

Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England

This first in-depth study of women's politeness examines the complex relationship individuals had with the discursive ideals of polite femininity. Contextualising women's autobiographical writings (journals and letters) with a wide range of eighteenth-century printed didactic material, it analyses the tensions between politeness discourse which aimed to regulate acceptable feminine identities and women's possibilities to resist this disciplinary regime. Ylivuori focuses on the central role the female body played as both the means through which individuals actively fashioned themselves as polite and feminine, and the supposedly truthful expression of their inner status of polite femininity.

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Bodies, Identities, and Power

Soile Ylivuori

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Soile Ylivuori



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To all female friends and friendships

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------------|---|
| BL | British Library, London |
| BL Add. MS | British Library Additional Manuscripts |
| BL RP | British Library Exported Manuscripts |
| BLRA | Bedfordshire and Luton Records and Archives, Bedford |
| CMD | <i>The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany</i> . Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover (ed.) 6 vols. London: Richard Bentley 1861–2 |
| CT | Catharine Talbot |
| EM | Elizabeth Montagu |
| FB | Frances (Fanny) Burney |
| HL | Huntington Library, San Marino, California |
| JCT | <i>Journals of Catharine Talbot</i> , BL Add. MS 46688, Add. MS 46690 |
| JFB | <i>The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney</i> . 5 vols. Lars E. Troide (I–III, V), Stewart J. Cooke (III, V) and Betty Rizzo (IV) (eds) Oxford: Clarendon 1988–94 and Montreal & Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2003–12 |
| MO | Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino (CA) |
| MD | Mary Delany |
| LEM | <i>The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu, with Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents</i> . 4 vols. Matthew Montagu (ed.) London: T. Cadell and W. Davies 1809–13 |
| LCT | <i>A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the year 1741 to 1770</i> . 4 vols. Montagu Pennington (ed.) London: F. C. and J. Rivington 1809 |
| ODNB | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| OED | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| QBS | <i>Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of Blue-Stockings. Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761</i> . 2 vols. Emily J. Clemenson (ed.) London: John Murray, 1906 |
| Wrest MS | Wrest Park Manuscripts, Bedfordshire and Luton Records and Archives |

Introduction

This is a book about women's politeness. Why politeness, someone might ask, yawning—surely we have exhausted all possible angles on eighteenth-century politeness already? Indeed, politeness has come to be known as the key concept in understandings of a variety of aspects of the British eighteenth century. It is not only one of the central idioms of eighteenth-century culture, but it has also served as an important analytical category in historical studies of the eighteenth century. In Lawrence E. Klein's words, politeness has been used to interpret, among other things, 'material and visual cultures, the organisation of space, the constitution of social and political identities, the character of intellectual and artistic life, and even institutional structures'.¹ In a more narrow sense, politeness has been an important tool in research that delves into eighteenth-century disciplines of social interaction and the cultural codes that regulated appropriateness of not only speech, appearance, or bodily comportment, but also moral and social values. Important works have been written on the specific manifestations of politeness, the philosophical ideals behind different modes of politeness, as well as the historical links between eighteenth-century politeness and early modern norms of civility and courtesy.² Politeness has, in fact, become such an important master metaphor for eighteenth-century culture that scholars have recently voiced concerns that the paradigm of politeness 'may have spread too far', and that since the English were, in reality, more uncouth, violent, lewd, and, in a word, impolite than scholars have generally envisioned, politeness presents a distorted picture of eighteenth-century English culture.³

As we seem to have passed the immediate pinnacle of politeness studies, it is surprising that among the myriad studies examining eighteenth-century politeness from different aspects, there are very few that discuss *women's* politeness—even though eighteenth-century women have been exhaustively researched from practically all other social, political, and cultural angles by such scholars as Helen Berry, Elaine Chalus, Catherine Hall, Karen Harvey, Marjo Kaartinen, Felicity Nussbaum, Deborah Simonton, Kathleen Wilson, and others. In particular, Amanda Vickery has approached the life and behaviour of eighteenth-century Britons from a socio-cultural historical perspective, writing extensively on men and women's everyday lives and material culture; her work has been followed by, for example, Hannah Greig and Katharine Glover.⁴ Even though these writers

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analyse women's conduct books as sources for eighteenth-century feminine ideals, they do not engage with the scholarly discussion addressing politeness within its intellectual and philosophical context. Moreover, politeness features rather as a brief subplot in their books, which are dedicated to a wider analysis of women's life and ideals of femininity in eighteenth-century England. Further analyses on conduct books have been made from a variety of perspectives; they have been examined as repositories of information on eighteenth-century children's education, genealogies of elite power construction, or sources for cultural practices either deconstructing or reaffirming the creation of 'separate spheres'.⁵ Owing to the fact that an analysis of politeness is not the focal point of these studies, their representations of women's politeness are relatively simplifying and tend to ignore the inherent heterogeneity of the politeness discourse. Moreover, they do not attempt any rigorous analysis of the relationship between the discursive ideals of politeness and women's lives and experiences—something that is the main goal of this book.

The absence of scholarly analysis on women's politeness is all the more conspicuous when there is no lack of research investigating men's politeness and the importance of politeness for constructions of masculinity. Historians have noted that women were deemed crucial to polite culture, but the discourses targeted at women in particular and the impact these had on women's daily lives have not been explored. Politeness scholars have tended to either ignore women when examining politeness as a gendered culture, focusing exclusively on male politeness, or—which is much more common—ignored gender as a category altogether. The research conducted by Lawrence Klein, Markku Peltonen, and Anna Bryson, ground-breaking as it is, has simply left gender as a category of analysis unused and unproblematised.⁶ These scholars, generally adopting an intellectual historical approach and writing in response to the tradition of Norbert Elias and J. G. A. Pocock, write of politeness as if gender-neutral, not pausing to mention that the culture they describe can, as such, be applied only to gentlemen; gentlewomen are rarely mentioned, even to specify that they are not included in the scope of the research. Then again, Michèle Cohen, Shawn Lisa Maurer, and Philip Carter have examined intricately the relationship of politeness and the construction of appropriate masculinity in eighteenth-century England, but similar research on politeness and femininity is entirely missing—with the exception of Cohen's book *Fashioning Masculinity* (1996) which dedicates, despite its title, a chapter to a brief examination of the accomplishment of the eighteenth-century lady.⁷ Nevertheless, while Cohen's argument on the interconnectedness of women's polite education and the construction of Englishness is compelling, there certainly remains more to be done in the field. Indeed, Laura Gowing's remark that 'the recovery of women's history is still underway', while 'the history of men, by contrast, is ubiquitous, but it has rarely been written with an eye to gender' thus rings true also in the field of eighteenth-century politeness.⁸ My book aims to fill this surprising gap in literature by analysing politeness as a tool for gendered identity construction for women.

Ingrid Tague's insightful book *Women of Quality* (2002) is perhaps the first—and only—extensive attempt to examine Englishwomen's politeness in the eighteenth century. Tague's principal argument does not lie, however, with the workings of women's politeness as such; rather, she focuses on demonstrating that women's sociability, generally condemned as frivolous in the early eighteenth century, was an important means through which women participated in maintaining social networks crucial to the political and social weight of their families. The goals of this book are quite different; whereas Tague takes politeness as a tool for women's political participation, I want to examine women's politeness itself as a historical and cultural phenomenon within its philosophical and ideological context. My approach thus engages with and contributes to research linking politeness with history of ideas and political thought in ways that Tague's more social history-oriented study does not seek to do. Moreover, Tague's analysis on aristocratic women's self-representation and agency offers a very traditional interpretation of women's possibilities to defy social norms by utilising the loopholes and inconsistencies of the regime of politeness, whereas my interdisciplinary approach opens up a more theoretically informed perspective on the various techniques of the self women could use to gain freedom within the matrix of politeness.

The fact that women's politeness has been so meagrely studied has to do, perhaps, with the curious liminal position of politeness as both a cultural/social and an intellectual construct. Therefore, intellectual historians examining politeness have tended to sacrifice sociologically informed considerations of politeness as a system of gendered power to more philosophically oriented viewpoints, while women's historians engaged in cultural and social history have focused more on the more blatantly repressive structures of patriarchy, thus largely waiving focused deconstruction of politeness as a gendering discourse. This study aims to bridge these two approaches and analyse politeness as a set of gendered discourses and practices while still maintaining a sensibility for its philosophical framework. Indeed, the very multifacetedness of politeness makes it an extremely fruitful target of historical analysis. As a pervasive master discourse, the culture of politeness served as the locus for negotiations of different identities—not only gender, but also, for example, class, rank, wealth, nationality, race, sexuality, and health. Politeness thus provides an exceptional vantage point for an examination of eighteenth-century identity construction, as well as more broadly a window into the ways people conceptualised the world around them and their place in it. Politeness can be read as a comprehensive culture that operates through signs and symbols that preform the thoughts and actions of the people that live in it. As such, examining politeness helps us to unravel the relationship between thought and action and, in Annabel Brett's words, to understand the ways in which 'people in the past *made sense* of their world'.⁹ By attempting to understand the conceptual dimensions of individuals' behaviour and actions—how they conceptualise, experience, see, and understand the world around them—this book contributes to both intellectual and new cultural history.¹⁰

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Through these themes, this book also seeks to make wider-reaching points related to transnational cultural exchange, as well as the eighteenth century as a transitional phase between early modern and modern societies. Politeness is a particularly applicable case study for both. As a cultural phenomenon, politeness was simultaneously transnational and national; having originated as part of Italy's courtly culture, courtesy and civility travelled to England through the salons and court of France, only to become rhetorically fashioned as 'politeness'—a particularly English code of conduct. Indeed, many of the most popular conduct books were originally French translations, 'adapted to the Religion, Customs, and Manners of the English Nation'.¹¹ In fact, even though there was no great rift between the actual norms of good conduct between England and its continental neighbours, there was a profound rhetorical difference, aimed to serve nationalist purposes. This book also explores the pivotal nature of the eighteenth century in general by examining politeness as a culture that simultaneously carries many early modern beliefs about the body and identity while actively advocating modern ones. The promotion of mixed sociability is a good example of this; in the early modern framework where bodies were open to a wide array of external influences, the widely debated problem of men's effeminacy was thought to be a direct result of men's associating too much with women, thereupon becoming more like them. Therefore, the new idealisation of heterosociability in the urban polite context was an incongruous development, not only linked to ideas of refinement, but actually deeply embedded in shifts in conceptualisation of gender difference and the human body—from the so-called 'one-sex model' towards the 'two-sex model' of scientific modernity.¹²

Bluestockings and Conduct Books

More than a decade ago, Karen Harvey criticised existing studies on gender and sexuality in the eighteenth century for their tendency to focus exclusively on the discourses of gender norms and their subsequent failure to examine how individuals actually responded to the normative gender models set to them.¹³ Little has changed since the millennium, and therefore, this book is, in its own small way, an attempt to respond to this critique. Accordingly, rather than attempting to describe the rules and practices of women's politeness in exhaustive detail, I have aimed to examine the different ways in which women could react to the discursive norms of gendered politeness; to negotiate them as a part of their identity, ignore them, or even to reject them in favour of alternative modes of behaviour and, respectively, ideals of femininity. My goal is not to offer a comprehensive survey or to claim that all or even a great part of elite women put the strategies I analyse into practice. Rather, I wish to chart some attitudes, conceptualisations, and practices that certainly existed—and, more importantly, were considered as possible within the culture of politeness.

Women's means to appraise, react to, comply with, negotiate, and/or resist the discursive conduct ideals pushed towards them through didactic literature is examined through the specific case studies of four women who were all highly

appreciated by their contemporaries and considered to be ideal examples of femininity in their own ways—while paradoxically all also falling decisively short of many discursively promoted gender norms, especially because of their intellectual pursuits. These women, all more or less connected to the so-called bluestocking circle, are the court favourite Mary Pendarves Delany (1700–1788), the bluestocking Elizabeth Robinson Montagu (1718–1800), the moralist author Catherine Talbot (1721–1770), and the novelist Frances (Fanny) Burney d'Arblay (1752–1840). Through their journals, letters, and other autobiographical material, I demonstrate that individuals had a complex relationship with discursive ideals, and that politeness was not a straightforwardly disciplinary regime that lorded over women's behaviour and identity. The profound heterogeneity of the culture of politeness gave, in itself, individuals freedom of movement within it. More importantly, individuals could and did engage in specific strategies, or techniques of the self, in order to gain freedom from and within the restrictive norms of polite femininity. These strategies can be seen as clever utilisations of some of the central aspects of politeness with a subversive intent. They concentrate on challenging and redefining the naturalised formulations regarding authenticity, identity, femininity, and politeness. Accordingly, I examine Fanny Burney's journals as the site of self-fashioning where she negotiated various polite and often also controversial roles into her identity. Catherine Talbot's exceptional self-disciplinary practices are analysed as a means of creating autonomous subjectivity, and Elizabeth Montagu's chameleon-like play with different, often hypocritical roles offers a vantage point to the slow historical change visible in eighteenth-century conceptualisations of identity and selfhood. Mary Delany's self-conscious self-display sheds light on the ways in which women could use (semi-)public polite spaces to gain freedom from normative feminine modesty and demureness. Examining these women thus enables me to look at the various individual manifestations of ideal polite femininity as well as possibilities to negotiate failures to reach it, and thus to analyse the relation between discursive and 'real-life' practices.

I have chosen these four women for various reasons. They represent different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as different time periods of the long eighteenth century, which enables us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of elite women's relationship with politeness. Despite their variety, these women nevertheless represent a very select group of polite women; they were all well-educated, well read, and are nowadays generally considered to have been a part of the network of literary women called the bluestockings.¹⁴ They were also more or less based in London, or, at least, partakers of the fashionable London sociability. In fact, they were connected in many ways and certainly all knew, if not each other, then at least of each other. Their being a part of a literary elite is precisely the reason why they are such fruitful objects of intellectual historical research. Their letters and journals are immensely rich and detailed compared to less intellectually oriented women, whose correspondence and journalising is often much less abundant both in vocabulary and volume, and also generally more rarely preserved. Therefore, the letters and

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journals of these learned ladies make up a very suitable source material for research that examines polite women's thoughts and conceptualisations. They were also socially active and had a large circle of correspondents, with whom they discussed the many aspects of polite society. Moreover, since my goal is not to provide a comprehensive account of how 'all women' behaved but, instead, to examine what could be seen to be possible, plausible, and conceivable within the matrix of politeness, these women, who all in different ways pushed the boundaries of polite femininity, are very suitable case-studies. In fact, it could be argued that the very fact that they did not belong to the socially stable and well-established aristocracy (researched by Ingrid Tague and Hannah Greig) or local gentry (subjects of Amanda Vickery's study) but were, rather, a part of a literary elite that occupied a socially nebulous place in the polite hierarchy made politeness a particularly important tool of social survival for these women.¹⁵

Many of these women have been subject to numerous biographies; especially the life of Fanny Burney as a literary celebrity and one of the most popular novelists of the eighteenth century has been scrutinised from many angles. Elizabeth Montagu has also received scholarly biographical attention, mainly as a founding member of the bluestocking group. Talbot and Delany remain somewhat less researched, probably because they have not risen to a posthumous reputation comparable to Burney and Montagu; nevertheless, there is recent work on both, besides which they are often mentioned in literature examining the lives and writings of bluestockings.¹⁶ Biography is not the goal of this book; rather, these women's life writings are examined as a body of texts that provides clues on their understanding of their identity and place in the world as female members of the polite society. Neither does this book aim to provide another portrait of these women specifically as bluestockings, but to contextualise them primarily as members of polite society. Therefore, the details of their life and social status, as well as their bluestocking connections, are considered as far as they are necessary to provide an intelligible analysis of their thinking, but my aim is to draw wider-reaching conclusions based on this analysis and to suggest that the strategies they engage in can be taken to have been more generally available to the women of the English polite society—at least to some of them.

Mary Delany, *née* Granville, was the eldest daughter of a younger son of the Tory aristocracy. Her family was widely connected in court and political circles, but forced to retire to the country for political reasons after the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the ensuing Whig supremacy. Delany's family was financially dependent on Delany's uncle, Lord Lansdowne; accordingly, when he wanted to promote his political interests by marrying his niece off to the 57-year-old Member of Parliament Alexander Pendarves (1660–1725) in 1718, Delany was forced to succumb. The unhappy marriage ended in Pendarves's death in 1725, leaving Mary Pendarves Delany with no resources beyond her jointure. Despite her lack of funds, her personal charm and vivacity made her a popular member of London's fashionable society and courtly circles. She

married Dr. Patrick Delany (1685/6–1768), an Irish Anglican cleric, in 1743, and the couple resided in both Ireland and London. Delany was particularly famous for her talent in drawing, crafts, and design. Delany knew Elizabeth Montagu and attended her salons in the 1740s, and also met Catherine Talbot on several occasions. Hester Chapone introduced Fanny Burney as the celebrated author of *Cecilia* (1782) to Delany in 1783; Burney admired the elderly lady immensely, writing that ‘benevolence, softness, piety, & gentleness are all *resident* in her Face’, and that her mind ‘seems to contain nothing but purity & native humility’.¹⁷

Elizabeth Montagu was a salonnière and a celebrated figure of polite society, famous for her wit, scholarly merit, and exemplary politeness. Montagu was born Elizabeth Robinson, the first daughter and fifth child of the country gentleman Matthew Robinson and his wife Elizabeth. She received much of her education from her relative Dr Conyers Middleton, a noted Cambridge classical scholar. In 1742, she married Edward Montagu (1692–1775), a 50-year-old bachelor, grandson of Lord Sandwich, Whig and Member of Parliament, and owner of several coalmines and estates in northern England. Their only child, born in 1743, died unexpectedly a year later. Elizabeth Montagu became a prominent figure in literary circles and hosted informal assemblies focused on conversation on literary and philosophical topics; the circle that frequented these parties became known as the bluestockings by the 1760s. In her youth, Montagu was quite intimately connected to Mary Delany, with whom she also shared the close friendship of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715–1785).¹⁸ However, she also knew and corresponded with Burney and Talbot.

The moralist author Catherine Talbot remained unmarried throughout her life, living with her mother in the household of Thomas Secker (1693–1768), bishop of Oxford and, from 1758, archbishop of Canterbury. Talbot’s father had died before her birth, and she and her mother lived off the benevolence of Secker, being financially entirely dependent on him. Talbot acted as the bishop’s personal secretary and housekeeper, which made her life very much wrapped around Secker’s ecclesiastical position and duties. Accordingly, Talbot was only rarely able to join fashionable polite sociability. Nevertheless, she was a close friend of the bluestocking Elizabeth Carter and a member of her social circle, meeting the bluestockings in London and leisure towns whenever the bishop’s schedules permitted; in fact, Carter published Talbot’s essays on religious and moralist topics posthumously in two collections, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772), which soon became popular among the polite. Carter also brought Talbot in contact and ensuing correspondence with Elizabeth Montagu.¹⁹

Finally, Fanny Burney was of a somewhat lower social rank from the other three women. She was the third child of the musician and author Charles Burney and musician Esther Burney. The Burney family was respectable but not particularly rich, and certainly not part of the most fashionable segment of the polite society. Burney’s sentimental debut novel *Evelina* (1778) brought

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her immediate fame and bought her an entrance to London's fashionable circles and literary salons. The salonnière Hester Lynch Thrale (1741–1821) took Burney under her wings and introduced her to Elizabeth Montagu in Bath in 1780. Burney and Montagu did not, however, become intimate friends, despite associating through the bluestocking circle; Burney compared the older woman critically to Thrale, writing that '[Mrs. Montagu] is always reasonable & sensible, & *sometimes* instructive & entertaining,—& I think of our Mrs. Thrale we may say the reverse,—for *she* is *always* entertaining & instructive, & *sometimes* reasonable & sensible'.²⁰ Montagu claimed to be an ardent admirer of Burney's two first novels, *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. Despite having acquired an entrance to fashionable circles, Burney nevertheless never felt completely at ease amongst the beaux and belles of high society. After a five-year appointment as second keeper of the robes to Queen Charlotte—a post she disliked but accepted partly on the wish of her father—Burney married Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Piochard d'Arblay (1754–1818), an aristocratic French emigrant in 1793.

Autobiographical writing has been acknowledged to have a privileged position in the process of polite self-fashioning and identity-creation; it has been accurately remarked that 'diaries and journals, memoirs and letters were the field in which the confrontation between the different interpretations of the self took place'.²¹ In fact, eighteenth-century women's letters and journals are both the records and means of their negotiation of polite feminine identities. Moreover, textual sources, such as letters and journals, do not only give us information on their writer's actions, but represent, through the use of language, the relation between action and thought. Therefore, every text is, by virtue of being constructed through language, a window to its writer's conceptual understanding; it thus operates as a repository of the culture the individual lives and acts in.²² In addition to the private correspondence and journals of Elizabeth Montagu, Fanny Burney, Catherine Talbot, and Mary Delany, I also occasionally quote some additional autobiographical material—such as letters of Horace Walpole, Hester Lynch Thrale, and Samuel Richardson—to further illustrate my arguments. Eighteenth-century elite women were well aware of the long tradition of 'female epistolary excellence' they were to cultivate with their letter-writing, as well as of the performative position the personal letter occupied in this tradition.²³ Therefore, regardless of the writers' intentions, polite society's women's letters cannot be read—either by the present-day historian or the eighteenth-century recipient—straightforwardly as honest declarations of their true sentiments, but rather as performances that are used to both convey wanted identities to the audience, and to construct and internalise those identities in the first place. This should also be borne in mind when using women's journals as sources, since they, too, were often written to be read by family and friends. For research that addresses women's thoughts and understandings of politeness, this is, of course, rather a blessing than a problem, since their letters and journals open up a window into the process of their individual negotiation of polite feminine identities.

From the autobiographical writings of Delany, Montagu, Talbot, and Burney, I have identified four specific strategies, focused around manipulating the body in different ways, that these women engaged in to acquire freedom from normative polite femininity—namely, the practices of hypocrisy (Chapter 3), play between exterior and interior (Chapter 4), multiplicity of identity (Chapter 5), and self-discipline (Chapter 6). Chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for this in-depth analysis of women’s possibilities to circumvent, navigate around, and resist the requirements of polite femininity. Chapter 1 briefly outlines the historiographical and theoretical premises we are facing when we are looking into women’s eighteenth-century politeness as a tool of identity construction, while Chapter 2 analyses the discourse of politeness as a producer of gendered power relations, which were articulated increasingly in modern scientific terms of biological difference rather than early modern hierarchical concepts of underlying similarity between the sexes.

In Chapter 3, I show that women could have recourse to deliberately dissimulative or even hypocritical practices in order to escape the ideals of polite femininity. In effect, despite eighteenth-century claims of politeness being somehow ‘natural’ for women and the ensuing emphasis on honesty and transparency, the chapter works from the premise that politeness, in itself, was necessarily hypocritical to begin with. Chapter 4 examines women’s possibilities of strategically operating within the liminal space between public and private spheres, thus destabilising the seemingly rigid boundary between internal identity and external behaviour. Chapter 5 demonstrates how women could balance their unorthodox activities—such as literary pursuits—with more acceptable ones through strategically assuming multiple identities and playing different roles. This enabled them to retain their social prestige while acquiring freedom from norms of polite femininity. Finally, Chapter 6 examines self-discipline as a practice through which the subject assumes mastery over her desires, thus becoming rational and (seemingly) autonomous—characteristics traditionally depicted as masculine, making self-discipline potentially subversive in a woman.

Throughout the book, women’s autobiographical material is carefully contextualised against a variety of eighteenth-century conduct books, periodicals, and other didactic materials that were used to create the normative ideals of polite femininity. Women of polite society picked up many of the codes of politeness from their everyday social surroundings, in addition to being taught by their governesses, tutors, dancing masters, family, friends, and social peers. However, there existed also a massive print culture that aimed to discuss and define the polite norms and communicate them to the members of polite society. This textual corpus provides the context against which the case studies’ thoughts on politeness are mirrored. Most of these sources are various kind of conduct books, which were the privileged medium for communicating ideas and ideals of politeness to the women of polite society.²⁴ The eighteenth century, especially its latter half, saw an enormous growth in the number of published women’s conduct books; in fact, the years from 1760 to 1820 have been playfully dubbed as ‘the age of courtesy books for women’.²⁵ In fact, the emergence

of the women's conduct book is a phenomenon peculiar to the long eighteenth century, as early modern conduct manuals were generally addressed for both men and women. However, the conduct book is far from a uniform category, but instead ranges from sophisticated texts, written for the upper spheres of polite society, to all-around 'Very Useful Manuals', targeted to those members of lower middling ranks who wanted to pass as landed gentry.²⁶ In this study, I have chosen to use mostly the more elite part of conduct books—more or less those sorts of volumes Delany, Montagu, and other bluestockings might reasonably have been familiar with. Bearing that in mind, I have also strived to include as much variety as possible in terms of style, content, time of publication, as well as the authors' devotional, social, and political background. Moreover, I have favoured manuals that were relatively popular amongst their eighteenth-century audiences, generally reprinted several times during the century, to gain results that can arguably be thought to represent commonly shared ideas and notions among the polite.

My didactic source material is not limited to conduct books. A similarly important function in educating women on proper conduct was performed by periodicals, such as *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, as well as their *Female* counterparts—all of which women of polite society read avidly.²⁷ In addition, novels and plays were also an influential medium used to address women's conduct ideals—especially for the bluestockings and other literary ladies.²⁸ In fact, my case studies frequently referred to their favourite books as models for female behaviour; Catherine Talbot idolised *Sir Charles Grandison*, Elizabeth Montagu recommended the perusal of *Peregrine Pickle* to her sister, and Mary Delany and Fanny Burney drew lessons on proper conduct from *Clarissa*.²⁹ Novels' relationship to the ideals of politeness is, of course, more complex than that of conduct books or periodicals; novels do not straightforwardly aim at educating women on the norms of politeness, but also comment on those norms and reflect on the relations they have to different aspects of the society. Even though moralist conduct book writers denounced novel-reading as a waste of time at best, and a dangerous instrument of evil at worst, novels do, nevertheless, represent the behavioural values of the society they were written in. Novels and plays also paint more extensive discursive portrayals of the consequences that both norm-abiding and norm-breaking conduct is imagined to have within the culture of politeness than conduct books, and thus shed light on the broader workings of polite society and the shared mentalities of those who called themselves the polite.

The didactic material written to instruct women on points of behaviour covers a large spectrum not only of literary forms—from satire to sermon, educational letter to scandal novel—but also of moral ideology. Conduct literature can be seen as dispersed on a scale which is, at the one end, occupied by religious and moralist texts that emphasise the importance of internal goodness and honesty as the cornerstone of politeness. At the other end, then, stand the so-called externalist texts that approach politeness as an external, essentially theatrical mask of good conduct. The latter category quite often also includes

texts translated from French, adapted to the English audience. These manuals are also generally quite practical compared to the often lofty moral tones of the books that stress inner virtues. Most conduct manuals and other texts, however, stand at neither extreme, but hover somewhere in the middle ground; moreover, they are generally far from consistent in their approach, and often promote inconsistent and downright contradictory agendas of politeness. Written by both men and women, didactic texts reflect also their writer's social, financial, national, and devotional status; therefore, they use the discourse of politeness to discuss also other issues, such as sexuality, gender, nationality, and class. In the end, the categories of internal and external should be understood as suggestive tools for categorisation rather than rigid dividers.

Politeness literature can also be divided along a different line, where at one end are the practical conduct manuals and, at the other, philosophical texts, where politeness appears as a part of a larger philosophical system. Most texts, of course, fall somewhere in between the two extremes; for example, Hannah More and Joseph Addison do not approach politeness as matter-of-factly as a social performance as, say, *The Polite Academy*, but neither do they reach the intellectual sophistication of John Locke or David Hume. My focus in this study is on the more practically minded texts, but I also use philosophical treatises that address politeness and sociability; however, my approach to all sources follows readings generally used in cultural history rather than those employed in traditional history of ideas. I do not attempt to map the intentions of the particular authors of privileged texts, but my goal is, instead, to offer close readings of a variety of material that was used to communicate knowledge on politeness and, thus, to reconstruct as comprehensive a picture as possible of the discursively fashioned 'ideal polite woman' with all its inherent self-contradictions and multiplicities. My approach thus resembles Dror Wahrman's aim to reconstruct the 'underlying cultural soundbox' that resonates underneath these texts, at the price of 'leaving out the full exposition of where and how these fragments fit into the larger wholes of their individual originators'.³⁰ This method of reading sources has become common in new cultural history ever since Michel Foucault suggested that collective discourses, rather than individual writers, should be the proper object of a historian's study.³¹

Notes

- 1 Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation', 870. Norbert Elias' influential *Civilizing Process* (orig. 1939) of course sparked the original interest in politeness as an object of historical research.
- 2 See e.g. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Klein, *Shaftesbury*; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*; Peltonen, 'Politeness and Whiggism'; Klein, 'Liberty, Manners, and Politeness', 583–605; Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes', 362–82; Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 653–77; Jacob, 'Polite Worlds of Enlightenment', 272–87; Porter, *Enlightenment*, especially Ch. 16; Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, Ch. 7.

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- 3 Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, 3; Berry, 'Rethinking Politeness'; Gattrell, *City of Laughter*, 15–19; Davidson, 'Occasional Politeness'.
- 4 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*; Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?'; Greig, *The Beau Monde*; Greig, 'Leading the Fashion'; Glover, *Elite Women*. On eighteenth-century women, see also e.g. Chalus and Montgomery, 'Women and Politics'; Kaartinen, Montenach and Simonton, 'Luxury, Gender and the Urban Experience'; Harvey, 'Sexuality and the Body'; Wilson, 'British Women and Empire'; Berry, 'Women, Consumption and Taste'; Simonton, 'Women and Education'; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.
- 5 E.g. Cohen, 'To Think, To Compare'; Mayer, 'Female Education'; Arditì, *Genealogy of Manners*; Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.
- 6 E.g. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Klein, *Shaftesbury*; Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes'; Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*; Peltonen, 'Politeness and Whiggism'.
- 7 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*; Carter, 'James Boswell's Manliness'; Maurer, *Proposing Men*; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*; Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French'.
- 8 Gowing, *Gender Relations*, 4.
- 9 Brett, 'What Is Intellectual History Now?', 127, *passim*.
- 10 On the connections between intellectual and cultural history, see e.g. Surkis, 'Of Scandals and Supplements'; Brett, 'What Is Intellectual History Now?', 113–14, 127; Korhonen, 'Mitä kulttuuri merkitsee?', 99; Hyrkkänen, *Aatehistorian mieli*, 12–13.
- 11 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, [title page].
- 12 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 3–6, 152–4, *passim*.
- 13 Harvey, 'Century of Sex?'.
- 14 On defining who actually was a bluestocking, see e.g. Heller, 'Introduction', 1–2; Heller and Heller, 'Copernican Shift', 19–24, 31–6; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 177–81, 244.
- 15 Tague, *Women of Quality*; Greig, *The Beau Monde*; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*.
- 16 On Burney, see Harman, *Fanny Burney*; Doody, *Frances Burney*; Thaddeus, *Frances Burney*; Chisholm, *Fanny Burney*. On Montagu, see Child, 'Bluestocking Businesswoman'; Eger, 'Introduction'; Ellis, 'An Author in Form'; Hill, 'Course of the Marriage'; Smith, 'Elizabeth Montagu's Study'; Major, 'Femininity and National Identity'; Major, *Madam Britannia*. On Delany, see Laird and Weisberg-Roberts (eds), *Mrs Delany and her Circle*; Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany'; Moore, 'Queer Gardens'. On Talbot, see Rasmussen, 'Speaking on the Edge of My Tomb'; Schellenberg, 'Catherine Talbot Translates Samuel Richardson'; Zuk, 'Introduction'. On bluestockings, see Pohl and Schellenberg (eds), *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*; Eger, *Bluestockings*; Eger (ed.), *Bluestockings Displayed*; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*; Clarke, *Dr Johnson's Women*; Nussbaum, 'Eighteenth-Century Women's Autobiographical Commonplaces'; Spacks, 'Female Rhetorics'.
- 17 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [January 1783], *JFB*, V, 284.
- 18 See e.g. MD to Miss Dewes, February 1769, *CMD*, II, 204; MD to Mrs. Port, 3 July 1773, *CMD*, II, 521–2. On the four women's mutual relationships, see e.g. Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 26–44, 149, *passim*.; Clery, *Feminization Debate*, 163, *passim*.
- 19 Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 222.
- 20 FB to Charles Burney, 18 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 66–7.
- 21 Kekäläinen, *James Boswell's Urban Experience*, 25.
- 22 Korhonen, 'Toimivista käsitteistä', 136.
- 23 Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 2.
- 24 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 32–3.
- 25 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 61.

- 26 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 18–23; Klein, ‘Politeness for Plebes’, 367–9. Not all conduct manuals were necessarily written to the polite but, rather, to those that aspired towards politeness. Therefore, the audiences of these books did not all necessarily belong to polite society, even if they represent and attempt to communicate the cultural and social values and mores of the polite.
- 27 See e.g. Tague, *Women of Quality*, 18–20. Sylvia Harcstark Myers has shown that periodicals, including *The Spectator*, had an impact on bluestockings’ (such as Elizabeth Montagu) notions of ideal femininity (Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 123–5).
- 28 Hunter, ‘Novel and Social/Cultural History’, 19–22; Troide and Cooke, ‘Introduction’, ix–xv.
- 29 *JCT*, 4 January [1752], BL Add. MS 46690, f. 46; EM to Sarah Scott, [January? 1752], *QBS*, II, 2; MD to Anne Dewes, 6 October 1750, *CMD*, II, 598, 600; FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 44–6, 52. According to Ingrid Tague, women’s evaluations of polite conduct were heavily dependent on fictional literary sources, especially for those who were not an immediate part of the fashionable world of the uppermost ‘quality’ (Tague, *Women of Quality*, 176).
- 30 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, xvi.
- 31 Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 57.

1 Framing the Stage

Politeness and the Body

In 1741, the young Elizabeth Robinson—later Montagu—wrote to her close friend, the Duchess of Portland, to describe a gentry family of great peculiarity in her neighbourhood in Kent. Montagu drew their picture with biting sarcasm so characteristic of her. The father of the family, a former Member of the Parliament, she described as ‘a man of few words, but less meaning’, and his wife ‘an awkward woman’, always kept ‘in the country to nurse seven or eight daughters, after his own manner’. This dismal upbringing had ‘answered the design’, Montagu derided; ‘he has taught them that all finery lies in a pair of red-heeled shoes; and as for diversion (or, as I suppose they call it, fun), there is nothing like blind-man’s buff; thus dressed, and thus accomplished, he brought them to our races’. Montagu then compared ‘these jumping Joans’ to their overly refined polar opposites whom she and the Duchess had encountered earlier in Buckinghamshire: ‘they had not one article of behaviour so untaught as to appear natural; these have not one manner that seems acquired by art’—and, all in all, ‘the two families would make a fine contrast’. Montagu concluded with a little panegyric; ‘but you will say what are these people to you? because you keep the very medium of politeness, must you be troubled with those that are in the bad extremes of behaviour!’¹

As Montagu’s blunt evaluation of ‘bad extremes of behaviour’ shows, politeness played a crucial role in elite women’s social interaction and self-fashioning. From Montagu’s letter, it becomes clear that politeness required more than taking part in polite amusements or receiving a polite education. It was about keeping the perfect medium of behaviour—controlling oneself and performing according to carefully prescribed rules. This first chapter lays the conceptual premises surrounding those rules, as well as my methodological means of analysing them. Questions of what was politeness, who were the polite, and what did Montagu, Delany, Talbot, and Burney *think* about politeness, exactly, will be answered—as well as some more theoretical speculations of polite subjects’ possibilities for agency.

Female Bodies and Performances of Politeness

To get beneath the skin of politeness, so to speak, this book focuses on the importance of the management of the body to politeness. The body was the focus

of disciplinary discourses and the site of individual practice of politeness—a fact given little sustained attention in previous research. Women were socially expected to exercise and discipline their bodies in order to weed out ‘impolite’, ‘vulgar’, or ‘inappropriate’ manners and appearances and thus to appear ‘polite’. The idealised forms of conduct were strictly tied together with femininity; ‘appropriate’ conduct for women was always weighed against their supposedly ‘natural’ gendered character and inclinations, physical frame and humour balance, as well as position in society. My Foucauldian-inspired analysis thus approaches politeness as a regime of power/knowledge that uses discourses to convey feminine and polite ideals to the women of polite society, with the goal of producing normative gendered bodies that will, in their turn, participate in maintaining and further constructing the discourse that defines them. In this process, the body can be seen as not only the target on which power is inscribed, but also as the medium through which it operates. Recent feminist and post-structuralist scholarship has emphasised the role the body plays in the process of reiteration and reworking of cultural norms. The body has been seen as an inscriptive surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced; more than a physical entity, it is viewed as a set of actions, routines, and exercises that reflects discursive ideals imposed on it as performative deeds, postures, gestures, and appearances.² Thus, the body is seen as fictional in poststructuralist thought; in Elizabeth Grosz’s words, it is actively produced ‘by various cultural narratives and discourses [...] not always or even usually transparent to themselves’. Bodies become ‘emblems, heralds, badges, theaters, tableaux’ that are ‘marked [and] branded, by a social seal’.³ As I demonstrate, this is very much what was happening within the culture of politeness, which aimed to regulate women’s bodies by engaging them in techniques of polite education, training, and supervision.⁴

Poststructuralist feminist theory maintains that this marking of the body should not be considered as a simple superficial event; instead, the goal of this process is to generate psychological interiority, identity, individuality, and subjectivity. Grosz compares this paradox to the Möbius strip, where the outside changes into the inside without ever actually changing, since the strip is both its external and internal surface at the same time.⁵ Thus, to construct a body is to construct a soul. This way, politeness becomes a performative identity, where its laws are acted, and through that acting also internalised. Women were urged to internalise a gendered polite identity by exercising and disciplining their bodies to meet the norms of polite femininity deemed ‘natural’—despite the fact that within the heterogeneous politeness discourse, there was no consensus on what these natural norms exactly were. Nevertheless, certain forms of conduct were represented as ‘natural’ for women by the virtue of their gender. This positioned the body in a problematic dual role as both already intrinsically feminine and continuously under the need to be fashioned feminine through disciplined exercise.

What about the individual, then? The question of the possibility of agency has, of course, been a focus of debate and theoretical controversy between

historians for decades.⁶ The Foucauldian-inspired poststructuralist approach has problematised the entire distinction between discourse and reality; since the 'I' cannot exist outside the discourse, what kind of agency is left for an individual? The attempt to answer this question, in relation to eighteenth-century elite women, is at the heart of this book. On this score, my study has been greatly influenced by Foucault's later work, which is dedicated to examining the very question of the relationship between the individual and overlaying structure. Even though Foucault seems, in his earlier oeuvre, to take the stance that an individual's subjectivity is inevitably produced through a society's power/knowledge regime, the last two published volumes of *The History of Sexuality* signal a major departure from this idea. Foucault himself acknowledges in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* that he has in his previous works neglected the proper analysis of subjectivity. He states that in order to analyse 'the subject', one has to look for 'the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject'.⁷ Another influential concept has been Judith Butler's notion of iterative performativity, which has become a standard analytical tool for scholars working on questions of subjectivity and resistance. Butler has fruitfully approached power/knowledge as not a deterministic apparatus but a dynamic and complex strategic situation, where resistance appears as 'the effect of power, as part of power, its self-subversion'.⁸

The body plays, again, a central role in the process of negotiating agency, autonomy, and subjectivity. According to Johanna Oksala, the body is not only the means through which normativity is enforced but also the locus of resistance to normalising power.⁹ Therefore, the body performs a double role in the process of subjectivity construction, as it is both inscribed by power/knowledge and fashioned into autonomy by individuals. Foucault writes in *The Use of Pleasure* that submitting to a code of conduct requires forming oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code.¹⁰ This requires a specific kind of working on oneself, something that Foucault calls ethical work that 'one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behaviour'.¹¹ In other words, working on one's body through different techniques of the self is a means of managing discursive normativity on an individual level and negotiating it into one's subjectivity. The goal is to establish the required identity as an ethical choice and aesthetic self-fashioning. From this perspective, women were not merely being forced to act according to the rules of politeness, but they actively worked on themselves in order to internalise the polite feminine identities and to become true polite subjects.

