies the import of the papers by fortuitously remembering his own social arrangements, significantly with ‘some ladies’ – more a sign of dallying than marital commitment. At the centre of this nervous discussion lies the fixed, legal diction concerning marriage; that Jenny chooses to depart for Ranelagh at this point indicates that the more respectable of London’s pleasure gardens has interposed itself between the marital bond of two people. Implicit in his episode, is Haywood’s view that Ranelagh is not quite the polite resort that it was advertised to be. Like her depiction of it in The Female Spectator, it is a place which some regard as unsuitable for a young lady’s sense of modesty, although Haywood personally recommends moderation. And yet, the metonymic connection between the marriage articles at the beginning of this passage, and the departure for Ranelagh at the end suggest a vague connection: not so much an opposition between two social extremes as different stages on the same moral continuum. No longer the purely the resort of women of easy virtue, mid-century fictional representations of London’s more fashionable pleasure gardens imply not quite the respectable locus constructed by Tyers, but slightly more suitable venues than had hitherto been depicted in eighteenth-century literature.

In 1752 Fielding published his most respectable novel, Amelia, a narrative which contrasted the squalor and corruption of mid-century London with the shining virtue of its

eponymous heroine. In *Amelia*, Fielding offers an interesting interpretation of London’s pleasure-grounds. Although I will discuss the significance of the villification of Ranelagh in the novel, and the incident which takes place at Vauxhall, in more detail, in the next section, it seems interesting, in this context, that Fielding’s only extended literary consideration of the capital’s pleasure gardens occurs in a work whose central female character is a virtuous married woman. Amelia’s negotiations, ‘readings’, of Vauxhall and Ranelagh exhibit her moral worth and marital fidelity. Fourteen years later, in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), includes a description of Ranelagh within a more general consideration of marriage. In many ways, the novel constitutes an extended analysis of the state of matrimony: the Vicar, Dr. Primrose, is shown to enjoy an idyllic partnership with his wife Deborah; his daughter Olivia is seduced by the unscrupulous Squire Thornhill and made to go through a mock marriage ceremony; her sister Sophia’s virtue is similarly threatened when she is abducted by an unknown villain. In the end, after languishing a while in prison, the Vicar’s fortunes are restored by the hitherto disguised Sir William Thornhill, whose benevolence contrasts with the abuses of his nephew, the Squire. The novel concludes on a matrimonial note: Sir William marries Sophia; Olivia’s reputation is restored as her marriage is shown to have been legal after all; and the sisters’ protective brother, George, marries his sweetheart. Earlier in the narrative, four days before the planned marriage of Olivia to a Mr Williams, another brother, Moses, ponders the theme of matrimony, shifting from popular song (the family have just incongruously heard ‘An ELEGY on the Theme of a Mad Dog’) to a discussion about the contemporary marriage market. The common link is a geographical one: namely Ranelagh Gardens and its Spanish counterpart:

‘That may be the mode,’ cried Moses, ‘in sublimer compositions; but the Ranelagh songs that come down to us are perfectly familiar, and all cast in the same mold: Colin meets Dolly, and they hold a dialogue together; he gives her a fairing to put in her hair, and she presents him with a nosegay; and then they go together to church, where they give good advice to young nymphs and swains to get married as fast as they can.’

‘And very good advice too,’ cried I, ‘and I am told there is not a place in the world where advice can be given with so much propriety as there; for, as it persuades us to marry, it also furnishes us with a wife; and surely that must be an excellent market, my boy, where we are told what we want, and supplied with it when wanting.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ returned Moses, ‘and I know but of two such markets for wives in
Europe, Ranelagh in England, and Fontarabia in Spain. The Spanish market is open once a year, but our English wives are saleable every night."

'You are right, my boy,' cried his mother, 'Old England is the only place in the world for husbands to get wives.' — 'And for wives to manage their husbands,' interrupted I. 'It is a proverb abroad, that if a bridge were built across the sea, all the ladies of the Continent would come over to take pattern from ours; for there are no such wives in Europe as our own.107

In what is essentially a sentimental portrait of marriage, in keeping with the rest of the novel, the smooth transition from the church as inculcator of marital virtues, to Ranelagh as the most effective provider of the best marital partners, constitutes a moral corrective to the satirical portrait of Dame Ranelagh's Remonstrances. That earlier publication cynically viewed London's most respectable pleasure gardens as useful alternative venues for the flirtation that took place in the city's churches. As is often the case with The Vicar of Wakefield, it is difficult to distinguish between the genuine appreciation of Ranelagh's social and urban function and a more tongue-in-cheek treatment of sentimental naivety. But given earlier fictional treatments of Ranelagh as a marriage market, to varying sympathetic degrees, the echo of a familiar trope in an ambiguously sentimental work like The Vicar of Wakefield, actually comments on the novel itself, disturbing the surface of a simpler narrative. Topography is used to articulate a cultural preoccupation, which, in turn, changes the way that the place itself is seen.

The way in which fiction and geography serve mutually to comment on, and even shape, each other depends on a certain difference between literature's portrayal of urban space and its depiction through other media. Tyers' careful construction of politeness and respectability is not perfectly mirrored in the fictional portrayal of the Gardens, but neither does the gap between them indicate an absolute moral difference. It is, rather, one of degrees. The engravings commissioned by Tyers aimed to create an impression of polite, urbane entertainment inside the grounds. Contemporary literary representations of London's pleasure gardens reflected this air of respectability by alluding to marriage rather than romantic entanglements, but the ambivalence of these portrayals retained more than a suggestion of sexual impropriety.

In a sense, mid-century literary depictions of London's pleasure-grounds occupy an indeterminate space between the extremes of other dissenting public voices. In 1752 John Lockman's A Sketch of the Spring-Gardens, Vauxhall, in a Letter to a Noble Lord was

published. In this survey, Lockman emphasized the role that Tyers had played in reforming the Gardens’s reputation. The public

may almost be said to owe some Obligations to him [Tyers], upon a double Account. – First, for his having suppress’d a much-frequented rural Brothel (as it once was) ... [and] on a second Account, viz., for his having chang’d a leud Scene above-mentioned, to another of the most rational, elegant, and innocent Kent.\textsuperscript{108}

In this account, Tyers is figured as guardian of the public sphere who transforms a rustic venue for illicit pleasure in to a clean urban space – an inversion of the normal countryside-city opposition. Lockman also acknowledges contemporary anxieties concerning the detrimental effect that places like Vauxhall will have on industry and production:

Let all Ranks among us be more or less industrious, but let us not be \textit{Goths} ... The \textit{useful} and \textit{polite} ARTS should go Hand in Hand, and be consider’ed as Sisters; and none, except the Tasteless, should consider their Union impracticable ... Methinks one of the great Arts of Life is, to pass thro’ it with elegant Innocence, if that epithet may be allow’d. – \textquote{Tis} evident, that what is said above, relates only to People of Education, and a polite \textit{Turn} of \textit{Mind}.\textsuperscript{109}

As Tyers’ official spokesman, Lockman directs his sentiments towards those with a ‘polite Turn of Mind’. He gestures at uniting the spheres of commerce and politeness. In some respects, he is welcoming the new money of City merchants and exploits the vanity of those who like to consider themselves among the more refined classes. Just as Tyers announced the introduction of an admission fee in such a way as to imply that this new method would discriminate between the polite and vulgar masses, Lockman’s words flatter the visitor to Vauxhall. His persuasive tone suggests his faith in a new régime which would justify the contiguity of respectable entertainment with the City’s commercial sphere. Two years earlier, in 1750, the opening of Westminster Bridge, which obviated the need to cross the river, had literally bridged the distance between the Town and the fashionable resorts on the fringes of London.

The process of refinement continued into the next decade. David Solkin comments that in ‘an entirely consistent development, pictures of Vauxhall were becoming more

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p. 30.
emphatically “artistic”, more delicately drawn’. In 1762 a publication entitled A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens. Being a Companion and Guide for all who visit that Place, insisted:

The present proprietor has studied every art, and extended every means, however costly, to render these gardens worthy of the reception and esteem of every polite person, and indeed he has so far succeeded and by annual improvement that Vauxhall has deservedly acquired public form.

Like Lockman’s Sketch, the author of the Description presents Lockman as the indefatigable corrector and saviour of the city’s morals. The writer goes on to describe in detail the artistic works currently on display in the Gardens, focusing particularly on the Shakespeare paintings. Just as the authors of the Sketch and the Description both implied polite readers who would be moved to fashion for themselves identities as respectable visitors to the Gardens, ‘the primary moral function of Hayman’s four Shakespeare scenes ... [was] to engage and refine the sympathies of the audience, thus implicitly predisposing Vauxhall’s clientele to the virtuous exercise of social feeling (and confirming their capacity to act this way)’.

But although both Lockman’s Sketch and the Description of Vauxhall Gardens are frequently cited, often anachronistically, for their insights into, and lavish descriptions of, Vauxhall Gardens, it seems that they are pursuing a particular agenda: the construction of a more refined type of urban pleasure garden. The focus on the style and subject of the paintings suggests an effort to cultivate a particular kind cultural ambience; a refined public space in which the visitors to the grounds would see mirrored back at themselves a reflection of a desirable, polished urban identity, which Tyers was happy to confer on them. But there were competing voices which contradicted this idealized portrait, and which suggested that the Gardens’ older, more scandalous reputation was still pertinent, even topical, later in the century, despite Tyers’ efforts to consign Vauxhall’s early disgrace to history.

Newspapers regularly included spoof letters and columns highlighting the moral risks

110 Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 134.
112 See Solkin, Painting for Money, pp. 149-56 for an extended analysis of the significance of the Shakespeare paintings.
113 Ibid., p. 155.
posed by a trip to London’s pleasure-grounds. Greater emphasis was placed on the loss of
honour than on serious physical assaults. Recent studies of the representation of female
virtue in this period stress that what mattered was appearance. Janet Todd, for example,
writes: ‘for women, reputation was identity. A woman became “even such a one” as she
was represented and there was no possibility of change; representation was the reality.’
One wit was tempted to translate virtue into more tangible terms by recording its loss in a
newspaper column.

June 1757. Lost. In the dark Walk at Vaux-hall, on Tuesday the 24th Instant, two
female Reputations. One of them had a small spot occasioned by some dirt
thrown upon it last Week in the Road to Ranelagh; the other never soiled.
Whoever will bring them back to the Owners shall receive Five Thousand
Pounds, with Thanks.115

Like Shamela’s ‘vartue’, reputation is figured here as a palpable commodity, worthy of
economic exchange. Nevertheless, the proliferation of warnings in London’s newspapers,
reporting the alarming increase in these disreputable events, reflected genuine fears and
provided the quotidian backdrop to persistent anxieties about the threat to female honour. In
1759 a letter to The Chronicle, signed DECENCY, lamented an incident in which a ‘lady
with her daughters were attacked so rudely by a set of ruffians, that the mother, seeing her
children torn from her, and forced into into the thicket of the wood, and there treated with
the greatest indecency, fell into a fit, and it is said she is not yet recovered from the illness
which this fright and vile treatment occasioned’.116 In the same year, John Tyers railed off
the dark walks in response public criticism that these landscaped divagations were
responsible for moral deviation. A short while later, they were violently ripped open by an
indignant party of male protesters, who objected to Tyers’ reformatory intentions.

What the contemporary cynical newspaper announcements implied was that both
Vauxhall and Ranelagh were still associated, in the public imagination, with irregular social
behaviour. In order for the humour to work, the pleasure gardens’ early history still had to
resonate sufficiently in the 1750s for the reader to appreciate the insinuations which belied
the contemporary refinement of the gardens. The contradiction between competing forms of
public discourse – polite and decorous entertainment in official topographical descriptions,
on the one hand, and imputations of dishonour and disgrace in the city’s newspapers, on
the other – is reflected in the ambivalent, shifting representation of London’s pleasure
gardens in contemporary literature. The ambiguous allusions in these fictions, to the role
that Ranelagh played in London’s marriage market imply a new air of respectability, but
also a lingering suggestion of impropriety.

The moral confusion and contradiction of literary and historical sources is illustrated in
Charlotte Lennox’s contemporary The Female Quixote (1752). The quixotic heroine of the
novel’s title is drawn to the grounds of Vauxhall because of its resemblance, in popular
descriptions, of romantic settings:

The Season for Vaux-Hall being not yet over, she was desirous of seeing a Place,
which by the Description she had heard of it, greatly resembled the Gardens of
Lucullus at Rome, in which the Emperor, with all the Princes and Princesses of
his Court were so nobly entertain’d, and where so many gallant Conversations
had pass’d among those admirable Persons.117

Arabella’s Vauxhall is infused with language of romance; she expects to see princes and
princesses entertained by pleasant diversions and engaged in noble conversation. Her
version of romance does not include the scandal and intrigue which characterized the early
eighteenth-century fictions by Manley and Haywood, and she is therefore unable to
distinguish between the prostitute masquerading as a young man and the royal figure
Arabella believes her to be.

Arabella tries to rescue the prostitute whom she imagines to be in danger of physical
attack. The ‘assault’ is actually merely an attempt by another visitor to the grounds to
unmask the disguised mistress and reveal her true gender rather than her dubious social
position. But Arabella is a reader of romances, not newspapers. She reads the scene
through the adventures of her favourite heroines as the artificial and flimsy scenery,
marking out the different walks in Vauxhall Gardens, is transformed into Arcadia and the
unfortunate prostitute – the strumpet of Addison’s essay in The Spectator, forty years
earlier – becomes the virtuous female in mortal danger of losing her life or, more gravely,
her good name. The Female Quixote offers a supreme example of misreading and of the
blurring of boundaries between life and art. In Vauxhall, Arabella projects her mental store
of fictional romances onto the unknown history of the female victim:

117 Charlotte Lennox, The Female Quixote, 1752, ed. Margaret Dalziel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
Lovely Unknown, said she to her with an Air of extreme Tenderness, tho’ I am a Stranger both to your name and History, yet your Aspect persuading me your Quality is not mean, and the Condition and Disguise in which I behold you, shewing that you are Unfortunate, permit me to offer all the Assistance in my Power.118

Arabella substitutes a romantic fiction for an equally falsely imagined personal history. She tries to lead the 'young lady' away from danger, much to the horror of her respectable companions, and asks her: "acquaint me with the History of your Misfortunes".119 By situating herself between different narratives, Arabella dissolves any idea of an essential or fixed identity, in a confusing mirroring of various myths and tales. She reads Vauxhall through her romantic fictions and misses what the reader of The Female Quixote comprehends: that the Vauxhall depicted in the narrative is both an evocation of the Gardens from an earlier period and, more problematically, a reflection of its contemporary reputation. It resembles the scene described by The Spectator, equivocating between an appreciation of its idyllic appeal and disapproval of some of the company to be found inside its grounds. Arabella is unable to see the latter because her perception has been obscured by an excessive consumption of romantic fiction. The reader of more acceptable novels, such as The Female Quixote, it is implied, is able to adjudicate between the genuine charm of Vauxhall Gardens and the moral irregularities that persist within its walls. The broader literary point, then, involves a reciprocal exchange: the Vauxhall that emerges through literary interpretation is actually a more dubious one than Arabella sees, and certainly a less respectable venue than Tyers’ contemporary pronouncements suggested. The gap between Arabella’s clouded vision and the sharper perception of the reader also throws the emphasis back on the role of fiction itself: the reader’s superior perspective implies that narratives like The Female Quixote are suitable reading material for the discerning individual. And yet, behind the humour lies the importance of the role that literature plays in increasing and confirming popular images associated with the Gardens – the impression that the grounds still presented considerable social risks. In certain respects, the fictional account aligns its position partly with newspaper reports of occasional scandalous incidents still taking place in London’s pleasure-grounds. It reflects and even shapes the reputation of an urban site whose grounds are familiar to the reader, but whose very familiarity also implicates the

118 The Female Quixote, p. 335-6.
119 Ibid., p. 336.
reader in its particular version of London’s more dubious pleasure resorts.

The construction of public identity in Vauxhall and Ranelagh

If the account of Vauxhall Gardens given by *The Female Quixote* throws light on the role of fiction in the cultivation of a particular character for London’s different urban venues, it could be equally said to emphasize the potential for disguise and shifting identity inside places like Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Although Arabella ultimately errs in mistaking a prostitute for a princess, her mistake is really only an exaggeration of other, equally ignorant observers; the lady is unmasked because a suspicious onlooker wishes to confirm that she is indeed a female masquerading as a man, and not because he believes her to be a common whore.

The constantly changing design of the Gardens, particularly in mid-century, reflected the theatrical nature of the grounds; ‘trompe l’oeil effects, proliferated from about 1750.’ At the North End of the Cross Walk, a huge landscape painting of ruins and running water bisected the Gardens, and the installation of a cascade of running water in the mid 1750s was a very popular attraction:

[B]y drawing up a curtain is shown a most beautiful landscape in perspective of a fine hilly country with a miller’s house and a water mill, all illuminated by concealed lights; but the principle object that strikes the eye is a cascade or water fall. The exact appearance of water is seen floating down a declivity...

The ‘drawing up’ of a curtain, and the exact ‘appearance’ of water all serve to underline the theatrical nature of the Gardens; the painted landscapes resemble the stage scenery of the playhouse. The construction of the rotunda and its annex was Tyers’ last personal alteration to the layout of Vauxhall Gardens before his death in 1762: ‘By using the illusory effect more commonly associated with the fantastic world of the theatre, Tyers had created a remarkable spectacle sensitive to the later vagaries of style and fashion.’

While the topography and design of the Gardens fostered the kind of urban roleplaying commonly associated with the anonymity of the city and the sheer variety of its venues, the actual architecture of the Grounds also provided material examples of the metaphors frequently ascribed to the construction of social and personal identity. In an earlier chapter

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120 Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 20.
121 *A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens*, p. 9.
122 Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 22.
on the London playhouse, I cited the ponderings of a cynical spectator, bemused by the narcissism rife in the city’s public venues.

An old dry Gentleman, who sat by me the other Night in the Pit, was proposing a Scheme to exclude these pretty Fellows from the Scenes, and with their own Consent: He was saying, that if you wou’d fix up a Looking-glass in every Box, it wou’d certainly draw ’em to that Part of the House; for the double Pleasure of seeing themselves, and being seen and admir’d by the Ladies there, wou’d be preferrable to that, of being seen only, and not admir’d, on the Stage.123

The idea of including mirrors as part of the interior architecture of the London theatre suggests that the looking-glass is only a physical and material manifestation of the familiar and timeless social phenomenon to be found in the vast metropolis: the desire to see, and, more significantly, to be seen, in the city’s most popular venues; the shifting public identity adapted to fit the image reflected in the gaze of others. The implication is that there is no essential, core identity, but rather, a ceaseless mirroring back and forth of projections and reflections constructed in the looks of social observers. To absorb visually one’s surroundings while inventing oneself as an object for public scrutiny by means of mutual reflection is the ultimate social achievement in London’s pleasure gardens. The absence of subjectivity, and therefore responsibility, gives way to a train of visual mobility, where seduction is reduced to the moving back and forth of a reciprocal gaze. The figurative use of mirrors to describe the simulation of social identity was famously deployed by Hume, in an early examination of the origin of ‘pleasure’ in his Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40):

In general we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each others emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may often be reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees.124

It is impossible to trace the original source of the endless reflections which precipitate the constantly modifying adjustments to one’s public urban identity. But while Hume’s figurative employment of the mirror was meant to convey a sense of the construction of sociability, one can also trace an historical and material basis for the popular metaphor inspired by the properties of the looking-glass.

In his classic study *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling puts an historical gloss on Jacques Lacan's formulation of the emergence of the concepts of selfhood and interiority:

The individual looks into mirrors, larger and much brighter than those that were formerly held up to magistrates. The French psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan believes that the development of the 'Je' was advanced by the manufacture of mirrors: again it cannot be decided whether man's belief that he is a 'Je' is the result of the Venetian craftsmen's having learned to make plate-glass or whether the demand for looking-glasses stimulated this technological success ... His conception of his private and uniquely interesting individuality, together with his impulse to reveal his self, to demonstrate that in which it is to be admired and trusted, are, we may believe, his response to the newly available sense of an audience, of that public which society created.125

In fact, Trilling's understanding of the mirror image as a stage in the development of human consciousness and identity is based partly on a misreading of Lacan,126 but the idea of the looking-glass as an historically significant factor for a way of understanding and talking about human identity is a provocative one. Lorna Weatherill's study of changing patterns of material consumption during the eighteenth century draws attention to the increase in ownership of mirrors in the city: 'Looking glasses were more widely distributed but they were three times as frequently in London as in rural areas.'127 She comments further: 'Looking glasses, suggestive of a certain self-awareness and a desire to set the atmosphere of rooms, were three times as common in the dealers' inventories as in those of yeomen, suggesting a greater aesthetic awareness on the part of those in the non-agricultural sector.'128 As a desirable object of luxury, the mirror encouraged a certain social self-consciousness, which was most prevalent in fashionable towns and cities, particularly London.