More significantly, working on the body in different ways can also be utilised as a strategy of resistance, with the goal of acquiring freedom from discursive normativity.¹² Johanna Oksala argues that subjects can cultivate and practice freedom and materialise and stylise the possibilities that are opened around them through critically reflecting on themselves and their conduct, actions,

beliefs, and their social environment. Oksala states that care for the self as a practice of freedom means ‘challenging, contesting, and changing the constitutive conditions of subjectivity’, as well as ‘exploring possibilities for new forms of subjectivity, new fields of experiences, pleasures, and relationships, and modes of living and thinking’. Thus, the quest for freedom becomes a question of ‘developing forms of subjectivity that are capable of functioning as resistance to normalising power’.¹³ In other words, politeness could also provide women with enabling subject positions through different practices of the body.

Throughout the book, I trace women’s possibilities to resist the normalising power of feminine politeness. As Judith Butler and Joan Scott have argued, identity construction itself creates its own subversion, since the process of repetitiously performing normative acts is, by necessity, imperfect.¹⁴ The goal of this book is to move beyond this somewhat abstract formulation by identifying specific tangible strategies of freedom women engaged with within the context of polite society. Indeed, I suggest that the practices of hypocrisy, play between exterior and interior, multiplicity of identity, and self-discipline can be located from my case studies autobiographical writings as actual means they used to resist dominant gendered behavioural norms. To what extent their employment of these strategies was conscious, intentional, or calculated rather than unconscious, unpremeditated reactions to feelings and situations, is difficult to determine with certainty. In the footsteps of Pierre Bourdieu, I would venture to claim that they could be both, sometimes even simultaneously—that women could rationalise some of their acts of resistance, while others would have been engaged in unconsciously, without the intention of forming deliberate ‘game plans’.¹⁵

Questions of how power operates within the regime of politeness are central in my analysis; I demonstrate that politeness was used simultaneously to assert hierarchical power over subordinates, but also by those subordinates as a subversive means to undermine that hierarchical power. Especially in women’s case, where open political power was unavailable, politeness provided the means to achieve power indirectly and clandestinely through these specific tactics. I do not wish to claim that these possible strategies of freedom applied to all women of polite society. Rather, my goal is to explore the limits of what could be conceived as possible subject positions, possible resistances, and possible tactics of constructing rebellious subjectivity within the culture of politeness. The underlying aim is thus to determine what sort of agency could have been available for women, when the discursive power/knowledge of politeness constituted their identity.

All of these strategies were based on the ambiguous position of the body as both the means through which an identity is produced and worked on, as well as the allegedly truthful and unerring indicator of an individual’s level of polite normativity. The body was conceptualised simultaneously as an opaque mask that needed to be actively fashioned according to discursive ideals of polite femininity, while it was also envisioned as transparent entity that passively reflected the innate reality of an already possessed femininity. This controversial

ambiguity of the body is the central common theme of this book, manifesting itself in the analyses I provide of women's strategies of freedom throughout the following five chapters. The dual role the female body played was, as I show, the central source for that deeply seated anxiety over dissimulation, inauthenticity, and hypocrisy that surrounded women's politeness. It also made the question of self-control—prerequisite of all politeness—highly problematic for women. Even though politeness was mainly framed with two opposing ideologies, emphasising either internal virtue or external poise, which on a first glance seem to have radically different takes on fashioning the body through discipline, I propose that an imperative of women's persistent self-control is the focal point of both discourses. However, since inward politeness—the dominant discourse in eighteenth-century England—was committed to presenting polite femininity as a natural state of being instead of a learned one, women's self-control became an ambivalent practice; on the one hand, self-control was required to fulfil the ideals of polite femininity, but on the other, it needed to be concealed, since engaging in self-discipline shook the allegedly natural core of women's gendered identity. Thus, polite femininity could not be reached on an individual level without concealment and dissimulation. The culture of politeness forced women to hypocrisy in practice while simultaneously advocating honesty as the essential emblem of femininity.

Thus, this book is not only an attempt to address women's politeness in eighteenth-century England or even politeness within a broader European context; it is also an attempt to engage with more wide-reaching interdisciplinary discussions concerning identity construction, the possibility of individual autonomy, and the position of the individual both as subject to discursive truth and an agent of resistance against that truth. Both Foucault and Butler have been criticised for reducing agency to passive resistance and all action to mere reaction, thus making it unclear if the subject can actually 'do' anything on her own.¹⁶ While this might be true on a discursive level where subjectivity is constituted non-volitionally and all the choices available to the individual are pre-conditioned, there may well be agency available for the subject within the discursive bubble she lives in. Surely there is nothing to stop the individual from choosing to use the preconditioned tools available to her consciously and creatively for her own personal, sometimes subversive, ends? As Isabel Karremann writes, the question of discursive structure and individual agency can be seen, not as an either/or choice, but rather as the two extremes of a continuum; even though the discourse defines what sort of subject positions are intelligible, the subject can 'decide which offers it will take up in what context, and which not'. Therefore, identity becomes a "strategic and positional" membership of and identification with particular social groups'.¹⁷

The question of the nature of the relationship between the individual and the surrounding world is also connected to the problematic surrounding the very term 'identity', which has been criticised as analytically both too broad and too narrow a concept. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have even called for the abandonment of the whole term in favour of a set of more narrow and precise ones;

they particularly criticise ‘identity’ for not making clear differentiations between personal and social identity, or identity as self-understanding and as an external category of classification.¹⁸ However, as scholars have pointed out in response to this critique, even though it is certainly crucial to be aware of the problematics surrounding the term, the usefulness of ‘identity’ lies precisely in the way it collates both categorisation and self-understanding and is, in fact, constructed as an interactive relationship between the two.¹⁹

Indeed, in my interpretation, the interaction between individual and society/culture is dialectical. An individual operates within a regime of power/knowledge, outside of which there can be no identity as self-understanding or subjectivity; however, the choices and actions of that individual operate not only to constitute but also to transform and even subvert that regime. As the concept of *habitus* (made famous by Pierre Bourdieu) or the notion of mental *bricolage* (employed by David Sabean) suggest, the individual can be understood to appropriate all the resources and meanings that her culture offers her—but to use them unexpectedly and creatively to construct her own understandings and manoeuvre in the world.²⁰ Thus, individuals’ thoughts, words, actions, and appearances are both representations of the culture that surrounds them and acts that both stabilise and transform that culture. Therefore, a culture is not a totalitarian force that erases all agency; instead, it is in a dialectical relationship with the individuals that live in it and shape it. Individuals are not just saying their lines but writing them, as the cultural historian Anu Korhonen reminds us; ‘cultural scripts are forever malleable, forever open to individual reworking’.²¹ Moreover, discursive power operates through individuals—it does not exist on its own. Whatever an individual is able to achieve with her performance is solely dependent on those around her. In other words, if an eighteenth-century servant girl’s dress was fashionable enough and her curtsy was elegant enough, she could be (and sometimes was!) taken for a gentlewoman by her audience. Therefore, any agency an individual can have must come out of her ability to negotiate herself leeway among her fellow individuals. By thus deconstructing the relationship between performance as volitional theatrical act and performativity as unvolitional iterative practice through eighteenth-century case-studies, this book offers fruitful reinterpretations of Butler’s concept of performativity while maintaining an empirical and intelligible historical focus.

Defining Politeness

Politeness [...] may be defined the art of being easy ourselves, in company, and of making all others easy about us. It is the proper medium betwixt the total want of, and an officious, over-acted, civility. It consists in a general, *indiscriminate* attention; in doing little civil offices, and saying obliging things to all the parties we converse with; in accommodating ourselves, as well as the conversation, to their particular tastes, habits, and inclinations; in keeping every offensive subject and idea out of view; in never glancing at *our own* affairs, and always paying the

minutest regard to those of others; in *annihilating*, as it were, ourselves, and as studiously exalting all that are about us.

John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789)²²

Much has been written about politeness, its importance, and its limits in the creation of the eighteenth-century social elite.²³ Without going into the intricacies of politeness in detail, it will suffice to say that politeness was understood to be a cultural code that was used to define normative class- and gender-specific behaviour, taste, appearance, and identity. Politeness meant regulating and refining the ways in which people interacted with each other—or, in Lawrence Klein's influential words, 'the dexterous management of words and actions'.²⁴ Its main goal was to make sociability not only pleasing by making people attentive to each other's wishes and needs, but also to render social encounters predictable by a shared code of conduct. However, politeness has also meanings that go beyond the immediate sphere of behaviour and deportment. It was like a language that was used to interpret and give meaning to a whole culture, ranging from philosophy and religion to material culture.²⁵ This should not be taken to mean that politeness was all-encompassing; rather, it was the pervasive general discourse that was used to discuss and negotiate all kinds of issues that caused anxiety amongst the social elite. For this reason, politeness and polite culture played a role in many discourses that in themselves had little to do with politeness—such as religion, fashion, or politics, for example—where politeness simply provided the vocabulary to discuss norms and ideals. For this reason, these discourses cannot be seen as entities that are entirely separate from politeness; rather, they overlap with the domain of politeness when they are discussing propriety of behaviour and thus merge partly but inseparably together.

Politeness is often conceptualised as essentially dissimulative. For example, David Runciman contends that politeness is necessarily hypocritical, since it is 'by definition a dressing up of one's true feelings', whilst amiable behaviour that is 'sincerely motivated by concern for another [...] is being something more than merely polite'.²⁶ Eighteenth-century English conduct writers, however, wanted precisely to suggest that politeness could spring out of sincerity, and that dissimulative hiding of one's true thoughts was not actually politeness at all. In fact, they wanted to redefine nice behaviour by calling it 'politeness' and rhetorically distancing it from earlier forms of theatrical courtesy and civility, and also from the allegedly hypocritical behavioural codes of the Continent—especially France.²⁷ This politeness tradition was fundamentally influenced by John Locke, who in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) grounded good behaviour on moral character and inner goodness. Locke thus preferred 'inward Civility' to external good manners, claiming that inner refinement was enough to make an individual's external actions pleasing.²⁸ Locke's views were shared by several early eighteenth-century writers, most notably the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele. For them, good manners were an immediate and natural result of a virtuous mind. Moreover, only inner

virtue would guarantee the easy, free, and unrestrained external manners so fashionable among the urban elite, since manners as ‘natural Emanations from the Spirit and Disposition within, cannot but be easy and unconstrain’d’.²⁹

Scholars like J. G. A. Pocock, Lawrence Klein, and Philip Carter have underlined the close ties English politeness had to virtue; they argue that eighteenth-century politeness was a primarily Whiggish project of reconciling virtue in a novel way with republican urban commercialism.³⁰ Others have, however, criticised this interpretation and argued that the landscape of eighteenth-century English politeness was far more complex. Markku Peltonen and Anna Bryson have emphasised the continuities between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century codes of conduct; both writers present eighteenth-century politeness as a heterogeneous combination of discourses where the definitions of politeness could vary greatly, and regardless of party lines. Peltonen has further identified a strong reiteration of opaque and dissimulative forms of courtly courtesy in eighteenth-century England.³¹

In fact, the inward interpretation of politeness was continuously challenged by a cynical politeness tradition, which based politeness on men’s theatrical self-representation instead of their moral virtue.³² This ‘external’ conceptualisation of politeness had its origins in Renaissance courtly etiquette, where the ‘ability to ingratiate oneself through calculated self-representation’ was considered ‘a necessary element of the courtier’s repertoire’.³³ The advocates of external politeness saw man not as virtuous but as essentially flawed and selfish; therefore, virtue was a mask of calculated behaviour that could be used to hide one’s true self. For them, politeness was a set of carefully practiced external appearances, gestures, and postures—a ‘spectacle of marionettes’—not something that flowed effortlessly from within.³⁴ The body thus became, instead of a truthful mirror of the inner self, an opaque canvas on which polite appearance could be painted while hiding the true self carefully from sight. These early modern understandings and practices continued to influence men’s and women’s behaviour still in the 1790s, and even if they were more likely to favour sincere and sentimentalist forms of politeness, there were always those who found opaque theatricality the most refined mode of behaviour.

The concepts of inward or external politeness did not remain static during the long eighteenth century, but were constantly redefined. For example, the rising culture of sensibility had a profound impact on politeness during the latter half of the eighteenth century—particularly in formulations of inward politeness, and especially when women were concerned. Philip Carter has noted that sensibility had such a strong influence on post-1740s politeness that the terms were often even used interchangeably. Similarly, Michèle Cohen has identified a shift in the ways inward politeness was discussed by the 1760s; according to Cohen, English politeness discourse began to question the necessity of politeness in the first place and, instead, to promote unpolished integrity, plainness, and even taciturnity, perceived as particularly English modes of good conduct.³⁵ Articulations of women’s politeness and propriety towards the end of the long eighteenth century were also influenced by the rising trend of

domesticity. Political situations, both domestic and foreign, as well as fluctuating trends of taste, aesthetics, and philosophy also played a role in formulations of polite ideals, both external and internal. However, even if we can recognise such general trends during the eighteenth century—the growing influence of inward politeness over external show, sensibility and sincerity over insincere compliments, and domestic pleasures over public sociability—it would be difficult to claim that any totalising or immediate change occurred. Instead, the long eighteenth century is distinguished by continuity rather than disruption of politeness tradition.

The neat juxtaposition of internal and external notions of politeness is a heuristic tool rather than a faithful representation of the ambiguous and conflicted rhetoric used by eighteenth-century conduct writers. Their notions of politeness were more often inconsistent than not, and different writers are, indeed, more suitably placed on a slippery line between the extreme poles of internality and externality than categorised neatly. Moreover, the so-called internalists generally stressed the need for external polish to embellish the virtues of a moral disposition just as keenly as the externalists cherished naturalness and emphasised the importance of virtue. Roughly dividing didactic writers into these two camps gives us, however, a general idea of what was happening during the long eighteenth century, and it seems clear that even though the dissimulative politeness tradition never disappeared completely, there nevertheless was an unquestionably growing emphasis on internal politeness during the long eighteenth century.³⁶ However, I demonstrate that the emphasis the so-called internalist writers placed on rehearsing and controlling the body renders the difference between internal and external conceptualisations of politeness rhetorical only. Individuals needed to deliberately fashion their bodies to reflect polite femininity—but only the externalists admitted this straightforwardly, while the internalists attempted to disguise it with rhetoric of inward goodness and natural femininity. Thus, even internal politeness was eventually necessarily hypocritical.

The hypocrisy of politeness inevitably opens up crucial questions concerning identity and persona that are central to this book. David Runciman argues that, rather than simply coincidence with the truth, ‘hypocrisy turns on questions of character’. It involves the ‘construction of a persona’ that ‘generates some kind of false impression’. Accordingly, Runciman compares hypocrisy to ‘the wearing of masks’.³⁷ Indeed, as he points out, the idea of hypocrisy has its origin in the world of theatre, and the original Greek term (*hypokrisis*) means, according to the *OED*, ‘acting of a theatrical part’. The problem of hypocrisy, so fundamental to politeness, not only addressed questions of morality and integrity but also closes on philosophical ruminations on identity. When one is acting a polite part, who exactly is doing the acting? What is the relationship between the actor’s self and the role she is playing? Runciman also asks the question whether hypocrisy needs to be intentional on the part of the hypocrite for it to count as such.³⁸ If self-knowledge is essential for hypocrisy, is it only the hypocrite who can have true agency in the context of politeness? The will to

ask and attempt to answer these kinds of questions has prompted me to frame this book with considerations of such concepts as performance and performativity, discourse and practice, power and knowledge, subordination and freedom; these are questions that Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, and Judith Butler have grappled with, and to which the foundation they have built provides invaluable insight.

Polite Identities and Cultural (Ex)change

Who were the polite? This is another question that escapes any clear-cut answer. The culture of politeness was a powerful tool of social identity construction, as it was used to differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ on various levels. Therefore, attempts to define ‘the polite’ certainly revolve around class, or rather, social hierarchy and power relationships, but not in a straightforward manner. Politeness has often been seen as a culture of common taste and decorum that was used by the middling sort to distinguish themselves, not only from those below them, but especially from those above. Politeness has been described as a tool in an ‘epic battle of commercial versus aristocratic mores’ that took place during the eighteenth century, where the middling ranks forged a collective identity in conscious contrast to an aristocracy that they defined as profligate, dissipated, and morally corrupt.³⁹ Some scholars have stretched the limits of the polite to include the lower middling sort, shopkeepers, servants, and craftsmen who all aspired towards a polite lifestyle, while others have argued that the aristocracy, too, certainly saw itself and also was seen by others to number among the polite.⁴⁰ Indeed, the heterogeneous class texture of polite society highlights the ways politeness was used as a tool of both arbitrating and affirming social difference.⁴¹ Even in situations of apparent equality, social hierarchy was tangibly present in the very polite rituals. As Laura Gowing has shown, early modern social interaction between different classes was an equivocal situation where the power relations needed to be made explicit through performative display.⁴² Thus, both positions of superiority and subordination needed to be displayed in the seemingly equal polite interaction—and therefore, politeness served simultaneously purposes of distinction and solidarity.

Often those who were *not* polite were more easily defined than those who were; creation of identity is, after all, constructed around the question of the Other.⁴³ Membership in or exclusion from polite society was not only a question of social hierarchy, but also dependent on nationality, race, religion, location, and gender, for example. Neither was non-politeness expressed in simple terms of rudeness or vulgarity, as Lawrence Klein has shown; rather, politeness could be juxtaposed with rusticity (underlining the metropolitan–provincial axis), barbarity (contrasting modernity with the past, but also western with non-western), and usefulness (differentiating the ornamental from the substantial).⁴⁴ In addition to these, politeness was repeatedly contrasted with violating moral and gender boundaries, especially when women were concerned. However, as this book shows, failing to match these characteristics by no means automatically resulted

in a categorical exclusion from polite society, for these categories were not stable enough not to include exceptions. Rather than a rigid system of categorisation, politeness can be seen as an influential but flexible matrix of creating desirability that could, to some extent, be negotiated by individuals. It was a set of cultural practices that individuals activated—or did not activate—to different extents, depending on their goals, interests, capacities, and needs.⁴⁵

Moreover, while claiming that politeness was a central discourse in gender building I do not mean to imply that there were no other forms of commendable femininity in the eighteenth century. Politeness was certainly not the only discourse used to construct normative gender roles, and women of various ranks could strive towards ideal femininity through the manipulation of such discourses as religion, occupation, sentimentality, or motherhood, for example. However, it is important to note that, firstly, these discourses were always partly entwined with politeness, and cannot therefore be altogether separated from it. Secondly, within polite society, politeness was such a central system of giving meaning to gendered ideals that it is questionable if a gentlewoman wholly void of politeness could have been considered admirable—or, for that matter, if such a woman could have even existed in the first place. Even in cases when women acted against the polite norms—as they often did—their actions were interpreted and given meaning through the culture of politeness.

Politeness was not only tied to questions of class identity, but national identity as well. As a cultural phenomenon, politeness had simultaneously strong national and transnational underpinnings. The norms of refined behaviour practiced in English tearooms, parks, and assembly halls had long, continental roots and, in fact, differed very little from the manners displayed in French salons or Italian opera houses. The cosmopolitan ethos of politeness was not only the driving force behind the Republic of Letters, but it also enabled the elite ranks' travelling and suave interaction with local elite circles in European metropolises, as the tradition of the Grand Tour indicates.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it prevented neither an English feeling of superiority nor derisive commentary on the 'barbarised' courts of Germany, for example, that retained 'a great deal of the Goth and Vandal still' and, therefore, required 'more reserve and ceremony' of behaviour than the supposedly easy and free sociability in England.⁴⁷ Nicole Pohl has shown that many of the bluestockings were well-versed cosmopolitans who travelled across Europe, cultivated pan-European correspondence, and hosted foreign visitors in their own salons. Nevertheless, they simultaneously displayed a nationalist particularity that predisposed them critically towards their continental neighbours.⁴⁸ Elizabeth Montagu, for example, condescendingly observed travelling through Holland that 'its soil is mud, its air is fog, its inhabitants are selfish, & Liberty who is a Goddess in other Countries is a vulgar shopkeeper in theirs', and—despite her admiration of French culture and manners—derided France as 'a Land of slavery & Superstition'.⁴⁹ The bluestockings were not the only ones who managed to marry 'polite patriotism with neoclassical notions of taste and intellectual cosmopolitanism', but this curious mixture was paradigmatic for the English polite society in general.⁵⁰

Despite its cosmopolitan character, politeness was also effectually used as a means of forging a homogenous English identity. According to Paul Langford, the English 'national character' came under scrutiny during the long eighteenth century, and it was predominantly fashioned through manners.⁵¹ The English liked to characterise themselves—and to be characterised by others—through their customs, which were taken to describe the qualities of the English society at large. They prided themselves in their plainness, modesty, honesty, taciturnity, and liberty, which were traits fashioned as particularly English and, accordingly, supposedly natural features of English manners and politeness.⁵² Moreover, the Englishness thus constructed became increasingly synonymised with Britishness during the long eighteenth century; English character was 'the dynamic force, squeezing out Celtic claims to determine what made Britain British', as Langford claims.⁵³ Polite manners were thus a tool for creating unity of taste, fashion, and behaviour between the Scottish, Welsh, English, and also Irish elite. Most foreigners used the terms 'English' and 'British' unsystematically and ambiguously, as often synonymously as not, and even British subjects themselves grappled with the differences between the two.⁵⁴ In fact, to the foreign eye, the English seemed to have 'a great uniformity in the manners and customs' compared to the sharper differences in habits between the provinces of continental Europe.⁵⁵ London's influence had a greater unifying force in people's manners than in the Continent, which retained a clearer division between fashionable courtly and urban culture and provinciality.

Indeed, foreign travellers paid special attention to the fact that different regions betrayed little distinctiveness, and that everyone with any genteel pretensions simply had to visit London.⁵⁶ Moreover, the fashionable circles of Scotland and Ireland habitually sent their daughters to stay with relatives or at a boarding school in London specifically to polish their manners out of any rural tint. For example, Elizabeth Montagu congratulated her sister-in-law for her wise decision to send her daughter to a boarding school—not to learn 'trifling' skills, but to 'unlearn what would be of great disservice, a provincial dialect, which is extremely ungentee', and which they 'get in the Nursery'—or, in other words, learn from servants. For Elizabeth Montagu, the 'Kentish dialect' was especially abominable, 'tho' not so bad as the Northumberland, & some others'; but, as she concluded, 'in this polished age it is so unusual to meet with young Ladies who have any patois that I mightily wish to see my niece cured of it'.⁵⁷ Indeed, a uniform manner of speech played a key role in the homogenisation of the English polite society and their manners.⁵⁸ However, this does not mean that Englishness and the English experience could be unproblematically generalised to represent all of Britain. Rosalind Carr has shown that women's presence in polite sociability and Enlightenment culture was more restricted and complicated in Scotland than in England, and that we should be wary of drawing unwarranted similarities between different national, political, and religious contexts without careful examination.⁵⁹

The English took pride in the alleged naturalness of their manners; they claimed to be honest, sincere, and unaffected in their ways, and saw this as

something that set them apart from other European nations. In fact, there was a decided attempt to brand the Lockean inward politeness as a specifically English mode of good behaviour, while theatrical politeness was associated with the Continent, particularly with the immoral France. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, claimed that in France, boys and girls were ‘only educated to please, to manage their persons, and regulate the exterior behaviour’, and she called theatrical politeness ‘an art of pleasing’, practiced only ‘to extract the grossness of vice’.⁶⁰ Addison and Steele maintained that affectation—allegedly the defining quality of French politeness—rendered the French morally inferior to the English, since artificiality corrupted virtue and morality.⁶¹ ‘English’ politeness, then, was claimed to base itself on open frankness and unpretending simplicity, and associated with urban sociability of the middling sorts—not the aristocratic decadence of the French court.⁶²

Even though thus affiliated with French thought, theatrical politeness was popular in England as well, and not only amongst ‘dancing-masters turned author’ as Philip Carter has claimed, but among such writers as Bernard Mandeville, Thomas Gordon, and fourth Earl of Chesterfield.⁶³ Moreover, the external interpretation of politeness had similarly strong links to the English eighteenth-century urban modernity. Many scholars have argued that public life in eighteenth-century metropolises, including London, was essentially based on theatrical principles—‘a play with social masks without any reference to the performer’s personal qualities’.⁶⁴ The externalists saw politeness as an external performance, an artificial show put on in order to please—and through pleasing, ultimately to forward one’s own interests. Indeed, while the internalist interpretation of politeness became widely endorsed as a specifically ‘English’ mode of politeness during the eighteenth century, a theatrical attitude towards sociability by no means disappeared.

Moreover, recent scholarship has indicated that French politeness was not as hypocritical as its English critics claimed; rather, the image of French artificiality was a straw man that was necessary for English national self-fashioning. French ideals of good conduct emphasised the ‘politeness of the heart’ and aimed to reconcile Christian humility, charity, and natural manners with the polished exterior of the *honnête homme*.⁶⁵ Not only is this the case with France, but also with Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden—as well as Britain’s American colonies. Scholars have argued, for example, that English and Italian intellectual women shared a tradition of cosmopolitan sociability, and that Enlightenment ideas of transnational commercial civility had a profound impact on the largely European-born population of the Atlantic world.⁶⁶ Not only were the offspring of the British elite commonly educated in the universities and boarding schools of France, Holland, and Germany, but conduct manuals circulated from country to country swiftly in translations and original texts, spreading a more or less unified understanding of fashionable conduct amongst the European and Atlantic elite.⁶⁷ The education provided for the young descendants of polite society consisted largely of elements borrowed from France or Italy, thus promoting not only a uniformly English but a

distinctively cosmopolitan code of conduct.⁶⁸ Margaret Jacob argues that by 1750, ‘a polite and de facto cosmopolitanism’ came not only to dominate the social life of ‘Britain’s educated and affluent upper classes’, but also became a commonplace in continental Europe.⁶⁹ Of course, there were provincial variations on how these ideals were interpreted in practice, but there was no great rift between the discursive norms of good conduct among the elite between England and its continental and Scandinavian neighbours.

However, despite this relative uniformity, national variations of manners and customs were effectively rhetorically emphasised and used to fashion a peculiarly national character. Indeed, eighteenth-century European culture has been described as a curious mixture of cosmopolitan increase of tolerance and openness in society on the one hand, and nationalist parochialism, xenophobia, and feeling of national superiority on the other.⁷⁰ Even though nations boasted with their uniquely superior manners, these manners were rarely peculiar for one nation only. For example, the English were by no means the only nation fashioning themselves through the honesty and freedom of their manners; these were also the cornerstones of ideal Swedishness, as well.⁷¹ If anything, there may have been a cultural difference between more rigid northern and more lively southern codes of conduct, explained partly through the different climates and humoral compositions of the inhabitants of England and Scandinavia on the one hand, and France, Spain, and Italy on the other.⁷² Nevertheless, the perceived national differences between manners and customs were predominantly rhetorical ones, aimed to serve nationalist purposes. This sets English politeness apart both as a unique case study and an example of a larger European phenomenon.

Ambivalent Politeness and Questionable *Ton*

What did such bluestockings and renowned members of polite society as Elizabeth Montagu, Catherine Talbot, Mary Delany, and Fanny Burney think about politeness in the first place? Did they view themselves as ‘polite’? The relationship between didactic norms and real-life practices is an elusive one. First of all, it should be noted that these women used the term ‘politeness’ simultaneously in a very specific and yet ambivalent manner. Especially in the everyday language and writings of women of the upper middling sort, such as Burney and Talbot, politeness was generally associated with the *beau monde* or the court, and, as such, it acquired a negative connotation as something formal, opaque, insincere, and rigid. In other words, ‘politeness’ was understood in its external meaning; to this end, it was often used synonymously with the French word *ton*, meaning both a fashionable air and people of fashion.⁷³ For example, Burney described the fashionable society in Brighton with its baronets and quality ladies as ‘the polite World’—a strange land into which the success of her first novel made her venture—whereas for Talbot, politeness often spelled court.⁷⁴ Politeness in this sense was thus associated with the urban upper class. Describing the *crème de la crème* of Brighton,

Burney remarked disdainfully that ‘every body Laughs at them, for their Airs, affectations, & tonish graces & impertinences’.⁷⁵ On another occasion, she wrote about meeting the Grenvilles—‘all 3 mighty *tonish* folks,—the *Mr.* in a common & *heavy* way, the *Mrs.* in an insolent, overbearing *downing* way, & the *miss* in a shy, proud, *stiff* way’.⁷⁶ Thus, politeness’s connection to form—that is, to the ‘manner in which actions were performed’—was, as Lawrence Klein notes, well acknowledged.⁷⁷ In Burney’s writing, the fault of the ‘tonish folks’ she disapproves of is, indeed, overbearing rigidity of form and an inability to adapt the self to different social situations and locations. Politeness required, first and foremost, the ability to adapt to different settings; to ‘be universally liked’, mused Elizabeth Montagu, ‘a person must be able to take a part in the amusements and employments of the company he happens to be in’.⁷⁸ Therefore, tonish manners appeared ridiculous, if not adapted to the differing conduct norms of the leisure town or country hamlet. As Fanny Burney claimed, doing ‘[a]ny thing, alike *worse* as *better* than other folks, that does but obtain notice & excite remark, is sufficient to make happy Ladies & Gentlemen of the *Ton*’.⁷⁹ Inconspicuousness was, indeed, one of the most important characteristics of ‘true’ politeness.

Because of its courtly and aristocratic associations, the bluestocking women also often perceived politeness in its tonish meaning to be antithetical to religious piety. For example, when dating her letter ‘Ascension Day’ to Marchioness Grey, Catherine Talbot felt the need to note that ‘Such a Date does not look whimsical to You my Dear Lady Grey who know how to value one of the most joyous & least regarded Holydays in the Year. I could excuse myself to a politer Reader by the frequency of such Dates in M^{me}. Sévigné’.⁸⁰ Similarly, Elizabeth Montagu wrote that ‘the Dutchess [of Portland] and Mrs. Pendarvis are expecting me [upstairs] to read a sermon, which, as unfashionable as it is, I have the courage to own amongst friends; but were it known in the *beau monde*, what would they say!’⁸¹

Because of these negative connotations, many women denied having any ‘politeness’ at all and instead used terms such as cheerfulness and amiability to describe their own behaviour. Elizabeth Montagu, who was, if not strictly part of the *beau monde*, at least hovering on its edges, decidedly distinguished herself from it in her letters to more sober-minded friends. ‘I shall return to London without the least concern about the figure I shall make there, most happily trusting that I shall not make any figure at all’, she wrote to the author Gilbert West, adding that the ‘*beau-monde* will pay you respect for not imitating their follies’.⁸² Montagu made a point of underlining the distance between her easy-going manners and those of the *ton*; instead of ‘making parties at Whist or Cribbage, and living with and like the *beau monde*’, she entertained her friends in a more informal manner, by ‘wandering about like a company of gipsies, visiting all the fine parks and seats in the neighbourhood’.⁸³ Montagu also denounced the hypocritical external use of politeness as a means to gain acclaim, preferring inward goodness:

Popularity is the vainest of all the things that are done under the sun: I mean if proposed as the end of our actions. As for that praise which accompanies actions done for good and great purposes, it is musick to an honest ear, and the delight of the benevolent; but I had rather be bound to whistle to the hydra than make it my business to be always speaking and doing things of courtesy to the grand mode.⁸⁴

Similarly eager to claim sincerity as a personal virtue over politeness, Catherine Talbot replied to her newly acquired friend Elizabeth Carter's letter in humble tones: 'I have not the gift of saying fine things, therefore shall not pretend to answer all those with which your politeness would flatter me [...] The most I pretend to is common sense enough not to be deceived by them into a false notion of myself'.⁸⁵ In another letter, Talbot compared herself to the Duchess of Somerset: 'She seems to me to have one of the best & frankest hearts I ever met with. Has as much Candour as a poor friend of yours'—meaning herself—'with much better judgment; she seems to be in everything wise & reasonable, has all the politeness of Courts with the Sincerity of the Country'.⁸⁶ In fact, women of the *beau monde* who still managed to be easy and free of formality despite their knowledge of courtly politeness (like the Duchess of Somerset) were specifically credited with having 'all the high politeness of a Person accustomed to Courts & to fill Gracefully the highest Station; & all the Friendly Sincerity of the honest Country'.⁸⁷

However, politeness was by no means used solely in this specifically negative meaning. For Catherine Talbot, politeness was also something to aspire towards, and practically synonymous with amiability. She wrote after visiting a 'good Clever' friend that she had 'learnt many lessons of true Good-Breeding & Good humour this day'. These lessons made her hanker after the 'Charm of Politeness' and decide to improve her own behaviour.⁸⁸ In other words, the word 'politeness' could also be used to mean the exact opposite of stiff form—good humour, affability, and pleasantness. In her *Essays*, Talbot defined politeness as 'the just medium between form and rudeness'.⁸⁹ Politeness was also linked to gay and fashionable metropolitan sociability in these women's thoughts, but not in a negative way. In fact, Talbot regretted her shortcomings in urban London politeness, complaining about her tendency to 'carry the same stiff face & Uncomfortable Heart into every genteel part of this busy Town' and wishing 'with all my Heart I could fit up this parlour of mine', meaning her persona, 'in rather a more gay & fashionable taste'.⁹⁰ Mary Delany rejoiced that her four-year-old nephew 'shows already so much politeness: *politeness is the polish of virtue*, and it ought not to be neglected', and even Fanny Burney, who so disapproved of 'tonish folk', was eager to make a distinction of *ton* between her vulgar stepmother and herself. When she was one sociable evening engaged 'in a very *witty confabulation*' with a gentleman behind a bookcase at her father's house, her stepmother's crude interruption made her blush, as she later recounted to Samuel Crisp: 'my mother came up to us, & said "So Fanny, I see you have got Mr Chamier into a Corner!" You must know I don't at all like these sort of Jokes, which are by no means the *ton*, so I walked away'.⁹¹

Thus, these women could and often did find politeness desirable and tempting. For Elizabeth Montagu, the most ‘extreme politeness’ came nearest to ‘extreme simplicity of manners’, and was thus far from any rigidity or formality. She saw her friend, the bluestocking Elizabeth Vesey as an epitome of this perfect politeness:

I am glad you are acquainted with Mrs. Vesey, she is a very amiable agreeable woman, and has an easy politeness that gains one in a moment, and in reserve she has good sense and an improved mind, to keep up the approbation she acquired by her manners. She is so entirely polite, that it is a wonder if one ever reflects, that she is polite at all, her behaviour ‘shews no part of study but her grace’.⁹²

Such women were not rarities among Montagu’s circle of friends. The Duchess of Somerset with her ‘easiness of manners’ and ‘civility without the intention of being gracious’ proved to Montagu that she had not been spoiled by her association with the court. Such was also the case with Mrs Anne Pitt, who, despite being a ‘court lady’ and having the ‘manners [...] of a court’, still had sentiments of ‘higher extraction’ which made her ‘a most amiable and valuable’ woman.⁹³ As a matter of fact, Elizabeth Montagu herself was widely lauded as an example of polite feminine behaviour; many of the conduct books written during the last half of the eighteenth century were, in fact, dedicated to her as someone who, by her own impeccable conduct, furnished ‘an admirable pattern of life and manners’.⁹⁴ And yet, Montagu’s conduct was, according to many contemporaries, verging on the immoderate show and love of luxury of the *ton*.⁹⁵ Fanny Burney noted that Montagu was known for her ‘love of finery’ and ‘parade & ostentation’, for which ‘her power in Wealth, & rank in Literature offer some excuse for’.⁹⁶ Therefore, she thought Montagu ‘a Character rather to respect than love, for she has not that *don d’aimer* by which alone love can be made fond or faithful’.⁹⁷ Thus, even though Montagu rhetorically embraced the virtues of inward politeness in her letters, in her actual behaviour she clearly lacked the easy affability and freedom of form that the critics of external politeness held so dear—and yet, she was considered by many the glory of her sex. This is an early indication of what will become apparent in later chapters—that, on a practical level, women of polite society could push the boundaries of discursive exemplarity while sustaining their polite status.

Emma Major observes that Montagu’s exemplariness started to lessen in contemporary imaginations during the 1790s, when her flashy politeness was no longer perceived as straightforwardly commendable.⁹⁸ Ostentatious politeness was, indeed, a feature of the *ancien régime* courtly code of conduct, which seems to have been rapidly becoming obsolete during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the rise of the middle class.⁹⁹ What is notable, however, is that on a discursive level, there is practically no visible change. The Hannah More who dedicated her *Essays* to Montagu in 1777 advocated very similar ideas of female excellence in her didactic texts as the Hannah More who, in the

1790s, while writing her *Strictures*, found Montagu suddenly too ostentatious.¹⁰⁰ Politeness as an insincere and formal show had been condemned already by Addison and Steele, but it seems to have been tolerated in practice until the very end of the eighteenth century. The shift in the perception of Elizabeth Montagu's exemplariness is an indication of the rise of middle-class values that Nancy Armstrong, for example, has discussed.¹⁰¹ The old aristocratic modes of politeness had been slowly declining throughout the century, and the French Revolution acted as a watershed, making them appear old-fashioned and decadent to the English audience.

Gentlewomen's equivocal opinions about politeness were also tied to their need to display their patriotism. Ostentatious, external politeness was, as we recall, associated with France, with which Britain was at war repeatedly throughout the long eighteenth century. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that politeness was heavily permeated by a patriotic discourse portraying Britannia, albeit inferior to France and Italy in elegance, superior in 'real politeness'—or, authenticity and sincerity of manners.¹⁰² In other words, contrasting English honesty and inward politeness with the insincere courtesy of the courtly foreigner played a crucial role in the construction of English national character.¹⁰³ And yet, Englishwomen's relationship with Frenchness was simultaneously wary and flirtatious; while rhetorically framing the French as the debauched Other, the English (like the rest of Europe) still hailed France as the most refined nation and imitated their manners and looks.¹⁰⁴ This ambivalence is discernible in young Elizabeth Montagu's witty letter to Anne Donnellan, where she enquired after Donnellan's brother, Reverend Christopher Donnellan, who was staying in Tunbridge Wells. 'Does not your brother think he is in Babel? How does he like English women with French dresses and French manners? In short, what does grave good sense think of Tunbridge?'¹⁰⁵ Montagu recognised the moralist patriotic discourse of English gravity and 'good sense', while implicitly representing it as unfashionable and dowdy and suggesting that English polite sociability was, in fact, based on French manners. Indeed, Montagu's flippant collation of Frenchness, women, and immoral leisure town sociability highlights the uneasy relationship between gender, national character, and politeness.