In Lockman's *Sketch of the Spring-Gardens*, the author offers the following description of the interior of the rotunda:

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128 Ibid., p. 189.
There were sixteen sash Windows, the Frames whereof ... are in an elegant Style of Carving ... Likewise, the Frames of sixteen oval Looking-Glasses, with two-arm'd Sconces. In all those Glasses the Spectator, when standing under the Balls of the grand Chandelier, might see himself reflected at once, to his pleasing Wonder.129

The Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens presents a similar scene:

Round the rotunda is a convenient seat. Above are sixteen white busts of eminent persons... a little higher are sixteen oval looking glases, ... if the spectator stands in the centre which is under the great chandelier, he may see himself reflected in all these glasses.130

The circular designs of some of the walks, and the strategic placing of mirrors around the interior of the rotunda helped to foster a narcissistic expectation and satisfaction of pleasure. The visitor literally sees him or herself reflected in the immediate surroundings, which replicate architecturally the construction of the individual’s sense of identity.

Social pleasure is translated into specular phenomenon. The pleasure garden is designed especially to cultivate the pleasures of seeing and being seen. David Solkin remarks that the later pictures displayed at Vauxhall laid an ‘unprecedented emphasis ... on the activity of viewing, as opposed to other forms of polite pleasure (notably music) ... With the completion of Tyers’ rebuilding programme, the overall balance of Vauxhall’s attractions shifted away from the aural in the direction of the visual’.131 The architecture, flimsy scenery and sudden diversions are all aids to a social interaction of the gaze. A notable literary illustration of this occurs in Henry Fielding's Amelia (1752), where the virtuous heroine is menaced, in Vauxhall Gardens, not by physical aggression as she might have been earlier in the century, but by a relentless stare.

Interestingly, Amelia is strictly forbidden to attend Ranelagh by her husband, Captain Booth, although, as Terry Castle has pointed out, it is the masquerade being held there to which he objects. The persistent Mrs. Ellison unsuccessfully attempts to persuade an inflexible Booth to permit his wife to visit Ranelagh: ‘You can’t conceive what a charming elegant, delicious Place it is – Paradise itself can hardly be equal to it.’132 The clichés

130 A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens, p. 21.
131 Solkin, Painting for Money, pp. 133-34.
employed by Mrs Ellison – Ranelagh exceeds comparison with Paradise – suggest a kind of social banality, indicating, as The Female Spectator did, that, as the more respectable of the two most popular London pleasure gardens, it is frequently visited and endlessly debated by a social band of more polite visitors. But surprisingly, and in contradiction to the popular image of Ranelagh, Amelia is not permitted to attend that particular venue. She is however, allowed to visit Vauxhall. In a reprise of his journalistic role as writer for The Champion and The Gentleman’s Magazine, Fielding once more lavishes praise on the Spring-Gardens. ‘The extreme Beauty and Elegance of this Place is well known to almost every one of my Readers; and happy is it for me that it is so; since to give an adequate Idea of it, would exceed my power of Description’.133 Fielding, of course, has already attempted such a description in the articles he had written ten years earlier. The reference to ‘my Readers’ doubles for both the original essays and for his novel, Amelia.

A company of seven visits Vauxhall, including Booth, his children and a clergyman, Dr Harrison; the last two bear out Tyers’ intentions to make the Gardens appear more conducive to the presence of respectable families. Amelia is impressed by the grounds and enthuses: ‘I was just now lost in a Reverie, and fancied myself on those blissful Mansions which we hope to enjoy hereafter.’134 But although Vauxhall is the favoured resort in the novel, what takes place there is a powerful illustration of the power of the gaze which governs social behaviour inside the grounds. As Booth temporarily disappears, Amelia sits down, any fears allayed by the fact that there are three other men to chaperone her in, what is for her, a slightly inappropriate urban setting. As she sits eating, presumably in one of the boxes which contained the paintings that permitted unashamed and outright staring, Amelia is subjected to what amounts to a visual assault. One member of the group of young rakes addresses Harrison as he situates himself opposite his female victim:

‘Doctor, sit up a little, if you please, and don’t take up more Room in a Bed than belongs to you.’ At which words, he gave the young Man a Push, and seated himself down directly over-against Amelia, and leaning both his Elbows on the Table, he fixed his Eyes on her in a Manner with which Modesty can neither look, nor bear to be looked at.135

Amelia is rendered passive, unable to return the gaze of a menacing ogler. Harrison

133 Ibid., p. 393.
134 Ibid., p. 395.
135 Ibid., p. 396.
interposes himself between Amelia and the offending party. The modest heroine’s virtue remains intact as she is prevented from reciprocating the stare of her brazen admirer. She avoids the specular transgressions which dominate social gatherings in London’s public venue by managing to avert her eyes from the mirror-image of herself as temptress, formulated in the gaze of her would-be seducer, countering the social construction of self in the sense of ‘seeing and being seen’. Fortunately, Booth returns in time to prevent a more violent altercation breaking out, but the incident itself is sufficient to modify an otherwise idealized portrait of Vauxhall Gardens which would appear to mirror closely Fielding’s earlier writings on the subject.

While Fielding seems, at times, to be borrowing himself, many of the later literary references to London’s more fashionable pleasure reprise commonly established popular impressions of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, as well as their less polite imitations in other parts of the city. For instance, Oliver Goldsmith’s Chinese correspondent in The Citizen of the World (1762) expresses his delight at Vauxhall through familiar recourse to Addison’s early image in The Spectator:

All conspires to fill my imagination with the visionary happiness of the Arabian lawgiver, and lifted me into an extasy of admiration. Head of Confucius, cried I to my friend, this is fine! this unites rural beauty with courtly magnificence, if we except the virgins of immortality that hang on every tree, and may be plucked at every degree, I don’t see how this falls short of Mahomet’s Paradise.

But it is not only exact and identifiable phrases which resonate in later literary works. Certain impressions and associations gradually evolve through repetition, across time, in different literary works. The diligent reader learns to recognize internal echoes and construct a reading of literary London, where fictional representations of the metropolis generate their own collective urban code, despite the different stories and wider agendas of otherwise unrelated stories. A natural and chronological culmination of this kind of

136 This episode curiously anticipates a real episode which achieved notoriety two decades after the novel’s first appearance. In 1773, a violent incident, popularly called The Vauxhall Affray, became a national cause célèbre. On the evening of July 23, the Reverend Henry Bate was sitting in the company of the actress Mrs. Hartley, when a group of of young male visitors sat down opposite her in attempt to stare her into submission. When the young clergyman rose to defend his female charge, he became involved in a complicated series of events during which he floored the footman representing the main offender, Mr. George Fitzgerald, in Turk’s Head Coffee House in the Strand. For a fuller discussion of this incident, which considers its implications in terms of gender and the economy of the gaze, see Kristina Straub, Sexual Suspects, pp. 16-22.


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‘reading’ is, I suggest, the significance of the appearance of London’s pleasure gardens in Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778). One of the earliest urban sites which Evelina breathlessly describes from London to her guardian, who lives in the country, is Ranelagh Gardens. As a later eighteenth-century novel, *Evelina*’s inclusion of Ranelagh, Vauxhall and Marylebone Gardens seems as important for the sequence of visits as for the events which take place in the respective grounds.

Evelina first attends Ranelagh. As the heroine is constantly shown to be naturally attuned to aristocratic taste and sensibilities, this visit is a fairly untroubled affair, and is marked by the silent, but increasing awareness of Lord Orville’s presence. Evelina is charmed by Ranelagh’s design, while the famous Rotunda provides a perfect opportunity for mutual visual attraction.

The very first person I saw was Lord Orville. I felt so confused! - but he did not see me. After tea, Mrs Mirvan being tired, Maria and I walked round the room alone. Then again we saw him, standing by the orchestra. We, too, stopt to hear a singer. He bowed to me; I courtsied, and I am sure I coloured. We soon walked on, not liking our situation; however, he did not follow us, and when we past by the orchestra again, he was gone.138

Like silent actors, each party genuflects in a mirroring of each other’s social graces, differing only according to gender. In this passage, it is clear that, already at this early stage, Evelina is drawn to Lord Orville as she identifies him immediately in the crowd. She is therefore, rather disconcerted by his sudden disappearance from the scene: without verbal exchange, Orville is free to depart as quickly as he arrived.

But Evelina’s appearance at Ranelagh, and Lord Orville’s observation of her there, is significant in the light of the literary reputation Ranelagh had established as a marriage market for the eligible bachelor; Evelina worries about Orville’s opinion of her and takes his departure as a sign of his lack of interest or misunderstanding of her character. Interestingly, when she visits Vauxhall Gardens, later in the novel, she does not meet Orville. Evelina’s aristocratic tastes are communicated through a depiction of Vauxhall Gardens, which places an emphasis on the residual scandalous reputation of the Gardens’ dark Walks; her description of the grounds ignores the veneer of respectability cultivated by Tyers. She becomes separated from her group and accidentally wanders into the obscure terrain of the notorious Lovers’ Walks, where she is first manhandled and then recognized

by a shocked Sir Clement Willoughby.

‘By heaven,’ cried he with warmth, ‘you distract me, – why, tell me, – why do I see you here? – Is this a place for Miss Anville? – these dark walks! – no party! – no companion! – by all that is good, I can scarce believe my senses!’

Evelina’s hitherto impeccable reputation is threatened by her topographical meanderings. Mr. Branghton’s exclamation: 'The long alleys! ... and, pray, what had you to do in the long alleys? Why, to be sure, you must all of you have had a mind to be affronted!’ insinuates that Evelina’s veering off into an area known for its breaches of social decorum discloses a latent transgressive streak. All this proves very distressing for Evelina, particularly when the rest of the group similarly berate her for abandoning her female companions, or for merely acting foolishly. The sole comfort is that Lord Orville is not present to obeserve her shame; Vauxhall does not provide such suitable wives as Ranelagh.

Evelina’s final ignominy is reserved for Marylebone Gardens. This particular resort featured rarely in literary works of the period, probably because it did not have the same social cachet as either Vauxhall and Ranelagh. That Evelina agrees to visit its grounds is an indication that things are about to go awry; Marylebone Gardens may have become a more acceptable venue for polite company, but its traditional associations, not to say its notable absence from earlier novels, suggested otherwise. What complicates matters is that Lord Orville is present to witness her embarrassment.

Evelina becomes accidentally caught up in the company of two prostitutes in Marylebone Gardens, a distressing turn of events which is made all the more mortifying when her admirer eventually acknowledges that he has seen her. In a distortion of the visual games which took place between Evelina and Orville at Ranelagh, the young heroine experiences anguish at the prospect of ‘being seen’ in her present, indecorous circumstances; likewise, Orville sees that Evelina has noticed him observing both her and the prostitutes. The latter commend Evelina on possessing ‘a monstrous good stare, for a little country miss’. In what Ruth Bernard Yeazell calls the ‘awkward recognition

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139 Ibid., p. 197.
140 Ibid., p. 200.
142 Burney, Evelina, p. 234.
scene’, the two protagonists struggle to evade and establish eye contact. Evelina must keep her gaze constantly on Orville in order to ascertain that he has not noticed her.

But what, good heaven! were my emotions, when a few moments afterwards, I perceived advancing our way, — Lord Orville! Never shall I forget what I felt at that instant: had I, indeed, been sunk to the guilty state, which such companions might lead him to suspect, I could scarce have had feelings more cruelly depressing. However, to my infinite joy, he passed us without distinguishing me; though I saw that, in a careless manner, his eyes surveyed the party.¹⁴³

Orville’s casual glance is, of course, Evelina’s interpretation of events in Marylebone Gardens, but it does seem possible that Orville might have failed to notice her because she is situated in an unexpected social context; one does not look for wives in Marylebone Gardens. On the other hand, his own sensibilities would require him to ignore the less virtuous female population circling the grounds, although what he is doing there himself is slightly less clear. When Orville eventually approaches Evelina in Marylebone Gardens, it is only after her presence has been partly vindicated by her reunion with the uncouth but essentially morally safe Madame Duval and Branghtons.

And this was our situation, — for we had not taken three steps, when, — O Sir, — we again met Lord Orville! — but not again did he pass quietly by us, — unhappily I caught his eye; — both mine, immediately, were bent to the ground; but he approached me, and we all stopped. I then looked up. He bowed. Good God, with what expressive eyes did he regard me! Never were surprise and concern so strongly marked, — yes, my dear Sir, he looked greatly concerned.¹⁴⁴

In slightly more worthy company, Lord Orville is free to demonstrate his moral sensibilities without tarnishing his impeccable reputation through association with the town’s whores.

The specific and extended pleasure-garden scenes in Evelina seem to acquire an independent narrative pattern, which corresponds to the grander plot of the novel. Earlier novelistic representations of Vauxhall and Ranelagh are mostly relevant to the immediate context in which they appear, and acquire emblematic importance through similar deployment in different works. But the intermittent yet sequential plotting of Ranelagh, Vauxhall and Marylebone Gardens in Evelina seems to have a purposeful narrative tension of its own. The heroine appears appropriately at Ranelagh and is seen by Lord Orville,

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 234.
¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 235.
marking her out her as a possible future candidate for marriage. She commits a social *faux pas* at Vauxhall when she fails to read its topography correctly, but fortunately Orville is not there to witness her error. However, a near-catastrophic misreading of character in Marylebone threatens the very terminus of the plot: by consorting with prostitutes, Evelina has all but destroyed her chances of proving herself a suitable wife for Lord Orville. The narrative sequence of the pleasure gardens follows the general plot of the novel. Although matters are resolved eventually – Evelina marries Lord Orville, thus retroactively confirming the impressions formulated earlier in Ranelagh – the temporary crisis is conveyed, even activated, through London’s moral geographical code.

The canny ability to decipher this urban code is predicated on the superimposition and accumulation of previous literary allusions to London’s pleasure gardens. Although each novel has its own agenda to pursue and story to unfold, the topographical echoes and imitations differ only according to the context in which they are placed. Although the fictional representation of Vauxhall and Ranelagh changed gradually over time, partly reflecting a transformation in the reputation of the grounds but also a dialectical shift in genres and literary and cultural sensibilities, for the most part, their reading of London’s pleasure gardens shared many assumptions concerning their moral social significance.

All of which made it difficult to distinguish the ‘real’ Vauxhall and Ranelagh from their fictional interpretations. Internal literary allusions contradicted other discursive forms like respectable, official descriptions of the gardens, or the newspapers which continued to play mercilessly on the scandal traditionally associated with the Gardens. Fiction often occupied a middle ground between these polarized attitudes, painting a different picture of the same place, and negotiating a more equivocal interpretation of the pleasure-grounds. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), where the reader is given two different epistolary accounts of Ranelagh and Vauxhall. Lydia Melford describes both of them to a friend:

All that you read of wealth and grandeur in the Arabian Night’s Entertainment, and the Persian Tales ... is here realized.

Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving and gilding, enlightened with a thousand golden lamps, that emulate the noon-day sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair; glittering with the cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones.145

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The familiar reference to the *Arabian Nights* and *Persian Tales* show that Lydia tends to read London through other literary works. She mentions the famous castrato Tenducci – ‘a thing from Italy’ who gives a stirring performance in Ranelagh. The singer looks ‘for all the world like a man, though they say it is not. The voice to be sure, is more melodious than either; and it warbled so divinely, that, while I listened, I really thought myself in Paradise.’

Lydia similarly rhapsodizes about Vauxhall:

> Image to yourself ... a spacious garden, part laid out in delightful walks, bounded with high hedges and trees, and paved with gravel; part exhibiting a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottoes, lawns, temples, and cascades; porticoes, colonades, and rotundos; adorned with pillars, statues, and painting: the whole illuminated with an infinite number of lamps, disposed in different figures of suns, stars and constellations.

Lydia’s description of Vauxhall follows that of her uncle’s:

> Vauxhall is a composition of baubles, overcharged with paltry ornaments, ill conceived, and poorly executed; without any unity of design, or propriety of disposition. It is an unnatural assembly of objects fantastically illuminated in broken masses; seemingly contrived to dazzle the eyes and divert the imagination of the vulgar – Here a wooden lion, there a stone statue; in one place, a range of things like coffee-house boxes, covered a-top; in another, a parcel of ale-house benches; in a third, a puppet-shew repetition of a tin cascade ... The walks, which nature seems to have intended for solitude, shade and silence, are filled with crowds of noisy people, sucking up the nocturnal rheums of an aguish climate.

Bramble spleenetically conveys a Vauxhall stripped it of any enchantment. Strategically placed immediately prior to Lydia’s effusive praise, his jaundiced view casts a sceptical haze over his niece’s description, making her remarks seem more like a composite of stale clichés and liftings from a large body of literary comment on London’s pleasure gardens. Bramble’s assessment, by virtue of its stark cynicism, appears the more accurate of the two. His is a description devoid of any imagination. By removing himself from the

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146 Ibid., p. 92. The familiar gender confusion evoked by the sight and sound of the castrato aligns the crowd at Ranelagh with the more polite audience to be found, at this time, at the Opera House.

147 Ibid., p. 93.

148 Ibid., p. 89.
plethora of myths and platitudes that have gradually accumulated over time, he sees the gardens in their bare materiality, as a collection of artificial ruins and flimsy sets.

But the epistolarity of *Humphry Clinker* also offers its readers a choice: they are free to choose between Bramble's critical debunking and Lydia's hyperbole. The point is that there is no single 'correct' version of the city and its pleasure-grounds. Malcolm Warner's observation that '[h]istorians of London are constantly disappointed by the failure of visual documents to correspond to what they know, from more reliable sources, to have been fact' points to the disjunction between artistic depictions and more straightforward reportage. The idea that pictorial representations of the metropolis are detached from any fixed topographical or historical sources corresponds to the endless mirroring of literary depictions and alternative, competing versions of the same place, an impression nicely illustrated in *Humphry Clinker*. Any portrayal of the city's pleasure gardens seems to be partly constructed out of an endlessly receding series of earlier descriptions.

And yet, not all literary genres could be said to be equally subject to the charge of echoing and mirroring other descriptions of London. In a way, what makes Matthew Bramble's description of Ranelagh and Vauxhall strikingly memorable is its satirical tone. It could be said that so long as London's pleasure gardens were unable to shake off their associations with scandal and social transgression, they were always going to be prey for the satirist. It is significant, perhaps, that, unlike the playhouse or Italian opera, London's pleasure gardens never properly established a polite or respectable reputation. And it may be for this reason that neither Vauxhall nor Ranelagh appear in any major sentimental novel. Whereas the pathos of *opera seria* and the theatricality of public social performances meant that there was a place for Italian opera and the urban playhouse in the literature of sensibility, the same could not be said of the London pleasure garden. It was still too tainted by its association with illicit affairs and liaisons, in the popular imagination, to be incorporated by sentimental fiction, which was distinguished by its belief in man's inherent goodness and purity of heart.

The satirist, on the other hand, steps back from the fray in order to assess the social codes being enacted inside the gardens. In 1747 Joseph Warton's critique of Ranelagh performed this task by writing from an unusual aerial perspective. The narrator is lifted high above the grounds of Ranelagh, by the devil, in order to gain a better view of the petty scheming of scoundrels and whores promenading inside the Rotunda: 'Said the Devil, I am

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glad to see so many of my Votaries assembled here. Here's food for laughter! Let us get up into yonder Gallery, from whence we may survey each single person as they walk by in the Great Circle.'¹⁵⁰ This superior vision is not often achieved in literary treatments of the Pleasure Gardens. Often they are bound by the necessarily limited vision of an epistolary framework, as in Humphrey Clinker, The Citizen of the World and Evelina. The epistolary novel was the ideal genre for defamiliarizing the delights of London’s pleasures: the device of describing familiar urban venues as novelties to untutored addressees delighted self-regarding consumers of novels. The epistolary novel was not the only kind of writing which offered a deliberately narrow perspective. Fielding’s narrator, usually the most omniscient of commentators is curiously absent from description of Vauxhall in Amelia. What these novels share is a more insular perspective, and they look to each other for literary examples of, and general attitude to, their subject.