Women served an important purpose in the forging of Englishness. In Hilary Larkin's words, women's bodies and minds 'functioned symbolically and literally as the bearers of national values and ideals'.¹⁰⁶ It was women's responsibility not only to perform modest English virtues through their appearance and behaviour, but also to guard their countrymen's Englishness. According to conduct writer John Burton, it was 'in the power of the female Sex to inspire young Men with maxims of Honour, Virtue, and even Patriotism; or to corrupt their manners by effeminate pleasures'.¹⁰⁷ In national discourses concerning women, the famous English modesty was mirrored against the equally famous English liberty. According to Emma Major and Paul Langford, women's greater freedom compared to the Continent was often raised as an example of English superiority, as well as an indicator of civilisation and political liberty as

opposed to barbarity and despotism. Therefore, the national character of an Englishwoman was largely constructed on modesty, chastity, and reserve, while Frenchwomen were imagined in terms of ‘Coquettes’ and ‘sirens’.¹⁰⁸ For these reasons, Elizabeth Montagu—while travelling in France—shirked from likening herself to a noble, accomplished Frenchwoman, and rather identified with an eccentric and slovenly English acquaintance. ‘There is a Comtesse de Rochefort who is all ye 3 Graces’, she wrote to Elizabeth Vesey; ‘I was told in England that I resembled her alas! no! I am much more like Peg Wharton, I think indeed ye best can be said for me is that I am in a medium between them, not a golden but a leaden mean’. She concluded that she was glad Vesey did not know the *Comtesse*, as ‘you would never like me again’.¹⁰⁹

The most prominent aspect of alleged French influence was its problematic effect on gender. French influence was accused of making men effeminate and women masculine. Frenchified Englishwomen were supposedly abandoning their English feminine morality and domesticity for immoderate urban luxury, love for publicity and admiration, and sexual profligacy.¹¹⁰ Joseph Addison accused women of outright copying Frenchwomen’s masculine behaviour and appearance by adopting their riding habits and feathered hats, their masculine assurance and forwardness, and their masculine vices, such as swearing and drinking. Such shocking manners, while suitable for the French temper, Addison claimed to be unnatural in Englishwomen:

as Liveliness and Assurance are in a peculiar manner the Qualifications of the *French* Nation, the same Habits and Customs will not give the same Offence to that People, which they produce among those of our own Country. Modesty is our distinguishing Character, as Vivacity is theirs: And when this our National Virtue appears in that Female Beauty, for which our *British* Ladies are celebrated above all others in the Universe, it makes up the most amiable Object that the Eye of Man can possibly behold.¹¹¹

Addison was afraid that the English manners had already been corrupted by French depravity; that a modest blush and bashful silence had become unfashionable amongst English ladies, and that ‘Discretion and Modesty’, the ‘greatest Ornaments of the Fair Sex’, had been lost.¹¹² Addison’s fears highlight the fact that there was, in reality, little difference between the behavioural norms of the English and French elite. In fact, they were both greatly influenced by an old tradition of transnational politeness, stimulated during the eighteenth century by the massive increase of international circulation of books. Accordingly, Frenchness proved to be alluring to many Englishwomen despite their condemnation of it. Catherine Talbot, struck by one of her ‘Winter Dumps’ and feeling particularly gloomy, complained that she felt herself ‘grown so abominably English’ that only ‘a trip to Paris’ and ‘the ease & liveliness of that Joyous People’ could cure her.¹¹³ Similarly, Elizabeth Montagu, who so decidedly resigned herself from French femininity, wrote to Elizabeth Carter to Bristol, enquiring whether she ‘put on rouge’ as a proper ‘belle’; Montagu

herself confessed letting her ‘frizeuse to put on whatever rouge was usually worn’ while travelling in France, and embracing other similar French customs.¹¹⁴ Thus, French lightness seems to have been appropriate, if not strictly desirable, in certain contexts of elite women’s life; particularly when participating in urban amusements, a certain degree of French-like modishness was even expected. Likewise, Frenchness was more appropriate for young women than old, just as public amusements such as dancing were perceived to be appropriate for the enthusiasm of youth but ridiculous for the old.¹¹⁵ Most of all, Frenchness was strongly associated with aristocracy, mostly for moral reasons, but also because Francophilia was most common amongst the upper classes.¹¹⁶ In other words, despite anti-French rhetoric, the relationship between English and French national characters was complex and by no means entirely negative.

Notes

- 1 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 5 July 1741, *LEM*, I, 236–8.
- 2 See e.g. Bordo, ‘Body and the Reproduction of Femininity’, 90. Feminist post-structuralist theory, that acts as my theoretical framework, has been heavily influenced by Michel Foucault’s understanding of the historical constitution of the body through the network of power/knowledge. However, because Foucault himself did not present any coherent theory of the body, or even a unified account of it, feminist writers have had to complement and further develop the Foucauldian theory of the body with their own formulations. (See e.g. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 111.)
- 3 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 118, 141–2; Bordo, ‘Body and the Reproduction of Femininity’, 90. Judith Butler explains that the fictionality of the body derives from its performativity; the gendered body thus has ‘no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’ (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185).
- 4 On the production of normative bodies, see e.g. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146–8; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 10.
- 5 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116–17. Judith Butler calls this process internalisation or incorporation (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 227).
- 6 See e.g. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, 124–9.
- 7 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 6.
- 8 Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 93. On questions of subjectivity and agency, see e.g. Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity?”’. On performativity and early modern identities, see e.g. Karremann, ‘Mediating Identities’.
- 9 Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 111, passim.
- 10 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 26.
- 11 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 27.
- 12 See e.g. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 89.
- 13 Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 12.
- 14 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii; Scott, ‘Fantasy Echo’, 291–2. See also Karremann, ‘Mediating Identities’, 4.
- 15 On the consciousness and unconsciousness of culturally conditioned acts, see Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 53, 56.
- 16 Magnus, ‘Unaccountable Subject’, 87; Nussbaum, ‘Professor of Parody’.
- 17 Karremann, ‘Mediating Identities’, 5. See also Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity?”’, 2–3.
- 18 Brubaker and Cooper, ‘Beyond “Identity?”’, 6–8.
- 19 Fisher and O’Hara, ‘Racial Identities’, 19–21.

34 *Framing the Stage*

- 20 Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 139–46; Sabeau, *Power in the Blood*, 90–1; Korhonen, ‘Witch in the Alehouse’, 191. See also Costa and Murphy, ‘Bourdieu and the Application of Habitus’, 6–9; Korhonen, ‘Toimivista käsitteistä’, 140–2.
- 21 Korhonen, ‘Witch in the Alehouse’, 190. See also Fisher and O’Hara, ‘Racial Identities’, 21–2.
- 22 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 8–9.
- 23 See e.g. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*; Klein, ‘Liberty, Manners, and Politeness’; Klein, *Shaftesbury*; Klein, ‘Politeness for Plebes’; Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation’; Klein, ‘Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation’; Peltonen, ‘Politeness and Whiggism’.
- 24 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 4.
- 25 Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation’, 877.
- 26 Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 10.
- 27 ‘Politeness’ itself was an eighteenth-century term, used to denote the peculiar variation of the rules and ideas of sociability that were called civility or courtesy in previous centuries (Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 46–7; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 21–3).
- 28 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 126 (§67).
- 29 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 123 (§66).
- 30 Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 48–9, 195–6, 236; Klein, ‘Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere’, 108–9; Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 8–14; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 25. For similar interpretations, see e.g. Sweet, ‘Topographies of Politeness’; Langford, ‘Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness’.
- 31 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 44–6; Peltonen, ‘Politeness and Whiggism’, 398, 402–6; Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 29–37. For similar interpretations, see e.g. Kekäläinen, *James Boswell’s Urban Experience*; Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume*.
- 32 The conflict between the virtues of honest, transparent sincerity and prudent, dissimulative theatricality was not new, but had long roots in Renaissance self-fashioning (Martin, ‘Inventing Sincerity’, 1333–4). On early modern theatricality, see e.g. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, esp. Ch. 4; Bailey, *Flaunting*, 124–7, passim.; Harvey, *Little Republic*, 130, 182–3.
- 33 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 57.
- 34 Kekäläinen, *James Boswell’s Urban Experience*, 21; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 55; Peltonen, ‘Politeness and Whiggism’, 402–3.
- 35 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 28; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 26–41; Cohen, ‘Manliness, Effeminacy and the French’, 53–4.
- 36 Kekäläinen, *James Boswell’s Urban Experience*, 5; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 54.
- 37 Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 9.
- 38 Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 10–11.
- 39 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 13–14; Smail, *Origins of Middle-class Culture*, 28; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 21–2; Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, 45. Lawrence Klein argues that aristocratic excess and vice became a standing topic of criticism and satire in public culture from the 1770s onwards (Klein, ‘Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation’, 659).
- 40 Klein, ‘Politeness for Plebes’, 362–82; Looney, ‘Cultural Life in the Provinces’, 485; Klein, ‘Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation’, 658–60. Lawrence Klein and Paul Langford have pointed out that the boundaries of social hierarchy were fuzzy and ambivalent even to contemporaries (Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation’, 896; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 62).
- 41 Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation’, 873; Klein, ‘Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation’, 677, 662.

- 42 Gowing, 'Manner of Submission', 40. See also Korhonen, *Kiusan henki*, 151.
- 43 See e.g. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 3.
- 44 Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes', 365–6.
- 45 Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation', 872–3.
- 46 On cosmopolitanism and the Republic of Letters, see e.g. Goodman, *Republic of Letters*. On the Grand Tour, see e.g. Black, *British Abroad*; Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*.
- 47 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 11 May 1752, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, III, 256.
- 48 Pohl, 'Cosmopolitan Bluestockings', 74–84.
- 49 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 2 August 1778, HL MO 3454; EM to James Beattie, November 1776, HL MO 172.
- 50 Pohl, 'Cosmopolitan Bluestockings', 77. See also Major, 'Femininity and National Identity', 904–6.
- 51 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 7–10.
- 52 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, passim.; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 1–4, passim.; Larkin, *Making of Englishmen*, 25–46, 209–12.
- 53 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 14.
- 54 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 12–13; Colley, *Britons*, 164–7.
- 55 Prevost, *Memoirs of a Man of Quality*, II, 130.
- 56 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 15–16.
- 57 EM to Mary Robinson, [n.d., 1773?], BL, Add. MS 70493, ff. 37–40.
- 58 Glover, *Elite Women*, 103.
- 59 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 73–6.
- 60 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 179. See also Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 13–25, 48–50.
- 61 Tolonen, 'Politeness, Paris and the Treatise', 23.
- 62 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 85–90; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 46–50, passim.
- 63 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 55.
- 64 Kekäläinen, *James Boswell's Urban Experience*, 5. See also e.g. Withington, 'Honestas', 516–33.
- 65 Tikanoja, *Honnête Homme*, 22–5, 51–8.
- 66 See e.g. Rydén, 'Provincial Cosmopolitanism', 26–9; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 25–30; D'Ezio, 'Sociability and Cosmopolitanism', 47–57; Morzé, 'Self-Created Societies', 101–20; McCoy, 'Margins of Enlightenment', 141–62; Shields, *Civil Tongues*.
- 67 See e.g. Colley, *Britons*, 168; Black, *British Abroad*, 318–19; Parland-von Essen, *Behagets betydelser*, 47–58; Karppinen-Kummunmäki and Kaartinen, 'Pilatulapset ja kurjat kasvattajat', 9.
- 68 Glover, *Elite Women*, 33–6; Colley, *Britons*, 168.
- 69 Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere*, 22; Jacob, 'Cosmopolitan as a Lived Category'.
- 70 Jansson, 'When Sweden Harboured Idlers', 250–1.
- 71 Jansson, 'When Sweden Harboured Idlers', 253.
- 72 Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race*, 8–19.
- 73 See e.g. Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 13.
- 74 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [8 November 1782], *JFB*, V, 160; *JCT*, 3 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, f. 19; CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 16 November 1752, BLRA, Wrest MS 2962.
- 75 FB to Susanna Burney, 12 October [1779], *JFB*, III, 380.
- 76 FB to Susanna Burney, [post 4 – post 10] June [1780], *JFB*, IV, 161.
- 77 Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation', 874.
- 78 EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, 28 August 1759, *LEM*, IV, 231–2.

- 79 FB to Susanna Burney and Charlotte Burney (1761–1838), [24] May [17]80, *JFB*, IV, 115.
- 80 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 26 May 1756, BLRA, Wrest MS 3275.
- 81 EM to William Freind, [n.d., 1741?], *LEM*, II, 46.
- 82 EM to Gilbert West, 21 January 1753, *LEM*, III, 227.
- 83 EM to Frances Boscawen, 21 August 1753, HL MO 564.
- 84 EM to William Freind, 15 November [1741?], *LEM*, II, 78.
- 85 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 7 January 1742, *LCT*, I, 11.
- 86 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 16 November 1752, BLRA, Wrest MS 2962.
- 87 *JCT*, 3 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, f. 19.
- 88 *JCT*, 19 [June 1751], BL Add. MS 46690, f. 21.
- 89 Talbot, *Essays*, I, 13. See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 88.
- 90 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 7 May 1748, BLRA, Wrest MS 3151.
- 91 MD to Anne Dewes, 24 August 1745, *CMD*, II, 379; FB to Samuel Crisp, 21 November – 11 December 1775, *JFB*, II, 183.
- 92 EM to Gilbert West, 13 July [n.d., 1755?], *LEM*, III, 310.
- 93 EM to William Freind, [n.d., 1749], *LEM*, III, 127; EM to Elizabeth Carter, [n.d., 1759], *LEM*, IV, 186–7.
- 94 More, *Essays*, [iii]. See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 72–4.
- 95 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 72–4.
- 96 FB to Susanna Burney, [post 16–21 September 1778], *JFB*, III, 152; FB to Charles Burney, 18 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 66–7.
- 97 FB to Hester Lynch Thrale, 8 February [1781], *JFB*, IV, 290–1. See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 74–5.
- 98 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 75.
- 99 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 164–5, 218–19, *passim*.
- 100 Hannah More to Martha More, 25 April 1790, Roberts (ed.), *Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, I, 349–50.
- 101 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 96–107.
- 102 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 205; Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 88–9, *passim*;; McCormack, *Independent Man*, 72–3, *passim*.
- 103 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 88–9, 175–7; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 34–5.
- 104 On the English cosmopolitanism and simultaneous xenophobia, see Black, *English Abroad*, 1–2, 158–9, 332–5.
- 105 EM to Anne Donnellan, 30 August 1743, *QBS*, I, 159–60.
- 106 Larkin, *Making of Englishmen*, 8; Wilson, *Island Race*, 93.
- 107 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 73.
- 108 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 98, 205–6; Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 79, 163–8, 170; Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle*, II, 65.
- 109 EM to Elizabeth Vesey, 15 July 1776, HL MO 6482.
- 110 On Englishwomen's idealised domesticity, see Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 111; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 19; Major, 'Femininity and National Identity', 910–14. On immorality of urban pleasures, see *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 77. On French effeminacy, see Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 65–78; Cohen, 'French Conversation or "Glittering Gibberish"?', 99–100, 107–9.
- 111 *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19.
- 112 *Spectator*, No. 45, 21 April, 1711, I, 250–5.
- 113 CT to George Berkeley, [n.d., 176-?], BL Add. MS 39312, ff. 304–5.
- 114 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 7 June 1759, *QBS*, II, 160–1; EM to Matthew Robinson, 7/9 June 1777. BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 57–60.
- 115 See e.g. Burney, *Evelina*, 222; *Spectator*, No. 91, 14 June 1711, II, 53–8.
- 116 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 292.

2 Gendered Politeness and Power

Politeness was ultimately a matrix of knowledge and power. Scientific and medical discourses produced knowledge on the female nature and character, and politeness provided a convenient vocabulary through which ‘truths’ of natural femininity were communicated to the members of polite society. Individuals were thus urged to fashion their bodies and selves into normativity by representing certain manners and appearances as ‘proper’, ‘civil’, ‘genteel’, ‘feminine’, or—as increasingly happened—‘natural’. In this way, power intertwines with the culture of politeness. As Pierre Bourdieu famously argues, manners are a form of cultural domination; they are used to display power and differentiate between the powerful and the powerless, and this distinction is embedded in ‘the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body—ways of walking or blowing one’s nose, ways of eating or talking’.¹ In other words, ‘manners are all about power’.² This chapter examines the ways gendered power operates in the culture of politeness, marking women as both members of a social elite and, simultaneously, subordinate to men. Polite femininity as both an intellectual construct and lived experience was fundamentally a power-play, defining who had the right to perform authority and in what means.

The eighteenth-century polite society that is under inspection here was manifestly patriarchal by definition. Patriarchy was embedded in England’s—as well as its continental and Atlantic neighbours’—cultural, political, economic, and legal systems, but it was also constantly reinforced through men’s and women’s daily interaction, which was conducted in the gendered language and manners of politeness. However, the patriarchal circulation of power should not be understood simply as male domination and female exploitation, as many historians have pointed out; instead, male power was ‘frequently insecure, threatened and contradictory, while women held authority within the system over their children, servants and those of lower social class’.³ As Bernard Capp and Katie Barclay have shown, subordinate negotiation of power was also fundamental to the workings of patriarchy. Capp notes that ‘without challenging the general principles of patriarchy, women frequently sought to negotiate the terms on which it operated’, seeking ‘an acceptable personal accommodation that would afford them some measure of autonomy and

space'.⁴ It is worth questioning, however, whether the small-scale autonomy women were able to achieve within the framework of polite society constituted a subversion of patriarchal power. Indeed, Barclay argues that negotiation of power ultimately served to repair, develop, and maintain patriarchy, as women were allowed to experience empowerment and agency in their 'day-to-day lives, but not in their status in relation to men'.⁵ To be sure, subversive acts, such as the strategies of freedom this book examines, did not immediately translate into women's political and legal rights, but arguably they sowed the seed for future change. The bluestockings were an important link in the development that led women less than a hundred years later to fight for education, suffrage, and property rights. Deborah and Steven Heller have even argued that a line of bluestockingism 'led directly to the rise of organized feminism'.⁶ Surely this means that their acts of resistance had a subversive impact, and that through continuous negotiation and redefining of power, patriarchy can be unstabilised, weakened, and perhaps eventually even dismantled.⁷

This chapter also maps the shift in scientific discourses of gender which had a direct impact on how femininity was conceptualised and, accordingly, advocated as a behavioural norm in didactic writings. The long eighteenth century witnessed a gradual (if incoherent) move from the *ancien régime* towards modernity in terms of notions of identity and selfhood, conceptualisations of sex and gender, and valorisation of inward rather than theatrical politeness. These changes were connected to each other; in fact, we could talk about a growing overall emphasis on the internal, the authentic, and the natural. Then again, it is vital to remember that these shifts were in no way comprehensive or linear. The long eighteenth century can perhaps most fruitfully be seen as a period where old and new models of thought lived side by side, continuously influencing each other. In other words, the discourses of gender and politeness were multiple, uncohesive, and contradictory rather than uniform entities; therefore, pinpointing any particular point in time as the definite moment of fundamental change is impossible.

Women and Polite Sociability: Civilising or Gendering Process?

An exasperated Catherine Talbot chided herself in her journal in 1751 for being 'monstrously Selfish Arrogant & Unpolite. How can I Continue so When I feel so strongly the Charm of Politeness?'⁸ Talbot had good cause to be worried, because women were thought to bear close and manifold links to politeness in eighteenth-century England. Particularly the bluestockings, with whom Talbot was closely associated, were considered to be indispensable for polite refinement. In fact, many scholars hold that women's central role in polite sociability was a specific eighteenth-century feature, and something that sets that period apart from both previous and following centuries. According to Lawrence Klein, 'the enhanced stature of sociability and politeness involved a normative enhancement of the feminine'.⁹ In other words, politeness became associated with femininity, and women became the paragons of ideal politeness.

The new urban politeness was based on heterosociability, and particularly on women's refining influence on men's manners. Men and women naturally engaged in same-sex sociable practices, as well, but an increasing emphasis on mixed-company sociability and conversation has been interpreted as a defining feature of eighteenth-century politeness. Michèle Cohen asserts that by the end of the eighteenth century it had become a virtual commonplace that 'free communication between the sexes' was an index of the refinement and polish of a nation.¹⁰ Conversation within a heterosocial setting was deemed crucial for the civilising process that women were thought to induce on men.¹¹ Indeed, as Hannah More stated, the 'rough angles and asperities of male manners are imperceptibly filed, and gradually worn smooth, by the polishing of female conversation'.¹² *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696) claimed that even though a man might be honest and understanding, without women's refining company 'he can hardly be a Polite, a Well-bred, and Agreeable-talking Man'.¹³

Mixed company was universally promoted as the source of social improvement, even by religious and moralist writers who saw the domestic arenas as women's primary concern. In fact, moralists were among the keenest advocates of heterosociability, partly because they believed not only in women's polishing but also their moralising effect. Emma Major has argued that women held a special place in Anglican polite sociability as humanisers of manners; they were thought to act as beaming lights of Christian morality and goodness, making people around them more virtuous by their own good example.¹⁴ 'I can hardly conceive that any man would be able to withstand the soft persuasion of your words, but chiefly of your looks and actions, habitually exerted on the side of goodness', wrote James Fordyce, thus suggesting that it was women's duty to use their feminine attractions in the cause of good.¹⁵ As Major points out, engaging women's charms to promote religion presented women as not only religiously but also sexually alluring figures, making the dividing line between virtuous example and sexual display 'perpetually troublesome' for women.¹⁶

Politeness writers based women's refining effect partly on their nature, partly on their respective place in society. Women were, firstly, represented as the naturally polite sex. Corresponding to their more delicate bodies compared to men, women's natural character was respectively thought to be more soft, complaisant, and agreeable—which were all qualities essential for politeness. The supposedly natural feminine sensitivity forced men to control their allegedly hotter tempers and regulate their behaviour in women's presence. Women were practically seen as catalysts that needed only to be brought into the room, and miraculously a civilising process would begin—indeed, they have been described as 'the passive agents' of civilisation, whose agency in Enlightenment conceptions of the civilising process was limited.¹⁷ However, it was not women in general but feminine women in particular that were deemed essential for men's social refinement. Only women who possessed virtue, modesty, and gentleness would lead men into 'the decencies of life, the softness of love, the sweets of friendship' and 'the nameless tender charities that pervade and unite the most virtuous form of cultivated society'.¹⁸

Secondly, as the anonymous author of *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* explained, the sexes' different responsibilities influenced their habits. Men's public and business duties made them habitually aggressive, grave, and pedantic—thus, wholly unsuited for politeness. Left alone in their coffee-houses, they would talk of nothing else than 'State-News, Politicks, Religion, or Private Business'.¹⁹ Women, on the other hand, were forced to lead a more secluded life, whereby their manners were less vulnerable to corruption; also, motherhood was thought to naturally refine their behaviour and soften their temper.²⁰ Women's education was their key advantage; since women were thought to have inferior minds, they were educated less formally than men. Therefore, men needed to bring their conversation down to women's level when in a mixed company. This generalist and non-serious ethos is what came to define politeness and polite conversation.²¹ In other words, women were considered to have a bent for politeness—be it of natural or social origin—and were considered essential for refining men's manners. Women's supposedly weaker mental and physical frame became their greatest polite asset, and their civilising function was grounded on their social disadvantages.²²

In other words, the ideals and norms of politeness were constructed in a heavily gender-specific language, which shows that eighteenth-century politeness discourse was deeply embedded in gender construction.²³ Indeed, one of the most crucial functions of eighteenth-century polite heterosociability was its gendering effect; it was required to separate and define femininity and masculinity. In fact, the civilising and gendering effects of mixed sociability were mutually constitutive and firmly intertwined. As Silvia Sebastiani, Jane Rendall, and Rosalind Carr have noted, Enlightenment stadial theories, attempting to create an empirical and conjectural methodology for the study of human society, human difference, and progress, placed a considerable emphasis on gender as a category of analysis. In stadial history, European women's alleged femininity was a marker of civility, while so-called 'savage' women's supposed lack of femininity signalled their non-European societies' barbarity.²⁴ According to Carr, commercial society was perceived to 'enable women's achievement of the ultimate expression of their "natural" femininity' by allowing them to exist as men's companions rather than idols or slaves. Women and their nature thus became simultaneously dependent upon and an indication of men's social, economic, and moral progression.²⁵ These theories were particularly influential in England and Scotland, and were visibly reflected by eighteenth-century conduct literature—such as Joseph Addison's double-issue of *The Spectator* dealing with the two single-sex countries, 'Commonwealth of *Amazons*' and 'Republic of Males'. According to Addison, both men and women were masculine in their natural state; therefore, heterosociability was needed to make a distinction between the two sexes.²⁶ Addison used these imaginary countries to discuss the importance of the gendering effects of heterosociability. 'Had our Species no Females in it, Men would be quite different Creatures from what they are at present; their Endeavours to please the opposite Sex, polishes and refines them out of those Manners which are most Natural to them', Addison claimed; 'Man

would not only be unhappy, but a rude unfinished Creature, were he conversant with none but those of his own Make'. For women, Addison's vision of heterosociability provided—not wisdom, sense, or knowledge—but the desire to please men:

[T]heir Thoughts are ever turned upon appearing amiable to the other Sex; they talk, and move, and smile, with a Design upon us; every Feature of their Faces, every part of their Dress is filled with Snares and Allurements. There would be no such Animals as Prudes or Coquets in the World, were there not such an Animal as Man. In short, it is the Male that gives Charms to Womankind, that produces an Air in their Faces, a Grace in their Motions, a Softness in their Voices, and a Delicacy in their Complexions.

Thus, according to Addison, neither single-sex state could produce civilised, pleasingly gendered citizens; only when they made peace and learned to live together did the men learn to become cleanly and courteous—while the women, becoming the object of the men's attention, developed feminine arts. In other words, as Addison concludes, 'the Women had learnt to Smile, and the Men to Ogle, the Women grew Soft, and the Men Lively'.

According to Addison, mixed sociability was needed not only to polish men, but to feminise women. Women thus acquired their femininity only through the dialectical process of constructing gender difference that took place in the discourses and practices controlling heterosociability. In other words, the civilising power of mixed conversation was based on continual reiterations of gender difference. As Hannah More asked, '[w]here would be the superior pleasure and satisfaction resulting from mixed conversation, if this [gender] difference were abolished?'²⁷ This gives rise to the question to what extent did civilising process in the minds of eighteenth-century didactic writers hinge on assigning pseudo-natural characteristics on the behaviour and appearance of male and female subjects. Was civilising process, in the end, ultimately a gendering process?

Even though the aim of heterosociability was to strengthen the gender boundaries through dialectic approaches to gender, those approaches were not symmetrical; instead, gender difference was enforced mainly through defining femininity and fashioning women's bodies. Indeed, in Addison's vision, even though the women were masculinised in their natural state, the men were not feminised. It was the Amazon that needed to change her gender into a more female one—the Male only became more polished. Indeed, as Rosalind Carr has shown, stadial conjectural histories commonly envisioned male progress within the scale from 'savage' to 'civilised', while women's progress occurred only in gendered terms of 'sensibility', directly caused by men's stage of civility.²⁸ For men, the civilising process acquired through heterosociability—beneficial as it was for polite manners—always also posed a risk of effeminacy if taken too far.²⁹ For women, however, there was no such risk; for women, heterosociability was a necessary practice that was needed for their fashioning into 'true' femininity.

The regulation of femininity served also the goal of defining the norms of acceptable masculinity. Shawn Lisa Maurer, Joan Scott, and others have demonstrated that the primary concern of regulation is not the repression of the subjugated, but, instead, the self-affirmation of the powerful.³⁰ The male gaze was aimed at women not only to own, dissect, analyse, and admire, but also to recognise the Other and define the Self; in this way, conduct book writers in fact gave birth to those feminine vices, such as love of fashion and luxury, that they so industriously tried to upbraid and reform. The reproachable eighteenth-century female stereotype—the flighty, superficial, irrational, luxury-loving woman, depicted in Addison’s story as well—was thus a necessary discursive creation, needed to balance out the new sentimental, domestic masculinity that Maurer and Philip Carter claim emerged during the eighteenth century.³¹

However, women’s position in the workings of heterosociability did not merely make them tools of defining gender difference, or passive instruments of men’s refinement. Lawrence Klein suggests that women’s crucial role in polite sociability ties them to the Habermasian public sphere, thus opening up possibilities for social and political action. Katharine Glover similarly views heterosociability as both women’s chance and duty of partaking in nation’s affairs. Sylvana Tomaselli and Karen O’Brien have emphasised women’s voice and active participation in the project of Enlightenment through heterosocial practices.³² Politeness was also a tool of empowerment for women, in the sense that it also gave women power over men’s behaviour—or, supposedly, even over the nation’s well-being. However, as Rosalind Carr has noted, women’s abilities to gain social agency and power in the British Enlightenment culture seems to have been limited to Englishwomen, who arguably played a more integral role in polite sociability than their Scottish sisters who were hampered by the strong emphasis on homosociability of the Scottish Enlightenment.³³ More importantly, the power women used, could use, or were supposed to use over men was not straightforwardly enabling—instead, it could be a discursive responsibility, aimed at regulating women rather than empowering them. Even though assurances that women’s behaviour regulated men seem to offer women a position of power, in their heart lies an endeavour of women’s normative disciplining. Urging women to refine men of ‘loose morals or impertinent behaviour’ by their ‘cold civility’ did more than aim to improve men’s morality; the ultimate goal was regulating women’s behaviour.³⁴ Placing the task of controlling men’s manners, along with their own, on women’s shoulders was thus a strategic move, since women could only achieve this supposed position of power by assuming the normative position of demure femininity offered to them in didactic literature. This process of normalisation ultimately aimed at isolating women from power by producing ideal femininity—soft, non-rational, and essentially submissive. Therefore, by assuming the refining power over men, so condescendingly offered to them, women simultaneously relinquished their possibility of achieving autonomous agency.

The essentialisation of heterosociability for creating gender difference is a forceful indication of a shift from early modern towards modern ideas of sex.

In the early modern world, a variety of external influences, or even pure imagination, was believed to have the power to induce changes in the material world. This had a direct impact also on social encounters; in the early modern framework, the widely debated problem of men's effeminacy was thought to be a direct result of men's associating too much with women, thereupon becoming more like them. In other words, heterosocial interaction could make bodies 'slip from their sexual anchorage' and lead into 'the blurring of what we would call sex'.³⁵ The idealisation of heterosociability in the eighteenth-century urban polite context was thus a radically new development, deeply embedded in shifts in conceptualisation of gender difference, the human body, and scientific modernity. The very fact that men and women were now encouraged to socialise together indicates a profound change in the ways in which gender difference was understood. Indeed, politeness presents us with a discursive showcase of the ways in which early modern ideas of human nature and identity start to shift towards modern ones, mixing together and living alongside each other in the long eighteenth century.

Much has been written about the shift from what Thomas Laqueur has described as one-sex view of men's and women's essential similarity to a two-sex view of their essential incommensurability. Simplistically put, in pre-Enlightenment understandings, gender difference was conceptualised in terms of degree, not in terms of kind. Men and women were imagined to exist at the opposite ends of a single scale of gender, where slippage between genders was not out of the question.³⁶ Women were thought to be deficient men, whose development in the womb had been left unperfected. Moreover, early modern gender was not irreversibly fixed by biological sex. All distinctions between men and women—natural and cultural alike, between which early modern Europeans did not differentiate in the way we do—were understood to be fundamental because they were part of 'God's holy order in nature'.³⁷ Sexual difference before the Enlightenment was embedded in the Bible, and further explained with the help of Galenic anatomy and humoral theory. The balance of humours in each body determined a person's sex and character; heat and dryness made men, prone to cholera, while cold and wet made women susceptible to melancholy.³⁸ Somewhere around the eighteenth century this all began to change, and the modern model of biological divergence of the sexes rose to compete with the early modern understanding of arraying men and women on the same hierarchical scale.³⁹ This change has been variedly timed as taking place slowly between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as abruptly during the final two decades of the eighteenth century. Karen Harvey has convincingly argued that the change was very slow and incomplete, and that both models were always only partly embraced.⁴⁰ Thus, the eighteenth century witnessed a massive but gradual paradigm change in conceptualisations of gender and body, manifesting both ideas of the old and the new. In the emerging new system, sex became a biological fact instead of being a divinely ordained social and hierarchical category, and the difference which had been articulated in terms of gender came to be articulated in terms of sex and biology.⁴¹

Understandings of sex and gender are intrinsically linked to the culture of politeness. To contextualise the different and often contradictory norms of politeness, it is important to grasp the conceptual tumult that was in progress regarding questions of sex and gender—something previous scholarship on politeness has thus far ignored. Indeed, Anthony Fletcher and Shawn Lisa Maurer have argued that eighteenth-century politeness discourse is distinctively the discourse of ‘modern gender construction’, and thoroughly marked by a system that ‘constitute[s] masculinity and femininity as incommensurable opposites’.⁴² However, a more careful analysis reveals that since gender difference was an integral part of early modern thinking as well, the fact that politeness discourse forcibly promotes gender difference is no proof of its complete adherence to the two-sex model—especially when one-sex ideas of the body are blatantly visible on the pages of conduct books and periodicals in the form of humoral theory and corresponding notions of gender difference.⁴³ The ongoing paradigmatic shift had a significant influence on how female nature and character were imagined. To be sure, both models emphasised gender difference, but in different ways. In the one-sex model, women’s cold, wet humours and leaky bodies were thought to make them deceptive, passive, and volatile, whereas in the two-sex world, their emotional instability was explained through the nervous system.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most profound difference occurred in notions of sexual drive. One-sex women were thought to be passionate, lustful, and sexually active, while the two-sex model desexualised women; their alleged lack of passion became grounded in scientific ‘knowledge’.⁴⁵

It is, however, short-sighted to treat the two models as uniform schemas that dictated the mind-set of individual didactic writers or members of polite society in general. The eighteenth century is a period which witnessed an overlap of old and new understandings of sex; therefore, the notions of difference and similarity were used incoherently and often simultaneously. However, even if the individuals’ ideas of precise anatomical models were bound to be blurry and confused at best, frequent allusions to humoral theory and its effects on character and health, for example, demonstrate that eighteenth-century individuals had an extensive if incoherent grasp of physiological theories. Allusions to humours then grew sparse the further the century proceeded, and became gradually overtaken by more vague, proto-biological references to female ‘nature’. Rather than ascertaining which models existed at particular periods, it is more fruitful to examine what functions the concepts of bodily difference and similarity performed, as Ludmilla Jordanova suggests.⁴⁶ Within the matrix of politeness, the one-sex and two-sex models were used as complementary tools of warranting claims of appropriate feminine conduct. For example, the necessity of women’s strict guarding of their chastity could be justified both by claiming that women were naturally lewd and passionate (one-sex view) and, therefore, in greater need of relentless control, and by pleading to women’s naturally passionless nature (two-sex view) as the instigator of their immaculate chastity. Similar conceptual flexibility surrounds the whole discourse defining normative feminine behaviour. Masculine activities and behaviour could, in the

one-sex view, actually cause a change of sex, whereas in the two-sex view, they made a woman an unnatural sexless monster. In either case, however, gender transgressions were to be avoided.

To what extent these shifts impacted women's lives outside discursive formulations is less certain. Robert Shoemaker, for one, maintains that even though images of women became more confining in conduct books and other didactic material, public opportunities for women actually expanded during the long eighteenth century.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the emergence of the two-sex model has usually been connected with a deterioration of women's social position and opportunities, as well as narrowing of acceptable feminine identity positions. Barbara Duden and Dror Wahrman have claimed that the two-sex model led to unprecedented glorification of wifehood and particularly motherhood as the only socially and biologically acceptable roles for women—a development which reached its peak in the Victorian sanctification of middle-class domesticity and hyperfemininity.⁴⁸ In this way, the eighteenth century stands in between the early modern and the modern, manifesting simultaneously both pre- and post-Enlightenment conceptualisations of the body and identity.

Discursively Created Natural Femininity

Addison's story of the Commonwealth of Amazons, while celebrating the gendering effects of heterosociability, also simultaneously raises the question of how 'natural' women's soft and pliable nature was, in the end. The Amazon story is liable to an interpretation of the female nature as uncouth and savage in its natural state, refined only through the culturing influence of society. Alongside the eighteenth-century epistemological association between women and culture, emphasised by Tomaselli and Carr, which attributed women's civilising influence to their natural politeness and sensibility, there ran also a contrasting parallel story.⁴⁹ In fact, women were also routinely likened to Nature herself in the eighteenth century, which meant that they were seen as naturally not polite but quite the opposite—unruly, passionate, unrefined, sensual, and wild. In Ludmilla Jordanova's words, women had, in fact, an intricate and multifaceted connection with nature in eighteenth-century imaginations.⁵⁰ Women as non-rational creatures were believed to have a diminished capability to control their urges and, therefore, to be vulnerable to all sorts of weaknesses of the flesh. Because of this, women were thought to be in special need of the refining effects of heterosociability and polite education.

In other words, women were imagined simultaneously as agents of culture and creatures of nature—naturally polite and naturally impolite. This fundamental duality runs through eighteenth-century politeness discourse, making it self-contradictory and ambiguous. Women's politeness as both allegedly innate and carefully constructed is manifested in the most basic truisms of didactic literature—such as John Gregory's introduction to his popular conduct book for women in 1761: 'from [...] your natural character and place in society, there arises a certain propriety of conduct peculiar to your sex'.⁵¹ This somewhat

trite statement can be read to mean two things: firstly, that women naturally behave in a way different from men—and secondly, that women *ought* to behave in a way different from men. These were both valid readings in the eighteenth century, and by no means mutually exclusive.

Paradoxically, the importance of heterosociability for the creation of gender difference in no way called into question the commonly held view that femininity was a quality which elite women possessed naturally. This ‘natural femininity’ was also one of the most important ingredients of what constituted women’s politeness. For Gregory, as for his contemporaries, it was an everyday commonplace that women and men were bound by two different, gender-specific sets of conduct norms. Even though the basic principles were the same for both sexes—both men and women needed to aim to please with their easy, conventional, and unaffected behaviour—all rules going beyond this general principle were dictated by the sexes’ different ‘natural character’ and ‘place in society’. Accordingly, gender difference was the organizing principle of women’s politeness. It was not possible for a woman to be truly polite, unless she was truly feminine.

In women’s didactic literature, gender difference in behaviour was mainly authorised by appealing to nature in various, often contradictory ways. Indeed, Ingrid Tague has observed that in the beginning of the long eighteenth century, the rhetoric of nature emerged into women’s politeness discourse, where it was invoked as a moral and ethical norm.⁵² As religion had been in previous centuries, nature became a ‘moral category of considerable weight available for and well suited to the expression of tensions concerning gender’.⁵³ At the same time, nature played a significantly smaller role in men’s conduct books. This disparity is partly explained by women’s close association to nature, which made any deviations from ideal femininity passionately condemned as a breach of nature, ‘presented as errors to which women were particularly prone’, as Ludmilla Jordanova puts it. Women, who were defined by their identification with nature, became disciplined through what was natural and, therefore, feminine and proper behaviour. According to Jordanova, the ‘claim that an individual woman was or women in general were *unnatural* was particularly effective rhetorically’.⁵⁴

Naturalness played a considerable role in women’s didactic literature, starting from *The Spectator*, which claimed that nothing ‘ought to be held laudable or becoming, but what Nature it self should prompt us to think so’.⁵⁵ *The Ladies Calling* declared that women were placed under ‘proper and distinct Obligations [...] by the assignment of God and Nature’.⁵⁶ The rhetoric of nature often combined both divine and scientific authority, operating between early modern and modern world views. Indeed, despite the emergence of nature as an authority, religion was still routinely invoked in formulations of gendered behaviour. Since God was seen to have created the natural order of things, godly authority and natural authority were more or less synonymous in eighteenth-century language.

Moreover, there was no clear division between nature and culture in the eighteenth century, as Jenny Davidson has demonstrated; therefore, what

counted as ‘nature’ was ticklish at best. The language of natural versus cultural is a post-Enlightenment construction, whereas in pre-modern thought, these two entwined together and leaked into each other. When in modern scientific understanding the biological—or the genetic, or the innate—is taken to be the primary category, early modern people saw things the opposite way. Locke’s *tabula rasa* is perhaps the most well-known example of the early modern belief on the all-conquering power of nurture. Moreover, in early modern thinking, nature did not straightforwardly equal innate or stable, nor did nurture stand for external or mutable; therefore, characteristics considered natural were not necessarily inborn, but could result in habituation, as well.⁵⁷ In conduct treatises, nature, tradition, and custom were often used interchangeably, as is the case in *The Ladies Calling* (1673), which claimed that ‘all Ages and Nations have made some distinction between masculine & feminine Vertues, Nature having not only given a distinction as to the beauties of their outward form, but also in their very mold and constitution’.⁵⁸

Because ‘nature’ and what exactly constituted it was an extremely contested debate, it provided a flexible and versatile tool for disciplining women into gender-appropriate performances of politeness. Qualities as far removed from each other as honesty and deviousness, taciturnity and loquaciousness, chastity and lustfulness could all be presented as ‘natural’ for the female sex and, accordingly, either something women should strive to persevere in or strive to banish from their character. Despite these internal contradictions, the code of conduct propagated for women was made to appear, not arbitrary, but logical and indisputable, being based on a person’s natural (biological) sex, and thus ordained by nature itself. Accordingly, ‘femininity’ was argued to be a woman’s most important epithet in all manners, behaviour, and appearances. This natural femininity was perceived as something timeless and pre-discursive—and through appealing to ahistorical ‘truths’ such as ‘nature’, ‘tradition’, or ‘God’, gender difference became irrevocably legitimated. In Judith Butler’s words, it is precisely through the ‘infinite deferral of authority to an irrecoverable past’ that authority is constituted.⁵⁹ Ordained by higher powers, the natural characters of the sexes appeared unalterable—despite the fact that didactic writers failed to reach any unanimity on the specific definition of ‘natural femininity’. Indeed, even though writers agreed that women should act according to feminine ideals, consensus on how exactly these ideals should be performed proved more difficult to find. There were as many opinions on how, when, and where to portray feminine modesty or gentleness as there were attempts to define it. Some writers thought that true femininity showed itself in elegant dresses and impeccable dancing skills, whereas others maintained that it was embodied by modest blushes and bashful silence. Despite these drastic differences of opinion, practically all writers agreed that femininity was a natural female trait, shared by at least all elite women, and that it was displayed specifically through the body in its various attitudes, appearances, and movements.