In 1848, William Thackeray included a chapter, entitled ‘Vauxhall’, in his novel Vanity Fair. In this chapter, the narrator, typically flaunting his omniscience, constructs a running meta-narrative explaining his strategic use of Vauxhall. Set in the early nineteenth century, the Vauxhall depicted in Vanity Fair has passed its prime, but its reputation for forming unlikely liaisons and alliances remains unchallenged. Jos Sedley and Becky Sharp are sent down a dark alleyway by Thackeray in order to give them the greatest opportunity for a proposal of marriage:

But when Miss Rebecca Sharp and her stout companion lost themselves in a solitary walk, in which there were not above five score more of couples similarly straying, they both felt that the situation was extremely tender and critical, and now or never was the moment, Miss Sharp thought.¹⁵¹

Thackeray’s inclusion of Vauxhall as a plot device that fails to work is a wry reworking and atavistic deployment of a quintessential urban space from the previous century, and relies on a large body of eighteenth-century texts for its efficacy. The parodying of an overused topographical setting therefore has a firmer, more traceable basis for its use of familiar territory than its own literary sources. Thackeray succeeds in establishing an obvious starting point for his scathing satire. Earlier literary delineations, be they fictional narratives, periodical pieces or paintings are less easy to trace amidst the ‘endless

mirroring' which characterizes both the identities of the visitors to London's Pleasure Gardens and the texts in which they appear.
‘Men of Business, or Men of Pleasure’: The London Coffee-House

But as from th’ top of Pauls high steeple
Th’ whole City’s view’d, even so all people
May here be seen.

*The Character of a Coffee House, by an Eye and Ear Witness*, 1665

I am a Scotchman at Forrest’s, a Frenchman at Slaughter’s, and at the Cocoa-Tree I am – an Englishman.

*The Connoisseur* No. 1, 1754

In 1717, on her way to Constantinople, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote a letter to the Countess of Bristol, comparing English with Turkish town life. From Adrianople, she describes the absolute dominance of the military over other nominal forms of leadership.

‘Even the Grand Signor’, she writes, ‘is as much a slave as any of his Subjects.’¹ Political hierarchy expresses itself through the control of and access to speech: ‘Here is, indeed, a much greater appearance of Subjection than among us. A minister of state is not to be spoken to, but upon the Knee.’² Obsequious genuflection is only part of a régime intent on suppressing potentially seditious and therefore punishable talk. The city’s centres for social gatherings are also subject to constant surveillance and severe retribution:

Should a reflexion on his conduct be dropp’d in a Coffee-house (for they have spys everywhere), the House would be raz’d to the Ground, and perhaps the whole Company put to the Torture. No Huzzaing Mobs, senseless Pamphlets, and Tavern disputes about Politics.³

The coffee-houses are infiltrated by secret, anonymous informants, who, by taking advantage of the unrestrained qualifications for entry, create an uneasy mixture of conviviality, guarded conversation and persistent suspicion.

Lady Mary’s vignettes of life in Adrianople are illuminating for the reciprocal light they

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¹ *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1, p. 322.
² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 322.
³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 322.
shed on the eighteenth-century London coffee-house. Her descriptions are significant for the way in which they reaffirm the Oriental provenance of the urban coffee-house; like Vauxhall and Ranelagh, whose exotic origins were absorbed into the strange and distinctive mixture of garish ostentation and other-worldliness that made a visit to the pleasure gardens almost a *sine qua non* of the eighteenth-century London experience, the city coffee-house also boasted its Turkish ancestry while simultaneously fashioning itself an identity as a quintessential urban, social venue.

Montagu’s gender also offers the reader a vivid and original account of the local Turkish culture from the unfamiliar, alternative perspective of the female traveller. Her information concerning the men’s coffee-houses is garnered from second-hand sources: as a woman, she is prevented from entering any coffee-house in Turkey; the Oriental coffee-house was, according to Ralph Hattox, ‘a world strictly of men’. The enclosed space of male sociability created an environment where the popular practice of exchanging tales quickly became a custom of ‘relating stories about others, particularly about women’. Montagu’s more detailed reports are drawn from her personal and direct experience of the strictly female social areas of the city, in particular the harem and the bath-houses. The latter she delightfully defines in opposition to the male resorts of pleasure and entertainment: ‘In short, it is the Women’s coffee-house, where all the news of the Town is told, Scandal invented, &c.’ Montagu’s conception of these female social spaces as the ‘Women’s coffee-house’ uses the same language of privilege and exclusivity that sets the men’s coffee-houses apart for male, homosocial company. She writes: ‘’Tis no less than Death for a Man to be found in one of these places.’ And if the Oriental coffee-house is the male locus for the exchange of gossip and defamatory stories about females, the women’s own space furnishes them with an opportunity to enjoy their own fictional embellishments and fabrications – ‘Scandal invented’. Moreover, women are allowed a greater freedom of

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6 Ibid., p. 108.

7 Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 314. [my italics].

8 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 315.
speech, as various forms of careless talk and tattle are liberally exchanged without fear of political or social repercussions and reprisals.

Montagu’s personal documentation of the spatial demarcations governed by gender provides an interesting point of departure for an examination of the role that the eighteenth-century London coffee-house played in the construction of a contemporary sense of urban identity. Montagu’s detailed vignettes support the central thesis of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. In his book, Said posits the idea that ‘[t]he Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is ... the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other’. Montagu’s Turkish letters appear to confirm the construction of one culture through the social and civilizing customs of another. Through her description of the homosociality of local coffee-houses and her reading of the private female spaces that challenge the conventional power of male conviviality, Montagu underlines the very features that have traditionally been said to characterize contemporary coffee-houses in London – the idea that they too constitute a public arena for all-male sociability. But one can also discern a dialectical relationship at play here. In 1714 Montagu wrote a piece for *The Spectator* (No. 573) in which she responded to Addison’s earlier invention in No. 561 of the *Widows-Club*, a gathering of women who enjoyed life no longer fettered by the restraints of matrimony. The notion of a group of women brought together and intentionally separated from the public male sphere underlines Montagu’s perception of London as spatially divided along gendered lines. Although she was admitted into the urbane pages of *The Spectator* by virtue of her wit and literary talent, her gender prevented her from actually attending the social space on which the periodical modelled its precepts of polite sociability. Lady Mary’s allusions to the ‘women’s coffee-house’, and her political reference to the male meeting-places in Adrianople, suggest residual prejudices and resentment from her proscription from coffee-houses in London, which are brought to bear on her account of cultural life in Adrianople.

There have been various attempts by twentieth-century critics to read the eighteenth-century coffee-house as a crucial locus for the transformation and establishment of a new

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public sphere in English society. These accounts are each, in their own way, illuminating for the way in which they demonstrate how the urban coffee-house played a key role in the cultivation of a new, polite, urban culture. However, they all seem to rely heavily on the same secondary sources on which many of their shared premisses are based. The circular and repetitious use of the same second-hand material means that many cultural assumptions go unquestioned. White and Stallybrass readily admit that they rely almost exclusively on Aytoun Ellis’s history of the coffee-house, *The Penny Universities*, which was published in 1956. Similarly, Markman Ellis has suggested that Jürgen Habermas relies on a ‘restricted range of generalist secondary texts of the English coffee-house’ and that his account of the coffee-house is ‘filtered through the Victorian coffee-house historians, thus reflecting the model of sociability of the Spectatorial reformed coffee-house’. More recently, critics have begun to challenge the shared presuppositions of critics like Habermas, Terry Eagleton, Stallybrass and White, the foremost of which is the exclusion of women from the London coffee-house. Stephen Pincus writes that ‘there is every reason to believe that women frequently attended the newly fashionable coffee-houses’, citing Martha Lady Giffard, sister of Sir William Temple and Lady Ranelagh, sister of Robert Hooke as just two examples of female habituées of the London coffee-house. Likewise, Emma Clery, Helen Berry and Markman Ellis have also contested the prevailing

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14 Aytoun Ellis writes in 1956 that, ‘[f]or the first time in history the sexes had divided ... since women were not allowed in the coffee-houses’, *The Penny Universities*, p. 88. This statement appears to establish the official line on women and the eighteenth-century coffee-house which is accepted and unchallenged by Eagleton, Stallybrass and White.

15 Stephen Pincus, ‘“Coffee Politicians Does Create”’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture’, 807-34, *The Journal of Modern History* 67 (December 1995), pp. 815-16. Pincus’s main contention is that the notion of a public sphere emerged at the end of the seventeenth century, rather than at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Habermas suggests. He also argues that ‘coffeehouses were ubiquitous and widely patronized in Restoration England, Scotland, and Ireland’, p. 811.
notion that no women were admitted into London’s coffee-houses.\footnote{Emma Clery, ‘Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth’ 168-77, \textit{Woman: A Cultural Review}, 2 (1991) 2; Ellis, ‘The coffee-women’; Helen Berry, "‘Nice and Curious Questions’: Coffee Houses and the Representations of Women in John Dunton’s \textit{Athenian Mercury}, 257-276, \textit{Seventeenth Century}, 12 (1997) 2.} That many women ‘kept’ coffee-houses is also clear from the exhaustive and encyclopaedic listings of Bryant Lillywhite.\footnote{Bryant Lillywhite, \textit{London Coffee Houses: A Reference of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries}, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963).} However, there is also a tendency in these later studies, in Clery’s and Berry’s in particular, to conflate historical document, newspaper and anti-coffee petitions (of questionable veracity) with literary treatment of this fundamentally urban site.\footnote{This is, of course, intentional. Berry points out that ‘[alternative sources from popular print culture ... provide rare and valuable (though not unproblematic) representations of the lives of ordinary women’, ‘Nice and Curious Questions’, p. 257. Clery writes: ‘the bourgeoisified body of the coffee-house frequenter was itself notably discursive ... fought over and reformulated in the printed pages of broadsheets like the “Women’s Petition” and periodicals like the \textit{Spectator}, ‘Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth’, p. 174.} The sources of these revised interpretations of the London coffee-house seem often to fall within the nebulous category of ‘cultural’ documents. Fictional representation is absorbed into other, less distinctive and precise forms of discourse.\footnote{Markman Ellis, for instance, describes \textit{The Velvet Coffee Woman} (1728) as ‘something between a whore’s biography and a scandalous biography’, ‘The coffee-women’, p. 8. In other words, a mixture of factual and fictional titillation.}

This chapter focuses on the literary depiction of the eighteenth-century London coffee-house, in particular, the way in which fictional representation creates its own agenda and attitude to the coffee-house. Larry Stewart has pointed out the role that coffee-houses played in the publicizing and dissemination of the Royal Society’s scientific discoveries as well as bringing together scientist, financial backers and other interested parties:

\textit{On an empirical level, Newtonianism entered the world of practical men through the efforts of a few individuals who refused to limit themselves to the disputes with Leibniz. The points of contact were initially found in the coffee-houses that brought entrepreneurs and financiers together with the wits and politicians of London and Westminster.\footnote{Larry Stewart, \textit{The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660-1750}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. xxviii.} However it is not my intention here to pursue the historical recording of organizations like the Royal Society, whose meetings, Londa Schiebinger suggests, significantly excluded women both physically and metaphorically from the sphere of science and public}
knowledge, thus perpetuating the symbolic barring of women from London’s coffee-houses.21 Bearing in mind the attempts by new studies to revise and rectify popular impressions, the reflection in fiction of the older stereotypes is significant for the way in which it generates internal echoes that contradict other, more recent historical evidence which seems to point to different conclusions. The confirmation that women actually did attend London’s coffee-houses prompts the reader to look again at Montagu’s letters: although her description of the separation of male and female spheres is conveyed through the institution of the coffee-house, her writing seems, in retrospect, less accurate reportage than impressions inflected by the image of the London coffee-house in the eighteenth-century popular imagination.

I am concerned less with the issue of gender than the representation and construction of a particular London identity through the eighteenth-century coffee-house. The discrepancy between literary and other portrayals of the position of women vis-à-vis the coffee-house typifies the way that fiction tries to shape the identity of an important urban venue. The title of this chapter: ‘Men of Business, or Men of Pleasure’, taken from a pamphlet entitled The Case Between the Proprietors of News-Papers, and the Coffee-Men of London and Westminster & c., (1729) suggests different points of emphasis.22 On the one hand, it indicates a gender bias, and I will be examining the persistence of the image of the excluded female who is traduced by the male visitors in her absence, in the literature of the period. But the fickleness implied by the choice – men of business or pleasure – also denotes an unanchored identity contingent on geography for a temporary semblance of personality; the City governs ‘business’ while ‘pleasure’ is popularly considered to be the preserve of the Town. I will be exploring the way in which the different and distinct characters of London’s numerous coffee-houses provide their visitors with a provisional urban identity. I argue that a polite, masculine sensibility is articulated through the representation of the coffee-houses in the pages of the early periodicals, in particular, The Tatler and The Spectator. I go on to demonstrate how later fictional delineations of the coffee-house are variations on themes established in the earlier part of the century: the separate identities of individual establishments and the barring of women from fictional coffee-houses are used


to comment on the associations of urban anonymity, as well as the marginalized position of women in the public sphere. Finally, I will show how the recuperation of female reputation, in the coffee-houses of sentimental literature, expresses a shift in cultural sensibilities, from earlier urbane, masculine respectability towards a more feminine, bourgeois sentimental respectability.

The relationship between the London coffee-house and different forms of urban writing is an integral part of this study. The "exchange of information" facilitated by the gathering of disparate male customers, made the coffee-house a perfect medium for emergent literary genres like the newspaper and the periodical. The London coffee-house provided the perfect conduit for the distribution and dissemination of newspapers as well as the reciprocal and self-reflexive function of furnishing the columns with scenes and vignettes taken from the very houses in which they were read. Novelistic treatment, on the other hand, by virtue of its particular presentation of the London coffee-house, comments obliquely on the identity of its readership. Through these different forms of writing we can trace what Roy Porter has termed an "aesthetic of the urban".

The London coffee-house and the early eighteenth-century periodical

"The vogue of the coffee-house in London", writes Bryant Lillywhite, "reached its zenith during the eighteenth century". Although the coffee-house began to appear in London in the previous century, its representation as a place for the construction of a new, polite, urban sociability gradually emerged in the pages of early eighteenth-century periodicals like The Tatler and The Spectator. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have discussed the concept of the public sphere and its relationship with different forms of "discursive space". Using ideas drawn from cultural materialism and Foucauldian theory, they examine the creation of new social spaces like the pleasure gardens and the coffee-house as "the emergence of new public sites of discourse" through which "new kinds of speech can be traced". This approach is helpful insofar as it recognizes the material conditions which are influential, even integral, to the development of new forms of writing. Habermas also underlines the relationship between writing and place: "the new periodical

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27 Ibid., p. 80.
was so intimately interwoven with the life of the coffee houses that the individual issues were indeed sufficient basis for its reconstruction. As critics have pointed out, the essays in periodicals like The Tatler and The Spectator performed a regulatory function of excluding from its pages the less salubrious establishments favoured by other urban writers. Theirs’ was no peripatetic tour of London’s coffee-houses and taverns in the style of Ned Ward’s colourful and grubby London Spy (1698-1709). In that earlier work, the reader is led by the narrator into a riotous coffee-house scene:

Accordingly, in we went, where a parcel of muddling muck-worms were as busy as so many rats in an old cheese-loft; some going, some coming, some scribbling, some talking, some drinking, others jangling, and the whole room stinking of tobacco like a boatswain’s cabin ... Being choked with the steam that arose from their soot-coloured ninny-broth ... and the suffocating fumes ... my friend and I paid for our Mahometan gruel and away we came.

In this diabolic scene, the London coffee-house is a choking pit where the beverage – ‘Mahometan gruel’ – emits noxious vapours into the miasmic atmosphere.

The London conveyed and disclosed through the coffee-houses of The Tatler and The Spectator is a far more sanitized city than the metropolis described by Ward. Unlike the irregular and chaotic sprawl described in The London Spy, the city is gathered in and contained within the columns of the periodical. In The Tatler (1709-1711) and its immediate successor, The Spectator (1711-12; 1714). London is figured as a text to be read at leisure, by men, in the male environment of the coffee-house; women, who, like their Turkish counterparts were still debarred from entry, could read about scenes from the coffee-house, as depicted in newspapers and periodicals, but were positioned as voyeurs situated in a more domestic setting. Richard Steele’s gesture towards his female readers, ‘I resolve also to have something which may be of Entertainment to the Fair Sex, in honour of whom I have invented the Title of this Paper’, acknowledges their interest in his periodical, but also marginalizes them by constructing the columns of his publication as the

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28 Habermas, Structural Transformation, p. 33.

29 Markman Ellis describes how ‘Steele consciously revises the coffee-house sociability in his own reformative image’ and opposes a ‘counter-culture’ depicted in ‘essay, drama, tract and criminal biography’ to demonstrate how other representations of the coffee-house, particularly those regarding women disrupt the conventional Spectatorial model of respectability.


31 The Tatler, vol. 1, p. 15.
very coffee-houses from which they were denied access. Steele appears to literalize the idea of matching specific houses to the general rubric of his publication:

[I shall divide our Relations of the Passages which occur in Action or Discourse throughout this Town, as well as elsewhere, under such Dates of Places as may prepare you for the Matter you are to expect, in the following Manner:

All Accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure, and Entertainment, shall be under the Article of White's Chocolate-house; Poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-house; Learning under the Title of Græcian; Foreign and Domestick News, you will have from St. James's Coffee-house.32

The plan is to dispatch journalists to different coffee-houses in the West End in order to provide the reader with reviews of first night performances and new literary publications, in addition to recording the witty conversation of the coffee-house regulars. The first editions of The Tatler do not concern themselves with the coffee-houses in the City, preferring to attend to those in the Western part of town which most closely identify themselves with cultural pleasure and sociability in their purest form; the coffee-houses associated with commerce by their proximity to the Royal Exchange, appear later, in The Spectator.

Steele attempts to circumscribe and contain London by tabulating, compartmentalizing and shrinking its irregular contours into different sections of The Tatler. He transforms the city into text by exploiting the spatial relation between different parts of the capital and imposing on it a rigid discursive structure. Richmond Bond has remarked on the transition of the formal structure of The Tatler from ‘departmental sections averaging about eight hundred words ... a size suitable for notices of players, reports of gossip and coffee-house incidents, letters, poems ... [to] essays of at least moderate length’.33 It is, of course, impossible to establish a clear link between the format of the early periodical and the London it presented to its readership. Economic considerations such as the 1712 stamp tax, which determined the size and number of the news sheets after The Tatler had been

32 Ibid., p. 16.
superseded by The Spectator, as well changes in the libel laws were important factors in
determining the physical appearance of the early eighteenth-century periodical. However,
the early Tatler advertised itself as textual representation of polite opinion issuing from the
city’s coffee-houses. The first numbers published a variety of London news, within
individual editions, under the heading of Will’s, White’s or St. James Coffee-house; events
were compiled and arranged contiguously in successive newspaper reports. This was no
arbitrary perambulation of London’s coffee-houses as Ned Ward’s itinerant London Spy
purported to be. Through the columns of The Tatler, a particular perspective of London
emerges. The reader’s taste is guided and cultivated by the city’s coffee-houses, whose
associated cultural interests provide the framework for the newspaper columns in which
readers see their own interests both reflected and shaped by their urban reading-matter.
Other versions of the metropolis are extraneous to the material of The Tatler’s pages, and
the less polite coffee-houses are filtered out through a process of social, literary refinement.

If the earlier Tatler’s plan outlined the construction of a model of London as a fixed and
exclusive text, its successor, the longer-lived Spectator, presents a more mobile view of
the city, with a greater metropolitan range. The coffee-house also provided the framework
and context for many of the paper’s essays, but the London that emerges through its pages
implies movement between seemingly unrelated parts of the city. A century later, Walter
Bagehot noted this sense of incongruous juxtaposition in Charles Dickens’s London, and
made the connection between the contiguity of disparate urban scenes and the layout of the
nineteenth-century newspaper. Disparate city vignettes are tabulated and textualized:

London is like a newspaper. Every thing is there, and everything is disconnected.
There is every kind of person in some houses; but there is no more connection
between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of ‘births, marriages
and deaths’ ... each scene ... is a separate scene, –each street a separate street.

In Dickens’s London, citizens unknowingly live in close proximity to each other. They
inhabit areas which border closely on other socially distinct districts. Different episodes are
separated geographically, and each scene provokes and gives way to the next one, as the
narrator turns every corner. Social stratification collapses as London is rearranged spatially

34 For a summary of the evolution of the format of the early eighteenth-century newspapers and periodicals,
see the article ‘Eighteenth-century women’s magazines’ 43-74, in Ros Ballaster et al. eds, Women’s

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in new topographical and textual contexts which create connections and associations where previously there were none.

There are, of course, obvious problems with evoking Bagehot's illuminating insight into Dickens's literary London—comparisons between two different periods risk drawing anachronistic conclusions by eliding or ignoring distinct historical peculiarities—but the affinity between the two underlines the powerfully resonant idea of London as a text to be traversed and read. In the first copy of *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison, in the guise of Mr Spectator, outlines the urban route he intends to take in order to collect the sketches and anecdotes which are an integral part of his essays.