Since natural hierarchies between human beings became increasingly articulated in terms of gender, polite femininity was forcefully contrasted with

masculinity. In this sense, eighteenth-century politeness as a gendering regime of behaviour differs radically from earlier codes of conduct. Renaissance courtesy books' differentiation of the civil and the uncivil was organised around hierarchies of age and status rather than gender. The status of wifehood, not gender, made women most clearly subordinate, and women's demeanour as inferior was mostly discussed only in relation to husbands. Laura Gowing argues that as the focus of the literature of manners shifted, in the late seventeenth century, to 'politeness rather than civility, authors began to concern themselves more explicitly with the manners of the female body'.⁶⁰ Ingrid Tague has identified a seventeenth-century English tradition of non-gendered good conduct, originated in France, and propagated in England in translations—only to be overridden by the English national project which rejected French modes of politeness in favour of English gendered ones.⁶¹

The English politeness discourse was, to a large extent, organised around the dichotomous concepts of meek/passive/femininity and bold/active/masculinity. Nearly all attributes and characteristics were interpreted through this dichotomous, evaluative matrix and given a gendered significance. Hannah More, for example, defined women as naturally concerned more with things that were brilliant, pretty, pleasing, or shining, being of more passionate nature than men who were more interested in things of reason and solidity.⁶² James Fordyce described 'Modesty, meekness, prudence, [and] piety' as the 'chief ornaments' of the female sex, which 'will render them truly lovely as women'.⁶³ Being a woman elided into acting a woman, making femininity a performative category. If a woman did not settle into the position thus outlined for her, she became unfeminine, which made her and her behaviour unpredictable to the members of polite society. By deviating from her expected role, such a woman complicated well-ordered sociability, as polite norms were created to enable smooth social interaction. A masculine woman thus became automatically an impolite one, as well. In this way, women were disciplined to hone their bodies into discursively appointed shapes and movements in order to communicate their 'natural' femininity. Gendered identity was thus produced through the use of distinct techniques of education, training, and supervision.⁶⁴

Despite the widespread rhetoric of naturalness, eighteenth-century writers also recognised the performative and artificial basis of gendered behaviour. In the *Fable of the Bees*, Bernard Mandeville famously stated that—

The Multitude will hardly believe the excessive Force of Education, and in the difference of Modesty between Men and Women ascribe that to Nature, which is altogether owing to early Instruction: Miss is scarce Three years old, but she is spoke to every Day to hide her Leg, and rebuk'd in good Earnest if she shews it; while Little Master at the same Age is bid to take up his Coats, and piss like a Man.⁶⁵

Mandeville maintained that femininity was constructed through 'the force of education'—or, discursive regulation and repetitive disciplinary practices. In

other words, Mandeville was basically articulating a notion of gender performativity, later made famous by Judith Butler, whose claim that gender is ‘the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ has become widely adopted in gender studies.⁶⁶ As it turns out, Butler was not the first one to arrive at the conclusion that ‘natural’ femininity was, in reality, a fictitious construct. In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill argued that ‘[w]hat is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others’.⁶⁷ Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft dismissed the idea of ‘gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection’ being in any way natural for women; instead, she argued that men imposed these characteristics on women to soften their ‘slavish dependence’.⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft pointed out that men were allowed to cultivate whatever characters as individuals, to ‘have a choleric or a sanguine constitution, be gay or grave, unproved’, whereas women were ‘to be levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance’. According to Wollstonecraft, the reason for this asymmetry was not the different nature of the sexes, but simply women’s subordinate position and men’s arbitrary pleasure.⁶⁹

However, it is important to understand that the performative acting out of the feminine role was not a superficial event. Instead, in early modern thinking, the fashioning of the body was understood to change the inner self in a profound way, as Stephen Greenblatt has demonstrated.⁷⁰ The eighteenth century stands in between the early modern and modern scientific thought; the body was not yet seen as a closed, immutable biological entity, but it was still open to a ‘wide array of astral and earthly influences’, to quote Thomas Laqueur.⁷¹ In this sense, early modern and postmodern understandings of identity have a lot in common, for they both advocate a permeable relationship between the interior and the exterior. Feminist poststructuralist writers have disputed any straightforward demarcation of an autonomous, internal self and external bodily stylisation and argued, instead, that the two are locked into a reciprocal relationship. At the same time, the body as the exterior surface of the self was also thought to mirror a person’s internal reality. Therefore, masculine dress or manners stirred up questions of the physical essence underneath; even though the ‘science’ of physiognomy had become little more than an amusing game by the eighteenth century, its influence lingered in eighteenth-century Europeans’ imaginations well into the nineteenth century, suggesting that individuals’ characters could be read from their physiological traits.⁷²

Understanding these intricate links between internal and external self are crucial for understanding the overwhelming anxiety eighteenth-century didactic writers seem to have felt over potential crossings of gender boundaries. For the post-Enlightenment mind that has been accustomed to the idea of authentic, essential, immutable inner selfhood, it can be difficult to grasp to how large an extent performances of gender were still thought to concretely *make* that gender in the eighteenth-century European world. Women’s masculine behaviour was

abhorred because, even if polite society no longer believed that it could actually change a woman's sex, they were wary enough of its physiological implications to call it unnatural. Accordingly, every single conduct writer discussing women's politeness addressed the issue of femininity, advising women, as Hannah More did, to 'aspire only to those virtues that are PECULIAR TO YOUR SEX'. According to More, 'Nature, propriety, and custom' had 'prescribed certain bounds to each [sex]; bounds which the prudent and the candid will never attempt to break down'. These distinctions between the sexes 'cannot be too nicely maintained', More argued, 'for besides those important qualities common to both, each sex has its respective, appropriated qualifications'.⁷³ John Bennett (1789) described the ideal woman in terms of 'softness', claiming that she 'is (what *nature* intended her to be,) wholly a woman'. This true woman's every quality 'is the direct opposite to *manliness and vigour*'; her 'voice is gentle' and her 'passions are never suffered to be *boisterous*: she never talks *politics*: she is seldom seen in any *masculine* amusements: she does not practice *archery*. I will venture to prophesy, that she will never canvass for votes at an election'.⁷⁴ For James Fordyce, a masculine woman was 'naturally an unamiable creature':

a young woman of any rank, that throws away all the lovely softness of her nature, and emulates the daring intrepid temper of a man—how terrible! [...] What though the dress be kept ever so distinct, if the behaviour is not; in those points, I mean, where the character peculiar to each sex seems to require a difference? There a metamorphosis in either will always offend an eye that is not greatly vitiated. It will do so particularly in your sex. [...] To the men an Amazon, I think, never fails to be forbidding.⁷⁵

Thus, according to Fordyce, the natural character of the sexes made all deviations from gender-appropriate appearance and behaviour terrible and offensive—especially if the perpetrator was a woman. Accordingly, such unnatural creatures needed to be specifically disciplined to follow, paradoxically enough, the dictates of nature.

The emphatically masculinised female antitypes—hoydens, Amazons, romps, and viragos—were didactically used to chastise gender-bending female behaviour by representing them as unnatural and monstrous. For example, Joseph Addison reprimanded the horsewoman—the epitome of troubling masculine energy and strength: these 'Rural *Andromache[s]*' dared to 'dress themselves in a Hat and Feather, a Riding-coat and a Perriwig, or at least tie up their Hair in a Bag or Ribbond, in imitation of the smart Part of the opposite Sex', resulting in a 'Mixture of two Sexes in one Person', which in itself was a deviation from nature. 'Had one of these Hermaphrodites appeared in *Juvenal's* Days, with what an Indignation should we have seen her described by that excellent Satyrist. He would have represented her in a Riding Habit, as a greater Monster than the Centaur', Addison concluded.⁷⁶ The caricature of Jane Gordon, Duchess of Gordon (1748/9–1812) dressed in

nothing but an enormous pair of breeches drove the point home with little subtlety; the duchess's boisterous and masculinely independent behaviour made her the one wearing breeches in her marriage, and therefore monstrous and abnormal (Figure 2.1).⁷⁷

Several scholars have argued that the move from one-sex to two-sex system resulted in a sudden shift from early modern 'fluid' conceptualisations of gender

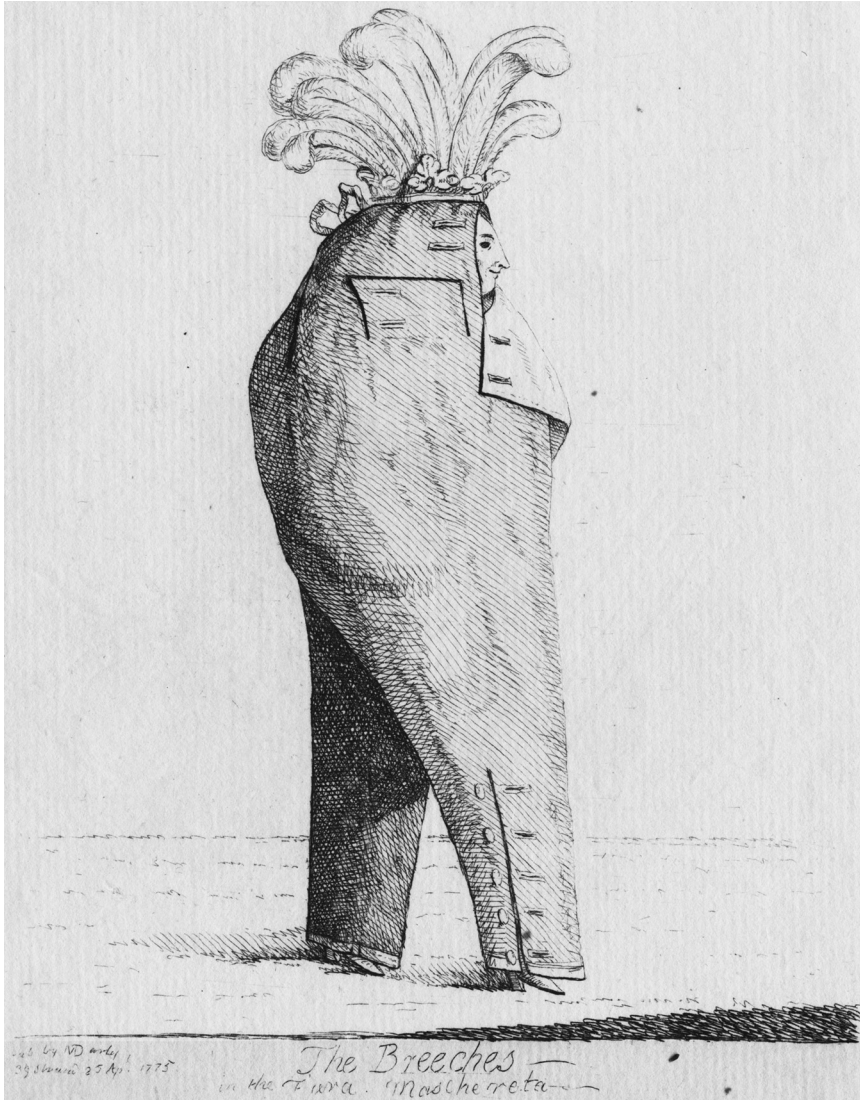


Figure 2.1 *The Breeches in the Fiera Mascherata* (London: Matthew Darly 1775).
Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

to post-Enlightenment ‘fixed’ notion of gender at some point during the eighteenth century. Perhaps most famously, Dror Wahrman has described the early eighteenth century as a period of ‘free floating’ gender, no longer regulated by divine law, but not yet tethered to sex. Wahrman claims that the years 1700–1780 were marked by gender ambiguity and accepting attitudes towards gender crossing.⁷⁸ This all changed abruptly, according to Wahrman, during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, when people were seized by a ‘gender panic’, which rapidly replaced the flexible space between sex and gender with a mimetic relation where gender necessarily mirrors sex.⁷⁹ However, a comparison between early and late eighteenth-century didactic literature does not corroborate this interpretation; rather, gender distinction is rigorously upheld in conduct literature throughout the long eighteenth century. Addison and Steele, writing in the 1710s, were the most vehement critics of women’s masculine behaviour, and mid-century didactic writers addressed the importance of maintaining gender division with just as much gusto as late eighteenth-century moralists. One of the first treatises explicitly organised around women’s politeness, *The Ladies Calling* (1673), already bemoaned the present ‘degenerous age’ where ‘every thing seems inverted, even Sexes’; where men adopt the ‘Effeminacy and Niceness of women, and women take up the Confidence, the Boldness of men, and this too under the notion of good Breeding’. According to the manual, even ladies of ‘the best Rank’ too commonly aim at a ‘perfect metamorphosis’ of their sex by affecting masculinity in their gestures, language, and clothes.⁸⁰ Both *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were committed to warning women of masculine behaviour, and repeatedly stated that ‘Men and Women ought to busy themselves in their proper Spheres, and on such Matters only as are suitable to their respective Sex’—a sentiment echoed by late eighteenth-century writers such as Hannah More and John Bennett.⁸¹ Indeed, even though the construction of gender in the one-sex system was more fluid and open to change in what we would define as sex, gender difference in itself was never flexible. Rather, it was rigorously upheld, perhaps all the more so because there was no biological sex to lean on. Therefore, regardless of the understanding of *sex*, defining *gender* difference was always tremendously important—it was just communicated and authorised in different means within the two systems.

Many of the female antitypes—such as jezebels, salamanders, jilts, and coquets—were also ambiguously intersectional instead of straightforwardly gendered, addressing a variety of issues that polite society considered problematic.⁸² For example, like the coquet, the ‘Jezebel’ from *The Spectator*—a woman who deliberately displayed her ‘pernicious charms at her window’ for men to gape at—can be seen as a commentary on the downsides of urban publicity.⁸³ The sportswoman was depicted not only as a masculine but also a decidedly lower-class figure; Hester Lynch Piozzi compared female cricketers to ‘*Poissardes*’—the revolutionary lower-class Frenchwomen who stormed Versailles in 1789, and who Elizabeth Montagu thought had ‘too much of the male character’, thus breaking simultaneously the acceptable boundaries of gender,

class, and nationality.⁸⁴ Indeed, Isaac Cruikshank's caricature of a French republican belle underlines her masculinity through her manly pose, use of a firearm, and lack of compassion, as well as her utter disregard for her looks, while her ragged dress highlights her low breed (Figure 2.2). While the tangled rhetoric of acceptable femininity highlights the intersectionality of gender, class, and nationality, women were always seen primarily as the representatives of their gender before anything else, and their failings were attributed to the particular flaws of their female nature.

Politeness and gender building were thus not only intertwined, but politeness in fact contributed in crucial ways to a wider regime of truth delineating gender and sex in the eighteenth century. Complementing, for example, educational, philosophic, and medical discourses producing 'knowledge', politeness shaped gendered ideals regarding taste, behaviour, and appearance. All irregularities falling outside of the ordained categories of gendered behaviour were deemed impolite or inelegant; in this way, the language of politeness was utilised in forging normative femininity. Then again, the heterogeneity of politeness discourse ensured that the norms of proper conduct were constantly renegotiated and redefined. Femininity was, therefore, elusive and contradictory—and because it was in a state of constant flux, reaching ideal conduct-book femininity on an individual level was impossible. When even in theoretical works the exact definition of female conduct in society was, in Emma Major's words, 'a vexed question', the actual everyday practices women engaged in to achieve perfect feminine politeness could ultimately be as futile as Achilles' never-ending pursuit of the Tortoise—eternally postponed.⁸⁵

However, the unattainability of polite femininity made it also possible for individuals to use it flexibly and assume controversial and even anarchistic subjectivities. Even though politeness discourse seems dauntingly restrictive at first sight, women had means of negotiating freedom within it. Firstly, the heterogeneous and self-contradictory nature of politeness discourse manifested, in practice, in a plethora of feminine subjectivities, many of which could push the limits of normativity while still tiptoeing the line on the safe side. Indeed, politeness should not be seen as a uniform or essentialised identity, but, instead, as Lawrence Klein suggests, 'rather a set of skills adapted to a range of environments'.⁸⁶ This makes polite subject positions, by their nature, strategically multiple and inconsistent. Secondly, and more importantly, the very process of polite identity construction simultaneously always deconstructs itself. As Butler reminds us, the performative production of subjectivity and identity is in no way a deterministic or mechanistic event. It is not a causal project that culminates in a set of fixed effects; rather, it is a process that is full of instabilities and ambiguities, and thereby both produces and destabilises identity. The very act of iteration is, as Joan Scott writes, echo-like in the sense that it is an incomplete reproduction of the original.⁸⁷ Therefore, within the space between normative discourse and individual iterative practice lies the potential for distortion and resistance.



Figure 2.2 Isaac Cruikshank, *A Republican Belle—A Picture of Paris for 1794* (London: S.W. Fores). Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669789>

Subordinate Wives and Obedient Daughters

Design'd by Nature to act but a second part, it is a woman's duty to obey rules, she is not to make or redress them.

Elizabeth Montagu to William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, [March? 1761]⁸⁸

Even though the women of the polite elite were privileged in many ways compared to their social inferiors, they were still a part of a highly patriarchal society where their position was unquestionably subordinate. Scholars have pointed out that politeness was a system of asserting an uneven power structure where social inferiors were put in their place by the established code of conduct.⁸⁹ The power equilibrium of polite society was very much balanced against not only servants and other economically dependent groups, but also against the women included in it. The fact that politeness was strictly gendered was in itself a strategy of distinction, where elite women were prevented from sharing the social and cultural power that a shared code of conduct would have implied. At the same time, however, manners were also a means of taking a stance towards one's betters; moreover, adopting the manners of one's betters could enable the subordinate to take part of the power that lay within the authoritative gesture.

Women were subjugated not only in the most straightforward manner of economic and political dependency; their subordinate position was a much subtler web of unwritten everyday practices of the polite social code they lived by. By Judith Bennett's definition, patriarchy was a 'familial-social, ideological, political system in which men'—not only by force or direct pressure but 'through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play'.⁹⁰ The women discussed here certainly did occasionally feel powerless in the face of their own everyday lives. From a young age, they had been accustomed to put others' needs before their own and to quietly submit to the will of others as an integral part of feminine decorum. The unmarried Elizabeth Robinson found at the age of 23 that her control over her own life was minimal. 'Next summer, it seems, I am to go to York races, but that is no joy to me', she complained; 'Obedience has power over our actions; I wish it reigned as despotically over the will. [...] [My papa] is to choose, and I am by duty to approve; and indeed I intend to persuade myself to like well that which will be whether I like it or not'.⁹¹ According to Betty Rizzo, Fanny Burney had likewise been brought up to consciously 'sacrifice her own happiness and deny her own inclinations' for those of others, especially her father's.⁹² Of course, women's relative position and autonomy changed as they gained in age, wealth, or status. Married women were under the authority of their husband, and the position of single women was heavily dependent on the existence of any independent wealth. Generally, the unmarried women of genteel families were expected to make themselves useful in the households of their male relatives, and had, in practice, little authority over their own comings and goings. Catherine Talbot's life in

Bishop Secker's household is a good example of this sort of extreme female dependency. She had no possibility to make visits to her friends as she chose, which meant that her social networks were to be kept up mainly through letter-writing. '[W]hat a pity it is now we are so much better acquainted, that we can never meet', she complained to Elizabeth Carter, whom she had gotten to know mainly through correspondence.⁹³ Indeed, Talbot was forced to abide by Secker's busy schedule, which generally kept her closely in the bishop's palace in Cuddesdon during the summer and in London during the winter. To this she stoically stated that 'things must be as they can in this World'.⁹⁴

Even Elizabeth Montagu, one of the most privileged women in England, had her superiors. As a married woman, she needed to negotiate her comings and goings with her husband, who detested city life, and often required her reluctant presence while taking care of his business in Northern England.⁹⁵ Moreover, the correspondence between the spouses indicates that Elizabeth Montagu subjected her everyday decision-making, in many ways, to her husband. When she had been permitted to go to Bath or Tunbridge, she reported to her husband the happenings of her daily social life—or at least the aspects of it she chose to—for him to inspect and approve. 'It has been much the turn of the Society I am in to go out in parties to see places', she wrote to her husband from Tunbridge Wells; 'We went to see an old seat of a Mr Brown's [...] [and] drank tea yesterday in the most beautiful rural scene that can be imagined'. To this innocent rural amusement, Edward Montagu gave his blessing: 'I very much approve of the excursions you make, and think the more the better, as they both entertain the mind and give exercise to the body'.⁹⁶ Similarly, when Montagu had leave to visit Lady Sandwich in London, she wrote to Edward Montagu to assure him that her time in the capital was spent accordingly: 'the bustle of London does not exclude you from my thoughts, nor prevent my wishing continually for your company. Lady Sandwich's spirits were a good deal revived by my coming to her, and she is very thankful to you for giving me leave to do it. You may suppose, as she was my sole temptation to come, she is my sole engagement here'.⁹⁷

Elizabeth Montagu also presented her considerable intellect in a subjugated light for her husband to dominate over. When corresponding with the scholar and clergyman Conyers Middleton, she begged her husband 'the favour' to 'take the trouble to read' her letters before sending them, as 'it is with some uneasiness I correspond with the very wise'; Montagu humbly ascribed herself only with 'an understanding of a middle size' that had 'a great deal of trouble in conversation between reaching to those above it'.⁹⁸ This rhetoric of wifely submission in matters of polite amusements and intellectual capabilities Elizabeth Montagu apparently thought necessary—and indeed, she was able to carry on her correspondence with learned men and also to participate in the watering-place sociability regularly while constantly maintaining a friendly and confidential relationship with her husband. The rituals and vocabulary of politeness thus effectively brought women power over traditional masculine authorities; as Amanda Vickery notes, men's authority was—even though formally honoured—practically

managed through 'the dignity of genteel femininity' that 'demanded respect and courtesy'.⁹⁹ Elizabeth Montagu is a case in point. While acting the part of the submissive wife, she vented her frustration over Edward Montagu's lordly manners to her sister: 'Do not you admire these lovers of liberty! What do the generality of men mean by a love of liberty, but the liberty to be saucy to their superiors, and arrogant to their inferiors, to resist the power of others over them, and to exert their power over others. I am not sure that Cato did not kick his wife'.¹⁰⁰

After her husband's death, Montagu was at last free to do as she pleased; in fact, widowhood was the only position available for a woman that allowed her full self-determination—provided, of course, she had sufficient financial resources.¹⁰¹ 'I rejoyce much that my situation is indeed most perfectly independent', she wrote to her brother Morris soon after her husband's death in 1775; 'Owing every thing entirely to the blessing of God & Mr Montagu, I am in no danger of being controuled or teized, so that I may be as easy from others humours as they from mine, which is a great felicity'.¹⁰² Montagu then proceeded to use her new-found independence, among other things, to give annuities to her friends, anxious to demonstrate her freedom of 'using my own in my own manner'.¹⁰³

Networks of asymmetrical power by no means only appeared between men and women. Instead, women often found themselves dependent on other women in different and complicated ways. These hierarchies of power could be straightforward and official, as was the case with servants. The status hierarchy between mistresses and maids was, again, demonstrated by a code of conduct. Elizabeth Montagu's letter puts the implicit hierarchy into words: 'I like my [new] maid extreamly', she wrote; 'she is very humble, sensible, quick and diligent, and though her Father and Mother are above the common rate, she has never presumed to hint she was a person of fashion'.¹⁰⁴ Montagu as a wealthy member of the social elite is a prime example of a woman who used power over others, as well, and ruled her household with indisputable authority.

However, there were also all kinds of unofficial power hierarchies at play between the female members of the polite elite, which are more difficult to decipher. A case in point is the widely adopted custom of taking on companions. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, usually had a female companion living with her whose duty was to 'fetch and carry, to accompany her out', and to 'do her bidding'.¹⁰⁵ The exact status of these companions was ambiguously subordinate, hovering somewhere between a friend and a servant. Fanny Burney was one such companion, as she lived, for several years, in a curious relationship of unofficial servitude to the Thrale family, and especially to another bluestocking, Hester Lynch Thrale. Burney spent months at a time with the Thrales as a sort of combined friend and unpaid companion who, even though she was sincerely attached to the family, had nevertheless few rights within their household and whose status was somewhat vague. Betty Rizzo has argued that Burney's relationship with the Thrales was mutually beneficial, since it not only provided Hester Lynch Thrale with a much-wanted female confidante, but also enabled Burney to escape the tyranny of her vulgar stepmother and to

create a social network of her own amongst the literate—or, as Marianna D’Ezio puts it, ‘to distance herself from her role as her father’s secretary and copyist’.¹⁰⁶ However, the issue is far from straightforward, and the management of Burney’s time was often a cause of tension and controversy both with the Thrales and her father, which highlights the fact that Burney was not in charge of her own doings.

To negotiate the conflicting demands of others and to influence those to whom she was subjected, not to mention to assert her own will when possible, Burney resorted to emotive rhetoric. In one instance, Burney wrote to her father when her stay with the Thrales lingered on far beyond their original agreement. ‘I always meant, according to *articles*, to have taken my return Home & residence there as a *thing of course* upon the conclusion of the Bath Journey’, she explained, having discovered that the Thrales in no way indicated that she could go home, but intended to keep her on for another two or three months ‘as if upon the original agreement!’. ‘[I]ndeed I quite die to go Home *seriously*,—I have almost been an *Alien* of late,—nobody in the World has such a Father, such Sisters as I have’, she complained; ‘& yet I seem fated to Live as if I were an Orphan;—for the World I would not offend this dear [Thrale] Family, whom I love with the utmost affection & gratitude’.¹⁰⁷ The mere fact that there seems to have been a semi-official agreement between the Burneys and the Thrales on Fanny Burney’s time underlines the complex unequal power structure involved in their relationship. Burney clearly did not feel herself justified in bluntly announcing her departure, or even to bring the matter up with the Thrales. Hester Lynch Thrale’s comments on the incident in her journal underline the power she felt she had the right to exert over Burney:

Mrs Byron who really loves me, was disgusted at Miss Burney’s Carriage to me, who have been such a Friend & Benefactress to her: not an Article of Dress, not a Ticket for Public Places, not a Thing in the World that She could not command from me: yet always insolent, always pining for home, always preferring the mode of Life in St Martins Street to all I could do for her:—She is a saucy spirited little puss to be sure, but I love her dearly for all that; & I fancy She has a real regard for me, if She did not think it beneath the Dignity of a Wit, or of what She values more—the Dignity of *Doctor Burney’s Daughter* to indulge it. Such Dignity!! The Lady Louisa of Leicester Square!¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, Burney’s efforts to procure a permission from the Thrales to return home did not go unheeded. Even though Hester Lynch Thrale seems, to some extent, to have seen through her act, Burney’s demonstration of her subservience—both to her father and the Thrales—through a language of affection and politeness was successful, and within days she was reunited with her beloved family.

Women’s subjugated position was a topic on which Elizabeth Montagu mused throughout her life—probably because of her own multifaceted situation

as one who both had power and was subjected to it. She had acquired early on a sense of the limitations her gender placed on her, and was openly envious of her brothers' greater educational opportunities and freedom of movement.¹⁰⁹ At a young age, Montagu recorded riding to a hilltop with her father to 'see what did not at all concern me, a great deal of land which was none of it mine'—since, as a woman, she did not inherit any of her family's lands. 'Is it not a sad thing to be brought up in the patriot din of liberty and property, and to be allowed neither?' she sighed to the Duchess of Portland, another privileged woman with little formal power.¹¹⁰ Montagu had a grim view of women's general status in society that revolved around economic and political influence, and where 'virtue', women's allegedly greatest asset, had little meaning:

What is a woman without gold or fee simple? a toy while she is young, and a trifle when she is old. [...] we are no body's money till we have a foil, and are encompassed with the precious metal. As for the intrinsic value of a woman few know it, and nobody cares. Lord Foppington appraised all the female virtues, and bought them in under a 1000l. sterling, and the whole sex have agreed no one better understood the value of womankind.¹¹¹

Curiously, the imbalance of power led women to a situation where they were wholly dependent on their financial weight to have any impact, but, at the same time, had no means of acquiring financial assets—aside from marriage. In fact, as Laura Gowing has argued, marriage was for this reason often ridiculed as a form of prostitution, where women traded their bodies for wealth and status.¹¹² Elizabeth Montagu, for one, had a materialistic understanding of marriage as a rational investment in a woman's future, not to be bundled by foolish passion. 'Love has a good right over the marriages of men, but not of women', she mused, 'for men raise their wives to their ranks, women stoop to their husbands, if they choose below themselves'.¹¹³ Similarly, she thought that 'Gold is the chief ingredient in the composition of worldly happiness', and that—

Living in a cottage on love is certainly the worst diet and the worst habitation one can find out. [...] For my part, when I marry, I do not intend to enlist entirely under the banners of Cupid or Plutus, but take prudent consideration, and decent inclination for my advisers. I like a coach and six extremely, but a strong apprehension or repentance would not suffer me to accept it from many that possess it.¹¹⁴

Indeed, the unmarried Elizabeth Robinson weighed her own marriage with Edward Montagu carefully against her ambitions; she wished to 'live in London and move in the great world, to be known and acknowledged for her accomplishments and social position'.¹¹⁵ She also thought highly of Edward Montagu's character, and considered herself lucky to have met with 'the principles of Honour and Virtue' in addition to sufficient wealth and status.¹¹⁶ Montagu took marriage seriously, since it posed considerable risks for a woman as

wholly subordinate to her husband. 'There is no end of ye bad consequences of an improper marriage', she ruminated in a letter. 'A Woman runs more hazard of being render'd miserable by marriage than a Man, as he can controul the extravagances, & restrain the follies of his Wife, for men plead the right divine of ruling wrong, & the Woman can not check him in that career which leads to ruin & disgrace'.¹¹⁷

Despite Elizabeth Montagu's rational attitude towards marriage, the fact remains that she, like all eighteenth-century wives, resigned her legal, economic, and physical independence when she signed the marriage contract with Edward Montagu, and was obliged to subjugate her choices to his will. However, women had ways around this. The seventeen-year-old Mary Granville was used as a pawn in her uncle's dynastic scheming and forced into a disastrous marriage with the old and abusive drunk Alexander Pendarves, who was compulsively jealous of his young, beautiful wife. By the time death relieved her of her disagreeable husband seven years later, Mary Pendarves had understandably grown somewhat averse to the institution of marriage. In a characteristically plain-speaking letter to her sister, she vented her feelings:

Matrimony! I marry! Yes, there's a blessed scene before my eyes of the comforts of that state.—A sick husband, squalling brats, a cross mother-in-law, and a thousand unavoidable impertinences; no, no, sister mine, it must be a '*Basilisk*' indeed.¹¹⁸

Her sister Anne she encouraged to '*display your fan*, my dear sister, never spare it, and make those wretches tremble that would make you a slave were you in their clutches'.¹¹⁹

When Mary Pendarves then did finally marry again at the age of 43, she chose the Irish clergyman Patrick Delany, a man whose inferior birth and lack of fortune made the marriage vehemently opposed by her family.¹²⁰ Her choice of husband can, however, be seen as a highly tactical move; by marrying below herself and choosing a man who appreciated her for her mind and talents, she secured herself an equal marriage that preserved her independence and enabled her to distribute her time more or less as she chose—something that was not possible for Elizabeth Montagu. Lisa Moore has noted that Delany was free to continue immersing herself in her art, as well as frolicking with her numerous female friends.¹²¹ Indeed, Mary Delany continuously emphasised the intellectual and emotional freedom she had in her second marriage. 'D.D.' (as she referred to Patrick Delany) 'takes a particular pleasure in our friendship for one another', she wrote to her sister soon after their marriage; 'he knows the human heart was formed for social affections, and that the friendly communion between sisters and friends no way interferes with that of husband and wife'.¹²² Janice Farrar Thaddeus has noted that Delany's most emotional and intimate relationships were with her female friends. Her sister Anne, Catherine Hyde (the Duchess of Queensberry), Margaret Harley (the Duchess of Portland), Anne Donnellan, and Letitia

Bushe were the ones she lived, travelled, and corresponded with throughout her long life.¹²³ After her marriage, Delany often had one of her female friends staying with her—a circumstance that gave her much intellectual and emotional stimulation. For example, she regretted having to part with the ‘ingenious and agreeable’ painter Letitia Bushe:

She will be a great loss to me; she is one of the few who is perfectly qualified for an agreeable companion in a domestic way; her sweetness of temper makes her give into all one’s ways as if she chose to do whatever is proposed; her other agreeable and engaging talents you have long been acquainted with; she paints for me in the morning and draws in the evening, which with reading, prating, walking, backgammon and puss in the corner employ the hours of the day and evening so fully that we do not feel how fast they fly.¹²⁴

Delany described her relationship with D.D. in terms of ‘settled friendship’ rather than passionate love, and commended him for bearing ‘all my flirtations and rambles with *unchangeable good humour*’.¹²⁵ Accordingly, she congratulated herself and her sister on their successful choices of friendly husbands:

I think, my dearest sister, if *we* are not happy it *must be our own faults*; we have both chosen worthy, sensible friends, and if we act reasonably by them and ourselves, we may hope for as much happiness as this mortal state will afford: *thorns we must all find*, but if Providence allows us *roses to our thorns* we ought to be thankful, and make the best of their sweets.¹²⁶

In other words, Mary Delany used the institution of marriage strategically to secure herself an intelligent companion and a comfortable dwelling with a garden she was probably more passionate about than its owner—all the while maintaining her intellectual, emotional, and artistic independence, even if officially resigning her legal rights.

Interestingly, Delany’s case is not the only example of strategic marriage of equality within the bluestocking group; in fact, her second marriage bears a striking resemblance to the nuptials of Hester Lynch Thrale to Gabriele Piozzi and Fanny Burney to Alexandre d’Arblay some decades later. They all chose to marry below the expectations of their status, against the express wishes of their family. In the case of Burney and Thrale, both grooms were, in addition to being penniless, also foreign and Catholic.¹²⁷ Janice Farrar Thaddeus has described Burney’s marriage by her desire to get ‘both personal and professional freedom—the opposite of the usual effect of marriage for a woman at this period’. Thaddeus claims that, in choosing d’Arblay (who himself was a poet), Burney entered a marriage of intellectual equals, and that d’Arblay appreciated Burney precisely because of her mature, independent mind, as well as her remarkable literary career.¹²⁸ A similar desire for independence seems to have motivated all these women; by choosing below them they were able to gain the

sort of equality in marriage that would not have been possible had their husbands been the sort of wealthy and established members of high society like, for example, Edward Montagu was.

Thus, while women occupied, in many ways, a subjugated position in polite society—being both under the direct paternal management of their husbands or male relatives, and also entangled in complex webs of less direct assertions of power—they had means to find freedom. Politeness was not only a means of asserting power over one's subordinates, but could also be used by those subordinates as a means of appropriating power. Women could thus use politeness in carefully thought-out ways to manipulate the balance of power and to negotiate their own aims. Indeed, as I will show next, strategies of conscious dissimulation and even downright hypocrisy provided elite women a means to undermine the uneven power equilibrium and to assert control over their own lives.

Notes

- 1 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 468.
- 2 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 10.
- 3 Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 7. See also Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*; Scott, 'Gender', 1053–75; Amussen, *Ordered Society*, 91–3, passim.; Foyster, *Manhood*, 65.
- 4 Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 25.
- 5 Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 8.
- 6 Heller and Heller, 'Copernican Shift', 44–5.
- 7 See e.g. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 97, passim.
- 8 *JCT*, 19 [June 1751], BL Add. MS 46690, f. 21.
- 9 Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 107. See also e.g. Glover, *Elite Women*, 81–2.
- 10 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 4.
- 11 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 4; Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere'; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 66–70; Glover, *Elite Women*, 10–11, 81–91.
- 12 More, *Essays*, 13–14.
- 13 *Essay in Defence*, 123. The anonymous *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* is often attributed to the writer and Tory proto-feminist Judith Drake (fl. 1696–1723); written in a lively and witty style, it defends women against men's accusations of vanity, impertinence, dissimulation, and inconstancy.
- 14 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 88, 166, 192–3.
- 15 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 18.
- 16 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 193; Fordyce, *Sermons*, II, 224.
- 17 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 12; Moran, 'The Commerce of the Sexes', 61–81. On women's refining effect, see Fordyce, *Dialogues Concerning Education*, II, 111.
- 18 Fordyce, *Character and Conduct*, 12. See also Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 14.
- 19 *Essay in Defence*, 124.
- 20 *Essay in Defence*, 101; Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 75–9.
- 21 *Essay in Defence*, 14–15, 77, 122–6; Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 107–8; Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation', 876–7.
- 22 Women were seen to benefit equally from the company of 'sensible, intelligent, and judicious men' by acquiring 'strength and solidity' of mind from them. Thus, the

- benefits of heterosociability were mutual: '[t]he fair sex should naturally expect to gain from our conversation, knowledge, wisdom, sedateness; and they should give us in exchange humanity, politeness, cheerfulness, taste, and sentiment' (Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 83).
- 23 See e.g. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 383; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 27.
 - 24 Sebastiani, "'Race", Women and Progress', 75–96; Rendall, 'Clio, Mars and Minerva', 135–41; Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 11–12.
 - 25 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 11.
 - 26 *Spectator*, No. 433, 17 July 1712, VI, 205–9; No. 434, 18 July 1712, VI, 210–14.
 - 27 More, *Essays*, 13.
 - 28 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 12.
 - 29 See e.g. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 4–9, 35–43, 107–10.
 - 30 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 2. See also Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 110; Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 123; Scott, 'Gender', 1053–1075.
 - 31 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 2; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 96–100. Another reaction to the lurking problem of men's excessive refinement and ensuing effeminacy was the birth of a competing masculine ideal—the serious and taciturn Englishman (Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 34–5).
 - 32 See e.g. Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 101–3; Glover, *Elite Women*, 84; O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, passim.; Tomaselli, 'Enlightenment Debate', 101–24.
 - 33 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 14, 73–4.
 - 34 Chapone, *Letters*, 170. See also Thomas, 'Double Standard', 195–216; Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 123.
 - 35 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 123–4; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 14.
 - 36 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 6–8, 87.
 - 37 Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 6–15, 87; Daston and Park, 'Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature', 427–8; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6.
 - 38 Gowing, *Gender Relations*, 6–7. On early modern understandings of gender, see Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission', 27; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 87–8; Duden, *Woman Beneath the Skin*, 20.
 - 39 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 3–6; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 5.
 - 40 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 8; Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 7–8; Harvey, 'Century of Sex?', 910–13. See also e.g. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 204–5; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*; Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*; Fissell, 'Gender and Generation'; Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*. Laqueur himself agrees that one sex has always been in tension with two (Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 114).
 - 41 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 154.
 - 42 Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 383; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 27.
 - 43 E.g. *Ladies Calling*, 79–81; *Polite Lady*, 188–9.
 - 44 Gowing, *Gender Relations*, 24–5; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 108.
 - 45 Harvey, 'Century of Sex?', 907; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 150. See also Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, 111.
 - 46 Jordanova, *Nature Displayed*, 3.
 - 47 Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 42.
 - 48 Duden, *Woman Beneath the Skin*, 29; Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 12–13. See also Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 152. On Victorian femininity, see e.g. Gorham, *Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*; Marcus, *Between Women*.
 - 49 Tomaselli, 'Enlightenment Debate', 101–24; Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 12.
 - 50 Jordanova, *Nature Displayed*, 35; Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 14–15.
 - 51 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 5.
 - 52 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 30–5.

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- 53 Jordanova, *Nature Displayed*, 22.
- 54 Jordanova, *Nature Displayed*, 35, 22; Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 14–15.
- 55 *Spectator*, No. 6, 7 March 1711, I, 32–7.
- 56 *Ladies Calling*, 3.
- 57 Davidson, *Breeding*, 3, 40–58, *passim*.
- 58 *Ladies Calling*, 3–4.
- 59 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 108.
- 60 Gowing, ‘Manner of Submission’, 26.
- 61 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 29–33; Ylivuori, ‘Luonnollisuuden retoriikka’, 71–2. See also e.g. Colley, *Britons*, 273–81.
- 62 More, *Essays*, 9–10.
- 63 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 13. See also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 88; Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 17; *Polite Academy*, xi.
- 64 On performative body production, see e.g. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146–8; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 10.
- 65 Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, I, 71–3. See also Allen, ‘Burning *The Fable of the Bees*’.
- 66 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.
- 67 Mill, *Subjection of Women*, 38–9.
- 68 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 65–6, 7.
- 69 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 212–13, 66.
- 70 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; see also e.g. Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*.
- 71 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 124.
- 72 Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 18, 32–3.
- 73 More, *Essays*, 2–3.
- 74 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 45–6. On abominable masculinity in women, see also e.g. d’Ancourt, *Lady’s Preceptor*, 38, 45–6.
- 75 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 53.
- 76 *Spectator*, No. 57, 5 May 1711, I, 319–23; No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19; No. 437, 22 July 1712, VI, 226–31. On the anxiousness surrounding sportswomen, see e.g. Major, *Madam Britannia*, 232.
- 77 Christine Lodge notes that Jane Gordon was ‘something of a problematic figure in London society, combining being Scottish and clearly outspoken with her role as a political hostess. Her vivacity and enthusiasm did not fit easily into carefully constructed polite society of the time’ (Lodge, ‘Gordon, Jane, duchess of Gordon’).
- 78 For similar interpretations, see e.g. Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*; Friendli, ‘Passing women’; Castle, ‘Culture of Travesty’; Kimmel, ‘Contemporary “Crisis” of Masculinity’; Epstein and Straub, ‘Guarded Body’.
- 79 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 42–4, 18.
- 80 *Ladies Calling*, 13–15.
- 81 *Spectator*, No. 57, 5 May 1711, I, 319–23; More, *Essays*, 2–3; Bennett, *Letters*, II, 45–6. Michèle Cohen and Will Fisher have demonstrated that pre-Enlightenment men and women were by no means free to self-fashion themselves however they pleased, but that there were ‘important cultural apparatuses in place [...] to insure that gender was “properly” materialized’ (Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 17, 23; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 8–9; see also Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 8; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 120–6). A certain amount of gender ambiguity has been argued to be a normal part of the normalising process of gender construction (Roper and Tosh, ‘Historians and the Politics of Masculinity’, 18; Bermingham, ‘Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs’, 492).
- 82 See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 466, 25 August 1712, VI, 389–95; No. 198, 17 October 1711, III, 163–8; No. 187, 4 October 1711, III, 102–7; No. 281, 22 January 1712, IV, 167–72.

- 83 *Spectator*, No. 175, 20 September 1711, III, 33–9.
- 84 Hester Piozzi to unknown, 25 August 1819, Mangin (ed.), *Piozziana*, 130; Elizabeth Montagu to Matthew Montagu, 11 October 1789, HL MO 3925; Major, *Madam Britannia*, 232, 260. On horseback-riding, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 272–6.
- 85 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 189.
- 86 Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes', 377.
- 87 Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', 291.
- 88 *QBS*, II, 233–4.
- 89 Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 6; Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 662.
- 90 Bennett, *History Matters*, 55.
- 91 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, [n.d., 1741], *LEM*, I, 242–3.
- 92 Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 83.
- 93 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 4 September 1745, *LCT*, I, 110.
- 94 See e.g. CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 6 June 1752, BLRA, Wrest MS 2963.
- 95 See e.g. EM to Gilbert West, 16 October 1755, *LEM*, III, 338: '[Mr. Montagu] is never in a hurry to change place; for my own part I am thoroughly tired of the country, and should be glad to leave it [...]; but as I can endure this sort of life without being out of humour or out of spirits, I shall acquiesce very quietly. [...] As Mr. Montagu has an undoubted right to choose what place he shall be in, I feel it most fit and proper to sit here to listen to the winter's wind all day'. See also e.g. EM to Elizabeth Carter, 6 June 1758, *LEM*, IV, 75: 'In about a week we shall set out for the North, where I am to pass about three months in the delectable conversation of stewards, and managers of coal mines [...] like poor Harlequin in the play, I am acting a silly part dans l'embarras des richesses'.
- 96 EM to Edward Montagu, 8 July 1753, *QBS*, II, 34–5; Edward Montagu to EM, [July? 1753], *QBS*, II, 35.
- 97 EM to Edward Montagu, 4 January 1751, *LEM*, III, 148.
- 98 EM to Edward Montagu, [n.d., 1742?], *QBS*, I, 127.
- 99 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 285.
- 100 EM to Sarah Scott, 25 October [1765], HL MO 5829.
- 101 On widows and their social and financial status, see e.g. Hussey and Ponsoyby, *Single Homemaker*, 14–16, 42–3, passim.
- 102 EM to Morris Robinson, 5 July 1775, HL MO 4802, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 103 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 7 July 1775, HL MO 3365, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 104 EM to Sarah Robinson, [n.d., 1741?], *QBS*, I, 89.
- 105 Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu, Elizabeth'.
- 106 Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 88–9; D'Ezio, *Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi*, 20.
- 107 FB to Charles Burney, 20 June [1780], *JFB*, IV, 198–9.
- 108 Hester Lynch Thrale, 1 July 1780, Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana*, I, 443. Lady Louisa refers to a character in Burney's *Evelina*—sister to Lord Orville, described as a 'pretty but affected young lady' (Burney, *Evelina*, 281).
- 109 Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 29–30.
- 110 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, [n.d., 1741], *LEM*, I, 240–1.
- 111 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 30 January 1740, *LEM*, I, 88–9.
- 112 Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', 225–34. On the financial and political importance attached to marriage, see e.g. Ilmakunnas, *Kuluttaminen ja ylhäisaatelin elämäntapa*, 77–9.

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- 113 EM to her mother, Elizabeth Robinson, 20 October 1741, *QBS*, I, 87.
- 114 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 25 January 1740, *LEM*, I, 83.
- 115 Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu, Elizabeth'.
- 116 EM to Edward Montagu, [n.d., 1742], *QBS*, I, 123.
- 117 EM to Mary Robinson, 9 January 1778, BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 69–72; EM to Mary Robinson, 30 June [1783], BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 124–5.
- 118 MD to Anne Granville, 19 March 1727–8, *CMD*, I, 164–5.
- 119 MD to Anne Granville, 6 September 1732, *CMD*, I, 382.
- 120 Moore, 'Queer Gardens', 53.
- 121 Moore, 'Queer Gardens', 54. See also Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 174; Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 130–2.
- 122 MD to Anne Dewes, 22 March 1743–4, *CMD*, II, 282.
- 123 Moore, 'Queer Gardens', 50–4.
- 124 MD to Anne Dewes, 3 January 1744–5, *CMD*, II, 333–4.
- 125 MD to Anne Dewes, 21 June 1745, *CMD*, II, 365; 30 March 1744, *CMD*, II, 287–8.
- 126 MD to Anne Dewes, 21 February 1744, *CMD*, II, 265.
- 127 D'Ezio, *Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi*, 20; Chisholm, *Fanny Burney*, 171–2. Even though Burney's marriage in many ways resembled Thrale's with respect to the poverty, foreignness, and Catholicism of her husband, Monsieur d'Arblay was of genteel birth and, for example, a friend of Madame de Staël.
- 128 Thaddeus, *Frances Burney*, 109–10, 113–15.

3 Hypocrisy and Strategic Dissimulation

Despite the rhetorical valorisation of openness and sincerity, women's politeness was, in practice, ultimately hypocritical. Using women's everyday lives, their practices of dress, as well as the cult of sensibility as entry points, this chapter teases out the implicit hypocrisy that was embedded in the fundamental incompatibility of the ideal of the transparent female body with the practical need of strategic self-fashioning. The juxtaposition between rhetorical invocations of naturalness and real-life practices of dissimulation are patent in the very division between honest/sincere/inward and dissimulative/theatrical/external politeness. In fact, as I demonstrate, the relationship between internal and external formulations of politeness is more problematic than previous scholarship has perhaps recognised. Inward politeness as something that would 'automatically' flow out of the goodness of one's soul was, in reality, just as much the result of disciplined practice and habituation as the theatrical external politeness. This is nowhere more evident than in the very writings of John Locke, the often-heeded originator of the concept of inward politeness.

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke acknowledges that the 'agreeable way of expressing' inner civility is through 'that decency and gracefulness of Looks, Voice, Words, Motions, Gestures, and of all the whole outward Demeanour, which takes in Company, and makes those with whom we may Converse, easy and well pleased'. This he calls 'the Language, whereby that internal Civility of the Mind is expressed'. And, as all languages, it is 'very much governed by the Fashion and Custom of every Country' and must, therefore, be specifically learned through education.¹ In other words, inward civility did not automatically translate into external good behaviour, but required sustained practice. More importantly, Locke's understanding of the actual meaning of 'inward' or 'natural' is by no means straightforward. When going into more detail on the education of children, he writes:

by repeating the same Action, till it be grown habitual in them, the Performance will not depend on Memory or Reflection, [...] but will be natural in them. Thus bowing to a Gentleman, when he salutes him, and looking in his Face, when he speaks to him, is by constant Use as natural to a well-bred Man, as breathing; it requires no Thought, no Reflection.

Having this Way cured in your Child any Fault, it is cured for ever: And thus one by one you may weed them all out, and plant what Habits you please.²

In other words, Locke describes how repetition of polite habits makes those habits so automatic that they become ‘natural’. What is more, even the so-called inner civility of mind turns out not to be innate, according to Locke; instead, that too needs to be planted at an early age:

Want of well-fashioned Civility in the Carriage, whilst *Civility* is not wanting in the Mind, (for there you must take Care to plant it early) should be the Parents least Care, whilst they are young. [...] Be sure to keep up in him the Principles of Good Nature and Kindness; make them as habitual as you can [...] And, when they have taken Root in his Mind, and are settled there by continual Practice, fear not; the Ornaments of Conversation, and the Outside of fashionable Manners, will come in their due Time.³

As Jenny Davidson has argued, Locke’s treatise on education demonstrates how blurred the distinction between nurture and nature, or environmental influence and (in modern terms) biological qualities, was in the long eighteenth century.⁴ For our purposes, it shows the artificially constructed nature of the so-called internal politeness; even though Locke claims that internal virtue is all that politeness requires, the concept of ‘internal’ does not necessarily mean ‘natural’ or ‘inborn’ in any straightforward way. Accordingly, when inner virtue and honest transparency of manners is marketed for women as ‘natural’ to them, the underlying meanings of inborn versus acquired qualities were not as clearly delineated to the members of polite society as they are to us. The vagueness of the concept of ‘natural’ made it a useful rhetorical tool, masking the fact that all politeness, internal and external alike, was artificial. Indeed, on closer examination, it is possible to question the entire division between internal and external politeness altogether; as this chapter will demonstrate, the difference between the two reveals itself to be mostly rhetorical, as inward civility seems to be, in practice, constantly leaking into theatrical self-fashioning.

The conceptual ambivalence between internal/natural and external/cultivated made women’s politeness particularly precarious. Internalist and externalist conceptualisations of politeness were also divided along gendered lines—which is something that has thus far escaped academic attention. Even though practical guides advocating theatrical self-fashioning were certainly published for women as well, the majority of women’s conduct books emphasised moral and Christian values as both particularly suitable and innate for womankind. Morality was generally considered an indispensable feminine quality and a much more crucial aspect of respectability for women than for men; accordingly, inward politeness was the dominant discourse of formulations of feminine propriety and good conduct.⁵ The ultimately artificial nature of inward politeness was thus a considerable problem for women whose open transparent

honesty supposedly arose from their gender. Some level of dissimulation and downright hypocrisy were thus not only constantly present in women's practices of politeness, but could and were—as this chapter will show—deliberately used by Montagu, Burney, and others to create freedom between discursive norms and actual behaviour by hiding subversive conduct behind a mask of feminine submissiveness.

Natural Sincerity and Dishonest Affectation

A natural and unconstrained Behaviour has something in it so agreeable, that it is no Wonder to see People endeavouring after it. But at the same time, it is so very hard to hit, when it is not Born with us, that People often make themselves Ridiculous in attempting it.

Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* (1711)⁶

On a rhetorical level, the proponents of inward politeness sought to distinguish themselves from the theatrical politeness tradition, claiming a monopoly on both pleasing behaviour and morality. This was an attempt to mask the fact that, despite their different premises, the goals of the advocates of both internal and external politeness were surprisingly similar. Both aimed at pleasing others with modest, unpretentious, and obliging behaviour. Both also promoted easy and free urban politeness over stiff country politeness or the mannerisms of courtly politeness. Naturalness was hailed by both as the corner stone of urban politeness; Addison and Steele as well as Chesterfield and Mandeville praised easy naturalness of manners as the prerequisite of good breeding that enabled free sociability over distinctions of rank and social status. However, even though the goals of the two camps were thus similar, their means of achieving those goals were different—at least on the surface.

The main internalist objection against theatrical dissimulation was its alleged incompatibility with truthful naturalness. Internalists saw external politeness as a mere affectation of true politeness—and 'Affectation will always be offensive, because the mind within, and the Actions without, do not correspond', as John Burton concluded in his conduct book. According to Hester Chapone, 'affectation seems to imply a mean opinion of one's own real form, or character, while we strive against nature to alter ourselves by ridiculous contortions of body, or by feigned sentiments and unnatural manners'.⁷ In other words, external politeness was accused of abandoning the first and foremost ideals of politeness—naturalness and sincerity—in favour of dishonesty and affectation. These immoral aspects linked to external politeness made it not only offensive, but also potentially dangerous. Politeness was intimately linked to public virtue; a basis of social intercourse, it was thought to lay the ground for the virtue and morality of the society and English nation as a whole. As Edmund Burke wrote, 'Manners are of more importance than laws', for they 'aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them'.⁸ Insincere flattery and theatrical politeness were thought to be indicative of the tyrannical absolutism of France, whereas

'English liberty' called for corresponding liberty of manners. Inward politeness was thus seen as a specifically moral version of politeness, conducive to public virtue and nation's morality.

The immoral implications of external politeness made women's relation to theatrical behaviour particularly problematic. Women were widely considered to be the moral backbone of England; an influential moralist discourse constructed womanhood as a safeguard of British religious, polite, and national values.⁹ Accordingly, the whole society was seen to be dependent on women's morality—increasingly so towards the end of the eighteenth century. 'The celebrated Montesquieu, speaking of the influence of the female Sex on public manners, says, that the safety of a state depends upon the virtues of the Women', declared John Burton in 1793.¹⁰ Women's virtue was considered to be crucial because of their much-discussed effect on men's manners. In the words of Hannah More,

The prevailing manners of an age depend more than we are aware, or are willing to allow, on the conduct of the women; this is one of the principal hinges on which the great machine of human society turns. Those who allow the influence which female graces have, in contributing to polish the manners of men, would do well to reflect how great an influence female morals must also have on their conduct.¹¹

Thus, not only men's manners, but also their morals could be either improved or ruined by women. According to Emma Major, women were urged to act as beaming lights of Christian morality and goodness, making people around them more virtuous by their own good example.¹² Therefore, inward politeness was given a special importance in conduct rhetoric addressing women.

However, the externalists did not see the matter in such simplistic light. They did not disparage virtue; as Lawrence Klein has stated, even the infamous Lord Chesterfield thought manners 'less intrinsically valuable than moral virtue'.¹³ Neither did they appreciate unnatural, affected behaviour; in fact, the externalists' conduct ideal was very similar to the internalists'—that of natural simplicity. Chesterfield asserted that learning graceful manners should be started at a very young age, for otherwise they will 'never appear easy, nor seem natural'. He advised his son to attune himself to the company he was in as perfectly as possible; to 'be serious with the serious' and 'gay with the gay', but always, 'in assuming these various shapes, endeavour to make each of them seem to sit easy upon you, and even to appear to be your own natural one'.¹⁴ In fact, the externalists were possibly even more occupied with the ideal of naturalness than the internalists, and denounced affectation in explicit terms. As Chesterfield declared, to be caught at a lie or affectation—in other words, to be found dishonest or insincere—not only made a person 'wonderfully ridiculous', but compromised their honour, reputation, and good character.¹⁵ Nor was such dissimulative advice limited only to men; despite the emphasis given to women's honesty and morality, women had their share of externalist politeness

manuals. One popular women's conduct book acknowledged that, since 'Affectation mingles itself with all our Actions, and it requires Perfection to be entirely exempt from it', women should concentrate on regulating their behaviour to make it appear as natural as possible. Indeed, the advice provided is strongly reminiscent of Locke's emphasis of habituating internal virtue, thus calling to question any strict difference between the two; 'Endeavour that Cheerfulness, Sweetness, and Modesty be always blended in your Countenance and Air, and let them be so habitual to you, that there mayn't appear any thing of Affectation in it'.¹⁶

Inward politeness was not only marketed as an important conduct ideal for women because of its links to honesty and morality, but also because simplicity, artlessness, and unaffectedness were deemed essential female characteristics. John Bennett defined, when describing a fictional Louisa, a paragon of feminine perfection, truthful naturalness as her most important asset:

The *ground work* of all her charms, is, [...] simplicity; and artless, undesigning, *unstudied* manner, flowing from an innocent and virtuous heart, which, never seeks *concealment*, as having indeed *nothing* to conceal. Louisa never affects to be any thing, but what she *is*. [...] Her gestures, attitude, voice, pronunciation are all under the immediate impression and guidance of *nature*. [...]

It is the very reverse of that absurd affectation, which, by assuming a thousand, *fanciful* shapes, renders graces unlovely, and even beauty disgusting. Louisa charms every person because she is *always* amiable and obliging, without *studying* to charm. Her face is always welcome in company, though she throws no *artificial* lightning into her eyes, softness into her features, nor *lisping* into her articulation.¹⁷

Bennett contrasted natural, transparent, and unaffected feminine behaviour with the 'absurd affectation' and artificial charms of women who, spoiled by contemporary education, pretend politeness to please.¹⁸ According to Bennett, women were naturally formed 'to be innocent and artless'; indeed, as a part of the changing gender paradigm, women were increasingly thought to be naturally moral and amiable, which made inward politeness easy to feminise. Women's supposedly natural 'softness and sensibility' not only shielded them from different vices, but also made them 'particularly fit [...] for the practice of those duties where the heart is chiefly concerned', as John Gregory wrote.¹⁹ Thus, inward politeness was not only particularly suitable for women, but also an innate feminine trait.

Indeed, femininity was habitually likened to artless transparency in eighteenth-century imaginations. Fanny Burney's sentimental novels are a good example of the idealisation of feminine honesty and transparency, which was also heavily influenced by the growing trend of sensibility towards the end of the eighteenth century. *Evelina* (1778), as an epistolary novel, works on the—somewhat perverse—assumption that Evelina reveals the depths of her soul to

her guardian, Mr Villars, for whom she keeps a minute journal of all her thoughts and actions.²⁰ In *Camilla* (1796), Edgar, the young admirer of the protagonist, reads ‘in the change, yet brightness of [Camilla’s] countenance, what passed within’—only to fear later on that improper company ‘has already broken into that clear transparent singleness of mind, so beautiful in its total ignorance of every species of scheme, every sort of double measure, every idea of secret view and latent expedient’.²¹ In fact, *Camilla* can be read, in its totality, as a defence of open transparency and its necessity in a woman; even the complexions of the moral heroines appear ‘fair, clear, and transparent’, the permeability of the sexed body thus further reflecting the gendered honesty of the soul.²²

Despite this supposedly natural female morality and transparency, women were at the same time also seen to be particularly prone to lying and affectation. Vanity, the prime cause of all affectation, was thought to be an especially feminine sin, since women supposedly had greater needs to please, in order to get married. *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift*, for example, cautioned women especially ‘against Vanity, it being the Fault to which your Sex seemeth to be the most inclined, and since Affectation for the most part attendeth it’.²³ Women were thought to be prone to vanity especially because of their constant desire to seek men’s attention. Since a woman herself, with her body and soul, was her own best commodity in the search for a husband, she was thought to be susceptible to affectation in order to better her appearance in front of men.²⁴ In fact, many externalist writers, such as Lord Chesterfield, defined veracity as a characteristically masculine virtue and a vital part of men’s honour, but less inherent or necessary for women. Affectation could even be a becoming feminine quality, especially according to the less morally (and sentimentally) tuned authors of the early 1700s.²⁵ Thus, women’s relationship to honesty was a complex one. On the one hand, open transparency was deemed necessary and natural for women—while on the other hand, they were imagined to be intrinsically unreliable and deceitful. Even though women thus needed to aspire towards inner goodness as a sign of their femininity, affectation was often thought to be just as feminine a characteristic as honest transparency; even though it was morally corrupt, it was still, on some level, expected of women, as a sign of their feminine weakness of character.

However, internalists hurried to declare that dissimulation would defeat its own end, and that men would only be attracted by a natural, unaffected woman. As early as 1697, John Vanbrugh’s popular Restoration Comedy *The Provoked Wife* assured its audiences in the words of the handsome misanthrope Heartfree that all a woman—in this case, the affected Lady Fanciful—needed to do to win a man’s heart was to lay down her affectation. In Heartfree’s opinion, Lady Fanciful’s artful appearance has made her an object of pity and ridicule:

Heart. I mean to tell you, that you are the most ungrateful woman upon earth.

Lady F. Ungrateful! to whom?

Heart. To nature.

Lady F. Why, what has nature done for me?

Heart. What you have undone by art; It made you handsome; it gave you beauty to a miracle, a shape without a fault, wit enough to make them relish, and so turned you loose to your own discretion, which has made such work with you, that you are become the pity of our sex, and the jest of your own. There is not a feature in your face, but you have found the way to teach it some affected convulsion; your feet, your hands, your very fingers' ends, are directed never to move without some ridiculous air or other; and your language is a suitable trumpet, to draw people's eyes upon the rare show.²⁶

Since women had a greater claim and need for truthfulness, affectation was deemed to be more despicable in a woman than in a man. In fact, gender was used as a tool to discipline women towards virtue and honesty; since morality and sincerity were natural female qualities, an affected woman—or, one practicing external politeness—automatically became a monster of uncertain gender instead of a true feminine woman. In Richard Steele's analysis in 1714, an affected woman was compared to a monkey:

She would have it thought that she is made of so much the finer clay, and so much more sifted than ordinary, that she has no common earth about her. To this end she must neither move nor speak like other women [...] The looking-glass in the morning dictates to her all the motions of the day, which by how much the more studied, are so much the more mistaken. [...] She comes into a room as if her limbs were set on with ill-made screws, which makes the company fear the pretty thing should leave some of its artificial person upon the floor. She does not like herself as God Almighty made her, but will have some of her own workmanship, which is so far from making her a better thing than a woman, that it turns her into a worse creature than a monkey. She falls out with nature, against which she makes war without admitting a truce [...] When she has a mind to be soft and languishing, there is something so unnatural in that affected easiness, that her frowns could not be by many degrees so forbidding. [...] Her discourse is a senseless chime of empty words, a heap of compliments, so equally applied to different persons, that they are neither valued nor believed.²⁷

As these examples from Vanbrugh and Steele—as well as many more throughout the long eighteenth century—indicate, affectation was thought inevitably to reveal itself through distorted bodily signs.²⁸ An affected woman would move in an awkward manner, overdo her looks and feelings, and speak falsities with a fake lisp. In other words, affectation was thought to make women reject the guidance of nature, rendering them ridiculous, but also unfeminine or even inhuman.

Incidentally, despite their assurances that affectation would always be discernible, the internalists were nevertheless deeply worried that a performance

skilful enough could deceive even the keenest observer. It was precisely the identical outcome of both sincere and theatrical politeness despite fundamental moral differences that concerned the internalists—not the ridiculousness and unauthenticity of theatrical dissimulation that they disparaged. The idea that vice could be effectually hidden behind a mask of virtue was a deeply disconcerting one. Despite her belief that regulating features was futile without inward restraint, Hannah More, for example, still worried that external signs could be mistaken ‘for the thing itself’:

A low voice and soft address are the common indications of a well-bred woman, and should seem to be the natural effects of a meek and quiet spirit; but they are only the outward and visible signs of it: for they are no more meekness itself, than a red coat is courage, or a black one devotion. Yet nothing is more common than to mistake the sign for the thing itself; nor is any practice more frequent than that of endeavouring to acquire the exterior mark, without once thinking to labour after the interior grace.²⁹

Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft lamented in her early book on women’s education (1787) that many women were only ‘whitened sepulchres, and careful only about appearances’.³⁰ The blurred content of the concept of naturalness as both innate and acquired—stable and mutable, truthful and unreliable—makes the discourse of politeness so challenging to navigate. For internalists, naturalness meant sincere transparency, laying one’s inner character open for everybody to see through unaffected and unconstrained manners—thus presupposing that men and women were innately moral and sociable creatures. For externalists, then, naturalness was a calculated performance of immaculate behaviour, so honed that it appeared completely natural; since men and women were by nature selfish, rude, and unsociable, they needed to mask their inner self with a perfect performance. These differences of thought were deeply grounded in eighteenth-century philosophical debates on human nature, morality, sociability, and the social contract, sparked by Thomas Hobbes’s claim of men’s and women’s natural unsociability and, thereby, sociability’s artificial nature. And yet, even though internalists based their rhetoric on the belief of the inherent goodness of the human nature, they admitted that the moral, internal self needed regulation as well. As Locke stated, the ‘Civility [of] the Mind’ needed to be specifically planted and industriously cultivated to produce the external marks of truthful naturalness.³¹

Hypocrisy and Transparency: The Dual Role of the Body

[I]n the present refined or depraved state of human nature, most people endeavor to conceal their real character, not to display it.

Horace Walpole, *Reminiscences* (1788)³²

The body functioned as the primary scene of constructing and communicating politeness, regardless of conceptualisations of politeness. Politeness was an

identity that was constructed through the stylisation of the body, which reflected the ideals of politeness through its appearance, postures, gestures, and acts; accordingly, didactic politeness literature put considerable effort into specifying the different ways in which politeness should be acted out. However, the ideological differences between inward and external politeness influenced the precise manner in which the body was defined as the locus of politeness construction and communication. External politeness viewed the body as a canvas on which the perfect appearance of politeness could be painted while carefully hiding the true inner self behind it. 'Do not mistake, and think that [...] you should exhibit your whole character to the public, because it is your natural one. No, many things must be suppressed and many things concealed in the best character', wrote Lord Chesterfield.³³ External politeness was concealing by its nature, and so was the externalist view of the body; the body was thought to be separate from the mind, an autonomous entity that could be moulded to reflect desired artificial identities. The theatrical body was essentially opaque, controlled, and flexible, ready to perform at will. The body was consciously manipulated to fulfil the requirements of polite decorum and sociability; through impeccable control of the body, all impolite characteristics, feelings, and thoughts were supposed to be carefully hidden from sight.³⁴

Since inward politeness was based on inner goodness and morality, in this tradition the body was seen as essentially transparent; it would honestly and inevitably reflect a person's inner self on its surface for everybody to see—be that inner self either virtuous or depraved. Therefore, internalist politeness writers wished to polish people's manners chiefly by urging them to refine their souls through religion, compassion, and charity. In this way, as John Burton explained to women, they could appear in their natural character, without fear of displeasing:

If, then, you wish to behave so as to please, the first object of your attention must be, to cultivate good dispositions and virtuous principles. You will not, in that case, be ashamed of appearing in your true characters. You will dare to be what you are. You will neither disguise your real sentiments; nor assume any manners but your own. This foundation for a good character being thus laid, any little embellishments it may afterwards require, on conformity to the external modes of politeness, may soon and easily be attained. But the last, without the first, will be but a superficial covering for a depraved or a weak mind.³⁵

Thus, according to internalist rhetoric, the locus of adopting polite manners was not the body, but the mind. Since the body was transparent to the point of painful honesty, it would be useless, in the moralist view, to try to polish external manners without inner virtue.

This apparent tension, extensively debated as it was by eighteenth-century politeness theorists, reveals itself to be, upon a closer examination, only a superficial, or rather, rhetorical difference. When we compare the conduct books that

represent these two conceptions of politeness, we immediately notice that the externalists were not the only ones to give a tremendous amount of practical advice on correct bodily movements; indeed, the internalists did just the same—even though it would be logical to assume that internalist writers would have seen deliberate manipulation of the body as useless, or even deceitful. Nevertheless, even the most moralist internalist writers engaged in the discourse of bodily manipulation. Reverend James Fordyce, for example, wished that ‘a young woman, ambitious of regulating her appearance, as well as her dispositions and deportment’, would model herself according to Christian principles.³⁶ Thus, internalist and externalist conduct books differed very little in this respect; they both focused on defining ideal politeness through bodily practices.

It is crucial to notice, however, that the rhetorical invocation of internality as the basis of all politeness and the body as its transparent reflector was the cause of an insurmountable paradox and one of the most pervasive concerns of politeness discourse. The moralist rhetoric of internality caused an unsolvable contradiction between theory and practice regarding the position of the body. Contemporary commentators from Locke to Chesterfield agreed that politeness needed to be physically visible to others; it was created and communicated through stylising the body into different acts and appearances.³⁷ For externalists this was not a problem, since their conception of politeness was based on the careful manipulation of the body. Internalists, who had avowed the primacy of the soul before the body, however, faced the problem of internal inconsistency and hypocrisy. From this controversy stem, to a large extent, the concerns of dishonesty, hypocrisy, and dissimulation, so extensive in eighteenth-century politeness discourse. The internalist problem was that the body had a dual role; it was simultaneously the active site of polite identity construction and the passive mirror of individual polite identity. Therefore, it was constantly subjected to two sets of demands. On the one hand, it needed to be mutable and reshapeable, open to continuous moulding and redefinition, in order to portray the constantly changing ideals of politeness. On the other hand, it needed to be an unwavering, truthful reflection of the inner self, a non-impressionable indicator of personal politeness and morality. In other words, the body had to be simultaneously both flexible, cultivated, and malleable—and pristine, truthful, and natural. For the Chesterfieldian branch, the body did not have this dual purpose; it displayed politeness, of course, but it was never meant to be truthful, since for the externalists, politeness was simply role play.³⁸ For internalists, however, the body had become fundamentally problematic, since it was not the unchangeable mirror of the inner self, but also a means of shaping that inner self.

In other words, politeness required, despite internalists’ demands of naturalness, strict control of the body and all its movements, which made politeness implicitly dishonest. Even if a woman appeared to be naturally open and honest, this appearance would have been achieved artificially, through communicating the designed messages of openness through the body. This problem was heightened for women by their extensive association with internal politeness. Even internalist writers themselves expressed doubts about the possibility

of absolute transparency. Hannah More, for example, thought that ‘the exterior of gentleness is so uniformly assumed, and the whole manner is so perfectly level and *uni*’ amongst well-bred women that ‘it is next to impossible for a stranger to know any thing of their true dispositions by conversing with them’; even their ‘very features are so exactly regulated, that physiognomy, which may sometimes be trusted among the vulgar, is, with the polite, a most lying science’.³⁹ Thus, a polite and strictly regulated exterior was something that was habitually expected from all elite women. A failure in this could lead into public ridicule and condemnation—as in the case of Jane Gordon, Duchess of Gordon, or Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, both of whose unguarded behaviour was a popular topic of satire.

Even though the open display of true sentiments was glorified by sentimental novels, control was needed to refine those sentiments to meet the class-specific requirements of polite society. Even if aristocratic dissimulation, masking corrupt morality, was something that the middling majority of polite society wanted to separate themselves from, easy transparency and undesigning artlessness were, in the end, characteristics associated with the lower classes—and, therefore, to be held at arm’s length. As *The Spectator* commented in its issue on May madness, ‘the Effects of this Month on the lower part of the Sex, who act without Disguise, are very visible’, urging ladies of quality to rise above such base instincts.⁴⁰ Similar identification between transparency and low social standing is made in Jane Austen’s *Emma*, where the illegitimate Harriet Smith, an uneducated woman of dubious birth, is characterised by her artlessness and simplicity, which the more cultivated heroine lacks.⁴¹

The question of control versus naturalness was, in many ways, the axis along which the discourse of women’s politeness aligned. There was an inbuilt demand for control, which the internalists did their best to try to camouflage by discursive means, causing problems concerning honesty and hypocrisy. In Jenny Davidson’s words, ‘the dominance of an ethos of self-command produced an accompanying uneasiness that reveals itself in [...] compulsive invocations of hypocrisy’.⁴² In other words, hypocrisy was an irremovable, built-in feature of feminine politeness, since women’s politeness was constructed through a play of control and un-control, or natural and artificial, where the discursive need to hide the organising principles of gendered politeness made hypocrisy obligatory. The constant conflict between the rhetoric of natural femininity and the practices of constructed femininity created an unavoidable inconsistency between the said and the done.

Dissimulation and Power: Strategic Opacity

Women’s politeness thus unfolds as an essentially hypocritical set of practices. It advocated naturalness, even though it was based on conscious self-fashioning; it positioned the female body simultaneously as the transparent and unerring sign of an individual’s inner essence, and the canvas on which that essence was painted and through which it was internalised. The practice of hypocrisy is

directly linked to the dynamics of gendered and social power. According to Jenny Davidson, hypocrisy was both a tool for the dominant party for securing hegemony and, paradoxically, a means for the subordinate to leverage herself into a more powerful position. Davidson argues that women effectively took advantage of the political possibilities offered by hypocrisy, and laid claim to ‘the right to be hypocritical: to exert modesty, tact and self-control to a degree that men could or would not’. Davidson thus discovers a duality in the politeness discourse, which on the one hand advocated openness for women, but at the same time not only allowed but ‘actively encouraged’ women ‘to cultivate an unreadable quality in their relations with men and with society at large’. Davidson asserts that ‘[h]owever desirable openness might be [...], opacity is tactically far more advantageous’.⁴³ Indeed, despite their moralist rhetoric, several didactic writers emphasised women’s need for caution and, if need be, dissimulation. The anonymous *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), often attributed to Judith Drake, rebutted the notion of dissimulation as a female ‘blemish’, declaring it instead—if not strictly a ‘Vertue’—yet, ‘many times absolutely necessary’ and a ‘main Ingredient in the Composition of Human Prudence’.⁴⁴ Indeed, as Fanny Burney wrote a hundred years later in *Camilla*—a professed manifesto of openness, domesticity, and honesty—there were supposedly two kinds of dissimulation: reprehensible hypocrisy and necessary discretion. ‘The first is a vice; the second a conciliation to virtue. It is the bond that keeps society from disunion; the veil that shades our weakness from exposure, giving time for that interior correction, which the publication of our infirmities would else, with respect to mankind, make of no avail’.⁴⁵ *The Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* claimed that women as the weaker sex needed to ‘live with so much Caution and Circumspection, in regard to their own security, that their Thoughts and Inclinations may not be seen so naked, as to expose them to the *Snares, Designs, and Practices of crafty Knaves*’; otherwise they would become ‘a *Prey to every designing Man*’.⁴⁶ Thus, dissimulation was an important tactic of sociability, especially for women, whose range of life and means of managing their person were narrower than men’s, while their reputation was all the more easily compromised.

Some writers went a step further and recommended unashamed hypocrisy as a female strategy to power. The Marquis of Halifax, for one, had a very practical attitude towards clever women usurping familial power from an unsuspecting husband. In his conduct book, he presented several different cases of husbands, advising women how best to use men’s weaknesses to appropriate their traditional patriarchal power, while maintaining the appearance of a submissive wife. A ‘Cholerick, or Ill-humour’d’ husband, for example, was best handled by manipulating his passions through careful flattery. A drunk husband was, although disconcerting and tiresome, easily taken advantage on; for ‘where the Man will give such frequent Intermissions of the use of his Reason, the Wife insensibly getteth a Right of Governing in the Vacancy, and that raiseth her Character and Credit in the Family, to a higher pitch than perhaps could be done under a sober Husband’.⁴⁷ The type of husband that offered most

potential power for a clever woman was a ‘weak and incompetent’ one, since the wife generally appeared all the more to her advantage when compared against a foolish husband. Moreover, the husband’s lack of intellect would give his shrewd wife—

the Dominion, if you will make the right use of it; it is Next to his being dead, in which Case the Wife hath right to Administer; therefore be sure, if you have such an Ideot, that none, except your self, may have the benefit of the forfeiture: Such a Fool is a dangerous Beast, if others have the keeping of him; and you must be very undextrous if when your Husband shall resolve to be an Ass, you do not take care he may be your Ass.⁴⁸

Thus, Halifax clearly thought that artful management was not only acceptable, but absolutely necessary for women to make their husbands ‘content to live upon less unequal Terms’ within patriarchal marriage, or even to gain the ‘Right of Governing’ altogether.⁴⁹ Noteworthy in Halifax’s treatise are the strategies he recommends. ‘There must be Art in it, and a skilful Hand’, as well as ‘a great deal of nice Care required to deal with a Man of this Complexion’. The appearance of submission was crucial for a successful coup of familial power in order not to ‘provoke the tame Creature to break loose, and to shew his Dominion for his Credit, which he was content to forget for his Ease’. Therefore, a clever woman would ‘do like a wise Minister to an easie Prince; first give him the Orders you afterwards receive from him’.⁵⁰ And finally, ‘when other Remedies are too weak’, he concluded, ‘a little Flattery may be admitted, which by being necessary, will cease to be Criminal’.⁵¹ Thus, Halifax suggested that women should unscrupulously resort to opaque tactics—careful flattery and skilful manoeuvring. This is, of course, essentially the notion of politeness that Chesterfield came to stand for some decades later—namely, that politeness is ‘the art of pleasing and thus of advancing one’s own interest in the context of satisfying that of others’, as Lawrence Klein puts it.⁵² In this way, women could use politeness strategically to gain power.

Indeed, as the previous chapter’s discussion on women’s subordinate position illustrated, women used such means as the rhetoric of submission to negotiate both their immediate and long-term aims with their fathers, husbands, and other superiors. However, women used also much more straightforwardly hypocritical strategies to secure their share of power. Fanny Burney is a case in point. Her manoeuvring to get her own way in the case of her lengthened visit to the Thrales, for example, required her to pay lip service to both her father and the Thrales; after assuring her father that she was more than ready to come home and having, indeed, managed to secure permission from the Thrales to do so, she did her best to convince Hester Lynch Thrale of the very opposite in her next letter:

not the less have I thought of or regretted my ever dear, ever kind & most sweet Mrs. Thrale!—but, as I am come, after many absences, to a Family

so deservedly beloved by me, I am determin'd niether to sour my Friends nor myself by encouraging a repining spirit, but *now* to be happy as I can with *them*, & hope ere long to be again so with *You*.⁵³

Thus, Burney used a certain amount of hypocrisy to balance between the two authorities who had the power over her immediate future and whereabouts. Burney's social position combined with the fact that she happened to be a woman prompted her into hypocrisy also on other occasions. When writing her debut novel *Evelina*, she wanted to escape the notoriety that automatically followed a female author, not to mention the possible shame a badly written novel would bring her and her family, by keeping the writing process and authorship of the published novel a secret, even from her family; she only divulged it when the novel was favourably received. 'To be sure, the concealment of this affair has cost me no few Inventions, & *must* cost me many, many more', Burney wrote in her journal.⁵⁴ Her sex was without a doubt one reason behind her need for secrecy—for a woman, to be talked of very nearly implied notoriety in itself—and it certainly made hiding her novel-writing all the more difficult, since she had no chance to claim time for herself without raising suspicions.⁵⁵ Most of *Evelina* was, accordingly, written during the small hours of the night. Elizabeth Montagu's chameleon-like ability to assume different masks according to different settings and audiences—discussed more closely in Chapter 5—is another example of women's hypocritical practices to gain freedom and power. By putting on dissimulative identities, Montagu aimed to promote her aims: reputation, politeness, networking, pleasing others, and the like.