I have passed my latter Years in this City, where I am frequently seen in most publick Places, tho' there are not above half a dozen of my select Friends that know me ... There is no Place of general Resort, wherein I do not often make my Appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my Head into a Round of Politicians at Will's, and listening with great Attention to the Narratives that are made in those little Circular Audiences. Sometimes I smoke a Pipe at Child's ... I appear on *Sunday* Nights at St. James's Coffee-House ... My Face is likewise very well known at the Grecian.... [and] the Cocoa-Tree.36

Instead of sending out writers to gather information from various parts of the city, Mr Spectator explains that it is he who will stroll through the town and make occasional, anonymous visits to the coffee-houses in order to collect material for his own writings. The gift of anonymity afforded by the city allows Mr Spectator to assume diverse identities in different coffee-houses: he is known equally well at each coffee-house, but each cultivates a separate identity particular to the character of each establishment. It is this focus on the chameleon identity of Mr Spectator which distinguishes the coffee-house of *The Spectator* from that of *The Tatler*.

Although the first number of *The Spectator* limits itself to the more modish coffee-houses associated with patronage of high culture, the implication for further issues is that urban space has the capacity to lend a temporary identity to its visitors, by virtue of its own affiliations and allegiances. It is the sense of *difference* governing London's various coffee-houses which counters the proclamations of sameness and social equality which Stallybrass and White use to define the coffee-house as: 'the creation of a sublimated body without smell, without coarse laughter, without organs, separate from the Court and the

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36 Bond, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 3-4. Child’s and the Cocoa Tree were mostly Tory coffee-houses, St James’s was frequented by Whigs, and the Grecian attracted lawyers, philosophers and scholars.
Church' and a powerful agent 'in the promotion of an incipient bourgeois democratic ideology'. The model being promulgated here, of the coffee-house as representative of a singular, united ideal of 'democratic' sociability, is derived from early coffee-house broadsides such as the one printed and distributed in 1674. Published after the restoration of Charles II, for the proprietor of a coffee-house in the City, during a period of officially sanctioned and approved forms of public pleasure, it lays down a list of self-imposed rules for the maintenance of polite and egalitarian male company:

Enter Sirs freely, But first if you please,
Peruse our Civil-Orders which are these:
First, Gentry, Tradesmen, all are welcome hither,
And may without Affront sit down Togethen
Preeminence of Place, none here should Mind,
But take the next fit Seat that he can find:
Nor need any, if Finer Persons come,
Rise up for to assigne to them his Room [...]
 [...] Let Noise of loud disputes be quite forbom,
No Maudlin Lovers here in Corners Mourn,
But all be Brisk, and Talk, but not too much
On Sacred things, Let none presume to touch,
Nor Profane Scripture, or sawcily wrong
Affairs of State with an Irreverent Tongue.

This inviting self-advertisement espouses the civilized and urbane democracy claimed by contemporary owners and later admirers of the coffee-house. All men (no mournful 'Maudlin Lovers' are allowed here), regardless of social standing, are requested to enter into an enclosed urban space which erases class distinction, and which demands only civilized, secular discourse in an ambience of polite sociability.

The invitation ostensibly extends to every (male) citizen – 'Gentry, Tradesman' and, perhaps ironically 'Finer Persons'. However, the point made by The Spectator is that each coffee-house in the early part of the eighteenth century actually possessed a different ambience and character, peculiar to a social group and contingent on the street or district in which it was located. Stallybrass and White's assertion that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coffee-house was an urban site 'without smell, without coarse laughter,

38 The Rules and Orders of the COFFEE-HOUSE, London, 1674, Printed for Paul Greenwood, sold at the sign of the Coffee-Mill and Tobacco-Roll, near Smithfield. Stallybrass and White quote this broadside which they take from Ellis's The Penny Universities.
without organs' disregards the local distinctiveness of each establishment.

This is not to say that there is no historical and contextual justification for associating the introduction of the first coffee-houses with a new social ethos which seemed to aim at dismantling the existing class hierarchy. The first coffee-house opened in London, in 1652 and was located in St. Michael's Alley, off Cornhill. Originally owned by a Turkish merchant named Edwards, proprietorship was subsequently given to a Greek named Pasqua Rosée, whose name became synonymous in broadsides and pamphlets advertising the virtues of coffee with the origins of this very metropolitan form of social pleasure.39 The timing of the opening of London's first coffee-house supports, chronologically at least, Stallybrass' and White's claim that the coffee-house 'combined democratic aspiration with a space of discourse less contaminated by the unruly demands of the body for pleasure and release than that of the tavern.'40 It made its debut in the interregnum, during which Cromwell's puritan leanings led to a suppression of much of the city's raucous and bawdy entertainment. A pamphleteer at the time of Charles II's restoration to the monarchy remarked that 'coffee and the Commonwealth came in together'.41 All this suggests that the London coffee-house was fashioning itself an identity as a locus which did not discriminate other than on the grounds of gender, and which encouraged uncensored discourse and conversation among its guests. But this is to assume that Londoners as well as visitors to London frequented different establishments arbitrarily. The fact is that there was no single, typical London coffee-house. Each one was characterized by particular political affiliations, aesthetic taste and mutual commercial interests. Bryant Lillywhite summarizes succinctly how the locality of the coffee-house attracted visitors of varying types.

The followers of the Court, the Whigs and the Tories, used the houses in Westminster, Whitehall, St. James's and Pall Mall. The Navy, Army, 'the Gentlemen of the Law', the doctors and the clergy, and 'other professional gentlemen' were to be found in Charing Cross, Strand, Fleet Street, St. Martin's Lane, Holborn, and round St. Paul's. The news-writers and the quacks visited the lot. Booksellers and publishers made full use of those round St. Paul's and on

Ludgate Hill; the 'chap-books' derive their name from the Chapter Coffee-house Paternoster Row. The literary, the intelligentsia, the wits, and men of science, all tended to congregate in a few houses, which changed according to the ebb and flow of fashion and other reasons.\textsuperscript{42}

Prowling the streets of London offers possibilities of new discoveries as Mr Spectator randomly spotlights a particular coffee-house, illuminating and activating the individual quirks that characterize each fraternity. As a news-writer, he ‘visits the lot’, able to eavesdrop on those who subscribe to Whiggish or Tory politics, record the opinions and interests of professional classes and men of science,\textsuperscript{43} as well as register the fluid permutations of fashion as it shifts its patronage from one coffee-house to the next.

Although there is no longer the sense, as there was in \textit{The Tatler}, of form imitating content (and topographical context), the impression of unconnected sites in \textit{The Spectator}, linked only through the pages of the periodical, conveys a picture of London held together by contiguity and proximity rather than community and interdependence. Little pockets of sociability are established inside individual coffee-houses, but the houses themselves play host to different interests, thereby diluting the democracy proclaimed in the independently produced broadsides and pamphlets of the time. A satirical portrait of London written later in the century captures this sense of a male populace united, yet also separated, by coffee-houses catering for a myriad of different social tastes and commercial interests.

This town contains an assemblage of houses which are called in the aggregate – the metropolis; \textit{i.e.} the Mother City. Here we might infer, that all its inhabitants are united in one common social interest, under one general parent ... Alas! it is quite otherwise; for although the houses appear as closely joined as the cells in a bee-hive, those in the island of Madagascar are not, in reality, farther distant. So that an Irishman might infer that \textit{separation joins} the whole town.\textsuperscript{44}

This satirical portrait anticipates Bagehot’s vision of Dickensian London: a city characterized by contiguous anonymity and social isolation. The point being emphasized in

\textsuperscript{42} Lillywhite, \textit{London Coffee Houses}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{43} For an analysis of the role played by London’s coffee-houses around Exchange Alley in the patronage of scientific innovations, see Larry Stewart, ‘Public Lectures and Private Patronage in Newtonian England’, \textit{ISIS}, 77 (1986), 47-58. Stewart claims that in its capacity of nurturing the relationship between natural philosophy and the entrepreneur as a new kind of patron, ‘the Royal Exchange was at least as significant as the Royal Society’, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{London, a Satire, Containing Prosaisical Strictures (on Prisons, Inns of Court of Justice: of Justices of the Peace ...Plays and Opera Houses}, London, first publ. 1751, revised 3rd edn., 1782, p. 2.

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this portrait is that the consistent, common feature of the city is its separateness. As part of the urban landscape, the London coffee-house shares this paradoxical distinction. Each one is an example of ‘the eighteenth-century coffee-house’, but each is held aloof from the other by virtue of its unique character. And it is this distinction which enables the citizen or visitor to London to adapt himself to the particular ambience and complexion of his chosen venue.

Jonathan Swift’s Journal to Stella (1710-13), conveys the impression of a deracinated visitor in London, learning to communicate with the indigenous political and literary élite, through the language of the city. Swift’s initial Whiggish sympathies are implied by the number of letters written from St. James’s coffee-house. However, as he records his gradual disaffection with Addison and Steele and begins to ingratiate himself within Tory circles, he adapts his itinerary using the same topographical code in the Journal. From March 1711 onwards, he protests regularly to Esther Johnson, ‘I go to no Coffee-house’; in April, he wrote: ‘I don’t go to a Coffee-house twice a month’; ‘Mr. Ford sends me one that he had pickt up at St. James’s Coffee-house; for I go to no Coffee-house at all’. This last reference alludes to the normal practice at the time of addressing a letter to the recipient’s favourite coffee-house, where the correspondence itself advertized its presence in a glass case at the front of the house. As Swift loses favour with his Whig associates, he converts political isolation into social taste: ‘Do you read The Spectators?’, he asks plaintively at one point in November 1711, ‘I never do; they never come in my way; I go to no Coffee-houses’. In one instance, his practice of collecting Stella’s letters from the coffee-house results in a disturbing, almost narcissistic, confrontation with himself. He tells Stella:

I met Mr. Harley in the court of requests, and he askt me how long I had learnt the trick of writing to myself? He had seen your letter through the glass-case at the Coffee-house, and would swear it was my hand; and Mr. Ford, who took it and sent it to me, was of the same mind.

In fact, as Swift explains, Esther Johnson had been taught to write by him and had

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subsequently adopted many of his graphological idiosyncrasies, resulting in the brief confusion of identities. Nevertheless, the reflexive moment of near self-recognition in the coffee-house window is representative of the self-conscious nature of the writings in the contemporary Spectator, many of whose essays purport to be faithful transcriptions of genuine coffee-house conversations. Coffee-house regulars, like many Londoners, enjoyed reading about themselves. Habermas describes how, through The Tatler, The Spectator and The Guardian, ‘the public held a mirror to itself; it did not yet come to a self-understanding through the detour of a reflection on works and philosophy and literature, art and science, but through entering itself into “literature” as an object’.50 Although Habermas ignores the gender division cultivated by the London coffee-house, which was subsequently reflected in its associated newspapers, the point he makes is an important one: the early eighteenth-century periodical provided an interface between Londoners as reading subjects and London as literary object. Instead of indirectly distilling and extracting an identity from a more oblique body of writing, Londoners preferred to see their tastes unmediated by abstract philosophy, art and science, choosing to view themselves as direct participants in their own urban culture. The ‘mirror’ is, of course, deliberately distorted: readers of both genders see reflected back a masculine and politer version of the city that they know; women are all but absent from the dialogues which precipitate the subject-matter and structure of the next number. The early eighteenth-century coffee-house is, despite recent documentation mentioned above, primarily a masculine sphere in literature.

However, ignoring temporarily the gender misrepresentation which I will discuss later, the modern reader can see how The Spectator exploited this delight in self-observation by simulating an endless mirroring of visitor and the text that emerged from reflecting a particular occasion. This was then rewritten as part of the next edition, which in turn, would also be read and exhaustively debated in a real coffee-house.51 In number 568 of The Spectator, Addison, masquerading as an anonymous citizen and concealing his real journalistic identity, actually instigates a discussion concerning his own publication:

I was Yesterday in a Coffee-house not far from the Royal Exchange, where I observed three Persons in close Conference over a Pipe of Tobacco. ... I took up the last SPECTATOR, and casting my Eye over it, The SPECTATOR, says I, is

50 Habermas, Structural Transformation, p. 43.
51 Habermas describes how imitators of this genre ‘even appeared without dates in order to emphasize the trans-temporal continuity, as it were, of the process of mutual enlightenment’, Structural Transformation, p. 42.
very witty to Day. 52

What follows is a self-conscious conversation during which the three men turn on ‘Mr Spectator’ and unknowingly castigate him for his frequent use of certain typographical idiosyncrasies. As one of the gentlemen rails against The Spectator’s promiscuous use of hyphens and asterisks as an ineffectual attempt to preserve anonymity, the writer recreates the physical appearance of the print which gave rise to his companion’s fulminations. Having faithfully recorded the criticism concerning the outrageous juxtaposition of ‘Ch-rch and P-dd-ng in the same sentence’, Addison responds mischievously with a reflexive typographical reproduction of the heated debate:

Who can endure to see the great Officers of State, the B-y’s and T-t’s, treated after so scurrilous a Manner? I can’t for my Life, says I, imagine who they are the SPECTATOR means? No! says he, – Your humble Servant, Sir! 53

The episode which generated the outburst is self-consciously reproduced for the next edition of The Spectator, ostensibly the reader’s present copy. He exploits the reciprocal relationship between the coffee-house regulars who provide the context of many of the periodicals’ essays, and the papers taken in by the coffee-house itself, which provide the impetus for sociable debate. Readers become producers of their own texts, while Mr Spectator must occasionally intrude on a particular coffee-house scene in order to elicit suitable material for his writing.

The anonymous and sometimes clandestine observation exercised by Mr Spectator is reminiscent of the surveillance practised during the previous century by spies appointed by the Crown to monitor and thereby check the spread of seditious talk. 54 Contemporary Domestic Series of State Papers revealed that coffee-houses were not infrequently ‘subjected to surveillance by government spies’. 55 In the same way that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu describes the repressive controls on speech imposed by the Turkish military in the eighteenth century, the late Restoration Court intervened periodically in the liberal environment of the coffee-house, often acting to close down particular establishments, on suspicion of political insurrection. In 1675, many coffee-houses were

52 Bond, The Spectator, vol. 4, p. 539.
53 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 540.
54 For a full theoretically-informed exploration of this theme, see Scott Paul Gordon, ‘Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle’, 3-23 and Kristina Straub, Sexual Suspects, p. 3. See page 37 in this thesis, n. 37 and n. 38.
55 Straub, Sexual Suspects, p. 18.
forced to shut, suspected of being ‘places where the disaffected met, and spread scandalous reports concerning the conduct of his Majesty and his Ministers’. London coffee-houses also competed with the official Post-Office (established in 1678, in Lombard Street) by employing alternative urban routes for the circulation of letters; this provided a more private conduit for the dissemination of information, as letters were frequently opened in the main Post Office. The seventeenth-century coffee-house was therefore a cause for concern, nurturing ideal conditions for potential sedition in addition to providing a rival postal service which would circumvent the scrutiny of government spies. Various Popish plots were spuriously traced to specific houses, where a short-list of possible suspects was drawn up. During James II’s reign, the seeds of the Duke of Monmouth’s uprising (1679) were said to have originated in particular London coffee-houses, and 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution, William ordered the Lord Chancellor to suppress all coffee-houses and other public houses which circulated news sheets, informing customers of details concerning domestic and foreign affairs. Owing to its growing reputation as originator and circulator of both town and foreign gossip, draconian laws were passed in order to curb what was seen as the alarming ease with which gossip, in the shape of news sheets, could exchange and disseminate information potentially damaging to the King and his ministers. It was therefore not uncommon for the government to approve the appointment of coffee-house spies who kept its inhabitants under close surveillance.

Stripped of its immediate political context, the association between spies and news sheets had evolved and become more closely identified with specific areas of London culture. Mr Spectator’s guise as anonymous urban observer is a depoliticized descendant of the seventeenth-century Court-appointed informer. The peripatetic writer saunters from one coffee-house to the next, recording the private conversation of each place. Mr Spectator is a politer version of Ned Ward’s London Spy. Ward’s spy figure is a rural outsider, ‘with an itching inclination in myself to visit London’, whose Journal ‘intended to expose the vanities and vices of the town’. But both, in their own way, represent the literary adaptation of a slightly earlier historical urban character.

The Tatler, The Spectator brought the external urban space of the reader into the writing itself, by including overt references and devoting whole articles to the subject of coffee and

coffee-houses. In one essay, Addison considers the variety of coffee-houses and their occupants by recording the diverse reactions to the same piece of foreign news – the death of the King of France.

The courts of two Countries do not so much differ from one another, as the Court and the City, in their peculiar ways of Life and Conversation. In short, the inhabitants of St. James’s, not withstanding they live under the same Laws, and speak the same language, are a distinct People from those of Cheapside, who are likewise removed from those of the Temple ... and as every Coffee-house has some particular Statesman belonging to it, who is the Mouth of the Street where he lives ... I was very desirous to learn the Thoughts of our most eminent Politicians on that Occasion.

Like the later publication, London, a Satire, Addison plays on the theme of a city united in its differentiation. Spatial non-sequiteurs gradually converge to form a collective body of thought on one particular subject. He traverses the streets of London, a flâneur before his time, calling in on different houses, where he learns that the conversation at Will’s ‘had gone off from the Death of the French King to that of Monsieur Boileau, Racine, Corneille, and several other Poets’, while in Fish Street, the local, self-appointed politician declares: ‘If ... the King of France is certainly dead we shall have plenty of Mackerell this season.’

Numerous other coffee-house spokesmen are enjoined by their admiring audience to pontificate on the possible repercussions of such an important event on the city, each with their own political, social and commercial bias. However, none is so illuminating about the stratification within individual coffee-houses as the report in St. James’s.

I found the whole outward Room in a Buzz of Politics. The Speculations were but very indifferent towards the Door, but grew finer as you advanced to the upper end of the Room, and were so much improved by a Knot of theorists, who sat in the inner Room, within the Steams of the Coffee-pot, that I there heard the whole Spanish Monarchy disposed of, and all the Line of Bourbon provided for in less than a Quarter of an Hour.

In a humorous imitation of the process of coffee preparation, it appears that a cruder, more

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58 Other periodicals, like The Gentleman’s Magazine and The London Magazine, contain numerous articles describing the commercial and medical history of coffee.
60 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 508.
61 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 508.
popular form of political discussion is taking place, furthest away from the inner sanctum of the coffee-pot. The theoretical abstractions become more specialized and sophisticated in closer proximity to the percolating coffee, comparable to Pope’s line ‘Coffee that makes the Politicians wise’ in *The Rape of the Lock*, where coffee is associated with keen intellect and political acumen. The writer implies that, contrary to the ideal integration of different bodies from all spheres, the physical framework of the coffee-house and the potent fumes of the coffee-pot separate the customers into their appropriate social groups; current political issues, compounded by the effects of coffee itself, serve to distinguish between the different social constituents. Ideas are exchanged and filtered into their appropriate intellectual and social group. Instead of the coffee-house’s identity being moulded by individual citizens, Addison inverts the causality by implying that it is the material conditions of the building and its beverage which fashion the political, social and intellectual identity of its occupants. Once again, urban identity presents itself as an elusive, prior, empty space, waiting for a specific topographical site to confer on it a temporary but definite quality.

The idea of assuming a provisional identity by entering into another’s space of another, and temporarily adopting the possessions which define that other person’s selfhood, anticipates David Hume’s philosophical consideration of the origins of the concept of pleasure in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). The observer, he suggests, imagines himself in the place of the owner of a particular property:

[B]y our sympathizing with the proprietor of the lodging. We enter into his interest by the force of the imagination, and feel the same satisfaction, that the objects naturally occasion in him ... to riches, joy and plenty; in which tho’ we have no hope of partaking, yet we enter into them by the vivacity of the fancy, and share them, in some measure, with the proprietor.

According to Hume, it is *sympathy* which enables the observer to share imaginatively the social perspective of one who appears to possess a substantial amount of property. However, the crux of this process of identification seems to be the illusion of shared ownership, the imaginary sensation of temporarily gaining access to, and assuming possession of, a specific ownership. The entrance fee of one penny, imposed by the

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62 Aytoun Ellis writes that ‘Pope obtained great relief from the headaches to which he was subject by inhaling the steam of coffee’, *The Penny Universities*, p. 59.

coffee-houses, ensured that every male citizen enjoyed the opportunity of entering the building of his own choice and aligning himself with the social and political leanings of the present company. Whereas proximity to particular areas in London often indicated the common sympathies of its occupants, like, for instance, the coffee-houses near the Royal Exchange's commercial 'walks' in the City, which mainly enclosed a number of like-minded speculators, traders and investors, the mere act of entering the establishment could impose a specific identity on the casual visitor. Social stratification theoretically dissolved on payment of the nominal admission charge, but when the hierarchy was dismantled and spatially levelled by the locating of very different sympathies in as many London sites, political leanings and social rank were separated by the topography of the city itself. A stranger could adopt as many identities as the number and variety of coffee-houses, in different parts of London, allowed.