In practice, honesty and sincerity acted more as rhetorical catchphrases that women used to construct desired images of themselves than actual guidelines of behaviour. Openness was presented by them as their true character, and hypocrisy was vehemently disavowed. 'What an abominable vice is hypocrisy!' exclaimed Elizabeth Montagu to William Freind, and expressed a lofty wish to preserve her heart uncorrupted enough to 'abhor deceit in myself' and 'avoid it in others'.⁵⁶ Indeed, none of these women presented dissimulation in a favourable light; they despised it in others, and forswore it themselves. In fact, they went to great lengths to justify their dissimulative behaviour by evoking images of their natural inclinations towards absolute honesty. For example, Fanny Burney excused her dishonesty in the matter of keeping her authorship of *Evelina* a secret by declaring that such falsehood was repugnant to her sincere disposition; 'perhaps no body can have a more real & forcible detestation of falsehood & of *Equivocating* than myself; but in this particular case, I have no alternative', she wrote.⁵⁷ Similarly, when Mary Delany chose to hide the nature of her true (negative) feelings towards her first husband, she passed her deception off as a one-time exception: 'As my nature was very sincere, this dissimulation was painful to me, but I think I may venture to affirm that I never deceived him in anything else'.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Montagu congratulated the Freinds for the birth of their daughter declaring that they were now able to educate her properly by 'mak[ing] them teach her it is much easier to be what one shou'd

be, than to seem what one is not'; however, she simultaneously admitted that the ideals of this feminine transparency were rarely adhered to in real life. In fact, Montagu stated that girls' common education neglected the principles of naturalness: 'affectation & absurd customs are often made their tutoress, & their manners are all art', to the point where 'Dissimulation is look'd upon by many fathers & mothers as an Accomplishment'.⁵⁹

Catherine Talbot was slightly more straightforward in her journal, where she confessed that the demands sociable decorum posed on women quite often required hypocrisy. Since women were forced into a stationary life where their responsibility—as the primary social entertainers of the household—was to politely receive whoever happened to pass through the door, disregarding their own present state of mind and occupation, good manners in practice equalled hypocrisy. Talbot wrote, regarding an instance when 'some Visitresses came in very mal a propos & took away a good hour & half', that 'However they meant a Civility, are good sort of Women & Cheerful, had I felt ever so much out of humour One must have disguised it, so as I hate Hypocrisy I thought it the Shortest way to be heartily in good humour'.⁶⁰ Thus, hypocrisy was a strategy of feminine politeness—perhaps not the most admirable one, but practical all the same. In Mary Delany's case, her hypocritical practices were quite effectual; only the surprising and untimely death of her disagreeable drunk of a husband prevented her from inheriting all his fortune and walking away from an unhappy marriage a rich woman (Pendarves died before he had the time to sign his new will).

In fact, Elizabeth Montagu, despite renouncing all hypocrisy in herself, nevertheless put women's need for dissimulation in the face of patriarchal society into revealing words:

It is said by some writer who honoured women (and perhaps geese) less than they deserve, that few women have the virtues of an honest man. If it be so, a little of the blame must fall to the share of the men, who are more easily deluded than persuaded into any compliance. This makes the women have recourse to artifice to gain power, which, as they have gained by the weakness or caprice of those they govern, they are afraid to lose by the same kind of qualities.⁶¹

According to Montagu, women's need for dishonesty rose out of their subjugated position, aggravated by men's inconsistency towards them. She also underlined women's unofficial power, which was specifically gained through putting on deceptive appearances. 'I imagine Bishops as well as women (both wear petticoats and a character of gentleness) command while seeming to submit', she wrote in a humorous analogy, "and win their way by yielding to the tyde".⁶²

Thus, women's power was essentially hypocritical, gained through indirect influence in circumstances where direct usurping of power would have been a violation against normative femininity. Having recourse to stealth, women

could maintain their ideal appearances of passive and honest femininity while managing their affairs actively behind the scenes. As Jenny Davidson argues, hypocrisy was a conscious tactic of the inferior ‘to get what they can’—that is, an important tactic of survival for people in positions of patronage and dependence, and, as such, an inseparable element of women’s social interaction.⁶³ Thus, women, being subjected to a patriarchal order of society, did not have the luxury of undisguised honesty, but needed to measure their actions against appearances. By masking their true ambitions, women could use insincerity and dissimulation as a means to power. According to Davidson, sincerity of communication was possible only between equals.⁶⁴ John Stuart Mill, arguing for equality between men and women, pointed out in the nineteenth century that ‘authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence’, and that ‘the position of looking up to another is extremely unpropitious to complete sincerity and openness with him’.⁶⁵ In other words, the patriarchal social system worked, paradoxically, effectively against the heterosocial ideal of polite sociability, discouraging the reciprocal openness and honesty in practice which it advocated in principle.

Problematic Dress: Extension of Body and Mirror of Soul

Lady Pomfret [...] honoured me in full Theatre with a Curtsie [whose Graciousness is undescrivable [...]]. Her Dress was Grave & Plain & struck me with the Idea of Propriety.

Catherine Talbot to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 13 July 1756⁶⁶

Dress was a crucial part of a proper polite appearance and, as such, a good example of the manipulation of the body necessary for the production of ideal femininity. Carefully chosen attire was one of the most important indicators of eighteenth-century politeness, for men as well as for women. Indeed, clothing, along with other forms of material culture, was a crucial part of polite self-fashioning.⁶⁷ Social status is expressly communicated through clothing, and its role was accentuated in polite society, which aimed at the sort of social inclusiveness where a membership of the polite elite did not depend on rank but could be acquired through a performance of shared ideas of taste, decorum, and refinement—in which a genteel attire was naturally included. Politeness writers generally described the proper gentlewoman’s dress in terms of modesty, easiness, elegance, and naturalness; ‘elegant simplicity’ was the most often used attribute.⁶⁸ Clothing was thus seen as a language through which individuals could create different kinds of meanings not only of their polite status, but also of their internal qualities.⁶⁹ As John Bennett warned women, ‘though dress, in itself, is no *essential* quality, we are induced to judge more of your *real* character and disposition from it, than you are apt to imagine’—

We fancy it, in its different *modifications*, a mark of good sense, delicacy and discretion, or of the very opposite defects. Every sensible woman,

therefore, will study it so far, as not to subject herself to unfavourable constructions. She will endeavor to convince every beholder, that she knows the proper *medium* betwixt a ridiculous *profusion*, and a total *want*, of ornament; that she can tissue plainness with elegance; that she does not wish to *seduce* by her appearance, but only to *please*; that she has cultivated her mind, much more than her person, and placed the highest value, not on the *outward*, perishable *casket*, but the diamond *within*.⁷⁰

In fact, as Jennie Batchelor claims, a woman's dress was thought to reveal not only her wealth, social and marital status, and level of taste, but also her morals.⁷¹ Therefore, a woman's dress was a mirror of her soul, and, as such, an extension of the internalist transparent body.⁷² Roland Barthes has famously argued that clothing always serves a dual purpose: on the one hand covering and protecting the body, and on the other hand working as a sign, carrying messages and constructing meaning.⁷³ Accordingly, a woman's dress was simultaneously an opaque cover of her body and a transparent looking glass into her inner self. In this way, a woman's apparel reflected the same ambiguities as her body, which also served simultaneously as a means of both constructing and reflecting identity.

However, if dress constituted a language, capable of being manipulated by its wearers and read by those who observed them, it was a form of language that was 'exceptionally unstable, elusive and ambiguous, easy to manipulate and easier still to misinterpret'.⁷⁴ The ambiguity of dress is manifest in Mary Delany's description of her friends' ball gowns in a letter to her sister:

Lady Dysart, Miss Dashwood, and I went together. My clothes you know. I was curled, powdered, and decked with silver ribbon, and was told by critics in the art of dress that I was well dressed. Lady Dysart was in scarlet damask gown, facings and robings embroidered with gold and colours, her petticoat white satin, all covered with embroidery of the same sort, very fine and handsome, but her gaiety was all external, for at her heart she is the *most wretched virtuous woman* that I know! The gentle Dash was in blue damask, the picture of modesty, and looked excessively pretty.⁷⁵

Delany unceremoniously read her friends' moral qualities from their garments, but while the gentle Catherine Dashwood was a 'picture of modesty' in her blue dress, Lady Dysart's embroidered finery Delany deemed 'external' only. Thus, clothes could be read as both a direct indication of internal qualities, or as a mask-like disguise of one's inner personality. As Delany described Lady Coventry later, she 'is a fine figure and vastly handsome', adding that her 'dress was a black silk sack, made for a large hoop, which she wore without any, and it trailed a yard on the ground; she had on a cobweb laced handkerchief, a pink satin long cloke, lined with ermine, mixed with squirrel skins', but 'her person at present is under disguise'.⁷⁶ Indeed, semiotic ambiguity plagued especially severely the eighteenth-century debate over dress, causing anxiety particularly

when women's attire was concerned.⁷⁷ The possibility for multiple interpretations both aided and vexed women in their performances of normative politeness, since the fact that the readings of their dress could vary greatly from one interpreter to another meant they had only a limited control over the meanings their dress conveyed. Accordingly, the same dress could be taken to be either too modest or too frivolous—an indication of moral purity or of false prudery.

The concern over the capacity of clothes to deceive grew as the eighteenth century progressed, when the discourse of inward politeness became more influential while fashion became ever more pervasive and accessible.⁷⁸ In the context of inward politeness, based on the expectation that appearance was a direct guide to an individual's personality, the inherent unreliability of clothing was, of course, deeply troubling, especially since it rendered women's moral status practically impossible to determine from the outside. Therefore, writers called for honesty in dressing. Honesty in clothes was interpreted as dressing according to one's gender, wealth, social status, nationality, and especially morals. According to James Fordyce, there 'ought ever to be a manifest difference between the attire of a virtuous woman, and that of one who has renounced every title to the honourable name'.⁷⁹ Dressing virtuously, however, proved a difficult task, since the dissimulative potential of modest clothing could easily lead to accusations of hypocrisy. Indeed, as Fordyce complained, 'the most unchaste dispositions' so often hid 'under the mask of an attire the most modest' that it was no longer possible for a virtuous young woman to dress modestly without getting accused of affectation.⁸⁰ Modest female attire was thus simultaneously deemed to be both ideal and deceptive.

Moreover, modest dress was thought to tell such a moral and virtuous tale of a woman that it was, paradoxically, viewed as a potential allurements. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* illustrates this belief; Pamela deliberately puts on a 'homespun gown' and an 'ordinary cap', wanting to reflect her lowly status, emphasise her chastity, and discourage the advances of her employer, Mr B. Mr B., however, finds her even more enchanting in her new garb which he interprets as a sign of her innocent femininity.⁸¹ Contemporary critics of *Pamela* accused Pamela of false humility; they thought that Pamela dressed down deliberately to seduce her master by her seeming modesty and faked virtue.⁸² Modest dress thus carried both meanings of female chastity and sexual enticement, and could be construed in either way.

In addition to faked morals, social status and wealth could also be counterfeited by a clever outfit.⁸³ The increasing availability of affordable fashion not only enabled the creation of a polite society that was not dictated by rank; it simultaneously posed a threat to polite society and the middling sorts by finding its way to the wardrobes of the lower classes, as well. Indeed, one of the most common complaints of the eighteenth-century was the bitter observation that the mistress and her maid dressed so alike that they were practically indistinguishable.⁸⁴ Accordingly, dressing above one's class was vigorously condemned; John Burton claimed that it would 'be absurd for the Tradesman to put on the habit of a Nobleman; or the Woman, whose fortune is small, to

affect the appearance of a Lady of rank'.⁸⁵ Polite dress code thus showcases the use of politeness as simultaneously a means of creating a shared polite identity and maintaining a hierarchical difference of rank; even and perhaps especially amongst the polite themselves, hierarchical difference in dress was to be scrupulously maintained, and lavishly luxurious dressing by women of the middling sort was particularly strongly disapproved.⁸⁶ The requirement for honesty applied also to age. *The Ladies Calling* warned that all 'superannuated virgins' who endeavoured to 'disguise their age, by all the impostures and gaieties of a youthful dress and behaviour' would unfailingly be exposed 'to scorn and censure'.⁸⁷ *The Female Tatler* joined in the ridicule of old women in bright clothes, claiming that 'nothing is more disagreeable and ridiculous' than seeing old women 'affect the gay, youthful airs of their daughters'.⁸⁸ In this way, the power to define the 'propriety' of dress was used to try to discipline women into modesty and humility, the emblems of feminine submission.

Dressing according to gender boundaries was, of course, the most important polite requirement. This was also seen as a question of honesty; women dressing in masculine clothes were displaying qualities they did not, in reality, possess. 'Why should the lovely *Camilla* deceive us in more Shapes than her own [...]? The Dress and Air of a Man are not well to be divided; and those who would not be content with the Latter, ought never to think of assuming the Former', reproached *The Spectator* women who 'dress themselves in a Hat and Feather, a Riding-coat and a Perriwig, [...] in imitation of the smart Part of the opposite Sex'.⁸⁹ Addison and Steele were amongst the most vociferous critics of the 'follies' of female dress, and were particularly keen to advocate gender-appropriate clothing. *The Spectator* regularly attacked women's riding habits featuring breeches, mocking female riders as 'Amazons', 'Hermaphrodites', 'Female Cavaliers', and 'Monsters'.⁹⁰ Similarly, John Bennett complained that a masculine habit unsexed women to an alarming degree:

The nearer you approach to the *masculine* in your apparel, the further you will recede from the *appropriate* graces and *softness* of your sex. [...] The riding habits, particularly, that have been so fashionable, and even made their appearance at all publick places, conceal every thing that is attractive in a woman's person, her figure, her manner, and her graces. They wholly *unsex* her, and give her the unpleasing air of an Amazon, or a virago. [...] we [men] daily feel the *unnaturalness* of the [garb]. We forget that you are *women* in *such a garb*, and we forget to love.⁹¹

Thus, masculine garb made women's gender questionable, rendering them unnatural and inhuman. Indeed, according to Addison, '[a]ll that needs to be desired of [women] is, that they would *be themselves*, that is, what Nature designed them'.⁹² Of course, the equation between fashion and nature effectively reveals the artificial and arbitrary nature of polite gender construction. Clothes are as far removed from nature as possible; being entirely fashioned and artificial, they are wholly un-'natural'. Thus, assigning clothes, empty of all gendered meaning in

themselves, any sort of naturalised gendered essence showcases the artificiality of gender construction; similar to the 'inherent' femininity of a piece of clothing, the essentialised characteristics of femininity—softness, meekness, modesty, and chastity, for example—were fictitious, discursive fabrications.

The anxiety provoked by dressing stems to a great extent from the complex role dress played in eighteenth-century notions of identity—and especially gender identity. Laura Gowing has argued that clothes were a strong feature of complaints against women, since '[h]ats, hair and clothes were fundamental to early modern demeanour' and contemporaries understood them to be 'part of the embodied self'.⁹³ Indeed, early modern ideas of gender and sex were still influential in the eighteenth century. Since the division between sex and gender was not biologically aligned, many such qualities that modern people would deem cultural expressions of gender were, in fact, considered effectively to *make* gender in the same way as physical features do. As Will Fisher argues, clothes played a key role in the process of early modern gender construction, and were, therefore, meaningful in ways beyond mere external expression of sex, status, or wealth. Indeed, clothing was often seen as 'integral to a person's identity'.⁹⁴ According to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, clothes were thought to have the power to 'deeply' make an individual—to 'permeate the wearer, fashioning him or her within' and, thus, to 'inscribe themselves upon a person who comes into being through that inscription'. Jones and Stallybrass point out that this early modern understanding about clothes 'undoes the opposition of inside and outside, surface and depth'.⁹⁵

Accordingly, assuming identities through dressing in the early modern period was not simply a masquerade-like external play with superficial roles, but instead involved deeper questions of personal identity. These early modern ideas of identity and clothing still influenced the discourse of proper dress in the eighteenth century. This is one reason why women's masculine apparel was particularly strongly condemned; even if eighteenth-century writers no longer wholly believed that dressing in the opposite sex's clothes could result in a permanent change of an individual's sex, as in previous centuries, they were nevertheless deeply concerned about the 'unnatural' and 'unsexing' effects of a manly garb worn by a woman.⁹⁶ Similarly, internalist writers' claims that dress reflected unerringly the inner self can be seen to rise from these early modern notions, where there was no clear division between the internal and the external, but fashioning the exterior effectively constructed the self within.

Of course, the abundance of reproachful comments on women's indecorous, dishonest, and in other ways unsuitable dress indicates that women of polite society did not always adhere to the dress code deemed proper and natural in didactic literature. Indeed, not all fashion was polite, and not all gentlewomen dressed according to the rules of polite decorum and propriety. The more secure a woman's membership in polite society was—established through rank, family, money, or other such means—the freer she was to break the rules of polite dress. Accordingly, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire could afford to appear in the park, observed by Fanny Burney, with one shoe 'down at Heel',

her cap 'awry', her cloak 'rusty & powdered', and the trimming of her coat 'in some places unsewn' with no damage done to her polite reputation.⁹⁷ Persons of rank and consequence could similarly garb themselves in excessive finery despite its connotations with immorality and vulgarity. In fact, in many cases, the dictates of fashion women followed were specifically contrary to the ideals of polite decorum—as in James Gillray's satirical print criticising the unseemly revealing cuts and sheer fabrics of ladies' fashion (Figure 3.1).

Women's interest in fashion was a paradoxically fraught issue; simultaneously 'natural to them, inherent in their very femininity, it is also something that must be zealously monitored by men', as Shawn Lisa Maurer argues.⁹⁸ Women's ties to dressing were tighter and more manifold than men's. Women were (then as now) thought to have a natural affinity to dress; therefore, a woman 'may be fairly allowed a little more attention to *ornament*, than would be pardonable in the other sex. Nature, through all her works, has lavished more *external* brilliancy, colouring and plumage on the *female*', according to John Bennett.⁹⁹ Despite its naturalness, women's interest in fashion was also considered highly problematic. As Lawrence Klein notes, eighteenth-century periodicals represented women as slaves to fashion, in need of being 'saved from their obsession with fashion and ornament'.¹⁰⁰ Klein argues that this fear of fashion reflected a more general anxiety over luxury and consumption, highly problematic especially for both the men and women of the growing middle classes, for whom consumption was simultaneously a status symbol and a moral dilemma.¹⁰¹ Women's role in debates over luxury was central—as well as ambiguous—since they were regarded as both the emblems of the nation's morality and the engines of its economy.¹⁰² Even though excessive finery was a problem for men as well—as demonstrated by the caricaturisation of the effeminate macaroni and dandy—because of women's essentialised association with fashion, attacks on the sumptuousness of dress can be interpreted as simultaneous attacks on the female sex, and as attempts to discipline women into social and moral conformity.¹⁰³

Women were stereotypically represented spending immoderate amounts of both money and time on their clothing, which was both wasteful and morally detrimental. According to Aileen Ribeiro, it was a common belief that immoderately fashionable women would also be inclined to a life of general frivolity and immorality. Indeed, the 'folly' of fashion was thought to 'produce many other follies, an entire derangement of domestic life, absurd manners, neglect of duties, bad mothers, a general corruption of both sexes'.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, the moralist Catherine Talbot dutifully reproached herself for spending almost two hours in such frivolous exercise—'Dressing from 1 to 2 $\frac{3}{4}$. Fie upon Dress!'—which made her '[v]exed not a little at being as usual a $\frac{1}{4}$ too late'. And yet, as she continued, she was comforted that her effort made her mother pleased with her dress; 'she does not love to see me awkward & attending to this Idle (Yet not unnecessary) Matter is obeying Her. Well then is not that Time well spent? Is it not my Duty?'¹⁰⁵ Talbot's ambivalent relationship with dress reflects the complexity of dress as a female accomplishment on a more general level.



Figure 3.1 James Gillray, *Ladies Dress, As It Soon Will Be* (London: Hannah Humphrey 1796). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

Elegant appearance was the sign of polite refinement, but the effort that went into acquiring it should be carefully hidden behind a sort of moralist *sprezzatura*. Mary Delany excelled in this skill perhaps better than anyone. In her friends' eyes, 'dress and the adorning of the person that takes up so great a part of that of most of our sex, only employs so much of hers as the exactest neatness requires', leaving her ample time to cultivate her numerous virtues—and yet, in reality, her letters reveal that dressing took up a significant part of both her time and interest.¹⁰⁶ Studied and fantastic clothing was not only an indication of lacking *sprezzatura*, but it also signalled an immodest desire to be watched, which was problematic for many internalist writers, who were concerned about women's visibility. As James Fordyce explained, the 'love of finery naturally prompts the passion to be seen, that is, to be admired; for between these two a conceited young creature makes no distinction'.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, women were advised to garb themselves with modest manners instead of flashy clothes.¹⁰⁸

Sensibility and Politeness

Her pure and eloquent Blood
Spoke in her Cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
That one would almost say her Body thought.
The Spectator (1711)¹⁰⁹

The cult of sensibility, one of the most dominant cultural trends of the latter half of the eighteenth century, was perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the problematic of the transparent, speaking body.¹¹⁰ As John Mullan has argued, sensibility was a language of feeling that was communicated first and foremost through the body—and that body was manifestly a female one, as women were characterised as the naturally soft and emotional sex.¹¹¹ According to the sentimentalist ideal, the body of a woman could be read as a book, conveying the signs of her sensibility. For example, *The Female Quixote* (1752) presented a woman telling a story by 'every Change of [her] Countenance; [...] [her] Smiles, Half-smiles, Blushes, Turnings pale, Glances, Pauses, Full-stops, Interruptions; the Rise and Falling of [her] Voice; every Motion of [her] Eyes; and every Gesture [she has] used'.¹¹² Sensibility could thus not be displayed by words—it was to be acted out through the body. As John Bennett asserted, an ideal woman 'never harangues upon, or vaunts a *superior* sensibility, but frequently displays no *inconsiderable* share of it, by *involuntary* emotions'.¹¹³ Sensibility was thought to operate through the nervous system, and its most important signs were thought to be spontaneous tears, sighs, palpitations, trembles, and faintings. In *Anti-Pamela*, the vocabulary of sensibility is described in a woman whose 'Colour would come and go, her Eyes sparkle, grow Languid, or overflow with Tears, her Bosom heave, her Limbs tremble; she would fall into Faintings, or appear transported, and as it were out of herself'.¹¹⁴ Since these kinds of bodily acts were supposedly involuntary, they were thought to reflect genuine feminine sensibility.¹¹⁵ In this sense, the theory

behind sensibility was based on the assumption that the body was, indeed, a transparent entity, truthfully reflecting a person's inner emotions. Women were thought to have a natural tendency towards sensibility, since their bodies were frailer than men's bodies—and, following the principles of transparency, a sentient body equalled a sentient soul.¹¹⁶ Then again, the rule applied also the other way around; a woman could not be considered ideally feminine, if her body did not display her deep sentiments.

The heyday of sensibility has often been set to the years 1760 to 1790, but the movement influenced early eighteenth-century culture particularly through its close links to politeness. Contemporaries both acknowledged the culture of sensibility and saw it as radically different from previous times. 'The present age may be termed, by way of distinction, the age of sentiment, a word which, in the implication it now bears, was unknown to our plain ancestors', explained Hannah More in 1777.¹¹⁷ Sensibility had, however, longer European-wide roots. As Jukka Sarjala has argued, already during the seventeenth century the European elite had begun to emphasise the importance of displaying certain emotions as an indication of refinement.¹¹⁸ Conceptions of emotions, their origin, and their proper mode of expression changed during the eighteenth century, giving birth to the age of sensibility. The seventeenth-century idea that bodily humours caused uncontrollable affects was partly replaced by a less mechanistic and more refined theory of sentiments, bringing forward a more subtle and delicate scale of emotional expression. Emotions became very personal and, in a sense, also internal—in a way that differed considerably from early modern affect theories. An individual was now thought not only to be able but also to be responsible for controlling and refining their own emotions. Uncontrollable passions came to be seen as disorders, or even illnesses.¹¹⁹ In other words, the culture of sensibility brought forward a new ideal of individualised emotional expression, based on control, propriety, and refinement—or, very much on the ideals of eighteenth-century politeness. This new ideal was discussed in novels and conduct books from as early on as the 1710s; Joseph Addison, for example, defined modesty in *The Spectator* as 'exquisite Sensibility', or 'a kind of quick and delicate *Feeling* in the Soul'.¹²⁰

Women's assimilation with sentiment was also an eighteenth-century development. Early modern affect theory had regarded women as naturally less passionate than men, because of their naturally cool bodies; 'nature hath befriended women with a more cool and temperate constitution, put less of fire and consequently of choler, in their compositions; so that their heats of that kind are adventitious and preternatural', claimed *The Ladies Calling* from 1673.¹²¹ In the new sentimental system, however, women became the emotional sex—and, accordingly, also the more moral (and, therefore, more polite) one; women's natural sensibility automatically made them act pleasantly, modestly, and pleasingly in a company.¹²² In fact, by the 1760s, sensibility was thought to be an essential feminine characteristic, complementing politeness; without 'charming sensibility', claimed Hannah More, 'though a woman may be worthy, yet she can never be amiable'.¹²³

Sensibility had much in common with politeness. According to Philip Carter, late eighteenth-century writers often even used the terms sensibility and politeness as synonyms.¹²⁴ Paul Goring has argued that the development of politeness in eighteenth-century Britain involved a 'positive valorisation of somatically displayed passions', and that politeness was as much a performance of sensitivity and emotions as civil manners.¹²⁵ Sensibility was commonly associated with gentleness, sympathy, obliging spirit, and general good-will towards others, and linked to politeness through the pleasing of others; since polite persons should regulate their behaviour to please their present company, they required the ability to read their companions' thoughts and feelings in order to assimilate themselves to them. This was thought to be possible through sensibility and the ability to sympathise that came with it. Since sensibility was defined as inner goodness and sympathy towards others, it was closely linked to morality, as well. David Hume thought that morality was an effect of sentiment; if a person could feel compassion towards others, their behaviour would automatically be moral.¹²⁶ Thus, sensibility shared much with the ideals of inward politeness in terms of morality, inner goodness, and gentleness; then again, it was closely bound to the aims of external politeness through the desire to please, as well. Moreover, sensibility served to sharpen the gender division of politeness. Even though sensibility had a crucial impact on notions of ideal masculinity, Jane Rendall and Rosalind Carr have emphasised the importance of self-command for the man of feeling, while John Dwyer has, in addition, demonstrated the perseverance of older polite virtues, such as courage, stoicism, and public spirit.¹²⁷ For women, sensibility brought about the valorisation of soft and tearful femininity which made them pleasing as women rather than polite individuals.

However, sensibility's links to politeness are more complicated than scholars have generally recognised. The complexity arises from issues connected to truthfulness and is, therefore, particularly visible in women's politeness that had a fraught relationship with honesty to begin with. Even though sensibility and inward politeness were tightly intertwined through ideas of morality and inner goodness, their relationship was muddled by the fact that sensibility was also a set of established practices that started to drift apart from their original ideological frame, and began a life of their own as status symbols of 'true femininity'. The original idea was that the bodily signs of sensibility would be produced automatically by the sentient body; however, given their high status as emblems of true womanhood, women often imitated them in order to produce the appearance of ideal femininity. Thus, the controversy between truthfulness and dissimulation played a key role in the display of sensibility. 'The emotions of the mind often appear conspicuous in the countenance and manner,' Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in her early conduct book: 'These emotions, when they arise from sensibility and virtue, are inexpressibly pleasing. But it is easier to copy the cast of countenance, than to cultivate the virtues which animate and improve it'.¹²⁸ Indeed, outward signs could be deceiving; *The Spectator* warned that 'nothing is so fallacious as this outward Sign of Sorrow, [...] this Faculty of Weeping'.¹²⁹

Hannah More was convinced that faked sentimentality corrupted women's morals, since it encouraged women to adopt debauched manners and opinions and hide them under a cloak of false sentiments:

Sentiment is the varnish of virtue to conceal the deformity of vice; and it is not uncommon for the same persons to make a jest of religion, to break through the most solemn ties and engagements, to practise every art of latent fraud and open seduction, and yet to value themselves on speaking and writing *sentimentally*. But this refined jargon, which has infested letters and tainted morals, is chiefly admired and adopted by *young ladies* of a certain turn, who read *sentimental books*, write *sentimental letters*, and contract *sentimental friendships*.¹³⁰

Practically minded, externalist conduct books were, once again, blamed for setting the example for dishonest sensibility. Another, much more dangerous source of false sensibility were novels. Hester Chapone, for example, was persuaded that sentimental novels corrupted the minds of young girls, making them imitate the unnatural habits of novel heroines:

I think the greatest care should be taken in the choice of those *fictitious stories* that so enchant the mind; most of which tend to inflame the passions of youth, whilst the chief purpose of education should be to moderate and restrain them. Add to this, that both the writing and sentiments of most novels and romances are such as are only proper to vitiate your style, and to mislead your heart and understanding. [...] the admiration of extravagant passions and absurd conduct, are some of the usual fruits of this kind of reading; which, when a young woman makes it her chief amusement, generally render her ridiculous in conversation, and miserably wrong-headed in her pursuits and behaviour. [...] I am persuaded that, the indiscriminate reading of such kind of books corrupts more female hearts than any other cause whatsoever.¹³¹

Hannah More agreed with Chapone, defining true sensibility as 'the enthusiasm which grows up with a feeling mind, and is cherished by a virtuous education; not that which is compounded of irregular passions, and artificially refined by books of unnatural fiction and improbable adventure'.¹³² Novels, however, did not only serve to set a bad example, but also criticised false sentimentality quite sharply. Jane Austen, for example, as a rule ridiculed women such as Mrs Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) and Isabella Thorpe (*Northanger Abbey*) for faking the symptoms of sensibility. Fanny Burney did the same in *Evelina*, where an affected lady received no sympathy for languishing on the sofa, grabbing her salts, and being 'nerve all over!'.¹³³

False sentimentality was claimed to make real-life self-appointed romantic heroines laughable in the eyes of polite society. Nature, insisted Hester Chapone, was the best guide of feeling:

There is nothing in which this self-deception is more notorious than in what regards sentiment and feeling. Let a vain young woman be told that tenderness and softness is the peculiar charm of the sex, that even their weakness is lovely, and their fears becoming, and you will presently observe her grow so tender as to be ready to weep for a fly; so fearful, that she starts at a feather; and so weak-hearted, that the smallest accident quite overpowers her. Her fondness and affection become fulsome and ridiculous; her compassion grows contemptible weakness; and her apprehensiveness the most abject cowardice: for, when once she quits the direction of Nature, she knows not where to stop, and continually exposes herself by the most absurd extremes. Nothing so effectually defeats its own ends as this kind of affectation: for though warm affections and tender feelings are beyond measure amiable and charming, when perfectly natural, and kept under the due control of reason and principle, yet nothing is so truly disgusting as the affectation of them, or even the unbridled indulgence of such as are real.¹³⁴

Thus, affected or excessive sentimentality could be antithetical to politeness, despite the close ties between the two. Girls weeping uncontrollably, having constant fits, or fainting on every turn were tiresome company, more interested in attention-seeking than in considerate pleasantness. Even real but excessive sensibility was deemed inconvenient, as Hannah More stipulated, for ‘this dangerous merit [...] is very apt to lead those who possess it into inconveniencies from which less interesting characters are happily exempt’.¹³⁵ True sentiment, then, was thought to show itself without any special effort. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, was convinced that all feeling ‘will appear if genuine; but when pushed forward to notice, it is obvious vanity has rivalled sorrow; and that the prettiness of the thing is thought of’.¹³⁶

Therefore, to maintain polite sociability, sentimentality was to be, not smothered, but regulated.¹³⁷ Passions needed to be moderated to avoid giving pain to fellow human beings—who, according to conduct writers, entered into the distress of their companions through sympathy—and sentiments had to be transformed into socially acceptable ones, expressed in a socially accepted mode and volume.¹³⁸ Indeed, as Barbara Rosenwein has influentially argued, people live in cultural, social, and historical ‘emotional communities’ which share particular norms of emotional expression and value.¹³⁹ In eighteenth-century England, the ideals of polite society discouraged rampant emotionality in favour of refined and controlled expressions of sentiment. Accordingly, the ideals of sensibility needed to be reconciled with the dominant discourse of behaviour—politeness. Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is a good example of this. Marianne Dashwood is the paragon of uncontrolled sensibility, whereas her sister Elinor is politeness personified. Throughout the novel there is a clearly stated struggle between these two types of conduct; Marianne follows her excessive sentiments in everything, often breaking the codes of polite decorum, whereas Elinor hides her true feelings to maintain her polite and pleasing

exterior. In Austen's words, 'Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell'. In the end, Elinor is pronounced the winner of the two, while Marianne, after nearly literally killing herself by her uncontrollable emotions, reforms her character after her sister's model: her 'feelings shall be governed' and her 'temper improved' through 'rational employment and virtuous self-control'.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the need for control was further heightened by the fear that indulging passions could lead to disability or even death—a possibility that was often introduced in sentimental novels, where pining heroines quite literally made themselves fatally ill by indulging their excessive sentiments. The belief that ungoverned feelings could lead to sickness or death was entertained in real life by, for example, Fanny Burney, who asserted in her journal that dying of grief was 'indeed [...] a Death but too possible', and was seriously concerned that her friend Hester Lynch Thrale, madly in love with her children's Italian music tutor, Gabriele Piozzi, would '*die* of a broken Heart'.¹⁴¹

The requirement of emotional control was a problematic ideal. On the one hand, it was needed to refine the sentiments to suit the proper polite code of expression. On the other hand, control could be used to produce dishonest signs of sensibility, so dangerous to the affections of men and, therefore, to the whole patriarchal social order. Thus, well-managed bodies made it possible for women to assert some power over men—and thereby their own lives as well. They could advance their goals or secure their polite and social status by channelling their true sentiments to approved emotional expression—or choose to produce artificially the signs of sentient, ideal femininity. Either way, the act of bodily manoeuvring was enabling and empowering—and therefore potentially subversive. Then again, too good of a control over one's feelings was deemed unfeminine, as well. Falling an involuntary victim to one's feelings was a sign of true femininity. Sentimental illnesses, such as hysterics, vapours, and melancholy, were such privileged signs of a frail physical frame that they have been described as—often feigned—status symbols of refined femininity in the eighteenth century.¹⁴² The idea of transparency entailed a correspondence between the inner and the external: a delicate (feminine) mind was thought to live in a delicate (feminine) body. As John Gregory warned, men 'so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way she is little aware of'; therefore, 'though good health be one of the greatest blessings of life, never make a boast of it, but enjoy it in grateful silence'.¹⁴³

Power through Tears? Sensibility and Dissimulation

While the ideal of the soft and tearful woman was lauded in didactic literature, women like Montagu, Talbot, Delany, and Burney tended to adopt a more cautious attitude towards abundant sentimentality in their everyday lives.

Bluestockings and other learned women were aspiring to break free from emotionalised female stereotypes by asserting their rationality and, therefore, generally focused on the importance of self-restraint and respect towards the conventions of sociability.¹⁴⁴ Their critical views of sensibility were influenced by the practical aspects of women's lives as subordinate, which made transparent sensibility less than desirable; instead, a certain degree of opacity was required for successful manoeuvring in polite society. As Mary Wollstonecraft wrote, the 'being who can govern itself has nothing to fear in life', while a woman ruled by the tyranny of emotions is easily enslaved.¹⁴⁵ The normative ideal of sentimental femininity did not, however, leave these women wholly untouched; Fanny Burney, for one, believed that delicacy of feeling was an important female quality, and advocated this view in her sentimental novels. Indeed, as with other polite virtues, women could pay lip service to the ideals of sensibility to secure their social reputation while cautiously avoiding being led astray by their sentiments in their everyday lives. They also ridiculed excessive and false sentimentality as hypocritical, thus distancing their own, 'truthful' and 'natural' sensibility from accusations of dissimulation.

For Catherine Talbot, sensibility appeared a violation against propriety, rather than a sign of ideal femininity. 'That excess of sensibility is what no Object in the World can render justifiable; be it Friend, Daughter, Lover, Lap dog, every inclination is reasonable in its proper degree, & every one has its bounds beyond which it is ridiculous or blame worthy', she mused; 'Those violent emotions, those strong attachments, those eager impatiencies, those tender indulged recollections struck me as something exceedingly wrong, & unsuitable to human life'.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Talbot thought that the requirements of politeness needed to be adhered to at all times, instead of giving way to unsuitable and awkward displays of sentiment. When Bishop George Berkeley died, Talbot commended his daughter Julia's attempts of self-restraint: 'It affected me extremely to see the sweet girl whose passions are extremely lively [...] trying to conceal her Emotion, struggling with it to no purpose & the tears trickling down her cheeks all the while she sat at dinner'.¹⁴⁷ Julia's visible failure to hold back her tears in the face of a real tragedy signalled, of course, also the sincerity of her feeling. Talbot herself battled to overcome her recurring gloom which she thought unprompted and, therefore, absurd—for '[i]n such a World as this one should not by overrefined sensibilities make miseries where there are none, but pass over all such feelings as lightly as one can'.¹⁴⁸ Elizabeth Carter she advised to 'arm all your good sense and resolution to conquer the worst enemy I know of—a 'nervous' complaint (by which she meant a sensibility-related disorder).¹⁴⁹ 'Spirits that have any thing of delicacy are easily and strongly affected, and influence the body so as to make it a very troublesome companion, and I know nothing one would not do to avoid being nervous'. Against this terrible fate Talbot recommended physical exercise 'with a due proportion of trifling and even merry idleness'.¹⁵⁰

To minimise the risk of getting weighed down by her emotions, Talbot carefully avoided dwelling on 'affecting Subjects' or sentimental literature:

‘Après tout Je n’aimè pas trop les Tragedies, elles donnent trop aux Passions, elles les representent trop importantes—elles alterent la belle Tranquillité—elles font ressouvenir des plus desagréables Moments de la Vie’.¹⁵¹ Another one to view sensibility as a result of immoderate reading habits was Elizabeth Montagu. ‘Miss C. you know thinks very abstractedly, free from all Interested Considerations upon the affairs of Love; see the Bad Consequences of studying Romances more than Arithmetick’, she commented to the Duchess of Portland on their mutual acquaintance—thus reflecting the widely held belief that romantic novels spoiled young women’s character and sense of reality.¹⁵² Thus, both Talbot and Montagu saw sensibility as something to be checked and avoided rather than indulged. Indeed, as Felicity Nussbaum argues, the blue-stocking circle attached great importance to governing one’s passions as an attempt to escape the emotional female stereotype and strive towards morality and rationality; one who ‘does not follow Virtue as by law establish’d, but despises forms and follows sentiment’, remarked Montagu, operates according to a ‘dangerous guide’.¹⁵³

For Montagu, sentimental reading was connected to the wider case of women’s rational education; she firmly believed that ‘[i]t is much better for a young Lady to read the Characters of the Lucretius & Portias, than to deform her mind with paragraphs of Crime: love: elopement etc.’¹⁵⁴ In fact, Montagu was a severe critic of women’s education, which she thought ‘too frivolous’ and too focused on external accomplishments:¹⁵⁵

The men laugh at us for our study of trifles when they are guilty of making us turn our thoughts that way by never commending us for any thing else. As our business is to please we should be elegant in trifles but to look upon ‘em as accomplishments, but not as Virtues they should be rather the Ornament than the Furniture of the mind.¹⁵⁶

In a letter to the Duchess of Portland, she analysed the behaviour of a woman who had ‘excellent sense and wit, but a want of softness in her manners’. In Montagu’s opinion, ‘[t]his is of great consequence for a woman to keep off disagreeable manners, for the world does not mind our intrinsic worth so much as the fashion of us, and will not easily forgive our not pleasing’. Thus, Montagu’s opinion of a woman’s place in society comes close to Wollstonecraft’s, who wrote of a woman being regarded as the ‘toy’ and ‘rattle’ of man.¹⁵⁷ Montagu continued:

The men suffer for their levity in this case, for in a woman’s education little but outward accomplishment is regarded. [...] I think it is much to the credit and honour of untaught human nature that women are so valuable for their merit and sense. Sure the men are very imprudent to endeavor to make fools of those to whom they so much trust their honour and happiness and fortune, but it is in the nature of mankind to hazard their peace to secure power, and they know fools make the best slaves.¹⁵⁸

In short, Montagu criticised women's education for only focusing on external features, such as accomplishments and good manners, and leaving their intellectual capacities untouched. The ultimate reason for this was, in Montagu's opinion, the patriarchal order of society, which allowed men to 'secure' their 'power' by leaving women uneducated and appreciating them only by their external merits. In this sharp analysis, Montagu indeed comes close to such proto-feminists as Mary Astell, Judith Drake, or Mary Wollstonecraft. The fact that also Hannah More—another bluestocking but also an avowed conservative—voiced similar views on female education testifies to the breadth of a shared critical stance amongst intellectual women towards girls' education.¹⁵⁹ Montagu herself did not perform on the harpsichord or paint vases and thought it 'an unreasonable thing of people to expect me to be handy'.¹⁶⁰ Instead, she prided herself in her own, unusually 'serious' education, which gave her the opportunity to think, write, and converse rationally.¹⁶¹

While Fanny Burney's novels promoted feminine sensibility unashamedly, her private views on the matter were more ambiguous. She was conscious of the popularity sensibility was enjoying among the fashionable, and assessed it in an ironical manner. She once joked with her friend, Samuel Crisp, about writing a flighty '*Treatise upon politeness*' for the edification of the masses, containing 'all the newest fashioned regulations':

'In the first place, you are never again to Cough. [...] it [is] as much a mark of ill breeding as it is to *Laugh*, which is a thing that Lord Chesterfield has stigmatized.' [...]

'And pray,' said Mr Crisp, making a fine affected Face, 'may you *simper*?'

'You may *smile*, Sir,' answered I. 'But to *laugh* is quite abominable.' [...]

'But pray, is it permitted,' said Mr Crisp, very drily, 'to *Breathe*?'

'*That* is not yet, I believe, quite exploded,' answered I, [...] I shall only tell you in general, that whatever is Natural, plain or easy, *is* entirely banished from polite Circles.'

'And all is sentiment & *Delicacy*, hay Fannikin?'

'No, Sir, not so,' replied I, with due gravity, '*sentiments* & *sensations* were the *last* fashion; they are now done with—they were *laughed* out of use, just before laughing was abolished. The *present Ton* is *refinement*;—nothing *is to be*, that *has been*; all things are to be *new polished*, & *highly finished*.'¹⁶²

After thus mocking the fashion of sensitivity and delicacy, Burney nevertheless described herself as sensitive and delicate. For her, though, there was a clear distinction between true and faked sentiments. Burney saw herself, quite naturally, as a representative of honest and artless sensibility; when she was suspected of affected delicacy, running away from a scene where a dog was punished by beating, she became highly vexed and 'took the trouble to *try* to clear myself,—but know not how I succeeded'.¹⁶³ Other women, however, she

thought commonly guilty of exaggerated and downright fabricated sensibility. Burney wrote down a penetrating analysis of the unauthentic delicacy of a new acquaintance, one Miss Weston: 'I was regaled with a Character equally ludicrous [as Miss Lewis's], but much less entertaining,—for nothing would she talk of but *dear Nature*, & nothing abuse but *odious affectation!* She really would be too bad for the stage, for she is never so content as when drawing her own Character for other people's as if on purpose to make one sick of it'. For Burney, 'the extreme delicacy of Miss Weston' made it 'prodigiously fatiguing to converse with her, as it is no little difficulty to keep pace with her refinement in order to avoid shocking her by too obvious an inferiority in daintihood & ton'.¹⁶⁴

Burney was also well aware of the role sensibility played in women's self-fashioning, and how it brought them visibility. She observed some young ladies' behaviour at a play:

Two Young Ladies who seemed about 18 sat yet above us, where [*sic*] so much shocked by the Death of Douglas, that they both burst into a *loud* fit of roaring, like little Children,—& sobbed on afterwards for almost half the Farce!—I was quite astonished [...] but I suppose, [...] they mean now to attract the notice by way of bringing themselves into the World, & as they are very young they think the best way to *begin* is by shewing their *sensibility*.¹⁶⁵

A highly illustrative example of fabricated sensibility in Burney's journals is the case of Sophia Streatfeild (1755–1835). Streatfeild was a widely recognised beauty and a member of Hester Lynch Thrale's circle of friends. Thrale soon had reason to be jealous of Streatfeild, as her husband, Henry Thrale (1728–1781), became infatuated with her. Thrale wrote in her journal that 'Mr Thrale is fallen in Love *really* & *seriously* with Sophy Streatfield'—

but there is no wonder in that: She is very pretty, very gentle, soft & insinuating; hangs about him, dances round him, cries when She parts from him, squeezes his Hand slyly, & with her sweet Eyes full of Tears looks so fondly in his Face—& all for *Love of me* as She pretends; that I can hardly sometimes help laughing in her Face. A Man must not be a *Man* but an *It* to resist such Artillery.¹⁶⁶

Thrale's opinion of Streatfeild as an artful woman who manipulated her looks and manners for her own benefit—mainly to gain admiration—received wider recognition when, one afternoon, Hester Thrale urged Streatfeild to cry for no other reason than to demonstrate to the company that she 'had *Tears at Command*'.¹⁶⁷ And indeed, this proved to be the case: 'Now for the wonder of wonders', Burney wrote with astonishment, 'two Crystal Tears came into the soft Eyes of the S.S.,—& rolled gently down her Cheeks!—such a sight I never saw before, nor could I have believed;—she *offered* not to conceal, or dissipate them,—on the contrary, she really *contrived* to have them seen by every body'.

According to Burney, Streatfeild's spectacle of voluntary tears was 'stared, & looked & re-looked again & again 20 Times ere we could believe our Eyes'. Streatfeild herself, however, calmly wiped her eyes 'as if nothing had happened'; Burney wrote that 'the S.S.', as the Thrale crowd called her,

seemed, the whole Time, totally insensible to the numerous strange, &, indeed, *impertinent* speeches which were made, & to be very well satisfied that she was only manifesting a tenderness of disposition that encreased her beauty of Countenance. At least, *I* can put no other construction upon her conduct, which was, without exception, the strangest I ever saw!¹⁶⁸

Indeed, the response of the observing crowd to Sophia Streatfeild's sang-froid was less than admiring. Hester Lynch Thrale despised Streatfeild's calculated softness and willingness to 'shew how beautiful she looked in Tears', and for her male guests, such serene and artificial demonstration of allegedly authentic signs of true sensibility was disconcerting. '[I]f it was not for *that little Gush*', Burney recorded the playwright John Delap saying, 'I should certainly have taken a very great fancy to her,—but Tears so ready—O they *blot out* my fair opinion of her'.¹⁶⁹ In fact, the men, for whose benefit Streatfeild produced her tears in the first place, thought her either 'rather *too* tender Hearted' or designing as a result.¹⁷⁰ Besides, even though sensibility was discursively represented as an indispensable quality for a woman, a tearful wife appeared to these men as tiresome. Even though they thought that Streatfeild was capable of insinuating herself into any man's heart, her being 'niether bright nor *deep* in respect to *parts*' would make a man 'devilish tired of her [...] in half a Year'.¹⁷¹ Sophia Streatfeild did, in fact, remain unmarried till her death.

Interestingly enough, Fanny Burney was the one who was presented by Hester Lynch Thrale and the rest of the little group as the sincere opposite of Streatfeild's false tears:

'Would *you* cry, Miss Burney, said Sir Philip, if we ask'd you.'

'Lord, cried Mrs. Thrale, I would not do thus by Miss Burney for ten Worlds!—I dare say she would never speak to me again. I should think she'd be more likely to walk out of my House, than to *Cry* because I bid her.'

'I don't know how that is, said Sir Philip, but I'm sure she's gentle enough.'

'She *can* cry, I doubt not, said Mr. Seward, on any proper occasion.'¹⁷²

Indeed, as Burney herself wrote on many occasions, she was—unlike Sophia Streatfeild—far from keen to draw eyes on herself: 'I could, however, *so soon bite off my own Nose* as stand forth to perform, at demand, any thing that I previously knew was to draw all Eyes upon me'.¹⁷³ Moreover, Burney underlined her inability to control her countenance, and thus positioned herself as the direct opposite of the crafty Streatfeild. 'Nobody, I believe, has so *very* little command of Countenance as myself!', Burney exclaimed, much like a heroine of

a sentimental novel. However, the unforgiving transparency of her body, ideally honest and feminine as it was, did little to aid Burney's manoeuvring in polite society. When teased by her friends over her supposed admirers, she cursed her expressive face: 'in spite of my utmost efforts to seem to take the Conversation as *general*, I presently felt my whole Face on Fire! [...] I am actually *shocked* that I should thus tacitly have marked *my* consciousness of their meaning by that vile Colouring', she complained.¹⁷⁴ In fact, Burney's transparency was one of the reasons she had such trouble with the concept of visibility, an omnipresent aspect of women's politeness. She lacked the ability to hide her emotions convincingly, and gave her true thoughts away too easily in her outward appearance. In Fanny Burney's case, there was indeed 'no difference between *saying & looking*', as one of her gentleman friends claimed—but contrarily to conduct book views, transparency was hazardous for women.¹⁷⁵

Scholars have argued that transparency was a central aspect of utopian Enlightenment thought that fuelled the French Revolution. Michel Foucault has described a transparent society as the Rousseauist dream of Enlightenment, 'visible and legible in each of its parts' with no more 'zones of darkness'.¹⁷⁶ The ideal of transparency was a particularly strong framework for the Scottish Enlightenment, epitomised by Adam Smith's conceptualisation of sympathy, which required full transparency of the actor to the spectator.¹⁷⁷ This focus on the spectator and transparency was then collated into the emphasis on inner virtue and the importance of inward politeness that, as Rosalind Carr has argued, was so paramount for Scottish politeness thought—and, through that, also found its way to conduct manuals read widely in England.¹⁷⁸ In practice, of course, complete transparency was unattainable, and statements such as Mary Wollstonecraft's glorification of feminine transparency in the words of Hamlet—'Seems! I know not seems!—Have that within that passeth show!'—remained utopian and fanciful.¹⁷⁹ Most of all, feminine transparency was impracticable. Opaqueness was a crucial strategy for women as subordinate subjects in polite society, and Fanny Burney's unfortunate transparency brought her little more than mortification and anxiety. In this sense, women's practices of power were incompatible with the Enlightenment ideal of transparency.

Utopian transparency and the visibility it presupposed also created an ethical dilemma. Charles Griswold argues that the impossibility of full transparency inevitably leads into self-falsification. Because full Smithian transparency and sympathy are impossible, 'nobody ever *really* understands anyone else', Griswold writes, adding that this realisation is 'inscribed both into the state of nature, where we are each solitary, and into those socialized states of being in which we are still alone but pretend not to be'.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Griswold maintains that the pretence ensuing from a false hope of sympathy through transparency necessarily requires various oppressive mechanisms of social control (since the individual cannot be relied on in this), which opens up a line of criticism that can be traced all the way from Rousseau to Marx and beyond—Foucault himself being, of course, a culmination of this tradition.¹⁸¹ Indeed, as Theresa Levitt argues, with the dream of transparency gone, 'visibility became a

form of discipline', and who was allowed to see what became 'inseparable from issues of control and authority, seated at the nexus between power and knowledge'.¹⁸² It is to this power play of visibility that we turn to next.

Notes

- 1 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 201 (§143).
- 2 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 120 (§64).
- 3 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 125 (§67).
- 4 Davidson, *Breeding*, 40–8.
- 5 On morality and femininity, see e.g. More, *Essays*, 169–70; Bennett, *Letters*, I, 17–18.
- 6 *Spectator*, No. 45, 21 April 1711, I, 250–5.
- 7 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 148; Chapone, *Letters*, 60. On Burton's liberal politics, see Mayer, 'Female Education', 515–16.
- 8 Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, 208. See also Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 175–94. Sincerity, or a 'congruence between avowal and actual feeling' has been seen as a characteristically modern concern, birthed by a new Renaissance emphasis on the self as subject, as well as a Protestant anthropology that underlined the dissimilarity of man and the divine (Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity', 1326–9).
- 9 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 84–91, 161–5. The importance of women for the morality of the nation also stemmed from nascent ideas of morality's heredity and women's role as 'breeders' (Davidson, *Breeding*, 82).
- 10 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 73.
- 11 More, *Essays*, 18–19.
- 12 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 88, 166, 192–3.
- 13 Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 658.
- 14 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 20 February 1752, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, II, 218; 11 May 1752, II, 244.
- 15 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 21 September 1747, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, I, 273.
- 16 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 37, 12.
- 17 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 36–7.
- 18 'The common systematick education of girls is unfavourable to this simplicity. The tendency of modern culture is to raise art, upon the ruins of nature. [...] If there be one object in the world, more disgusting than all others, it is a girl, whom nature formed to be innocent and artless, reducing affectation and disguise to a system' (Bennett, *Letters*, II, 37–8).
- 19 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 6. See also e.g. More, *Essays*, 8–9.
- 20 Burney, *Evelina*, 269. The same, of course, applies for Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the contested paragon of feminine transparency, where Mr B. prompts Pamela to hide nothing from him, and proceeds to read her letters and journal.
- 21 Burney, *Camilla*, 95, 671.
- 22 Burney, *Camilla*, 223.
- 23 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 133–4. On women's proneness towards vanity, see also e.g. D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 33; Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 338.
- 24 See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 515, 21 October 1712, VII, 223–9.
- 25 See e.g. Manley, *Adventures of Rivella*, 10.
- 26 Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, 2nd act, 19–20.
- 27 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 340–1.
- 28 See e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 52–3; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 21–7.
- 29 More, *Essays*, 107–8.

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- 30 Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 30. On women's dissimulation, see also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 62; Burton, *Lectures*, II, 148, 158–9; More, *Strictures*, II, 47.
- 31 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 125 (§67).
- 32 Walpole, *Reminiscences*, 125.
- 33 Chesterfield, *Art of Pleasing*, 97.
- 34 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 53–60.
- 35 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 164.
- 36 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 30. See also e.g. Chapone, *Letters*, 128–30.
- 37 On the visual aspects of politeness, see e.g. Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 76–80.
- 38 Practicing the body was also an important part in fashioning masculine politeness; as Matthew McCormack has shown, physique and fitness played a crucial role in it (McCormack, 'Dance and Drill').
- 39 More, *Essays*, 111–12.
- 40 *Spectator*, No. 365, 29 April 1712, V, 277–81.
- 41 Austen, *Emma*, 44–5, 149, 498. Jenny Davidson interprets Austen's novels exactly the other way around, claiming that deceptive opaqueness was a survival tactic specifically for the inferior and the dependent (Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 146–69).
- 42 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 145.
- 43 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 11–12.
- 44 *Essay in Defence*, 99.
- 45 Burney, *Camilla*, 361.
- 46 *Essay in Defence*, 99–101.
- 47 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 45–8, 44.
- 48 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 58–9.
- 49 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 40–2, 44.
- 50 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 57–60.
- 51 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 45–8.
- 52 Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 658.
- 53 FB to Hester Lynch Thrale, 1 July [1780], *JFB*, IV, 203.
- 54 *JFB*, 18 June 1778, III, 25.
- 55 On women's reputation and being talked of, see e.g. Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', 227. On the compromising aspects of women's authorship, see e.g. Ellis, 'An Author in Form', 417–18. Because of women's fraught relationship with public recognition, most early bluestockings avoided publishing under their real name. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, rejoiced that her authorship of the *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (1769) was 'concealed behind ye Grecian Masque, & beg ye secret may be kept, & then I may amuse myself with scribbling for ye publick when I please' (EM to Elizabeth Vesey, 24 May 1769, HL MO 6397. See also Kelly, 'General Introduction', xlviii).
- 56 EM to William Freind, 26 October 1744, *LEM*, III, 3.
- 57 *JFB*, 18 June 1778, III, 25.
- 58 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VI, *CMD*, I, 33–4. On Delany's dissimulative practices, see Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 120.
- 59 EM to William Freind, [s.d., 174-?], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 88–9.
- 60 *JCT*, 21 January 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 49.
- 61 EM to Gilbert West, 6 January [175-?], *LEM*, III, 215–16.
- 62 EM to Matthew Robinson, 26 [September 1760?], HL MO 4762, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 63 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 163.
- 64 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 161–3.
- 65 Mill, *Subjection of Women*, 44–5.
- 66 BLRA, Wrest MS 3212.
- 67 Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 4–5; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 135–9; Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation', 880–3.

- 68 See e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 34; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 33.
- 69 Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, 9–11. See also Barthes, *Fashion System*. On clothes as emblems of virtuous masculinity and symbols of power, see e.g. David Kuchta, *Three-Piece Suit*, 2–8.
- 70 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 1–2.
- 71 Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, 9–14.
- 72 See e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, I, 148; Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 42.
- 73 Barthes, *Fashion System*, 8–9. See also Hall, 'Work of Representation', 37. On clothing as a means of making the body 'culturally visible', see Silverman, 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse', 145.
- 74 Styles, *Dress of the People*, 181.
- 75 MD to Anne Granville, 22 January 1739–40, CMD, II, 70–1.
- 76 MD to Anne Granville Dewes, 10 November 1754, CMD, III, 300–1.
- 77 Styles, *Dress of the People*, 181; Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, 2–18. On the problematic of meaning and interpretation, see Hall, 'Work of Representation', 9.
- 78 Styles, *Dress of the People*, 181–2.
- 79 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 29.
- 80 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 29, 31.
- 81 Richardson, *Pamela*, I, 63–9.
- 82 Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, 31–8.
- 83 New machine-made print fabrics enabled showy dressing with a small budget. See e.g. Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, 8.
- 84 See e.g. Defoe, *Every-Body's Business*, 6.
- 85 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 153. See also e.g. Chapone, *Letters*, 142 and Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 392–4.
- 86 *Female Spectator*, I, 126–7. Lawrence Klein has described politeness as a temporary suspension of hierarchy that served to fortify that hierarchy (Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 662, 676–7).
- 87 *Ladies Calling*, 159.
- 88 *Female Tatler*, No. 48, 24 October to 26 October 1709, 111–13.
- 89 *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19; No. 104, 29 June 1711, II, 118–23. Women's masculine habit, as practically all reproachable fashions, were accused of being of French origin—as so many 'foreign' influences that supposedly threatened to corrupt the simple and honest English politeness. (See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19.)
- 90 *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19.
- 91 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 240–1.
- 92 *Spectator*, No. 435, 19 July 1712, VI, 214–19.
- 93 Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission', 35.
- 94 Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 5, 10–11.
- 95 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 2. See also e.g. Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 139, 143–4.
- 96 On sex-changes provoked by clothing, see e.g. Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 12–13.
- 97 FB to Samuel Crisp, [1–4] April [1776], *JFB*, II, 203–4.
- 98 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 139.
- 99 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 1–2. See also e.g. Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 33.
- 100 Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 110. On women's immoderate love of fashion, see e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, I, 149; Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 29–30; Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 35, as well as *Spectator*, No. 15, 17 March 1711, I, 83–8; No. 127, 26 July 1711, II, 238–43; No. 98, 22 June 22 1711, II, 91–5; No. 102, 27 June 1711, II, 109–13; No. 265, 3 January 1712, IV, 77–81.
- 101 Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 110. On social status and dress, see Styles, *Dress of the People*, 31–4. John Styles argues that clothes were an

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- important tool for the reformation of the class system and a means of self-fashioning for the emerging middle class (Styles, *Dress of the People*, 85, 196–211).
- 102 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 135–7. On women’s consumption and economy, see Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, I, 130, 226. On women and luxury, see *Female Spectator*, I, 126–7.
- 103 Wilson and de la Haye, ‘Introduction’, 2.
- 104 Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 103; Berkeley, *Querist*, 96–7 (Query 457). On the moral and political meanings of dress, see Wilson and de la Haye, ‘Introduction’, 1–2.
- 105 JCT, 18 December 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 41.
- 106 ‘Aspasia’s [i.e. MD’s] Picture, drawn by Philomel [i.e. Anne Donellan]’ in *CMD*, II, 179.
- 107 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 43. See also Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 32; Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 36.
- 108 Moralists often quoted St Paul and told women to ‘adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array’ (1 Timothy 2:9, King James Version); see e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, 27; Burton, *Lectures*, I, 148–9. See also *Spectator*, No. 271, 10 January 1712, IV, 111–15.
- 109 *Spectator*, No. 41, 17 April 1711, I, 226–31.
- 110 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 1–17; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 258–66, passim. Samuel Richardson’s novels, particularly *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), were among the first sentimental novels, fuelling the appetite for sentimentality that would become a dominant cultural norm by the 1760s.
- 111 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 61. On women’s natural sensibility see e.g. Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 16–27; Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 31; Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 71.
- 112 Lennox, *Female Quixote*, I, 138–9.
- 113 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 36–7.
- 114 Haywood, *Anti-Pamela*, 3.
- 115 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 61, 74, 112–13.
- 116 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 216–17.
- 117 More, *Essays*, 78.
- 118 Sarjala, *Music, Morals, and the Body*, 105–9, 143–7. See also e.g. Mikkeli, *Hygiene*, 66–8. For history of emotions, see e.g. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’; Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*. For early modern English understandings of emotions and passions, based on the Galenic humoural model, see e.g. Mary Floyd-Wilson, ‘English Mettle’; Steenbergh, ‘Emotions and Gender’; Broomhall, ‘Introduction: Authority, Gender and Emotions’.
- 119 Sarjala, *Music, Morals, and the Body*, 143–4, 184–94; Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, 1, 38–40. See also Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, 62–6.
- 120 *Spectator*, No. 231, 24 November 1711, III, 347–53.
- 121 *Ladies Calling*, 48.
- 122 See e.g. Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 6.
- 123 More, *Essays*, 100–2. A woman could also have a too large share of sensibility, and excessive feeling made women’s bodies vulnerable to emotion-related ailments, which have been thoroughly discussed by, for example, John Mullan, Jeremy Schmidt, and Sabine Arnaud (Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*; Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*; Arnaud, *On Hysteria*). Because sensibility was above all a bodily quality, ungoverned sentiments were thought to affect the body too severely, making it ill. This was an especially big risk for women, whose frail bodies were thought less apt to accommodate deep feelings, resulting in melancholy, hysteria, or even death. (On illnesses induced by indulging extreme passions, see e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, II, 24; Lennox, *Lady’s Museum*, 178; Lady Mary Wortley

- Montagu to her daughter, countess of Bute, 23 June 1754, Halsband (ed.), *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, III, 66; James, *Medicinal Dictionary*, II, 850).
- 124 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 28. See also Goring, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 24–6, 60–3.
- 125 Goring, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 60, 55.
- 126 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 469, 602; Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, II, 172–173, 226–227.
- 127 Rendall, ‘Virtue and Commerce’, 59–60; Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 19–22; Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, 38–65. See also Pollock, ‘Honor, Gender, and Reconciliation’, 9–16; Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, 542.
- 128 Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 30.
- 129 *Spectator*, No. 95, 19 June 1711, II, 74–9.
- 130 More, *Essays*, 78–9.
- 131 Chapone, *Letters*, 188–9.
- 132 More, *Essays*, 100–2.
- 133 Burney, *Evelina*, 286–7. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 220, passim.; Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 71, passim.
- 134 Chapone, *Letters*, 66–7.
- 135 More, *Essays*, 100–2.
- 136 Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 32–3.
- 137 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 233.
- 138 This echoes the ideas of David Hume on sympathy and passions (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 316).
- 139 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 2.
- 140 Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 118, 339, 336.
- 141 FB to Susanna Burney (1755–1800), [29] June – [2 July 1781], *JFB*, IV, 383; FB to Hester Maria Thrale (1764–1857), 22 November [1783], *JFB*, V, 416–17.
- 142 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 206–18; Arnaud, *On Hysteria*, Ch. 1.
- 143 Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 29–30.
- 144 See Nussbaum, ‘Hester Thrale: What Trace of the Wit?’, 196–8.
- 145 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 226; Nussbaum, ‘Hester Thrale: What Trace of the Wit?’, 197.
- 146 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 15 June [1744?], BLRA, Wrest MS 3356.
- 147 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 15 June 1753, BLRA, Wrest MS 2969. On Talbot’s relationship with the Berkeleys, see Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 113–16.
- 148 *JCT*, 19 December 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 31–2.
- 149 On sensibility and the nervous system, see Mullan, *Culture of Sensibility*, 3–15, 210–16, 338–45, passim.
- 150 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 21 June 1746, *LCT*, I, 152.
- 151 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 2 October 1762, BLRA, Wrest MS 772/685; *JCT*, 3 December 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 38. ‘All in all, I do not care too much for tragedies, they provoke the passions too much and represent them as too important—they mar the lovely tranquility—they make one remember the most disagreeable moments of one’s life’.
- 152 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, [n.d., 1740], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 1–6.
- 153 Nussbaum, ‘Hester Thrale: What Trace of the Wit?’, 196–8; EM to William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, [March? 1761] QBS, II, 233–4.
- 154 EM to Mary Robinson, 24 March [178-?], BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 129–31.
- 155 EM to Edward Montagu, 30 August 1751, *LEM*, III, 163–4.
- 156 EM to Anne Donnellan, 17 October 1740, BL Add. MS 70493, f. 12.
- 157 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 66.

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- 158 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 26 July 1743, *QBS*, I, 155.
- 159 More, *Strictures*, 39, 72–74.
- 160 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 7 May [1741], *LEM*, I, 187.
- 161 EM to Edward Montagu, 30 August 1751, *LEM*, III, 163–4; EM to Anne Donnellan, 10 April 1741, *LEM*, I, 147–8.
- 162 FB to Susanna Burney, [?17–29] September [1774], *JFB*, II, 48–50.
- 163 FB to Susanna Burney, 15 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 307.
- 164 FB to Susanna Burney, 4 June [1780], *JFB*, IV, 165; FB to Susanna Burney, [c.27] May [1780], *JFB*, IV, 126.
- 165 FB to Susanna Burney, [post 4 – post 10] June [1780], *JFB*, IV, 159.
- 166 Hester Lynch Thrale, [s.v.] December 1778, Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana*, I, 356. Hester Lynch Thrale, later Piozzi, was a writer and patron of the arts who entertained a literary group that included, for example, Samuel Johnson. She has often been seen as a rival of Elizabeth Montagu. After the publication of *Evelina*, Fanny Burney was a frequent house guest at the Thrales' country estate, Streatham. Since Hester Lynch Thrale's husband, the wealthy but bourgeois brewer Henry Thrale, restricted her participation in London social life, she was forced to entertain herself mostly in the countryside through her studies, writing, and a lively group of friends.
- 167 FB to Susanna Burney, 11 January [1779], *JFB*, III, 224.
- 168 FB to Susanna Burney, [post 15–?26] June [1779], *JFB*, III, 316–18.
- 169 FB to Susanna Burney, 15 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 304–5; FB to Susanna Burney, 12 October [1779], *JFB*, III, 369.
- 170 FB to Susanna Burney, 11 January [1779], *JFB*, III, 224.
- 171 FB to Susanna Burney, 11 January [1779], *JFB*, III, 224; FB to Susanna Burney, 15 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 304–5. Interestingly enough, Sophia Streatfeild had a classical education and was proficient in Greek, which was not enough to earn her a reputation of intellect in the Thrale crowd. According to Burney, 'Mr. Seward declared her *Greek* was all *against* her with *him*, for that, instead of reading Pope, Swift or the Spectator, Books from which she might derive useful knowledge & improvement, it had led her to devote all her reading Time to *the first 8 books of Homer*'. (FB to Susanna Burney, 15 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 303–4)
- 172 FB to Susanna Burney, [post 15–?26] June [1779], *JFB*, III, 316–18.
- 173 FB to Susanna Burney, 15 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 301–2.
- 174 FB to Susanna Burney, [16–?18] November [1779], *JFB*, III, 439–40.
- 175 FB to Susanna Burney and Charlotte Burney, [late August – early September 1781], *JFB*, IV, 462.
- 176 See e.g. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 44–9, 72–5, passim.; Acosta, 'Transparency and the Enlightenment Body'; Levitt, *Shadow of Enlightenment*, 2–8, passim.; Foucault, 'Eye of Power', 152.
- 177 See e.g. Griswold, 'Smith and Rousseau in Dialogue', 76–7.
- 178 Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 19–29.
- 179 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 221. See also Jones, 'Advice and Enlightenment'.
- 180 Griswold, 'Smith and Rousseau in Dialogue', 77.
- 181 Griswold, 'Smith and Rousseau in Dialogue', 77.
- 182 Levitt, *Shadow of Enlightenment*, 4.

4 Playing with Public and Private

The problematic of internality and externality was, in many ways, central to women's politeness. The dichotomy between the two was most manifestly visible in questions of moral and honest internal politeness versus dissimulative and hypocritical external politeness, which were deeply gendered and featured heavily in discussions of feminine politeness. However, the interplay of internal and external also opened up potential for individual resistance and freedom. One way of looking at the division is making an analytical elision between internal—private and external—public. It was common to view one's private self as the seat of authenticity, while the external self was thought as the public persona put on for the sake of other people. In this way, many aspects of the public/private juxtaposition operate on the same dichotomy as the external/internal. The public sphere—that is, venues of public sociability—was, due to its visual nature, a place for the stylisation of the external self, whereas contemporary commentators and conduct writers described the private domestic sphere in terms of authenticity and openness. These divisions were also deeply gendered in normative politeness discourse. However, women's autobiographical representations of public and private operate to reproduce these delineations only occasionally; more than anything, their writings blur the distinction between the private and public sphere. Indeed, women could and often did stretch the limits of normative polite femininity by blurring the difference between public and private; through clever utilisation of semi-public sociability, described in their autobiographical texts, as carefully positioned in the interplay between private and public, they could expand their sphere of influence and modes of acceptable conduct. The use of autobiographical writing was, in itself, simultaneously a means of theatrical self-representation and mirror of authentic interiority. My goal is to show that the ambivalence surrounding the internal/external dichotomy provided women with possibilities for destabilising gendered conduct expectations, while still operating within the framework of politeness and retaining their polite reputation.

Deborah Heller argues in an article on the bluestocking Elizabeth Vesey's subjectivity that the widely accepted view of eighteenth-century women as passively constructed by the 'discourses of femininity, domesticity, and the civilizing arts' is inaccurate; instead, she claims that there existed a notion of an

‘ungendered, autonomous self’ that provided a resource for women’s ‘practices of freedom’. For Heller, this ‘unbound’—that is, ungendered, autonomous, and authentic—subjectivity offered ‘strategic possibilities for resisting the dominant ethos for women, especially through the notion of interiority or indecipherable depth in the self’.¹ This is an important observation that I pick up and develop further in this chapter; women could and did use the notion of an autonomous interiority as a rhetorical justification for their subversive conduct. However, it should be noted that this autonomous subjectivity was not as antithetical to the discursive self as Heller claims. While the very process of internalising identity through performativity produces a *feeling* of authenticity for the individual, there is no ‘internality’ of the self, but the subject is always constituted within a network of power/knowledge which determines its conditions of possibility.² Moreover, the techniques of the self that the subject utilises in shaping herself as an ethical and autonomous subject ‘are not created or freely chosen’, as Johanna Oksala points out; rather, they are ‘culturally and historically intelligible conceptions and patterns of behaviour that subjects draw from the surrounding society’.³ Therefore, the internal self of an eighteenth-century subject, however free and autonomous she may have felt it to be, was nevertheless thoroughly discursively constituted.

This does not mean, of course, that eighteenth-century people did not have a notion of interiority, nor that invocations of sincerity and authenticity could not be successfully used to justify unfeminine or impolite modes of behaviour, as Elizabeth Vesey did in Heller’s analysis. However, in my reading, performative externality in the form of dissimulation and hypocrisy offered women far more possibilities for subversive conduct and freedom than any (false) idea of authentic interiority. Of course, by its essence, politeness was nothing more but an external performance, masked by rhetoric of internal authenticity. According to Erving Goffman, this is what all human interaction is ultimately about; his well-known claim is that social encounters are performances where people act the roles they ascribe for themselves in dynamic interaction with others. According to Goffman, individuals engage in performances to abide by social norms; by manipulating their appearance, manner, and setting, they bring forward desired impressions and, in this way, construct the fictional self they deem appropriate for a specific situation and portray it to their audience.⁴ In fact, recent studies have emphasised the theatrical aspects of early modern social identities, and analysed them as both individual and group-related performances.⁵

Of course, politeness was not only performed but also performative, which further complicates the internal/external problematic. Judith Butler writes that ‘[a]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause’.⁶ If individuals actually constituted the imagined internal identity they were supposedly expressing by their performances of politeness, that effectively merges the external and the internal into the one-surface Möbius strip depicted by Grosz. In other words, external is internal, and internal is external.

Female Bodies and the Polite Spectacle

'Now I must look at you, Fanny,' said Edmund, with the kind smile of an affectionate brother, 'and tell you how I like you'.

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814)⁷

Politeness was a culture that had a strong visual aspect, and the body was the means of communicating polite identity.⁸ Politeness was thought to reveal itself in multiple ways of standing, walking, gesturing, dressing, and facial expressions, up to a point where a person's level of politeness could supposedly be evaluated merely by looking. As Will Honeycomb, one of the characters of *The Spectator* stated, women's external appearances were thought to speak volumes of their inner self, their politeness, virtue, and character, so that 'the whole Woman [is] expressed in her Appearance! Her Air has the Beauty of Motion, and her Look the Force of Language'.⁹ The female body was on display, and the urban setting of politeness offered specific venues for the execution of this display.

England's urban renaissance and its links to the culture of politeness have been thoroughly scrutinised; it will suffice to say that the new urban sociability was acted out in respectable public and semi-public space, where polite society gathered to see and be seen. Members of the social elite spent their leisure time mingling in parks, streets, and parlours during the day, and going to assemblies, balls, theatres, and amusement parks at night. Bath, Brighton, and other leisure towns competed with London in providing amusements for the polite elite.¹⁰ Many scholars have also drawn attention to the problematic separation and gendering of public and private sphere, questioning women's affiliation with the private and domestic, and, indeed, the dichotomist juxtaposition of public and private in the first place.¹¹ Some have even argued that the early modern world consisted solely of semi-private/semi-public space, or meta-space, and that any imposition of a public/private distinction is fundamentally anachronistic.¹² The public or private nature of any social arena could also be regulated by limiting or increasing their availability and inclusiveness. The elite home, it has been demonstrated, was not a private but a semi-public sphere, and worked as a stage for polite sociability, hosting tea tables, dinners, concerts, and balls.¹³ To this effect, women were reminded that they should be constantly vigilant and prepared to be watched even in their own homes. 'Do not confine your attention to dress to your public appearances', warned John Gregory; '[a]ccustom yourselves to an habitual neatness, so that in [...] your most unguarded hours, you may have no reason to be ashamed of your appearance'.¹⁴ The semi-public role of the home was particularly important in the countryside, which offered a smaller number of public venues for polite sociability than the town.

Appearing and socialising in public and semi-public space was essential for politeness in many ways. Not only did it make sociability possible to begin with, but it enabled the very construction of an individual's polite identity. Observing other members of polite society was a crucial part of an individual's education in the codes of politeness, as Katharine Glover has pointed out.¹⁵

However, even more important was the acknowledgement of an individual's mastery of that code by established members of the polite elite. Much has been written about identities as social identifications or performances that are targeted to an audience for validation. In addition to Goffman, Jürgen Habermas, for example, has claimed that the paradox of the development of subjectivity as 'the innermost core of the private self' is that it is 'always already oriented to an audience', while many postmodern thinkers contend that identity is, in fact, an entirely fabricated, performative construction, and that an individual becomes a subject through the recognition of others.¹⁶ In other words, there was no polite identity without a polite audience to socially and visually reaffirm it.

The body of the polite woman was thus on constant display. Elite women grew up knowing that polite society observed their every move, every piece of lace on their gown, and every nod of their head, and they were also taught to constantly observe themselves in order to appear to their best advantage. *The Lady's Preceptor* (1743) reminded women that they always had a part to play:

When you are at a Play I wou'd not have you fancy that, because you are in a Place where People go only for Diversion, you may be under less Restraint than any where else; not that I am against your appearing pleased and diverted [...] only take care to remember the Part you ought to perform yourself; indulge a lively Mirth for a while if you please, but without Clamour or Extravagance, taking care at the same time that Purity and Modesty always appear to be your governing Principles.¹⁷

Polite women's bodily display appears, in many ways, to reproduce the modern disproportionately gendered system of looking. Feminist theory asserts that the act of looking is a masculinised event—even when the person doing the looking is a woman. Men are stereotypically defined as the active lookers, whereas women become passive objects to be observed.¹⁸ Thus, looking is inscribed by an unsymmetrical relation of power. To look is to judge, or, to assume a role of defining authority. Similarly, while women are in constant need of the corrective male gaze, for men becoming an object of the gaze is an untenable and emasculating position.¹⁹ In a similar way, eighteenth-century women were certainly seen as the natural objects of the gaze—and the gaze was often represented as an authoritative male one. The constant surveillance of women was, in many ways, critical for the workings of polite society and a central aspect of it. Emma Major and Mary Poovey have argued that 'judgemental spectatorship' is essential to eighteenth-century didactic literature. Fanny Burney's novels are a case in point; they are constructed around a 'rather sinisterly everpresent' critical observer, and 'the appearance and misinterpretation of the heroine's behaviour' is a key plot device.²⁰ Shawn Lisa Maurer and Angela Rosenthal have argued that eighteenth-century elite women were positioned as a naturalised object of (male) investigation with the object of asserting a dialectical gender difference. Rosenthal writes that female bodies were anxiously policed by conduct books and social commentaries because they were the crucial means

for holding sexual difference—as well as class positions—in place. The female body, ‘squeezed into shape with corsets and ensconced in hyperbolic hoop-dresses’, was ‘clothed, molded, and adorned in accordance with notions of social order and physical ideals’.²¹ In fact, many of the eighteenth-century didactic writers were men who openly announced their ‘Design to keep a watchful Eye over every Part of the Female Sex, and to regulate them from Head to Foot’, as ‘Nestor Ironside’ of *The Guardian* did in 1713.²² The evaluative power of the male gaze is aptly demonstrated by the 1802 print where ‘Country Gentlemen’ are guided into categorising women as objects—in this case, vessels—according to their external appearance. (Figure 4.1)

However, the power dynamics of eighteenth-century female bodily display were far less straightforward than simply men asserting an evaluative and desiring gaze over women. For one thing, women were doing the watching as well. Indeed, women of polite society actively and vigorously patrolled the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour, and could, indeed, be each other’s keenest and strictest critics. This is, of course, an example of the practical manifestations of patriarchy, where women are taught to observe themselves and each other through masculine spectacles. Sandra Lee Bartky writes that a woman, knowing that ‘she is to be subjected to the cold appraisal of the male



Figure 4.1 *British Vessels. Described for the Use of Country Gentlemen.* (London: T. Williamson 1802). Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/94504614/>

connoisseur and that her life prospects may depend on how she is seen', learns to 'appraise herself first'. In other words, the objectification of women creates a duality in feminine consciousness, where the 'gaze of the Other is internalized' and a woman becomes simultaneously a seer and a seen.²³ In fact, the undisguised goal of women's conduct manuals—written by men and women alike—was to teach women how to fashion themselves as pleasing as possible to the imagined male eye—or, to 'read Men, in order to make yourselves agreeable', as James Fordyce put it.²⁴ John Gregory explained this explicitly in the opening pages of his conduct book: 'While I explain to you that system of conduct which I think will tend most to your honour and happiness, I shall, at the same time, endeavour to point out those virtues and accomplishments which render you most respectable and most amiable in the eyes of my own sex'.²⁵ This female (self-)surveillance and self-fashioning was done because women's life prospects very concretely depended on their ability to catch men's attention with their pleasing shape and, thus, to secure a profitable marriage for themselves.²⁶ In other words, the 'natural femininity' that was propagated for women was defined by what men were imagined to find pleasing, proper, and sexually alluring.