The London coffee-house and the newspapers

What The Spectator demonstrated through its pages was this illusion of a fluctuating identity, facilitated and typified by the coffee-house and contingent on urban differentiation; a gathering of like-minded citizens whose opinions and social habits moulded themselves to the environment of their choice. But it also oscillated between the implicit depiction of customers as a passive source of inspiration for anonymous painters of the urban scene like Mr Spectator, and knowing contributors to the periodical's essays. This shifting relationship was made explicit in the later debate between the coffee-houses and newspaper publishers at the end of the 1720s. It was during this period of protracted rivalry that, according to Aytoun Ellis, the coffee-men's 'influence, status and authority began to wane'. The argument between the two groups centred round the relationship between visitors to the city's coffee-houses and the newspapers they could read there. Although both The Tatler and The Spectator had ceased publication by this time, what the coffee-house proprietors seemed opposed to was the parasitic hack writer who was utterly dependent on the London coffee-house for his own writing. In 1728, a writer known only as 'a coffee-man' published The Case of the Coffee-Men of London and Westminster, fiercely attacking journalists and the papers for which they worked.

Persons are employed (One or Two for each Paper) at so much a Week, to haunt Coffee-houses, and thrust themselves into Companies where they are not known;

64 Aytoun Ellis, The Penny Universities, p. 225.
or plant themselves at a convenient Distance, to overhear what is said, in order to pick up Matter for the Papers. By this Means Gentlemen are often betrayed and embarrass'd in the Management of their private Interests and Concerns. And by this Means too, the greatest Falsehoods and the idlest Fictions are often publish'd for Matters of Fact. For these sons of Mercury are so often distinguish'd by Persons of discernment; and when they are so, some rouzing Falsehood is utter'd in their Hearing for a Truth; which the next Day comes out, upon Credible Information, to the great Wonder and Edification of the whole Town.65

This passage offers a critique of the claims propagated by the early eighteenth-century papers. The intrusive journalist no longer occupies an imaginary space of urban omniscience and is re-presented as a real nuisance. The coffee-house guests being observed, however, are shown to demonstrate more intelligence than they are normally allowed. Narrative positions are inverted as the eavesdropping reporter is transformed into one of the ‘types’ he is so fond of delineating, and thus rendered completely visible to everyone present. The author of The Case of the Coffee-Men therefore confirms the interdependence of the coffee-house and the newspaper, but disturbs the idea that the subsequent writing will be a faithful depiction of factual information; through their rhetorical fabrications, the customers themselves instigate a false picture of London, by inventing the ‘greatest Falsehoods and the idlest Fictions’ which are then filtered through the papers to a wider readership. What the reader is given is a deliberately skewed vision of a part of the city.

The newsmen are also accused of knowingly misrepresenting London. They destroy any sense of historical chronology by ransacking previous written portraits of London.

Histories of Antiquity, and other Pieces recording Accidents and remarkable Occurrences of Times long since gone, for old forgotten Stories; which they publish as Relations of Matters just happen’d, only changing the Scenes. Accordingly, old Stow has been often plunder’d by these Enemies to Truth and Chronology.66

Stow’s Survey and possibly his historical chronicles are reworked into a depiction of eighteenth-century London so that the contemporary portraits of the city always bear a residual trace of the Elizabethan city: ‘By them the Channels of History are corrupted and

65 The Case of the Coffee-Men of London and Westminster, or an Account of the Impositions and Abuses, put upon Them and the whole Town, by the present set of newswriters. With the Scheme of the Coffee-men, for setting up News-Papers of their own.; By a Coffee-Man, London, 1728-9, p. 5.
66 Ibid., p.10.
poison'd with numberless Lies and absurdities.'67 Temporal distance is distorted as the later city is constructed in the image of the earlier one. Sixteenth-century London is translated into contemporary news and is re-read by a modern readership in a different context from the one in which it was originally published.

By subverting the status of customer and writer in the London coffee-house, the coffee-men aim to expose the seemingly transparent reportage of urban scenes for fiction. Readers of London's papers are seeing not so much a reflection as a misrepresentation of their city. Yet the main objection to the distortion of London inside the pages of the newspapers is only secondary to the complaint that, by the 1720s, the newspapers appeared to be usurping the coffee-house as the main attraction: 'Every Paper in a Coffee-House has its set of Partizans, to whose Humours and Understandings it is better suited than the rest.' If a particular paper is suddenly refused entry, its faithful group of readers will follow it to a different abode: 'And if a coffee-man turns a foolish rascally Paper out of Doors, 'tis ten to one but some or other of his Customers follow it, and he sees no more of them.'68 The fraternal, homosocial bond that exists between the male members of the coffee-house is replaced by the relationship between journal and reader, and the proprietor is compelled by this transferred fidelity to retain an inordinate number of titles in order to retain his customers. The coffee-men propose an alternative plan whereby the erstwhile scribbler and middleman — the newspaper hack — is to be dispensed with. Notebooks are to be strategically placed and visitors requested to write down any news deemed worthy of record. These collected scribbles will be collected, collated and presented in the coffee-house's own newspaper: 'The Coffee-House being the Grand Magazines of Intelligence, the COFFEE-MEN, by the due execution of this Design, will be better able to furnish the Town with News-Papers, than any other Persons whatever.'69 The London entrepreneurial spirit is circumvented as the coffee-house attempts to create an autonomous system of publication. In a possibly conscious imitation of the plan of The Tatler, the proposed paper's compiler, 'digesting and relating the said Minutes for the Press, shall set down in the Margin of his Paper, against each Paragraph, the Name of the House, from whence it comes'.70 London will be shrunk to self-reflexive and self-contained newspaper columns

67 Ibid., p. 13.
68 Ibid., p. 13.
69 Ibid., pp. 22-3.
70 Ibid., p. 32.
as the coffee-houses are figured as receptacles and purveyors of all domestic and foreign news: 'since there is not an Accident happens in or about Town, which some or other of the GENTLEMEN, using the Coffee-houses, have not Opportunities of knowing'.

The newspapers retaliated immediately, confirming that a drink of coffee is only a pretext for the real reason for a visit to the London coffee-house:

Many Gentleman, who frequently meet there to go to drink better and more generous Liquor, often lay down their Money at the Bar, without drinking anything, as a Gratuity for the Entertainment they have received from the Public Papers there taken in. And indeed, were not the News-Papers of the Day, the principal Inducement.

If the coffee-houses are where the news is to be found, the newspapers are responsible for its circulation: 'if it was just and natural for the Coffee-Men to consider their Houses as the Staples of News, it must be acknowledg'd, that the Proprietors of Papers are the true and proper Merchants of that Staple'. News is the desirable city currency, and the coffee-house is represented as merely a convenient urban locus in which to concentrate its numbers. The general tone in this pamphlet is one of appeasement as the mutual benefit is stressed:

[T]hey chuse to distinguish a House, where every Gentleman beside, is likely to meet some friend or other. And thus the Papers mutually beget Company, and the Company Papers; and the Masters of these Houses wisely consider one as the Occasion of the other.

Writing supersedes the priority of place with the contention that: 'Papers mutually beget Company'. While periodicals like The Tatler announced the derivation of their columns from designated coffee-houses, these later papers assert the dependence of the coffee-house on the body of writing it accommodates.

A second, more polemical attack on the London coffee-house adopts the tone of the original publication published by the coffee-men, but instead of taking the part of the reader-customer, the author treats the coffee-house visitors as vacuous dilettantes: 'Men of Business, or Men of Pleasure, (of which the Company resorting to the Coffee-houses is

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71 Ibid., p. 38.
72 The Case Between the Proprietors of News-Papers and the Subscribing Coffee-Men fairly stated, London, 1729.
73 Ibid., p. 9.
entirely compounded) never mind or remember any Thing that is of above a Day’s standing'; the collective memory of the clientele is made coterminous with the durability of the daily news-sheet. The charge of fabrication is neither challenged nor denied, as the newspapers defend the eloquent fictions which stimulate the urban imagination:

A handsome Lye well told makes a good Figure in a daily Paper; and I appeal to all who are conversant with Public Intelligence, if their Minds are not more frequently awaken’d by a rousing fictitious Tale, than by little foolish Truths not worth repeating.75

The London newspaper is exposed as just another urban fiction, whose invented tales offer greater edification than genuine stories of daily city life. And the wider implication is that, rather than seeing a self-reflection in its urban reading matter, the London consumer is presented with a double fiction: a formulated picture of coffee-house visitors reading a falsified image of London from the previous day.

The hostilities between the coffee-house owners and newspaper proprietors established that, although the numbers issuing from the coffee-house modelled themselves as self-reflexive portraits of urban life, substituting the transcription of quotidian experience for literary inspiration, much of the writing was fiction masquerading as urban actuality. This fictional quality extends to the literary instances of coffee-house representation, which took certain enduring images of the eighteenth-century London coffee-house and worked them into the immediate context of writing. One of the most persistent features in the popular imagination was the relation of women to the London coffee-house.

Women and the coffee-house in early eighteenth-century writings

Perhaps the most vitriolic accusation levelled at the coffee-house by newspapers was the strategic placing of attractive women at the bar in order to entice potential customers into an all-male environment. Whereas the coffee-house accused the newspapers and periodicals of maintaining and perpetuating the presence of their sub-standard publications by exploiting the fidelity of their regular readers, the news-men retaliate by drawing attention to the common coffee-house practice of substituting the attractions of a female decoy for the allure of newsprint. The pleasure of the text is replaced with the pleasures of male

75 Ibid., p. 9.
The susceptible male customer is enticed into the coffee-house through visual subterfuge. The translucent ethereality of the female decoy collaborates with the positioning of serving-women at the bar whose attractions draw the visitor into the gloomy interior of the coffee-house. A letter to The Spectator, No. 87 (1711) purports to be from a coffee-woman weary of being depicted as a temptress, intent on seducing the male customers. The letter was apparently written by Laurence Eusden,79 but exploited the stereotype of the flirtatious coffee-woman behind the bar; through this act of epistolary ventriloquism, the coffee-

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76 Ibid., pp. 12-13.

77 Eve Sedgwick has identified this consolidation of male sociability as 'male homosocial desire'. She defines the triangular relationship as 'a desire to to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females ... plunging into heterosexual adventure with an eye to confirming his identification with other men', pp. 38-9.


79 The letter is attributed to Laurence Eusden (1688-89) by John Nichols, in The Spectator, ed. John Nichols, Thomas Percy and John Calder, 1788-89, 8 vols. Markman Ellis writes that there is 'no textual evidence for Nichol’s attribution, which ... may be based on oral tradition', Ellis, The Coffee-Women.
woman traduces herself as disturber of sober male sociability. Eusden refers to the serving women as ‘Idols’ and criticizes the disruption of the city’s commercial and professional activities:

These Idols sit and receive all day long the Adoration of the Youth within such and such Districts; I know, in particular. Goods are not entered as they ought to be at the Custom-House, not Law-Reports perused at the Temple, by reason of one Beauty who detains the young Merchants too long near Change, and another Fair one who keeps the Students at her House when they ought to be at Study.

In a later essay, No. 534, (Wednesday, November 12, 1712) the correspondent signs herself as Lucinda Parly, a ‘Bar-keeper of a Coffee-house’ who is ‘in the Condition of the Idol’ described in No. 87. Both essays claim to be from women, but are in fact written by men. The real coffee-woman is spoken for, rather than allowed to speak for herself.

The silenced woman disrupts the homosociality of the coffee-house, and this is picked up in depictions of the coffee-house in related artistic fields. The manipulation of male susceptibilities through the specific placement of the female bait within the coffee-house is supported pictorially: An engraving, A London Coffee House (c. 1705) portrays a coffee-house scene of male conviviality. At the front of the picture, a young coffee-boy is preparing a bowl of coffee for one of the visitors. On the tables, one can see various news-sheets and booklets, indicating the discussion and exchange of current affairs as well as opinions of recently published literary works. At the back of the room, a young man has seated himself next to the female serving maid, drawn to the bar by her obvious physical attractions. Although the coffee-house is designated as an exclusively male locus, the admission of a single female is depicted as the premiss on which the creation of male sociability is made possible. This engraving encapsulates many of the social issues governing the reputation and internal workings of the eighteenth-century coffee-house: not only does the devious deployment of women indicate the presence of heterosexual desire, albeit to tighten the bonds of male friendship, but the foregrounding of the young coffee-boy draws on the importance of the presence of young men in the coffee-houses of the

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80 Shevelow comments in Women and Print Culture with reference to the Tatler rather than The Spectator: ‘Women correspondents of the Tatler appeared in the periodical primarily in two contexts: either paraphrased and referred to by Bickerstaff in the third person, or represented as the speaking subjects of their own letters ... [t]he paraphrased or reported letters from women that appeared in the Tatler presented the writer as entirely the objects of Bickerstaff’s essayistic monologue’, p. 107.

near East, in early travel narratives. In 1610, the English poet, Sir George Sandys, visited Egypt and described the scenes he saw in the local coffee-houses.

Although they be destitute of Taverns, yet have they their Coffa-houses, which something resemble them. There they sit chatting most of the day; and sippe of a drink called Coffa ... which helpeth, as they say, digestion, and procureth alacrity: many of the Coffa-men keeping beautifull boyes, who serve as stales to procure them customers.82

The OED lists a number of definitions for the obsolete use of the word ‘stale’ in its sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century context. It is defined as ‘a deceptive means of allurement; a person or thing held out as a lure or bait to entrap a person’, and ‘a person or thing made use of as means or tool for inducing some result, as a pretext for some action, or as a cover for some sinister design’. While the Oriental coffee-house was historically portrayed as a place for the procurement of young boys, the ‘stale’ in the eighteenth-century London coffee-house is generally depicted as a female ‘lure or bait’, offered to potential male customers. The coffee-house’s historical Oriental reputation for homosexuality is transformed into homosociality, reinforced by the allurement of the figure of the female.

But although there is clear evidence for presence of women in the early eighteenth-century coffee-house, they seem clearly confined to the lower social orders: serving women, flirtatious decoys and common prostitutes. Anne Rochford’s 46-page biography, *The Velvet Coffee-Woman* (1728), is contemporary with the altercation between the coffee-house proprietors and newspaper men, and also confirms the aspersions cast on coffee-women by Tom Brown and *The Spectator*.83 After a seemingly respectable upbringing, Rochford suffers a reversal of fortunes and becomes the owner of a coffee-house in Charing Cross, and turns prostitute.84 It is not my intention here to focus on this particular text, but rather, to demonstrate how the representation of women in the London coffee-houses was limited to a certain type of woman; there was no place for the polite urban

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82 Cited by Aytoun Ellis, *The Penny Universities*, p. 8. Ellis, incidentally, does not comment on this last sentence, preferring to discuss coffee in its in contemporary medical context. Emma Clery also passes over the historical, cultural significance of the coffee boys who ‘belong to a third, liminal, gender category: “coffee boys”, whose exclusive task its seems to have been to pour the coffee, fetch the cups to the table and return them to the immobile female “keeper”’, ‘Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth’, p. 174.

83 For a perceptive analysis of the significance of *The Velvet Coffee-Woman*, see Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-Women*.

84 Bryant Lillywhite writes that the coffee-house is referred to as Rochford’s Chocolate House in 1713, and as a coffee-house separately in 1724 and 1725. Lillywhite, *London’s Coffee Houses*, p. 486.
female inside these establishments.

The corresponding portrayal of coffee-houses by contemporary women writers confirms this sense of exclusion, using the coffee-house in a particular way in their writings. The urban coffee-house is transformed into the site of masculine betrayal, traducing and female absence. The positioning of women as casualties of urban male friendship has textual repercussions, and one can locate the ambivalence of the occupancy of city spaces by women, through a closer examination of fiction portraying the eighteenth-century coffee-house.

Diane Purkiss discusses the circulation of seventeenth-century texts about women, by men, as a pleasurable enactment of the pleasures described inside the stories: 'A central trope of [the] text is the exchange of sexually open or available women together with the knowledge of how to gain access to them.'85 She identifies the topographical context for this form of discursive exchange as 'the youth's and men's clubs of early modern period'.86 However, these meeting places are French in origin, and the youthfulness of their frequenters points more to a spatial representation of urban adolescence, tracing 'their emergence into publicity from the household of childhood', than to any general description of male city behaviour.87 But a similar practice of exchanging stories about women, in their physical absence, takes place in the eighteenth-century London coffee-house. Instead of separating the sexes and assigning gender roles respectively to public social spaces and the domestic sphere, an examination of storytelling in the eighteenth-century coffee-house demonstrates that male ties are strengthened and solidified by the pleasures of telling tales about absent women.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's detailing of the nuances that characterized the separation of male and female spheres in Turkey have a greater resonance in this context. Coffee-houses in the Orient demonstrated the same disposition to recount defamatory stories about women, despite strict laws warning against such slanderous speech: 'The patrons of the coffeehouse, it seems, were not immune to the temptation often to disregard the strict letter of the truth when relating stories about others, particularly women.'88 The significance of

88 Hattox, Coffee and Coffeehouses, pp. 100-1.
reliatory tales told by women in their own private space is evidently and understandably relished by Montagu in her rare and privileged insight into the women's social sphere. But Montagu's letters also make sense when considered in the context of portraits of London by contemporary female writers who had made the city their home. The connection between the coffee-house and the ruined reputations of virtuous women is transferred to London.

Delarivier Manley's earliest attributed work, the scandalous chronicle and roman à clef, *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705), earns its notoriety partly through its usurpation of traditional male power; Zarah is referred to at one point as 'the Mirror of her Sex, and the Phoenix of a Q-n'. Zarah's rule has been referred to as 'Machiavellian' and her power instils fear in her male subjects whose only recourse to airing their private grievances is the coffee-house. One day, as the princess is passing through the city, on her way to 'Traffick with the Merchants, and where the Traders would tremble when they saw her at the Shops', one unfortunate male subject breaks the glass of her chair with his sword, for which minor misdemeanour he is severely disciplined and denied any intervention by his male friends. The unfortunate subject makes his unhappiness known publicly, among masculine company, by leaking his letter to the princess to the frequenters of a city coffee-house:

This, as we may easily believe, provok'd the Aga to write the following Letter to Zarah, which he caus'd to be dropt in a Publick Coffee-House, and was read thus; Madam, How great a Shame it is for Albigion to see Albania the Mother of her Country, a Princess who loves Goodness, and the Repose of her Subjects, sacrificed to the Ambition of a ---, who renders her the weakest of all Women. The Generous Hippolito has too much Honour to Espouse your Actions, Albania too much Justice to Pardon your Crimes, Albigion too much Power to Bear your Usurpations, and I too much Wrong to Forgive the Injury.

This made a terrible Noise throughout Lodunum, and every Body pity'd the poor Aga, who was made a Sacrifice to her Indignation ... Some of them were so dis-spirited at the Narration of the Aga's Fate, they wou'd tremble at the Name, and as soon face the Mouth of a Cannon, as a Chair in the open Streets.

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89 Manley, *Novels*, vol. 1, p. 154.
90 See Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, p. 137.
91 Although the subtitle claims that it is 'Faithfully Translated From the Italian Copy Now Lodged in the Vatican', placing the narrative, as other contemporary works did, in the distant past, the city, as the name Lodunum indicates, is obviously intended to represent London.
The narrative unambiguously criticizes the autocratic abuse of power by a female ruler; the despotic stringency of the punishment is clearly demonstrated in the story. In its capacity as roman à clef, Manley was condemning women like Sarah Churchill, the Duchess of Marlborough, and the notorious mistress of Charles II, Barbara Villiers, who were both popularly implicated in corrupt Whig politics. Manley is ambivalent about the change in the balance of power between the two sexes. Ros Ballaster writes:

Manley unequivocally condemns those women who 'cross-dress' by attempting to operate within the social and political order of her imagined world in the same manner as their male counterparts, that is, those women who imitate the 'masculine' practice of exploiting and victimizing the innocent. An adoption of patriarchal power and its methods of control proves to be no resistance at all. Desire is an inescapable given for all human subjects in her fiction, but its exploitation in order to gain power and gratify personal greed is a specifically masculine practice.  

However the failure to subvert male domination by the annexation of power by women is illustrated through the urban setting of the coffee-house. The illusion of absolute female sovereignty is dissolved by events which take place in a traditional, exclusively masculine city location. The letter to the princess is accessible to male frequenters of the coffee-house, and, in her absence, her actions can be safely discussed without fear of excessive and vengeful reprisals.

The appearance of the London coffee-house as the site of female treachery and betrayal became a familiar image in early eighteenth-century writing. The absence of female company was compounded by the public reading of her private correspondence; while scandalous female behaviour formed the pretext for, and strengthened the bonds of, male conviviality, the open scrutiny of her writing demonstrated the damage to a woman's reputation in the coffee-house, where a respectable female had no place. The Tatler, a periodical which, as Kathryn Shevelow points out, 'invoked the term “tatler” in a context that was not uncritical of male coffee-house conversation and behaviour, but that still

93 Ballaster, Seductive Forms, p. 137.
preserved the notion of tattle as primarily female', showed the coffee-house as a space where men could freely discuss the reputation of a woman who was powerless to defend herself. The Tatler also uses the device of the intercepted letter to convey the idea of woman as writing subject rendered the silenced object of male gossip. One instance of this occurs in No. 57 of The Tatler and takes place in Will’s coffee-house. It describes Bickerstaff reading out a letter from Emilia, a ‘Refin’d lady of the Town’ and a ‘celebrated Wit in London’, who is suffering excruciating boredom in the countryside, and who laments the diminution of her sparkling urban reputation in ‘that dull Part of the World’. Inside Will’s coffee-house, Bickerstaff and male companions decide that the best course of action for Emilia is to have ‘less Humility’. Emilia’s original letter is read selectively by Bickerstaff and does not stand as a document in its own right; it is the pretext for masculine talk rather than an independent text.

A more pertinent example of the exposed coffee-house letter appears in No. 22, where the destruction of a female reputation is inserted into a more general consideration of the character of the coquette. The essay is set in White’s coffee-house, which, ironically, The Tatler had designated in its first number as the column which would consider gallantry as one of its urban topics. The capricious nature of female behaviour is held up to public scrutiny as the male lover Cynthio is shown to be dallied with and ultimately rejected by the wayward Lindamira. Eager to learn more about Lindamira, Bickerstaff intercepts a letter written by her and sent to a friend in the country. Instead of printing the epistle in full, he quotes selectively from it, thereby damning Lindamira as a treacherous, callous flirt. She writes that:

An account of the Slaughter which these unhappy Eyes have made within Ten Days last past, would make me appear too great a Tyrant to be allowed in a Christian Country ... Nothing can equal the sublime Pleasure of being follow’d

94 Shevelow, Women and Print Culture, p. 97. Number 4 of The Tatler proclaimed it ‘the greatest Glory of my Work if among reasonable women this Paper may furnish Tea-Table Talk’. The connection of the promiscuous chatter of women with the tea-table, as opposed to the more serious conversation shared by men in the coffee-house underlines the topographical distinction between men and women in London, as well as the respective gender associations of tea and coffee. For a fuller discussion of the connection between the tea-table and scandalous gossip, see Clare Brant, ‘Speaking of Women: Scandal and the Law in the Mid-Eighteenth Century’, 242-270, Women, Texts and Histories, pp. 248-50.


96 Kathryn Shevelow comments on this letter, although she is not concerned with the coffee-house as the locus for male sociability formed at the expense of female reputations. She writes: ‘Emilia herself is absent from participation in the discourse, though the object of it, and her letter is figured as the occasion that elicits the discussion, invoking the concept, but not the form, of epistolary exchange’, Women and Print Culture, p. 107.

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In fact, Lindamira’s words have been removed from their original context, which was an epistolary pact and confirmation of friendship made between the two female writers. However, in the hands of the male writer, whose chosen topic predetermines the way in which Lindamira’s words will be interpreted and made to reaffirm what Bickerstaff has to say about female fickleness, the letter becomes a symbol of the silenced female. Separated from their author, the written words are subject to deliberate distortion. In the all-male environment of the coffee-house, the letter, which was meant to strengthen female friendship, actually succeeds in reinforcing masculine sociability, based on the false premiss of female inconstancy. What seems at first to expose women as cruel manipulators of male hearts gradually reveals itself and the coffee-house as deliberate traducers of female reputations. Paradoxically perhaps, The Tatler seems here to be ultimately more sympathetic to the fate suffered by women in the London coffee-house than Delarivier Manley’s story.

This early eighteenth-century use of the London coffee-house as the site of the betrayal of women is shared by other, slightly later female authors. The more pious and didactic writer, Penelope Aubin, uses the coffee-house in her tale The Life of Charlotta du Pont (1723) as a familiar device through which to disclose information about the eponymous heroine. When Charlotta’s former lover seeks information about her, he learns the distressing news, from a local coffee-house, that she has since married his rival and is carrying his child:

In few Days after his Departure, Belanger arrived safely with his Kinsman at the Island of St. Domingo; and being a Stranger there, got the Captain of the Bark, who was used to trade there, to take them a Lodging, thinking it most prudent not to appear too openly in a Place where his Rival’s Father was Governor, till he had got Information how Charlotta was disposed of; which he soon learned, to his inexpressible Grief; for his Kinsman making Enquiry after her of Gonzalo, the Captain of the Ship who brought her thither, whom he met with at a Coffee-House to which he was directed: He told him of her Marriage and good Fortune, as he termed it: And indeed so it was, had her Lover never come to ruin her Peace. Belanger was quite distracted with this News; his Kinsman wisely advised him to return to Virginia and never see her.98

But like her contemporary Jane Barker, Aubin was anxious to identify herself as a writer of moral fiction, distinguished from the more scandalous writers of amatory fiction like Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood. Consequently, her use of the coffee-house as the location for the tales about the absent female has none of the scandalous connotations of imputed to it by writers like Manley, Addison, Steele and Eliza Haywood.

In Haywood’s *Memoirs of a Certain Island adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725), a stranger to the island is given an aerial view of the main metropolis (a thinly disguised version of London) by his omniscient companion. He observes a succession of urban characters, mainly rakes, scoundrels, promiscuous unfaithful women and their intended victims. One particular villainous womanizer, Bellario, demonstrates his knavery by trying to expose the contents of a sackful of love letters from various infatuated women of the town, for the general perusal of the coffee-house customers. But his attempt to prove his heterosexual charms to his male companions is thwarted, as the presiding deity of the narrative intervenes:

> The Papers from a height unfathomable to fleshly Eyes, flew down like Atoms in the Sun’s Beams; and without any visible direct, darted themselves into the Divine Hands which open’d to receive them, and in a moment deliver’d the whole packet to the wondring Youth, who, as he was commanded, began to inspect the Contents.

In this narrative, female reputation is rescued from the collective male gaze of the coffee-house. Instead, the young, male story-teller is forced, for the purposes of the narrative, to reveal the contents of the private letters to an external, mainly female readership. Rather than enacting the role of a female circulating library inside the male space of the coffee-house, the female letters cease to function as the discursive medium of exchange amongst masculine company and are reinterpreted as stern warnings of male perfidy, to Eliza Haywood’s predominantly women readers.

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99 Ros Ballaster points out that although the writings of Aubin, Barker and Elizabeth Rowe shared formal characteristics with the tales of Behn, Manley and Haywood, their moral weight ‘emerged in reaction to them’, *Seductive Forms*, p. 32. Aubin herself writes in the preface to *The Life of Charlotta du Pont*: ‘they tell me I shall meet with no encouragement and advised me to write rather more modishly, that is, less like a Christian, and in a style careless and loose, as the custom of the present age is to live. but I leave that to other female authors’, ‘Preface’, *The Life of Charlotta du Pont* (1723), repr. in *Eighteenth Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George L. Barnett (New York, 1968), p. 35.

For a nominal sum then, London’s male population could enter any coffee-house and assume the character of that particular establishment. Women, for the most part, were not admitted, but their narrative substitutes were circulated freely inside, thereby denying them ownership and control of their vulnerable reputations. The coffee-house adopts a specific function in the early prose works of the eighteenth century, particularly by women writers; its appearance in the narrative introduces and reinforces particular themes: it is used to convey the idea of successive and fluctuating identities, but more importantly, in the amatory fiction of Manley and Haywood as well as the more moral works of writers like Penelope Aubin, it is the site which underlines the fragility of women’s reputations. Male urban identity is transitory, but a female character, however falsely constructed, is fixed, by men, inside the coffee-house.

This is not to imply that the London coffee-house was a familiar and frequently recurring venue in early eighteenth-century fiction. In fact, compared with other city places of entertainment like the Pleasure Gardens and the theatre, the coffee-house make relatively few appearances in the literature of the period. Although the coffee-house forms an integral part of the tone and structure of the early periodical, and despite its ubiquity in eighteenth-century London, few early amatory fictions and later novels include it as a significant location, and those which do make no attempt to make this site integral to the plot. One reason for this apparent lack of representation must be that the essential narrative ingredients of the writings of Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood as well as the later novel – romance, courtship, imperilled heroines, threatened and threatening heterosexual liaisons – rendered the coffee-house, a space which, in fiction at least, forbade the mingling of the two sexes, peripheral to the central plot. In spite of social-historical evidence pointing to the presence of women, even in a limited, slightly scandalous, capacity, in the London coffee-house, early fictions by female writers banished women from this particular venue and imputed the dubious reputation to the fabrications of unreliable, male coffee-house gossip. The significance of the coffee-house in early eighteenth-century literature therefore, is not how frequently it occurs, but that its presence represents a specific function in the narrative: its appearance signals the potential damage to a lady’s virtuous reputation. The coffee-house gives *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* a spatial framework for its pages, while its distinctive demarcation on lines of gender provides an ideal material context for the representation of the fragility of female reputation in literary narratives.
The coffee-house on the London stage

The structural irrelevance of the coffee-house to the central narratives of early eighteenth-century fictions and the later novel, is a feature shared by other genres dealing with the London coffee-house. An exclusively masculine urban space is given a specific role in contemporary drama. During the latter half of the seventeenth century and in the early part of the eighteenth century, a number of plays appeared all bearing the alternative title 'the Coffee-House'. In 1664, *Knavery in all Trades: Or, the Coffee-House Owned by Mahoon (Arabian)*, was published, followed by *Tarugo’s Wiles: or, The Coffee-House*, in 1668. There is one reference to *Knavery in all Trades* in *The London Stage*, where it is recorded as ‘Author not known’ also noting that the 1664 edition lists no actors’ names, no prologue, no epilogue. There is a single record of a performance given ‘in the Christmas Holiday by several apprentices with great applause’. However, it seems not to have survived beyond this single occasion. Given the convoluted dialogue and plotting of the play, this is perhaps understandable. In 1668, a drama entitled Tarugo’s *Wiles: or, The Coffee-House*, was published by the minor playwright Thomas St Serfe. It fared slightly better than *Knavery in all Trades*; and was performed by the Duke’s Company at the Duke of York’s playhouse for three consecutive days, expiring after that. Samuel Pepys even refers to it in his Diary: ‘To the Duke of York’s Playhouse, but the house so full, it being a new play, “The Coffee House”, that we could not get in.’

*Tarugo’s Wiles* is defined by *The London Stage* as a transitional play; it is a Spanish Romance full of intrigue, and the action, for the most part, is set in Spain. However, like *Knavery in all Trades*, the third Act, the structural epicentre of the drama, includes a satirical scene set in a London coffee-house. The dialogue has little bearing on the rest of the play’s action and is mainly concerned with the self-conscious animated discussion of the virtues of the coffee bean and the intellectual value of newspapers. Peripheral characters are brought centre-stage to praise the stimulating powers of coffee as drink for political aspirants.

8th Customer: ...'tis only in *England*, where the advantage of the Air, with a particular way of preparation improves the Coffee-drinkers in these Misteries.

Baker’s Wife: Since my Husband came to be a *Vertuoso*-Hunter in these Prating-houses, he has altogether left off the caring for his poor Family.

Baker: Hey! ... I think the Woman’s mad; huzzy though I allow you to find me out in Taverns, yet this sawciness does not become you to intrude into the
The dialogue has no relevance to the romantic twistings and plottings of the remaining scenes. In the case of Tarugo's Wiles, this has been interpreted as a transitional stage in the gradual domestication of drama hitherto set in far-off countries. However, the publication details of these plays point the modern reader to the economic factors and motives underpinning these plays; both are published for the benefit of individual coffee-houses at the Royal Exchange. There appears to be a self-serving intention here, as if the City coffee-house, with its obvious commercial associations, were displaying its interests in the very structure of the play it was printing. As pivotal points in the dramas, the strategically placed coffee-house scene serves as an advertisement for the attraction of potential customers, who are presented with a curious combination of urban romance and shrewd commercial and political speculation. The implicit relationship between the coffee-house and literary discourse is made explicit. The 'man of business' is encouraged to identify himself also as the 'man of pleasure' who frequents the London theatre, as commerce merges with popular urban entertainment.

Charles Johnson's 1713 drama, The Generous Husband: Or, the Coffee-House Politician, coincided with the success of The Tatler and The Spectator and perhaps drew inspiration from it. It is a more subtle reworking of its more obviously commercial precursors. The central protagonists, who have names which are reminiscent of the characters in Eliza Haywood's romantic satires, share the action with coffee-house staples such as the obsessive news-gatherer and the pedantic 'coffee-house politician', who is the father of one of the young lovers. The Generous Husband was performed three times at Drury Lane. Henry Fielding also made his contribution to the coffee-house drama. His play, The Coffee-House Politician; Rape Upon Rape; or The Justice caught in his own Trap (1730), mocks the hybrid titles of earlier coffee-house plays masquerading as serious

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102 Knavery in all Trades: Or, the Coffee-House, Printed by J. B. for W. Gilbertson and H. Marsh; and are to be sold at the Royal Exchange, Fleet-Street, and Westminster-Hall, London, 1664, Act III.
drama. Fielding’s play does, at least, make an attempt to make the coffee-house an integral part of the plot, distancing itself from the shameless self-publicity of earlier models. The ‘Coffee-house Politician’ stands for the inflated pomposity of all self-appointed megalomaniacs who try to wrest power from the ordinary citizen. Furthermore, the character of Ramble, the son of Politick, the single-minded coffee-house pedant, and who is accused of raping Hilaret, who is the sweetheart of Ramble’s close friend, Constant, makes a speech condemning loose women, through the use of a familiar comestible trope:

Ramble: [...] If I had a Daughter that drank Tea, I would turn her out of Doors. The Reason that Men are honester than Women is, their Liquors are stronger. [...] Refuse the Tea! I like you now indeed; for you cannot have been long upon the Town, I’m sure. But I grow with Impatience.103

Ramble’s blustering serves to repeat the conventional association of women and tea with scandal and intrigue; men, who drink coffee, are not subject to the same temperamental vacillations as women. The popular perception of the respective physiological effects of tea and coffee is used here as a means of conveying character and action. Scientific speculation merges with literary creativity.104

All the characters are all ultimately and prefunctorially reconciled in a resolution which ensures the consolidation of male friendship between the vindicated Ramble and Constant, the lover of the assaulted Hilaret, who was anyway only too willing to pardon Ramble, in order to preserve the homosocial bonds between her beloved and his oldest friend. Politick, who has hitherto based every decision on information gleaned from, and filtered through, the coffee-house newspapers is made to confront reality when faced with the possible implication of his own son being charged with rape. The coffee-house is ultimately forced to relinquish its structural centrality in the play as a reunion between Hilaret and Constant is successfully brought about.

James Miller’s The Coffee House (1737) appeared as an afterpiece to the main feature, a performance of Measure for Measure. Markman Ellis has discussed the subtle

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103 Henry Fielding, The Coffee-House Politician; Rape Upon Rape; or The Justice caught in his own Trap, London, 1730. For a discussion of the connection between tea-drinking and female scandal, see Clare Brant, ‘Speaking of Women’, pp 248-250. The Female Tatler 1709-10, also makes extensive use of the imbibing of tea as synecdochal of urban scandal and slanderous talk.

104 For a full discussion of the relation between the eighteenth-century London coffee-house and scientific projects and innovations, some of them reminiscent of Swift’s Laputa, see Larry Stewart, ‘Public Lectures and Private patronage’.
implications of the plotting of *The Coffee-House* and offers an analysis of the play’s reworking of the conventional stereotyping of the coffee-house woman into a more refined drama. The plot revolves around the daughter of a coffee-man, the beautiful Kitty, whose mother has educated her daughter to adopt the genteel manners which belie her real social status. Her presence in the coffee-house attracts the attentions of a gentleman, Hartly, who ignores the social demarcation implied by their respective positions inside the coffee-house, and eventually, after much dramatic suspension, he marries her. What distinguishes the play’s depiction of the London coffee-house from other contemporary portraits is its attempt to transform the more familiar figure of the unrefined and ill-bred coffee-house woman into a more respectable and socially acceptable character. Ellis comments: 'Kitty ... conflates the conventional distinction between the sentimental construction of femininity and and the unruly femininity of the coffee-woman ...Miller’s *The Coffee-house* deliberately invokes the trope of the coffee-women, but does so in order to suppress it.'

Although the different treatment of the coffee-house woman in Miller’s play is of literary and social significance, the timing and reception of the first performance qualify its potential radicalism. *The Coffee-house* was performed twice: once in January 1738, and again, in September of the following year. On 28 January 1738, the *London Evening Post* reported that it was:

remarkable that the new comedy call’d The Nest of Plays ... and the new Farce call’d the Coffee House ... and which are the two first that have been performed since the Act of Parliament took place, obliging all Plays, Farces, &c. to be licens’d before play’d, were both damn’d by the Town.

The ‘Act of Parliament’, refers to the Licensing Act of 1737, which ruled that no play could be performed in London without first gaining a royal patent. The stringency of its censorship meant that very few new plays earned official approval; unrefined and coarse material and obvious political criticism were suppressed and not granted a licence for performance.

It is not clear why Miller’s *The Coffee-house* was damned by the town, but there are a few possible factors in its apparent unequivocal condemnation. The most obvious explanation is that the London audience simply disliked the play. However, its landmark status as the first of two plays to be granted a licence for London stage in 1737 suggests

105 Ellis, 'The Coffee-women'.
that the Town was determined to reject the plays approved by the Lord Chamberlain, on principle; the playhouse audience was not prepared to accept the bland and inoffensive material passed by the authorities. This had further significance for a different perspective of Miller's Play. If the 1737 Licensing Act was responsible for the censorship and 'refinement' of London's drama, it is possible to regard The Coffee-house as a post-facto response to the draconian measures proposed by the Act, rather than representing an autonomous anomaly among other depictions of the London coffee-house. In its attempt to reconcile polite sensibility with the conventional reputation of the coffee-house woman, Miller's pitch could be interpreted as a more conservative submission to the new laws concerning London drama. Kitty's refined coffee-woman is, perhaps, a concession to the city's attitude to the stage, rather than a reflection or attempt to shape the changing social status of women in London's coffee-houses.

No further instances of the 'coffee-house play' appear after the failure of Miller's drama, and another possible historical reason for the decrease in interest in the coffee-house play could be that it mirrored the concomitant decline of the coffee-house as a popular eighteenth-century urban venue. This does not mean that the coffee-house, a distinctive, almost definitive feature of early eighteenth-century London disappeared from the cityscape; historical surveys and catalogues show that they were still frequented at the end of the century. However, it does seem that, by the 1740s, the coffee-house's popularity was already waning. As I discussed above, the newspaper war in 1728 and 1729 was a primary factor in fracturing the authority of the coffee-house as sole purveyor and source of London's news-sheets and periodicals. But another important social phenomenon to consider was the growing popularity of the London club.

The coffee-house and the club

Much has already been written about the eighteenth-century club,107 and it is not my intention here to pursue its significance beyond its relevance to the London coffee-house. The club was not, of course, a mid-eighteenth century phenomenon; descriptions, many of them invented, of the sheer variety of different clubs pursuing a multitude of bizarre

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interests proved immensely popular in the earlier part of the century. The Whiggish literary
Kit-Kat club, which included Pope, Addison, Steele, Congreve and Vanbrugh among its
members is a famous example; as is the equally well-known Scriblerus Club. Ned Ward's
_Compleat and Humorous Account of Clubs_ (1709) suggested that for every eccentricity or
physical abnormality a club existed or was created in order to accommodate individual
quirks and idiosyncrasies. Among the myriad of spurious groups were the humorously
named No Noses Club, the Big Noses Club, the Short Club and the Tall Club. Despite
their structural dependence on the London coffee-house, Addison and Steele also included
comical references to different clubs in the pages of their periodicals. No. 132 of _The Tatler_
describes the _Tatler Club_ of 'Smokers and story-tellers'. The second number of _The Spectator_
details the members of its club and describes the 'club-room' in which they sit.
Another number discusses the Club of Fat Men whose conditions for entry create a stricter
exclusionary mechanism than the penny fee levied on coffee-house visitors:

If a Candidate for this Corpulent club could make his Entrance through the first,
he was looked upon as unqualified; but if he stuck in the Passage, and could not
force his Way through it, the Folding-Doors were immediately thrown open for
his Reception and he was saluted as a Brother. I have heard that this club, though
it consisted but of fifteen Persons, weighed above three Ton.

Other similarly ludicrous groups included the _Lazy Club_ who dressed in nightgowns
and stockings and the _Looker's-on Club_ which forbade any kind of noise and, for some
reason, prohibited the use of superlatives. The _Silent Club_ had a deaf-and-dumb
chairman; its motto was 'Talking Spoils Company' and its members were all married men
whose wives were 'remarkably loud at home'. The Surlv Club aimed 'to perfect ... the
art and misery of foul language' and the members of the Humdrum Club in _The Spectator_
'used to sit together, smoke their Pipes, and say nothing till Midnight'.

Like London's coffee-houses, the clubs attracted different political affiliations. Marie
Mulvey Roberts writes that 'there were no keener clubmen than the Whigs, who patronised the Hanover Club, the Mug-house Club and the Green-Ribbon'd Club'. The oppositional Tory clubs included 'The Brothers' Club, the Saturday Club and the renowned October Club.' Yet, although the clubs shared several features with the coffee-house – its homosociality and peculiar interests – its superficial similarities also mask a few vital differences. One important distinguishing factor was that 'the greater number [of clubs] met in the inns and taverns, and the drink that inspired the wits and lesser wits was certainly not coffee'. But what Addison and Steele were also keen to point out in The Tatler and more clearly in The Spectator was the way in which the anonymous citizen could easily assume the identity offered by the character of the coffee-house they chose to visit. By contrast, their depiction of the more absurd clubs implied that one must already be possessed of the vital distinctive features that allowed entry into a particular club.

What changed during the eighteenth century was the gradual domination of the club over the hitherto popular coffee-house. Although coffee-houses were still frequented in mid-century London, the club appeared to be the ascendant means of a more exclusive sociability which embraced various elements of culture and commerce. Moreover, former coffee-houses like The Baltic and Lloyds became exclusive business associations, which introduced strict subscription schemes to enable members to transact business with each other. Similarly, Whites and Almacks transformed themselves into associations which demanded subscription and attracted a higher class of membership. In 1755 Samuel Johnson, who invented the term 'clubbable', defined a club in his Dictionary as 'an assembly of good fellows meeting under certain conditions'. Johnson hated solitude and enjoyed company, but, as Aytoun Ellis points out, 'it was the tavern or the chop-house,

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115 Ibid., p. 60.
116 Ibid., p. 60.
117 Ellis, The Penny Universities, p. 234.
rather than the coffee-house, that made most appeal to him as the right venue'. When considering the public reception of his Dictionary, he wrote: 'It has, you see, no patrons, and, I think, has yet no opponents, except the criticks of the coffee-house, whose outcries are soon dispersed into the air, and are thought of no more.' Johnson dismisses the significance of the coffee-house as arbiter of public taste, but although his words partly connote an anxiety concerning unfavourable criticism of his own publication, they also reflect a waning of the coffee-house's popularity by the 1750s.

The decline of the coffee-house fortunes is not immediately apparent in the fiction written after the mid-century. However, the manner of its continuing depiction of the London coffee-house is significant for the way in which it seems to draw on earlier literary representations. In an almost incidental remark, Katherine Shevelow writes that Steele's periodicals 'virtually defined coffee-house culture for subsequent generations of readers'. In the same way that the young Boswell fashioned his London identity through the polite model of The Spectator, later writings appeared to look back to the early periodicals for their depictions of literary coffee-house culture. The final section of this chapter examines the treatment of the coffee-house in the periodicals and also the novels in the second half of the century.

The coffee-house and urban identity in later eighteenth-century writings

In 1754 The Connoisseur outlined its intentions in its first edition. Rejecting the exhaustive recordings of a Stow or Strype, the paper's spokesman, Mr Town, announces his method:

I shall follow the example of the old Roman Censor: the first part of whose duty was to review the people, and distribute them into their various divisions. I shall therefore enter upon my office, by taking a cursory survey of what is usually called the Town. In this I shall not confine myself to the exact method of a geographer, but carry the reader from one quarter to another.

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121 Ellis, The Penny Universities, p. 227. Johnson first club was formed when he was living in Gough Square, Fleet Street and met in a 'beef-steak house, the King's Head in Ivy Lane. Johnson's club also entertained respectable women, most notably, the author Charlotte Lennox, thus contravening one of the distinguishing characteristics of the coffee-house.
123 Shevelow, Women and Print Culture, p. 97.

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The Connoisseur conforms to a genealogical pattern of the opening numbers of eighteenth-century periodicals. Conflating the geometric topographical columns of The Tatler and the perambulations of The Spectator, Mr Town chooses personally to frequent a number of coffee-houses in order to furnish his paper with London’s present fads and preoccupations. The essays include elaborate detailing of the city’s consumption of pleasure. There are lucubrations ‘On Masquerades’, ‘On the Public Gardens’, ‘On the Juggle of the Theatre’ and letters ‘proving the City of London to be a University’. While The Connoisseur claims to encompass the entire city within its pages, the predilection for coffee-houses produces a version of London written from a male perspective and enlightened by masculine exchange of speech. The writer visits ‘the ‘Change and the adjacent coffee-houses’, and saunters from Garraways to Batson’s, both associated in contemporary writings with reckless commercial investment and hopeful speculation. Leaving the grubby houses of the City, he enters the West End, and is ‘glad to breathe the pure air in St. Paul’s coffee-house’. He enjoys the company of bibliophiles in Chapter Coffee-house, admires the wit of Covent Garden’s Bedford coffee-house, a descendant of Button’s – a favourite haunt of Pope, Addison and Steele – which is ‘every night crowded with men of parts’, and is apprised of the newest fashions at White’s, where ‘learning is beneath the notice of a man of quality’. By limiting his vantage point in London – ‘[i]n my present cursory view of the Town I have indeed confined myself principally to coffee-houses’ – The Connoisseur aligns itself with the popular urban sentiment that being inside a coffee-house was like enjoying a panoramic view of the city. This apparently paradoxical concept of spatial limitation as expansive, urban perspective recalls the author of The Character of a Coffee House who, in 1665 likened his view to being situated at ‘the top of Paul’s High Steeple’; depth is rearranged as horizontal urban space, where the unseen observer can gauge the variety of London’s quirks and eccentricities. Parochial distinction is made characteristic of the nearest coffee-house and imposed on its visitors. The Connoisseur’s pseudonymous collective voice, Mr Town, delights in the ease with which he can assume the identity of whichever coffee-house he chooses to enter.

I am a Scotchman at Forrest’s, a Frenchman at Slaughter’s, and at the Cocoa-Tree I am –an Englishman. At the Robin Hood I am a politician, a logician, a geometrician, a physician, a metaphysician a casuist, a moralist, a theologian, a

125 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
126 The Character of a Coffee House wherein Is contained a Description of the Persons usually frequenting it, with their Discourse and Humors... by an Eye and Ear Witness, London, 1665, p. 4.
mythologist, or anything but an atheist.127

The more eminent London coffee-houses were made distinct from each other by virtue of the different political and social principles to which they played host. St. James’s was known to be a meeting place for Whig sympathizers, the Cocoa Tree was a Tory haunt, while lawyers constituted the majority at the Grecian. However, Mr Town, an urban chameleon himself, accentuates the way in which the coffee-house endows the visitor with a temporary identity. Complications only arise when a coffee-house straddles two normally distinct parts of London. The Temple coffee-house is positioned on the border separating the City and less central area:

The Temple is the barrier that divides the city and the suburbs: and the gentlemen who reside there, seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are, in general, a kind of citizen-courtiers. They aim at the air and mien of the drawing-room; but the holyday smartness of a ‘prentice ... betrays itself in every thing they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world.128

This particular coffee-house produces an urban hybrid, a citizen-courtier, who mixes with unalloyed beaux and tradesman, but who appropriates elements of both so as to create a new external identity. While a visitor seeking a particular kind of company or political kinship could find it among the sheer variety of coffee-houses and the different sensibilities they embraced, there is also a reversal of influence, a sense that the city could appropriate a citizen’s identity. The simultaneous fluidity and hollowness of urban character implies a kind of urban negative capability, an emptying out of intrinsic identity, an idea pursued in the treatment of the coffee-house in some of the novels of the period.

Sarah Fielding’s *The Aventures of David Simple* (1744) uses the coffee-house as a typical location visited by the foppish type of London’s cultural élite, a group of languid, indolent frequenters of the town’s pleasurable sites. In a chapter entitled ‘In which is seen the negative Description most proper to set forth the No Qualities of a great number of Creatures, who strut about on the Face of the Earth’, the young Simple asks his companion Spatter to explain to whom he refers when he describes the set of people known as ‘No-bodies:

127 *The Connoisseur*, p.3.
128 Ibid., p. 2.
He [Spatter] told him he meant a number of Figures of Men, whom he knew not how to give any other Denomination to: But if he would saunter with him from Coffee-house to Coffee-house, and into St. James's Park, which are Places they much haunt, he would shew him great numbers of them: He need not be afraid of them, for altho' there was no Good in them, yet were they perfectly inoffensive; they would talk for ever, and say nothing; were always in motion, and yet could not properly be said ever to act. They have neither Wit nor Sense of any kind; and yet, as they have no Passions, they are seldom guilty of so many Indiscretions as other Men; the only thing they can be said to have, is Pride, and the only way to find that out, is by a Strut in their Gait, something resembling that of the Peacocks, which shews they are conscious (if they can be said to have any Consciousness) of their own Dignity; and like the Peacock, their Vanity is all owing to their find Feathers: for they are generally adorned with all the Art imaginable.129

There seems to be an absence of interiority among these pleasure-seekers; even that greatest of urban truisms, the adoption of a chosen role in the big city, is missing as they ‘could not be said even to act’, and ‘have no passions’. Their habit of frequenting the London coffee-house accords with the tradition established in earlier writings, of endowing its visitors with a temporary identity. By leaching the character out of the coffee-house, the No-bodies can adopt a semblance of personality for a while, but it seeps away when they move on to the next haunt, for, like Hobbes’s famous universal cause and explanation for the motivation of human behaviour, they are ‘always in motion’. The author considers that they might be ‘like Ciphers in an Account’: seemingly unreadable signs, which may eventually disclose a latent significance ‘of great Use in the whole, tho’ it was not to be found out by the narrow Sight of ignorant Mortals’.130 However, the impression is that the No-bodies are empty, meaningless signs with no internal impulses, and who drift through the city in search of different venues which will facilitate the endless absorption of different identities.

The no-bodies occupy an indeterminate status, somewhere between performance and passivity: their peacock display is more static tableau-vivant than active impersonation. A more typical example of the coffee-house hypocrite and urban actor occurs in Francis Coventry’s The History of Pompey the Little (1751), the adventures of an Italian lapdog, but also a perceptive portrait of early- and mid-eighteenth century London. One chapter...

130 Ibid., p. 93.
deals with ‘the Description of a Coffee-House’ and its significance in throwing light on the construction of identity in the city. After visiting the Clubs of Humour, Pompey takes himself to a coffee-house where he overhears ‘one little specimen of Coffee-house Oratory’. One gentleman known as the ‘chief Orator of the Club’ rises as usual and begins to expound on the hypocrisy of current government policy, accusing it of ‘acting all this while in secret’ and where ‘Walpole is behind the Curtain still’, suggesting the deception practised every day in Westminster. When the coffee-house politician is challenged by another visitor with the sneering: ‘Sir, nothing in the World can be so easy, except talking about it’, this provokes a furious riposte concerning the virtues of free speech cultivated inside the English coffee-house: ‘May not I have the liberty of speaking my Mind freely upon any Subject that I please? why ... you forget, surely – This is England, this is honest Old England, Sir, and not a Mahometan Empire.’ The coffee-house’s recent history of hosting sedition and political treachery is forgotten, as, ironically given the insult, is its Oriental provenance; ‘Old England’s tradition of free speech is invented to suit the purposes of the present argument.

The main point of the chapter, however, is the revelation at the end that the coffee-house orator is a domestic tyrant: an abusive husband and despotic father. Coffee-house democracy dissipates into private brutality and censoriousness. The narrator comments:

NOTHING can be more common than Examples in this way of People, who preside over their Families with the most brutal Severity, and yet are ready on all Occasions to abuse the Government for the smallest Exertion of its Power. To say the Truth, I scarce know a Man who is not a Tyrant in miniature, over the Circle of his own Dependents ... Happy is it for the World, that this Coffee-house Statesman was not born a King.

The noted discrepancy between the character of public and private man is hardly original, but what becomes clear by the end of this chapter is that this incident is not so much a detailed vignette of a coffee-house, but rather, a way of using its specific properties as a way of mediating and typifying the construction of urban identity.

131 Coventry, *Pompey the Little*, p. 7.
132 Ibid., pp. 71-2. cf. Henry Fielding’s comment in *Tom Jones* (1749): ‘When Transactions behind the Curtain are mentioned, *St. James’s* is more likely to occur to our Thoughts than *Drury-Lane*. See p. 64 in this thesis.
133 Coventry, *Pompey the Little*, p. 73.
134 Ibid., pp. 75-6.
The literary use of the London coffee-house as a means of conveying the anonymity of the city evolves into a type of urban shorthand. For instance, when a character in Henry Brooke's sentimental novel, *The Fool of Quality* (1765-70), tries to convey the experience of arriving as an ingénue in the great metropolis, the coffee-house is the singled out as the favoured resort. There he will be able to merge with the many city types who frequent the various establishments and reinvent himself as a spurious expert in different intellectual and artistic fields:

I began, seriously, to think of the Course I ought to take; and considered London as the Sphere in which a Luminary would appear with the greatest Lustre ... I took cheap Lodgings, near Charing-Cross; I was, altogether unknowing and unknown in that great City; and, reflecting that a hidden Treasure cannot be duly estimated, I daily frequented Markham's Coffee-House, amidst a promiscuous Resort of Swords men, Literati, Beaus, and Politicians.

Here, happening to distinguish myself, on a few Occasions, where some Articles of ancient History, or Tenet of Thales, or Law of Lycurgus, chanced to be in Question; I began to be regarded with better Advantage.\(^{135}\)

Markham's coffee-house\(^{136}\) differs from the coffee-houses of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Whereas the periodicals emphasized the distinction of each individual establishment along the lines of class, politics and cultural interests, later novelistic treatments depict the coffee-house as an undiscriminating resort, a microcosmic cross-section of the city's more privileged male population. It belongs to the more refined, polite social orbit of the early periodical, but conflates the different characters of the diverse houses in a more general context of urban anonymity where a figure is 'unknowing and unknown'.

Later fictional treatments seem to contain a residual sense of how the London coffee-house was depicted in earlier literature. Identity contingent on individual establishments is shown to be the simpler defining characteristic of an invented archetypal coffee-house. A migrating, shifting identity is limited to any single establishment. In a similar way, the idea of the coffee-house as the site of female betrayal reappears as a familiar trope to be used as a convenient and recognized, almost commonplace, image in the mid-century novel.

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\(^{136}\) There is no record of this coffee-house in Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses*. 266
Women and the coffee-house in later writings

Henry Fielding’s London novel *Amelia*, published in 1752, looks back to the kind of coffee-house epistolary exchanges described by Manley, Haywood and *The Spectator*. It includes a scene where the protagonist, Booth, meets his friend Colonel James in order to discuss a problem concerning a woman, Miss Matthews, whose correspondence, is a source of great anxiety.

So they walked directly to a *Coffee-house* at the Corner of *Spring-Garden*, where being in a Room by themselves, Booth opened his Heart, and acquainted the Colonel with his Amour with Miss Matthews, from the very Beginning, to his receiving that Letter which had caused all his present Uneasiness, and which he now delivered into his Friend’s Hand.137

Earlier in the novel, Booth, the husband of the virtuous Amelia had been imprisoned for debt, and had become involved in a relationship with fellow inmate Miss Matthews. The exact contents of the letter, which passes between Booth and the Colonel, are never revealed. Commenting on this episode, Clare Brant considers the connection between the control of female texts and the reputations of their authors:

[An ‘absent’ text – that is, a letter supposedly passed between characters, but not given to the reader – stands as a signifier for the vindicatory female text. Its non-contents generate negative definitions of the writer: ‘this dreadful Woman’, ‘a Whore’. Gender stereotyping is made efficient by being predicated on unreadable texts.138

Miss Matthews’s reputation suffers as her letter is passed from Booth to the Colonel. The coffee-house, identified by the editor of the Wesleyan edition as Brown’s, a fashionable resort situated in Spring Garden, is therefore the ideal urban context in which to cast aspersions on the character and even physical appearance of the absent Miss Matthews, via her letter. ‘The next Day early in the Morning, the Colonel came to the Coffee-house, and sent for his Friend, who lodged but at a little Distance. The Colonel told him he had a little exaggerated the Lady’s Beauty.’139 Miss Matthews’s character becomes the transitory property of the two men, who exchange opinions in a setting whose rules expel the virtuous woman from its premises.

138 Clare Brant, ‘Speaking of Women’, p. 264.
The coffee-house conceit in *Amelia*, as the site of ruined female reputations, is an extended reprise of the role it played in *Joseph Andrews* (1742). In that earlier novel, there is a passing reference to a ‘young Woman, and the handsomest in all this Neighbourhood’, enticed up to London by a farmer’s son who has ‘ruined’ himself by attempting to educate himself out of his working class origins. His subsequent alcoholic decline leads to his corrupting the innocence of others. He offers to make the unfortunate ‘young Woman’ a:

Gentlewoman to one of your Women of Quality: but instead of keeping his Word, we have since heard, after having a Child by her himself, she became a common Whore; then kept a Coffee-House in *Covent-Garden*, and a little after died of the *French Distemper* in a Goal.  

The woman’s fate resembles that of Hogarth’s *The Harlot’s Progress* (1732). She ‘progresses’ from naive arrivée in the big city, gives birth to an illegitimate child, turns prostitute and, by implication of the downward trajectory of her tale, slides further down the social scale by keeping a coffee-house, finally suffering a painful death in prison. Like *The Velvet Coffee-woman*, this coffee-house is not part of the periodical’s polite male sphere; it belongs to the scandalous area of Rochford’s memoirs. However, unlike Rochford’s narrative, this tale is interpolated into another inserted story told by a male. Instead of the female occupying the subjective voice of the narrative, the young woman’s fate is framed by the words of another. Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) also alludes to ‘such another place as the ever-memorable coffee-house of Moll King; with this difference, that the company here were not so riotous as the Bucks of Covent-Garden’. The coffee-house which the riotous company visits is actually in Amsterdam, but the reference to Moll King’s infamous establishment points to its lingering significance in the popular imagination.

Of all the eighteenth-century novelists, Smollett uses the coffee-house as a popular urban venue most frequently. Significantly perhaps, the biographical *The Life and Character of Moll King, late Mistress of King’s Coffee-House in Covent-Garden* was published in 1747, four years before *Peregrine Pickle* and just one year before *Roderick Random*, suggesting that there was still a public appetite for the more transgressive coffee-houses. Although they are usually passing references, convenient, familiar landmarks for

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his roguish male characters to dive in and out of, Smollett occasionally extends his
treatment to flesh out a character; the innuendos and popular associations with the coffee-
house allow him to create a comic incident, which, although it adds nothing significant to
the main plot, allows the author to indulge in another crude and boisterous episode.

Smollett’s first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), is a picaresque
narrative featuring the adventures of the titular hero. The reader follows the fortunes of
Roderick in the British Navy and on dry land, in the metropolis. In London, he falls into
the company of various, stock characters, identified by their names, Banter, Bragwell,
Ranter, Chatter, Slyboot and Dr. Wagtail. The inevitable visits to the town’s coffee-houses
are incidental episodes and not integral components of a tight, intricate plotting. The
disparate scenes in the novel are successive rather than interconnected, conforming to the
contiguous structure implicit in a tour of the city. The coffee-house incident occurring half-
way through the novel is representative of itself and coffee-house mores, rather than
providing an intrinsic part of the novel’s structure. The vulgar scene in Bedford’s
establishment, is full of in-jokes, relating to the popular reputation of the London coffee-
house. The pedantic physician, Dr. Wagtail is interrupted in the middle of his excruciating
monologue on the social and etymological history of the coffee bean and other learned
observations. The unfortunate doctor becomes, as ever in the novels of Smollett, the victim
of a crude practical joke. In the midst of his dull pronouncements, his excited male
companions, who can hardly contain their mirth, inform him that there is a certain female
desperate to see him. This woman turns out to be a prostitute who has been paid to accuse
Dr. Wagtail of making her pregnant and subsequently abandoning her. The doctor, whose
agonized denials make several oblique references to his impotence, are deliberately ignored.
Random admits his complicity.

I entered into the confederacy, and enjoy’d the distress of the Wagtail, who with
tears in his eyes, begged the protection of the company, declaring himself as
innocent of the crime laid to his charge, as the fœtus in utero; and hinting at the
same time, that nature had not put it in his power to be guilty of such a
trespass.142

There was an historical connection between the drinking of coffee and the charges of
impotence levelled at it. In 1674, the ‘Woman’s Petition against Coffee’ accused the drink
of having a feminizing effect on men; coffee was therefore often referred to in

contemporary literature as ‘ninny broth’ and Turkey-Gruel’. The Coffee-house also became, in the eighteenth century, a favourite haunt of quacks and other charlatans who exploited the unique circumstances brought about by exclusive company of men, boasting endless cures for various ailments, most notably those said to be affecting the citizens’ masculinity. The creation of a male urban space therefore facilitated the popularization of extravagant amateur medical claims. One enterprising citizen took advantage of the growing number of private urban channels of communication, in order to promote his own medical publications. In *The Secret Patient’s Diary*, the author addresses private individuals who are too wary of revealing the nature of their ailments and offers them an alternative method of obtaining medical advice.

If they send but the least Note by the Peny Post Directed thus: To Mr Robert Bradshaw, next to the King’s-Head on Crown Street ... So that as soon as ever the Note is received This Person will presently bring PRIVATELY to you, Or leave at any House, privately for you, as you shall order him, whatever of these Things you shall write to him from them.

Although not exclusive to the environs of the London coffee-house, the idea that new features of the urban landscape would enable the circulation of private information, maintaining the anonymity of the patient, would seem ideally suited to a site which could conceal any debilitating diseases specific to men from the knowledge of women. The eighteenth-century coffee-house became a perfect medium for the anonymous exchange of vital city information.

The coarseness of Smollett’s writing compared with other novels of the time and his interest in medical matters make his depiction of the seedier side of coffee-house culture perhaps unsurprising. The reputation cultivated in earlier broadsides, scandalous memoirs and less polite publications like Ned Ward’s *The London Spy* gave later narratives scope for using the London coffee-house as material for representing a less refined version of the city. As late as 1773, Richard Graves’s *The Spiritual Quixote*, a picaresque novel mocking the excesses of Methodism, includes a coffee-house episode where the unimaginatively named female proprietor Placket lets slip that it is also a place of promiscuity for both sexes:

143 For a survey of the relationship between coffee-houses and quacks, see Ellis, *The Penny Universities*, pp. 129-44.
144 *The Secret Patient’s Diary: also the gout and weakness, diaries Being each a practical journal or scheme* ... London, 1725.
Just as Wildgoose was coming out of his chamber, a fat elderly woman, tolerably well dressed, came to the door, grunting most bitterly, ... and enquired whether Mr. Wildgoose was stirring ... She said, 'her name was Placket; that she kept a little Coffee-house, where gentlemen and ladies sometimes met to drink a dish of tea together, in a harmless way, for what she knew to the contrary; but that she had censorious neighbours, who had given her house a bad name.’ - ‘Why,’ says Wildgoose, ‘the world is very censorious, without doubt: but we should take care, not to give room for any just reflections upon our conduct.’ - ‘Ah! Sir,’ says she, "why that is my business with you. God forgive me! I am afraid there may have been some little frolicks now and then carried on at my house. When young people get together, you know, Sir, they will be kissing and toying; and one does not always know where those things may end.’ - ‘Why, by your account, Mrs. Placket, you do not keep so good an house as you should do’ ... ‘Oh! Mrs. Placket, I find then you keep a downright Bawdy-house.’ - ‘Why, to be sure, Sir,’ says she, that is what ill-natured people call it’.145

Although this later coffee-house appears to contradict the segregation of earlier establishments by pointing to the mingling of men and women inside the coffee-house, it is clear that the hazy distinction between coffee-house and ‘bawdy house’ is more closely associated with the biographies of Anne Rochford and Moll King. Although this particular coffee-house appears to be a front for something more like a brothel, the later, rather reluctant permission to visit them confirms their status as questionable places for those easily led astray: ‘I do not expect them to renounce the world ... neither would I absolutely forbid them, in great towns, going to a Coffee-house or a Tavern, upon necessary occasions. But I would not have them make those places their constant rendezvous.’146

*The Spiritual Quixote* is, of course, partly mocking the excessive religious exhortations of Methodism, but it is able to do so by drawing on a different tradition of the coffee-house.

Graves’s depiction of the coffee-house conveys a less refined public arena than the novels which concern the depiction of female virtue as a central theme. The semi-reformed, mid-century Eliza Haywood uses the coffee-house almost as an urban code to convey the exclusion of women from certain social spheres: by following the route of a particular character, one is able to infer, or read the truth of their virtue by observing the moral spaces that they inhabit or take care to avoid. In Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), the character of the eponymous, eventually reformed coquette is

146 Ibid., p. 462.
discussed in a coffee-house.

[T]he young gentleman had seen Miss Betsy at St. Paul's rehearsal, when they were all there to hear the music; that the next day after, he had come to him at a coffee-house, which it was known he frequented, and after asking many questions concerning Miss Betsy, and hearing she was not engaged, declared he was very much charmed with her, and entreated his permission, as being her guardian, to make his addresses to her.\textsuperscript{147}

Betsy’s reputation is circulated in the coffee-house, where she is in no position to interrupt and represent herself. However, although her character is transferred to the masculine sphere of the coffee-house, at no point in the narrative does she attempt to visit one herself. That is left to other female characters whose dubious actions are implied through the language of the city as text. Miss Betsy’s former companion, the aptly named Miss Forward, later recounts her sorrowful tale of seduction and subsequent moral dissolution. Abandoned by her lover, she describes her attempt to follow him to London where she believed that ‘there were several great coffee-houses there, frequented by all the gentlemen of fashion, and that nothing would be more easy than to find Mr Wildly at one or other of them’.\textsuperscript{148} The heartless seducer is thus traced to the place traditionally associated with ruined female reputation. But Mr Wildly proves to be elusive in the ‘great metropolis’,\textsuperscript{149} and despite renewed attempts to send for news of him at the coffee-house, he is not to be found and Miss Forward’s downfall is assured as she gives birth to an illegitimate child.

Miss Betsy’s ultimately successful suitor and tamer of her wayward coquettishness, Mr Trueworth, also finds his moral integrity seriously tested when Betsy’s rival for his affections, the outwardly respectable Miss Flora Mellasin, disguises herself in an attempt to attract his attentions. Like \textit{Fantomina} (1725), Haywood’s earlier scandalous narrative, Miss Flora conceals her identity in the city, ‘not only masqued, but also close muffled in her hood’.\textsuperscript{150} However, the crucial difference is that, whereas Fantomina was clearly meant to be a heroine in Haywood’s early amatory fiction, her improper social conduct is imputed to an enemy to virtue in \textit{Betsy Thoughtless}. Yet although Haywood’s fiction seems at times to be conceding to a contemporary morally reformative climate, her use of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Haywood, \textit{Miss Betsy Thoughtless}, p. 77.
\item Ibid., p. 92.
\item Ibid., p. 93.
\item Ibid., p. 267.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the cityscape offers echoes of her earlier narratives. Trueworth is flattered by the seductive tone of 'Incognita's' letter and offers to meet her 'at a certain coffee-house, which he named to her'. The astute reader of London is immediately alerted to the location of the secret assignation: to meet at a coffee-house is a coded attempt to convey either the imminent seduction or moral demise of a woman in London. Being Mr Trueworth, Miss Betsy's admirer is horrified when he realizes the identity of the masked female (although one wonders what might have happened had she never revealed herself). Yet his subsequent attempts to make amends for a moment of moral frailty prove futile as his misconduct returns to haunt him in the city's coffee-houses. Flora sends a letter to him there, informing him that '[I] will call on you at the coffee-house this evening about eight'. When he fails to reciprocate her passion she writes to him in despair: 'I have sent twice to the coffee-house, – been there once in person, but could hear nothing of you.' Trueworth replies by beseeching her 'henceforward [to] forbear to make any enquiry concerning me at the coffee-house, or elsewhere'. Although he clearly regrets his previous misdemeanour, Trueworth is obviously disturbed at having his masculine urban space disrupted and invaded by the persistent and besotted Miss Flora, who finally signals her moral confusion by actually following him to the coffee-house, where she is met with a 'cool and indifferent reception'.

Haywood's treatment of the coffee-house indicates its status as a kind of urban barometer to measure the virtue of the female in London. That she uses it as an almost entirely negative urban space to connote the corruption of a female's reputation (in this case brought about by the woman herself) suggests a retrospective view of the earlier coffee-house. Haywood makes no attempt to overturn the traditional associations of the urban coffee-house by attempting to reverse or even ignore its position as destroyer of female reputations. Her female characters can only indicate their virtue by avoiding the coffee-house altogether. There are, however, a few literary instances where the coffee-house's traditional role as spatial arbiter of female respectability or damnation is inverted so as to be used against those who might try to threaten a woman's virtue.

In *Joseph Andrews*, Mr. Wilson interpolates a personal narrative, giving an account of

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151 Ibid., pp. 267-8.
152 Ibid., p. 320.
153 Ibid., p. 332.
154 Ibid., p. 334.
155 Ibid., p. 346.
his early life when, after coming into his fortune after the death of his father, he arrived in London where ‘the Character I was ambitious of attaining, was that of a fine Gentleman’. 156 He describes how he tries to earn the reputation of a fashionable rake by inventing letters purportedly written by them, but actually penned by him, to himself: ‘It is incredible the pains I have taken, and the absurd Methods I employed to traduce the Character of Women of Distinction.’ 157 Significantly, the gentleman, Wilson, is finally challenged in a coffee-house:

After I had continued two Years in this Course of Life, said the Gentleman, an Accident happened which obliged me to change the Scene. As I was one day at St James’s Coffee-house, making very free with the Character of a young Lady of quality, an Officer of the Guards who was present, thought proper to give me the lye. I answered I might possibly be mistaken; but intended to tell no more than the Truth. To which he made no Reply, but a scornful Sneer. After this I observed a strange Coldness in all my Acquaintance; none of them spoke to me first, and very few returned me even the Civility of a Bow. The Company I used to dine with, left me out, and within a Week I found myself in as much Solitude at St. James's, as if I had been in a Desart. 158

Wilson’s bluff is thus finally called in a city location traditionally associated with its capacity to arbitrate publicly the reputations of virtuous women. Although he later resumes his former caddish behaviour, it seems fitting that his ungallant practice of blemishing the names of unknowing females takes place in the coffee-house.

Henry Fielding is hardly the obvious candidate for the position of defender of female virtue, and the significance of this reported episode is relevant only to the local circumstance in which it occurs. However, a similar episode occurs in Sarah Fielding’s David Simple where a reformed clergyman narrates scenes from his earlier life: ‘The next scheme I took into my head was to follow Women, for their Money, instead of their Persons: and it was a Rule with me, generally to go amongst those who had but small Fortunes’. 159 Although he is not concerned with directly harming women’s reputations, his actions obviously give rise to such a possibility – a woman rendered destitute has few places to turn to in the city. However, he is prevented from continuing his mercenary

157 Ibid., p. 203.
158 Ibid., p. 205.
159 Sarah Fielding, David Simple, p. 287.
actions by the brother of one of his duped victims:

Another Woman, from whom I had got 500 l. in this treacherous manner, happened to have a Brother, who loved her so sincerely, that she was never afraid to let him know even her own Indiscretions: He pulled me by the Nose in a publick Coffee-house, and swore, till I had returned his Sister every Farthing I owed her, he would use me in that manner, wherever he met with me.160

Once again, a female is spared the fate of many other women in similarly reduced circumstances by reparations made in the male coffee-house.

In Richardson’s Clarissa (1747-48), Belford writes to Lovelace, telling him that, wishing to learn more about her history, the doctor treating Clarissa’s deteriorating condition takes Belford to a place where he can hear about her rather than listen directly to her own story:

We all withdrew together; and the Doctor and Mr. Goddard having a great curiosity to know something more of her story, at the motion of the latter we went into a neighbouring coffee-house, and I gave them, in confidence, a brief relation of it; making all as light for you as I could; and yet you’ll suppose, that, in order to do but common justice to the lady’s character, heavy must be that light.161

At first, Belford seems merely to be repeating the familiar pattern of discussing a lady’s reputation without her knowledge in a privileged male space. However, his concern to do ‘common justice’ to Clarissa’s name leads him try and obscure the reason for her present sickness. It is Lovelace’s fortune that a consequence of the preservation of Clarissa’s character is the temporary concealment of his crime. However, in a later letter to Lovelace, Belford, having undergone a sincere repentance for his former actions, informs his correspondent that:

Mr. Hickman and I went afterwards to a neighbouring coffee-house; and he gave me some account of your behaviour at the Ball on Monday night, and of your treatment of him in the conference he had with you before that; which he represented in a more favourable light than you had done yourself: And yet he gave his sentiments of you with great freedom, but with the politeness of a gentleman.

He told me how very determined the lady was against marrying you; that she

160Ibid., p. 287.
161 Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, ed. Ross, p. 1082.
had, early this morning, set herself to write a letter to Miss Howe, in answer to
one he brought her, which he was to call for at twelve, it being almost finished
before he saw her at breakfast; and that at three he proposed to set out on his
return.162

In this instance, it is the rake whose reputation is being sullied by two men conversing in
the coffee-house, as a result of which, Clarissa’s virtue is vindicated and reinforced. The
traditional role of the coffee-house is subverted here and turned against the former
beneficiaries of an all-male masculine urban space.

But these few examples hardly represent a united or deliberate attempt to invert the
traditional position occupied by the coffee-house in eighteenth-century fiction and the
contemporary popular imagination. The respective dates of publication: 1742, 1744 and
1748-9 are close enough to suggest a gradual change in the public reputation of the coffee-
house, but it cannot be said to form a body of writing to challenge the prevailing literary
view, that the coffee-house was where a woman’s good name was placed at greatest risk.
A work which places a greater emphasis on this inversion is Henry Brooke’s The Fool of
Quality.

In a study of the links between the sentimental literature and eighteenth-century
reformative projects to rehabilitate and educate prostitutes, Markman Ellis comments:
‘Prostitutes, in short, became sentimentalized subjects’.163 He also describes how Steele,
However, he also describes how, in 1758, a charity committee was established to help
former prostitutes:

Meeting in coffee houses from April 1758, the committee comprised eight
gentlemen, including Robert Dingley and Jonas Hanway. All were merchants,
including four directors of the Russia Company. The initial subscription raised
£663 in April, and £3,114 by 17 May of the same year. By 2 January 1760 they
had raised £8,129 – an extraordinary sum that testifies to the charity’s
timeliness.164

That the effort to help penitent prostitutes and immeasurably improve their future prospects

162 Ibid., p. 1130.
163 Markman Ellis, The Politics of Sensibility: Race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel,
164 Ibid., pp. 173-4.
took place in London’s coffee-houses is not necessarily particularly noteworthy or unusual in its historical context. If, as historians have suggested, there was a gradually transformation in cultural sensibilities, more kindly disposed to the misfortunes of prostitutes, then the campaign would not have seemed such a cultural anomaly, and the coffee-house would simply have provided a convenient place in London for the merchants to meet. Its appearance in the fiction of the time, however, provides a more surprising departure from literary convention.

In Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality*, the narrator relates how, on one evening, ordinary social intercourse in disturbed by an appeal made by a coffee-house speaker:

One Evening, as our Companions were drinking Tea in the Temple Exchange Coffee-House, a Man, advanced in Years, but of a very respectable Appearance, got up and addressed the Assembly.

Gentlemen, said he, among the several Hospitals and other charitable Foundations that have done Honour to the Humanity of the Inhabitants of this City, there is one still wanting, which, as I conceive, above all others, would give Distinction to the Beneficence of its Founders; it is a House for repenting Prostitutes, an Assylum for unhappy Wretches who have no other Home, to whom all Doors are shut, to whom no Haven is open, no Habitation, or Hole for Rest upon the Face of the Earth.

Most of them have been seduced from native Innocence and Modesty by the Arts of cruel Men. Many have been deceived under Promise and Vows of Marriage; some, under the Appearance of the actual Ceremony, and afterward abandoned, or turned forth to Infamy by their barbarous and base Undoers. Shall no Place then be left for Repentance even to those who do repent? forbid it Charity, forbid it Manhood. Man is born the natural Protector of the Weakness of Woman, and if he has not been able to guard her Innocence from Invasion, he ought at least to provide a Reception for her Return to Virtue.

I have the Plan of this charitable Foundation in my Pocket; and, if any of you, Gentlemen, approve my Proposal, and are willing to subscribe, or to solicit your Friends to so beneficent a Purpose, I request your Company to the Leg Tavern over the Way.

Here, the Speaker walked toward the Door, and was followed by Harry and Clement, and thirteen or fourteen more of the Assembly.\(^{165}\)

The passage seems almost certainly to have been inspired by the foundation of the charity in 1758. Unlike both Sarah and Henry Fielding’s and Samuel Richardson’s more muted, incidental attempts to subvert the popular use of the coffee-house in fiction to vindicate

female character, Brooke’s sentimental narrative has a natural historical context in which to set its untypically sympathetic coffee-house scene. Rather than exploiting the prostitute’s fallen circumstances for sentimental purposes, the lucid outline for reform not only historicizes an episode to underline the novel’s message concerning mankind’s basic benevolence and philanthropy, it also offers an unusual literary example of vindication of an urban space so long depicted in fiction as the site of female denigration.

Brooke’s treatment of the coffee-house is an anomaly among other novelistic representations. For the most part, the mid-century and later novels drew on the coffee-house tropes established in the earlier part of the century. They exploited the idea of an enclosed masculine arena in order to depict in spatial terms, the fragility and vulnerability of a woman’s reputation in a big metropolis like London, where appearance governed perception. The reformative campaign to rescue fallen women articulated topographically a shift in cultural sensibilities. Whereas the literary coffee-house in the early part of the century expressed a form of urbane, masculine respectability, the transformation of its social role in the literature of sensibility pointed to a different, more feminized kind of respectability. Later representations of the coffee-house chose to focus on and reflect a change in the emotional climate. The translation of current social campaigns into material for sentimental fiction involves less of a distortion of contemporary events and seems closer to factual reportage. Unlike the more selective renderings of the coffee-house experience in earlier writings, the coffee-house in Brooke’s narrative coincides with, and perhaps even participates in, the establishment of a more bourgeois and feminine sentimentalism.

Yet, despite the implied shift in sensibility, certain coffee-house tropes persisted. During this period in literature, particularly the novel, the coffee-house was still a city venue from which virtuous women, or those wishing to be thought of as such, excluded themselves. Even in Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), for example, the women do not visit the coffee-house, although they attend almost every other public venue in London. Yet, despite the implied shift in sensibility, certain coffee-house tropes persisted. During this period in literature, particularly the novel, the coffee-house was still a city venue from which virtuous women, or those wishing to be thought of as such, excluded themselves. Even in Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), for example, the women do not visit the coffee-house, although they attend almost every other public venue in London. In a study which asserts that women did visit coffee-houses at the end of the seventeenth century, Helen Berry makes a significant point when she comments that ‘there is little or no evidence that middling-sort women socialized in coffee-houses or went there’.

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166 There is one occasion when Mr Smith suggests that everyone, including the female company, visit Don Saltero’s coffee-house at Chelsea. However, this apparently irregular suggestion is not as radical as it might first seem: Don Saltero’s had, by this time, been almost absorbed into the museum which Hans Sloane had set up there, and it was not uncommon for both sexes to visit its exhibits. See Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses*, p. 194.
This statement seems intended almost as an afterthought: Berry is keen to demonstrate that there is evidence to support the claim that working-class and aristocratic women visited the coffee-house. But the absence of 'middling-sort' women from the London coffee-house provides some kind of clue to the representation of the coffee-house in the fiction of the period, particularly the novel. If the reading public and especially Londoners did indeed become self-referential 'city-watchers', then what they were reading was a version of the metropolis that they had partly constructed themselves; one which was also confirmed in the literature that they consumed. An implied middle-class readership, especially one inflected by gender, saw reflected back at itself, a narrative tradition of the London coffee-house which provided a way of reading the city. The literary coffee-house became emblematic of the way that the representation of urban space mediated in the construction of a specific social identity. Although this literary genealogy also made clear that no single 'character' could be imputed to the London coffee-house, its presence in the city constituted a way of defining the identity of visitors to the coffee-house and those who chose to absent themselves from it. Cruder picaresque narratives like those of Smollett and Richard Graves had recourse to a less refined coffee-house narrative tradition which had been expelled from the polite masculine sphere of the earlier periodical. But the lingering image of the London coffee-house, which endowed its male visitors with a transitory identity, and which, more significantly, gave men temporary possession of women's characters, bequeathed later fictional portraits an urban space with an established role in fiction. Although never integral to the narrative plot, the coffee-house became a topographical medium which was able to convey both the instability of urban identity and the exploitation of women in eighteenth-century fiction. Literary portraits did not always register the sheer variety and social nuances of the metropolitan coffee-house, but in polite fiction at least, it provided a way of negotiating and reading a particular version of eighteenth-century London.

167 Berry, "Nice and Curious Questions", p. 262.
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