The ability to observe, not only others but especially *oneself* and to aim at a constant, objective self-surveillance was thus a crucial aspect of politeness. To be recognised as members of polite society, individuals needed to fit their appearance, manners, and actions to the social world surrounding them. For the most part, this self-surveillance and self-adaptation was done unconsciously; as Pierre Bourdieu writes of *habitus*—a concept which aptly captures the dialectical construction of identity as an interplay between social control and individual action—an individual's manner of being in the world is 'embodied history' which is 'internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history'.²⁷

The ability to watch oneself and to aim at a constant, objective self-surveillance was the prerequisite of politeness. Based on constant surveillance, of both others and the self, the operating principles of polite society can be compared to Foucault's famous panopticon from *Discipline and Punish*, understood in a broad sense—not as a disciplinary prison but as a basic mechanism in which societies operate and produce normative group identity. Like the panopticon, polite society was 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'.²⁸ Polite society was based on individuals' relentless self-monitoring brought on by the sheer state of constant visibility; the awareness of constant peer supervision made polite individuals their own supervisors. Like the panopticon, polite society also ultimately aimed at training and correcting individuals. It was a self-monitoring, self-repairing, and self-sufficient system of creating normality and imposing it efficiently on individuals.²⁹ However, the functioning of polite society was not fuelled by force. The rules of politeness were, of course, discursively defined and affirmed by social pressure, or even a threat of being ostracised, but, unlike in a classic panopticon, there were no institutional punishments if the rules were neglected. The goal of polite power was not to coerce bodies into proper attitudes; rather,

the aim was to create desirability, correctness, and truth to the extent where there was no possibility for subjectivity outside polite norms. In this sense, it operated very much like Bourdieu's *habitus*, which 'tends to generate all the "reasonable", "common-sense", behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits' of a particular set of societal rules, and are therefore 'likely to be positively sanctioned'. At the same time, Bourdieu writes, "without violence, art or argument", it tends to exclude all "extravagancies" ("not for the likes of us"), that is, all the behaviours that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions'.³⁰ Moreover, individuals could also resist the normalising tendencies in multiple ways—some of which are the topic of this book.

Women were thus supposed to police themselves and each other. They were expected to consciously mould their bodies according to masculine desires; to be 'sensible that they are the Objects of Love, and born to be admired', and, therefore, to be 'ever changing the Air of their Faces, and the Attitude of their Bodies, to strike the Gazer's Heart with new Impressions of their Beauty'.³¹ Since women were 'born' to be watched, they needed to be aware of the best methods of showing themselves to their advantage. At the same time, however, consciously seeking attention and deliberately fashioning the body to please was a sign of vanity and immodesty, especially for the advocates of inward politeness. According to John Burton,

To be admired, seems, indeed, the peculiar privilege of your Sex; but this, if not properly understood, may lead you into fatal mistakes. [...] If you make it your chief study to be admired, you will not only lose your aim, but become the dupes of your own designs. Real Merit will discover itself without any ostentatious parade; and it will not be overlooked by those, who are capable of discerning it.³²

Thus, even though women needed to provoke admiration from men in order to be truly feminine, they should not aspire towards this goal with conscious design. Women seeking to be admired were thought to attract only the attention of unprincipled rakes who were planning to take advantage of their vanity. Instead, honourable husband material was to be attracted by doing precisely the opposite—by *not* showing one's body off with visible intention, since true excellence would attract the attention of the worthy by its own merit. Steele's Mr Spectator, for example, 'could not keep [his] Eyes off' a woman wholly unconscious of her own loveliness; she 'did not understand herself for the Object of Love, and therefore she was so'.³³ In other words, self-display was acceptable, as long as it was—or at least seemed to be—unconscious: an innocent by-product of unpretentious sociability.

Another thing that obfuscates the neat modern hierarchical power dynamic of the eighteenth-century female spectacle is the early modern notion of the power the object supposedly held over the gazing subject. Thomas King has suggested that early modern notions of the gazer/gazed-relationship were much

more complex than simply men regulating women by their gaze; instead, they often emphasised the ‘nonmastery of the adult, *gentle*, male spectator before the spectacle, a masculine submission to the object of sight’.³⁴ Thus, the association between masculinity and visual mastery was not a given in the seventeenth century, and remained contested and under construction during the eighteenth century. Indeed, in the early modern rationale of the spectacle, the object was deemed to possess all power, while the looking subject was reduced to a passive and involuntary receiver. Women’s bodies were thought capable of ‘mortally wound[ing]’ male spectators by their beauty, thus blurring the power structure of the spectacle.³⁵

Indeed, women of the eighteenth-century polite society were often accused of usurping power through their role of the object of the gaze. In Fanny Burney’s *Camilla*, Edgar is drawn to Camilla against his will; in Burney’s rhetoric, ‘he had no power to keep away from any place where he was sure to behold Camilla’.³⁶ Indeed, watching women was supposedly inscribed in men’s nature, so that artful women could easily abuse their partiality. An indignant man wrote to *The Spectator*, complaining of a type of young lady who, with their ‘Hands, Eyes, and Fan’, intentionally capture the gaze of innocent men attending service at church:

As I stood utterly at a loss how to behave my self, surrounded as I was, this Peeper so placed her self as to be kneeling just before me. She displayed the most beautiful Bosom imaginable, which heaved and fell with some Fervour, while a delicate well-shaped Arm held a Fan over her Face. It was not in Nature to command ones Eyes from this Object; [...] I frequently offered to turn my Sight another way, but was still detained by the Fascination of the Peeper’s Eyes, who had long practised a Skill in them, to recal the parting Glances of her Beholders.³⁷

In this way, women’s gaze was also represented as enticing, not judgemental, and thus stripped from the authority men’s gaze held.³⁸

This is not to deny that women had the ability or chance to watch men with a discerning eye; Manushag Powell has, among others, noted that also men were expected to behave as if women were watching them. Indeed, as we remember, the women of polite society were seen as ‘civilizing agents’, forcing men to refine their behaviour.³⁹ Thus, masculine polite identity was created through a dialectical relationship with feminine polite identity—or, as Powell puts it, ‘men regulate the women who will regulate the men’.⁴⁰ It could be even argued that the objectives of the regulating gaze were ultimately more stereotypically ‘feminine’; aiming at soft-spoken refinement and compassionate agreeableness, the normative politeness it aimed to exert was habitually deemed to be better suited for women’s ‘naturally’ soft character than men’s supposedly more aggressive one. Indeed, effeminacy was a danger always lurking behind the corner of men’s politeness.

Thus, the act of looking was wrought with ambivalence. Thomas King goes as far as to claim that seeing and being seen became a reciprocal, assented event

in the eighteenth century; he professes that the spectacle was a conscious, dialectical act of constructing gender, rather than a demonstration of male power over female objects. Instead of patriarchal regulation of the gender difference, what supposedly emerged was a practice of ‘gendered complementariness’—that is, both sexes observing each other—that was, according to King, primarily class-based rather than founded on gender; the ‘gendered self-presentation’ of the ‘conscious woman’ drew, not the ‘gaze of the rabble’, but the knowing eye of the gentleman, who by watching her recognised her as socially significant.⁴¹ This notion of mutually acknowledged consciousness recognises the inherent hypocrisy of the polite display. Unawareness, or, at least, assumed unawareness of the gaze was discursively presented as the greatest virtue of female self-display—or, indeed, as the principle that made the display possible and acceptable. Meanwhile, female self-display needed to be acted out according to meticulously described rules of propriety, making it a necessarily conscious act on the women’s part. King suggests, then, that polite display was a make-believe game, where both parties were aware of the artificial nature of the spectacle.

However, the production of gender cannot ultimately be viewed as mutual spectatorship. In my interpretation, King greatly exaggerates women’s power of spectatorship over men’s self-display by implying that the gender roles were, in this respect, symmetrical. As Shawn Lisa Maurer states, eighteenth-century didactic writers dominantly represented watching as ‘an unseemly position for women, whose construction as pleasing objects allows them only to be viewed’, while for men, ‘to be an object is itself wrong’.⁴² Women’s gaze was habitually described as alluring, not judgemental or authoritative; in this way, a woman watching a man was given a sexualised interpretation and thereby put back into her place as the object of the gaze.⁴³ Moreover, watching was recognised to be a form of exerting and misusing masculine power, as Richard Steele notes in *The Spectator*, where he labels men’s staring at women as ‘an Offence committed by the Eyes, and that against such as the Offenders would perhaps never have an Opportunity of injuring any other Way’. Steele writes indignantly that—

this Family of *Starers* have infested publick Assemblies: And I know no other Way to obviate so great an Evil, except, in the Case of fixing their Eyes upon Women, some Male Friend will take the Part of such as are under the Oppression of Impudence, and encounter the Eyes of the *Starers* wherever they meet them. While we suffer our Women to be thus impudently attacked, they have no Defence, but in the End to cast yielding Glances at the *Starers*.⁴⁴

Thus, watching could almost be an act of violence, against which women had no way of defending themselves.

Furthermore, despite women’s consciousness of display, and the power that lay in the body-spectacle over the spectator, women would have had little power over the actual event of the spectacle; they had only limited means of controlling who could, was allowed, or did watch them. Even if meaningful

watching was aimed at elite men, who is to say that servants, shopkeepers, or other lower-rank men necessarily present in polite venues did not exercise their masculine prerogative by sneaking a peak? Thus, even though the polite spectacle necessarily constructed class, the gendered power structure was the primary force operating in the event of watching and, indeed, constructing the whole event in the first place.⁴⁵ Within the framework of the spectacle, woman was the object, and, therefore, primarily gendered, and only secondarily a representative of her class.

Constructing the Feminine Body

The life of a young lady [...] too much resembles that of an actress; the morning is all rehearsal, and the evening is all a performance.

Hannah More, *Strictures* (1799)⁴⁶

Since the female body was the object of the evaluative gaze and the canvas through which feminine politeness was to be displayed, moulding and rehearsing the body to portray the discursive norms was an important aspect of assuming a polite feminine identity.⁴⁷ The precise practices of the female body were the means through which women fashioned themselves after the softness, modesty, and grace of ‘natural femininity’. Accordingly, the matter of proper polite, feminine appearance was endlessly discussed in didactic literature. Pages and pages were dedicated to ponderings on the perfect way to speak, dance, or look elegant, and the advice given to women on this score could be anything from vague recommendations to extremely specific step-by-step guidance. All conduct books agreed, however, that since appearances revealed a woman’s degree of refinement, women should constantly observe their external presentation and spend time practicing and improving it. Even those advocates of inward politeness who believed that the external frame would automatically settle into perfect politeness through the cultivation of inner virtue proceeded to give advice on external pruning of the body just as eagerly as the externalist branch of writers. Thus, despite their rhetoric, the internalists were keenly aware of the importance of producing perfect bodily performances. For example, Hannah More recommended that ‘the exterior be made a considerable object of attention’ in girls’ education, as well as ‘the graces be industriously cultivated’ and ‘the arms, the head, the whole person be carefully polished’—of course adding in the same breath that even though rehearsing the exterior was important, the interior should not be neglected.⁴⁸ There was thus no significant difference between the two branches of didactic writers; both shared the view that gracefulness and ease of movement was necessary for the ideal woman, and both agreed that this gracefulness could be reached only through specific training. Both also emphasised that even though the female body had to be thus consciously worked on to produce femininity, the impression of naturalness was to be preserved at all times.

Much of eighteenth-century politeness education for both sexes revolved around habituation, ‘the conscious repetition of an action, a habit of study, or

of reflection'.⁴⁹ According to Locke, habitual behaviour worked to instil customs as 'the very Principles of [a person's] Nature', thus freeing men from the trouble of everyday moral or social decisions and freeing their capacity for more refined intellectual pursuits. In other words, its goal was to make custom 'as natural' to the individual 'as breathing'.⁵⁰ As Brandi Lain Schillace argues, in women's case habituation was considered especially important, as 'constant Custom' that required 'no Thought, no Reflection' was thought to be best suited for educating the notoriously irrational women.⁵¹ Adopting mechanical habits is, of course, the very same process that Judith Butler calls performativity—internalising certain habits and appearances through iteration. Thus, conduct books sought to imprint in the minds of women the need of constant observation of the norm, and the continuous repetition of it, in order to create polite female bodies. These polite bodies would then be recognised as such by other members of polite society.

Gentlewomen's education was a controversial topic in the eighteenth century, influenced by debates on children's nature and the human nature in general, the nature of society, and the benefits of public versus private education. As Susan Skedd has demonstrated, the establishment of commercial schools in the seventeenth century and their expansion and growing popularity during the course of the eighteenth century gave, for the first time, girls the opportunity of an extensive public school education as an alternative to a private home education. While elite girls still mostly received their education at home, especially girls of the middling sort, aspiring towards politeness, were sent to these schools offering a mixture of 'useful subjects' (reading, writing, arithmetic) and polite accomplishments, either as boarding or day students.⁵² Even girls who still received their education at home from their mothers or fathers, governesses, and tutors, could be sent to commercial schools to 'finish off' their education especially regarding polite skills—even though there remained a morally wary attitude towards boarding schools throughout the century, as well. Boys generally received not only a more public but also a decidedly classical education, whereas girls were brought up with a much narrower curriculum.⁵³ As Deborah Simonton and Vivien Jones have argued, women's education in the eighteenth century was targeted towards maintaining a hierarchical social system, where knowledge was potentially hazardous and could lead to social disruption. Arguments about whether, how, and to what extent women should be educated, were part of larger political questions about inequality and hierarchy and tied to notions of sexual politics and gender difference.⁵⁴

The most common view of female education was that women, as the weaker vessel, could not endure intellectual training similar to men. However, since women had a duty to bring up moral and chaste children, they could not be left wholly uneducated, since a mind left to its natural state was prone to immorality, vanity, and luxury.⁵⁵ Thus, women should receive enough education to safely contain such disruptive forces as their 'curiosity' or 'imagination', according to, for example, François Fénelon, whose treatise *L'Education des Filles* (1687) was highly influential in England, as well.⁵⁶ Educated into self-restraint and

morality, women could then bring up their children soberly into either responsible citizenship (boys) or motherhood (girls).⁵⁷ By imprinting women's minds with stern moral values and humble piety, religion also played a considerable role in women's education. In Hannah More's words, girls' hearts were 'naturally more flexible, soft, and liable' to incorporate the principles of religion, and, since they did not receive a classical education, their 'feeble minds are not obliged at once to receive and separate the precepts of christianity, and the documents of pagan philosophy'.⁵⁸ In this way, education was not only a female tool of empowerment, but also a means of controlling women. An uneducated or natural woman was considered to be potentially dangerous, since she disrupted the patriarchal custom by having no code of proper order imprinted on her.⁵⁹ As Fénelon argued, 'Revolutions in State have been all caused merely or chiefly by the Irregularities of Women'; therefore, many conservative eighteenth-century educationalists chose to advocate girls' training through habituation rather than encourage them to develop themselves as rational creatures.⁶⁰ This didactic view was also heavily criticised. Mary Astell, for example, asserted that to 'be able to repeat any Persons *Dogma* without forming a Distinct Idea of it [...] is not to Know but to Remember'.⁶¹ Astell's pioneering critique was echoed a hundred years later by Mary Wollstonecraft, who addressed the problem of women's education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), claiming that women should be taught to become rational individuals, instead of being deliberately kept in a state of ignorance and subservience.⁶² Moreover, as the existence of bluestockings and their sisters in letters proves, discursive ideas of women's education could differ drastically from real-life educational practices.

Bluestockings emerged in a period of expansion and change in girls' education. According to Vivien Jones, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, few girls had any formal education, whereas during the latter half of the century, providing an education for the women of polite society became something of a norm.⁶³ Claire Boulard Jouslin has further argued that early eighteenth-century female education concentrated largely on accomplishments, whereas an educational reform—linked directly to the rise of inward politeness and supported by such writers as Richard Steele or Charlotte Lennox—widened the scope of women's education towards moral and intellectual improvement.⁶⁴ In fact, the changes in conceptualisations of politeness and the birth of moral, inward politeness had a direct impact on women's education. As Steele wrote in *The Spectator*, in addition to bodily training, women should train their minds as well:

The general Mistake among us in the Educating our [...] Daughters [is that] we take care of their Persons and neglect their Minds: [...]. Thus her Fancy is engaged to turn all her Endeavours to the Ornament of her Person, as what must determine her Good and Ill in this Life [...] the Management of a young Lady's Person is not to be overlooked, but the Erudition of her Mind is much more to be regarded. [...] The true Art in this Case is, To make the Mind and Body improve together; and if possible, to make Gesture follow Thought, and not let Thought be employed upon Gesture.⁶⁵

To make women fit for their role as emblems of politeness and improver of men's manners, they needed to be sufficiently educated to take part in polite and informed conversation.⁶⁶ Accordingly, gentlewomen's education commonly included not only instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also history, literature, geography, and modern languages—and sometimes even such rarer subjects as classical mythology or natural philosophy.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, many commentators complained throughout the long eighteenth century that the majority of women's education still rested on superficial talents and such trivial issues as dress or manners—in short, the exterior shell.⁶⁸ For example, Hannah More complained in 1777 that—

I am at a loss to know why a young female is instructed to exhibit, in the most advantageous point of view, her skill in music, her singing, dancing, taste in dress, and her acquaintance with the most fashionable games and amusements, while her piety is to be anxiously concealed, and her knowledge affectedly disavowed, lest the former should draw on her the appellation of an enthusiast, or the latter that of a pedant. In regard to knowledge, why should she for ever affect to be on her guard, lest she should be found guilty of a small portion of it? [...] for, after all the acquisitions which her talents and her studies have enabled her to make, she will, generally speaking, be found to have less of what is called *learning*, than a common school-boy.⁶⁹

In other words, the importance of learning external accomplishments persisted, along with the theatrical vision of politeness, throughout the eighteenth century.

The exterior shell continued to receive plenty of attention in women's education because it was ultimately the means through which polite femininity was constructed. The goal of female education was not only to cultivate the mind in polite knowledge, but to prepare the female body for the appraising gazes of polite society by making women internalise certain modes of being and behaving, which were then labelled 'natural' for them. However, how those naturally feminine bodies should behave, exactly, proved difficult to pin down, to the extent that they were most often described with the ambiguous phrase '*je ne sais quoi*'.⁷⁰ In the words of John Bennett—

The *manner* of Louisa *finishes* her character. It is a beautiful bordering to all her graces and her virtues. It is impossible for me to define, (what I mean by,) manner; yet no one can be, half an hour, in the company of this lady, without feeling its astonishing effects. [...] She embellishes, in a wonderful manner, a look, a gesture, an attitude, nay even silence itself. She confers a grace on the most *common* civility. [...] The best definition I can give of this quality must be imperfect. I should call it, however, a quick discernment of what is graceful, directed by an exquisite sensibility, and saying in an instant, to airs, gestures, features, looks, come with corresponding energy.⁷¹



Figure 4.2a 'Walking' in *The Polite Academy* (London: R. Baldwin and B. Collins 1762). © The British Library Board (Shelfmark Ch.760/41)



Figure 4.2b 'The Courtesie' in *The Polite Academy* (London: R. Baldwin and B. Collins 1762). © The British Library Board (Shelfmark Ch.760/41)



B. Dandridge Fins.

L. P. Roiland Sculp.

According to Act of Parliament.

Figure 4.3 'Dancing' in François Nivelon, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior* ([London?]: [s.n.] 1737). © The British Library Board (Shelfmark 1812.a.28)

The certain something that distinguished a gentlewoman was thus a specific bodily quality, described in the feminised terms of gracefulness and elegance. The rehearsing of the body to produce these qualities was started from such basic skills as walking, standing and sitting. As *The Polite Academy* (1762) declared, much could be read from a simple erect pose: 'Where we see a young Lady standing in a genteel Position, or adjusting herself properly, in Walking, Dancing, or Sitting, in a graceful Manner, we never fail to admire that exterior Excellence of Form, and regular Disposition, suited to the Rules of Decency, Modesty, and good Manners.'⁷² Therefore, the conduct book continued, a 'young Woman of Virtue and good Sense, will never think it beneath her Care and Study to cultivate the Graces of her outward Mien and Figure, which contribute so considerably towards making her Behaviour acceptable'.⁷³ *The Polite Academy* also instructed the ladies very thoroughly in the art of curtsyng, receiving objects, dancing and, as the example below illustrates, walking:

1. Hold up your Head without any stiffness.
2. Keep your whole person upright.
3. Let your shoulders fall easily.
4. Drop your Arms easily and gracefully down to the waist.
5. Then place the Hands on one another, with the Palms turning upward, and a little inward.
6. Take short steps and do not lift up your Feet too high.
7. Let the Foot that was up, be brought down slowly, and with an easy Motion.⁷⁴

This advice, addressed 'Directions for young ladies to attain a Genteel Carriage, with a Graceful Air, and easy Motion', was also complemented with pictures of the correct postures (Figure 4.2). This kind of detail was most commonly found in the practically oriented conduct books focused on external politeness, while writers praising internal politeness usually tended to be less detailed, but by no means less dedicated.

The recurring idea behind all such advice was the ideal that all female acts and gestures should be easy and natural. Indeed, the ideal of natural politeness dominated didactic notions of desirable behaviour and movement throughout the long eighteenth century. Slightly paradoxically, conduct writers also recommended various physical exercises, such as walking and horseback-riding, for women to attain this goal.⁷⁵ Dancing was a particularly important form of exercise towards acquiring a graceful way of moving (Figure 4.3). As *The Spectator* declared, 'so much of Dancing at least as belongs to the Behaviour and an handsome Carriage of the Body, is extremely useful, if not absolutely necessary'.⁷⁶

Dancing was also thought to expose the female body to the male gaze in its most flattering condition.⁷⁷ The ballroom was an arena of looking, and dancing was an approved means of bodily display. In fact, *The Polite Academy* straightforwardly announced that dancing 'not only furnishes the fair sex (whose sphere of exercise is naturally more confined than that of the men,) with a salutary amusement, but gives them the best opportunity of displaying their natural graces'.⁷⁸ Indeed, the ballroom was not only an important stage of

mixed sociability but also a sort of a marriage market, where the sexes could appear to watch and to be watched.⁷⁹ Dancing exemplifies the extent to which the rehearsing of the female body was motivated by the desire to please the male eye. Richard Steele's ironic description of girls' education in *The Spectator* might be caricature, but it nevertheless highlights the matrimonial goal that so often guided women's life and, therefore, education, as well as the importance of correct bodily appearance in this project:

When a Girl is safely brought from her Nurse, before she is capable of forming one simple Notion of any thing in Life, she is delivered to the Hands of her Dancing-Master; and with a Collar round her Neck, the pretty wild Thing is taught a fantastical Gravity of Behaviour, and forced to a particular Way of holding her Head, heaving her Breast, and moving with her whole Body; and all this under Pain of never having an Husband, if she steps, looks, or moves awry.⁸⁰

Ann Bermingham has gone as far as to argue that women effectively commodified their bodies by turning them into objects of 'eroticized, aestheticized, and marketable' art. The polite marriage market was constituted by an economy of consumerism and commodification of women; accordingly, women were marketing themselves not only as specific ideas of culture, but as cultural objects *an sich*.⁸¹ This power dynamic did not limit itself to the workings of the polite marriage market or single women; rather, as Peter Borsay has noted, the marriage market merely exemplified the commercialised functioning of urban public space, where polite cultural arenas operated as 'markets' in which wealth, breeding, and cultural capital could be exchanged for status.⁸² Even though the female body was the privileged commodity of this market, women's public display was nevertheless greeted with anxiety and ambivalence, as we shall discover next.

Women's Self-conscious Spectacle

We walked in the park to-day, all the world there.

Mary Pendarves to Anne Granville, 28 March 1724⁸³

According to conduct writers, women had a particularly important role to play in public sociability as the shining examples and catalysts of social and moral virtue and refinement of taste.⁸⁴ Being seen in public venues was thus a key aspect of politeness, and in many ways, an inseparable part of all elite women's lives. Despite this, being watched was considered to be also highly problematic for women, and women's actual practices of sociability were often a contested matter.⁸⁵ Women's venturing to public space was ridiculed, and their alleged endless craving for public amusement was a popular topic of satire. Richard Steele complained that elite women 'live in a Circle of Idleness, where they turn round for the whole year, without the Interruption of a serious Hour; [...] The Spring

that brings out Flies and Fools drives them to Hide Park. In Winter they are an Incumbrance to the Theaters, and the Ballad of the Drawing-Room.⁸⁶

The anxiety concerning women's public self-display stemmed from various sources. One of these was the rising tide of eighteenth-century domesticity, which advocated the notion that public display was incompatible with ideal femininity.⁸⁷ Public pleasures were thought to produce immodest, artificial coquettes, whereas 'the blushing fair one' was to be found, not in 'Crowds or Assemblies', but in 'the sequestered walks of domestic retirement'.⁸⁸ The critics of public display presented femininity as essentially private, thus masculinising public display. John Gregory, for one, criticised women's self-display as too masculine:

By the present mode of female manners, the ladies seem to expect that they shall regain their ascendancy over us, by the fullest display of their personal charms, by being always in our eye at public places, by conversing with us with the same unreserved freedom as we do with one another; in short, by resembling us as nearly as they possible can. —But a little time and experience will show them the folly of this expectation and conduct.⁸⁹

Public exposure was also thought to corrupt women's morality, and public women were, as Gary Kelly points out, 'easily associated with prostituted women'.⁹⁰

The critics of public display concentrated on the modes, amounts, means, venues, and audiences of that display. Public exposure was something to be taken only in careful, small doses; as James Fordyce stated, a face 'hackneyed in the public eye, how striking soever when first seen, [...] loses much of its power to please'.⁹¹ Thus, too much public display was thought to wear out a woman's worth, and according to Richard Steele, the 'ladies grow cheap by growing familiar, and cheap is the unkindest word that can be bestowed upon the sex'.⁹² When women then would show themselves out in public, it needed to be done discreetly and with proper care. Women needed chaperones who controlled their self-display, making sure that the spectacle was acted out in the right place, to the right audience, and in every way according to the ideals of polite femininity.⁹³ Elizabeth Montagu's use of her maid as a chaperone highlights the multifaceted nature of the female spectacle. When Montagu was returning to London from Newcastle she gave a ride to a young Tom Pitt and his friend to Durham. As it was not proper for a lady to travel alone, Montagu wrote in a letter to her sister that 'as Mr Montagu has now left us I have taken ye fair Susan into ye Coach, which I fancy my young Men do not much dislike as she is a good object for a *vis a vis*'.⁹⁴ In other words, Montagu made her maid into an object of lustful male gaze, while shielding herself from improper public exposure by using her as a chaperone. The lower-class female body was thus a rightful target for uninhibited viewing, which reversely made exposing a genteel female body to unrestrained male gaze an act of insolence and disrespect.

Controlling audiences was of crucial importance for the polite spectacle, since a gentlewoman's body was not to be shown to anyone and everyone. Thus, the more select the audience, the more acceptable the self-display.

Accordingly, places of general amusement, such as pleasure gardens and watering places which were open to a wide variety of crowds, were deemed more harmful than more selective and exclusive scenes.⁹⁵ Masquerades were the epitome of suspicious inclusiveness; since there was no way of ascertaining the identity of the company, they were widely looked upon as dangerous ‘scenes of lewdness and debauchery’—which naturally made them wildly popular amongst amusement-seeking urban crowds—and they lived in the popular imagination through fantastic stories of kidnapping and sexual assault.⁹⁶

Women’s public display was connected to broader questions of space, visibility, and power. Marjo Kaartinen argues that public and private can be seen as expressions of power relationships in space, effectively making the exclusion of women from public space an assertion of patriarchal power.⁹⁷ Indeed, didactic writers did their best to warn women of the dangers embedded in the act of showing oneself in public spaces—and yet, as Amanda Vickery argues, women ‘trafficked numerous public venues without the least criticism and used simple strategies to protect their reputations at more risqué diversions’.⁹⁸ It certainly appears that many women chose to ignore the moralist warnings and, instead, showed off their expressly honed polite bodies in the sociable arenas of the town. As Anu Korhonen reminds us, individuals are not passive end results of their culture, but they actively shape that culture by their every act.⁹⁹ Therefore, eighteenth-century women’s public appearances should not be reduced to individuals’ random outings to pursue amusement; instead, the act of appearing in public can be taken as an attempt to redefine the norms of gendered propriety and, thereby, to tilt the power equilibrium, if ever so slightly. The same thing applies also to the controversial roles women assumed in public spaces, positioning themselves as spectators rather than objects of the gaze, for example.

Women could and did embrace the public sphere with self-conscious glee. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, described herself humorously ‘raking in town’ and enjoying its ‘operas and delight’ without the smallest remorse.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the growing influence of domesticity as a feminine ideal seems to have had little effect on women’s public self-display—quite the contrary. In the 1750s, the novelist Samuel Richardson complained of the continuing degeneration of female morals, noting with reproof that ‘Women are not what they were’ and that ‘modesty, humility, graciousness, are now all banished from the behaviour of these public-place frequenters of the sex’.¹⁰¹ According to Richardson, these ‘wild pigeons of the sex’ that crowded ‘Ranelaghs, Vauxhalls, Marybones, assemblies, routs, drums, hurricanes, and a rabble of such-like amusements’ had forgotten that they were supposed to be the sex ‘in which virtue, modesty, sobriety ought to characteristically be found, in order to save a corrupted world’.¹⁰² Women were also well aware of the visibility they encountered in public places, and their role as the object of the gaze. Elizabeth Montagu described London sociability in terms of ‘seeing and being seen’; she was diverted at the opera by the audience, or, rather, ‘the Spectators, for they came to see and not to hear’.¹⁰³ She also made sarcastic comments about female beauty’s main objective being to catch the admiring male eye, and laughed at

society beauties' sad situation in Bath—for 'they are ill provided with beaus, so that it is scarce worth their while to be so handsome'.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, a surly-looking belle amused her at Tunbridge: she 'seems miserable here. What is beauty and what are graces where there are none to admire them? [...] A beauty and a keeper of a toy shop, are always unhappy in an empty season, at Tunbridge'.¹⁰⁵

Women were not only conscious of the critical eye they were being appraised with in public places; they were also usually quite skilled in handling the so-called public sphere and their own performances in it. Propriety in public performances was determined by circumstance; different scenes and audiences required different clothes and demeanour, and the flippant repartee that charmed a salon could be grossly misplaced in an assembly. Similarly, a woman's social and marital status played a considerable role in determining the propriety of the spectacle. Mary Delany, for one, felt this acutely during her seven-year marriage to Alexander Pendarves, who was compulsively jealous of any attention his wife received, forcing her to be overly cautious in her public appearances. Delany thus became skilled in meticulous image-control early on. For example, while staying in Windsor with her husband, she soon found it 'too public a place for me to live in with any comfort [...] when I went out I was embarrassed with more company than was either agreeable or proper for me to allow'. Therefore, she voluntarily made herself 'a close prisoner' in her own house to keep up modest appearances for her husband.¹⁰⁶ After Alexander Pendarves' death, she had significantly more freedom to go out as she chose, and became, indeed, one of the 'wild pigeons' Richardson so severely disapproved of, cheerfully frequenting Marylebone Gardens and Ranelagh.¹⁰⁷

However, women were not merely objects of the gaze, but also actively adopted the role of the spectator in public space. Fanny Burney, for example, had reason to be especially pleased with her box in the opera; it was 'the most delightful Box in the House, from not being so much in sight as to render very much Dress necessary, yet enough to have, every convenience of seeing both performers & company', thus offering her the ideal position of the spectator.¹⁰⁸ Being discovered appraising her fellow audience members was, however, enough to cause her acute embarrassment: '[Mr Jerminham] said to me "pray were not *you* the lady that used the *Glass* the other Night at the Play?" Here I was quite shocked,—but could only *defend*, not deny,—protesting, with great truth, that I only used it for the *Performers*'.¹⁰⁹ Female spectators were, after all, stepping outside the gender roles defined by the politeness discourse by adopting the active, evaluative stance traditionally reserved for men. In all fairness, Burney was extremely short-sighted, and needed visual aids to indeed make out anything of great distance.

The connection between patriarchal power and publicity is clearly visible in Samuel Richardson's attempt to discourage the public outings of Anne Donnellan, the daughter of an Irish peer and a prominent member of London society. In his letter to Mary Delany, Richardson complained that unmarried women, such as Donnellan (who was one of Delany's closest friends), tended to

behave in an intolerably independent manner, not having a husband to control them. '[T]hese *single* ladies—Upon my word, Madam, I do think it is not so very much amiss sometimes, that control—but no more on this subject', Richardson concluded his slightly incoherent rant on the failure of single women to bow to male authority as they should.¹¹⁰ Delany replied to Richardson with a mischievous air:

I am very sorry Mrs Donnellan was not controllable on the point of going into the sharp air of Hampstead, for which I doubt she has suffered. Your dash after *control* is a challenge; I turn you over to the single ladies, they are numerous enough, and some, I am sure (particularly of your acquaintance) able enough to defend their own cause.¹¹¹

Thus, Delany recognised that Richardson's frustrated wish to exert manly control over Anne Donnellan was a 'challenge' of power, and she not only advocated women's right to go out as they chose, but also believed in their intellectual capability to 'defend their own cause' against men like Richardson.¹¹²

In other words, women's self-conscious parading in public spaces can be seen as a means of asserting their autonomy against the gendered conduct norms that defined public display as dangerous and harmful for women. Mary Delany herself is a glaring example of a woman who embraced public amusements with both hands and urged others to do the same. She wrote to her sister Anne that their elderly aunt Stanley was 'very much pleased at your going to the Bath [...] She gives her service to you, and charges you to put on all your best airs and graces'. In addition to passing her this flippant advice, Delany equipped her sister with her 'Brussels night-clothes, which I desire you will wear, and tear if you please, as long as you flaunt it at the Bath'.¹¹³ Delany herself was an indefatigable partaker of polite amusements. 'To-morrow we go to a concert of music, on Saturday to the poppet-show, on Monday to the ridotto', she summed up her engagements in London; she flirted nonchalantly at balls and masquerades, and self-consciously dressed herself in her 'best array, borrowed my Lady Sunderland's jewels, and made a tearing show' at the Queen's birthday.¹¹⁴

Not everyone was as comfortable with being looked at as Delany, who was, indeed, something of a specialist when it came to clever management of appearances. Fanny Burney, for one, had continuous problems with public sociability, caused partly by her growing fame as a novelist, but also by her general shyness and inability to control her exterior appearances with due diligence. When she went to Brighton with Hester Lynch Thrale in 1782, shortly after the publication of her second novel *Cecilia*, she was the object of everyone's attention. '[M]ost violent was the staring & whispering as I passed & repassed', she described her visit to the assembly rooms; 'I shall certainly escape going any more, if it is in my power'.¹¹⁵ To her father she wrote:

We do here *very toll*[erably]: the place is still pretty full: but we go little into public, & twice that *I* have been has quite satisfied me for the season,

for I seem as much a *shew* to all the folks as Omiah could be, & they stare with as much curiosity, as they would at him; though they whisper with rather more caution.¹¹⁶

Burney's willingness to hide from the public gaze was a determining feature of her personality, and she generally avoided situations that would make her conspicuous. For the same reason she avoided public dancing as far as possible, being painfully aware of the public exposure it brought on women. A dancing woman was considered a rightful object of public scrutiny; therefore, Elizabeth Montagu, for one, thought that a girl should never 'dance Minouets at the ball till she was quite perfect in it'.¹¹⁷ For Burney, dancing posed endless horrors: 'it is so long since I have Exhibited, that I am a Poltroon', she complained upon going to a ball; 'besides, I see plainly *I* should be Watched & *commented* upon in a most scrutinizing manner,—for *that*, I have some reason to believe I am *without* Dance-ing,—& therefore I think I am most safe—& know I am most easy—in resting a quiet spectator'.¹¹⁸

Fears of being exposed to looks held little sway over Mary Delany, however, who described a particularly 'rakish' ball to her sister:

I told you we were to have a ball, and a ball we had; nine couple of as clever dancers (though I say it that should not) as ever tripped. The knight [Sir Thomas Pendergast] and I were partners, we began at seven: danced thirty-six dances with only resting once, supped at twelve, every one by their partner [...] At two we went to dancing again; most of the ladies determined not to leave Plattin till day-break, they having three miles to go home, so we danced on till we were not able to dance any longer.¹¹⁹

Yet, even Delany was careful in picking the events she showed herself at and the amounts of exposure she deemed appropriate, and emphatically did '*not dance in every crowd*'.¹²⁰ As Amanda Vickery and Hannah Greig have observed, there were sharp hierarchical differences between public places and amusements, dictated by their exclusiveness and fashionableness; it was considered bad form to mingle without discrimination in every public ball available.¹²¹ Therefore, when Fanny Burney and Hester Maria 'Queeney' Thrale refrained from dancing at the last ball of the season in Bath, this gesture was packed with implicit meaning. As Betty Rizzo notes, the Thrale party was expressing 'its high tone in Bath by not mingling in the Pump Room and by avoiding the subscription balls; and although they have attended this last ball from curiosity, they maintain their superiority to the notoriously mixed assembly by refusing to dance'.¹²² Similarly, in Delany's mind, exclusiveness made a ball appropriate for a lady of reputation to attend:

[T]here is to be another entertainment barefaced, which are balls. Twelve subscribers, every subscriber pays ten guineas a night, and is to have three tickets to dispose of, two of them to ladies and the other to a gentleman,

that will make up four-and-twenty couple. [...] Some prudes already have attacked the reputation of those ladies that will accept of the tickets, but as all the subscribers are men of the first quality, and most of them married men, I don't see what scandal can ensue, only spiteful people make harm of everything. There are to be no spectators, nor tickets to be sold.¹²³

Thus, even though Delany never shied away from public amusements in fear of losing her reputation for feminine modesty, as didactic writers threatened, she acknowledged that successful public performances required great skill, and the boundaries of appropriateness should never be too blatantly violated.

However, even an expert like Mary Delany could encounter awkward situations in public places. Her experiences at a concert are a reminder that women could control the public spectacle they put on only to a limited degree. At the concert in question, a certain Monsieur Fabrici, a Hanoverian minister, shamelessly kept on gaping at Delany. 'He stared at me the whole night, and put me so much out of countenance, that I was ready to cry', complained Delany; 'he soon checked all my pleasure at the entertainment, the music sounded harsh, and everything appeared disagreeable. I showed all the signs of discontent I could, enquired if my chair was come, and looked at my watch twenty times'—to no avail.¹²⁴ Delany was thus subjected to the 'Family of *Starers*' Richard Steele described in *The Spectator*, who used their eyes as a means of asserting power that women had little means to resist.¹²⁵ Thus, since the spectacle involved both the object and the audience, defiant public display could also turn against its intended purpose.

It should also be remembered that not all women viewed public display through its subversive potential, or even in a neutral light. For some, public space appeared threatening and morally corrupting. Catherine Talbot, a known moralist, was afraid of losing precisely those emblems of femininity—'virtue', 'modesty', and 'sobriety'—that Samuel Richardson (who, incidentally, was a close acquaintance of Talbot's and influenced greatly her notions of ideal femininity) and other didactic writers held so dear. Therefore, for Talbot, seeing and being seen posed deep moral dilemmas. She recorded in her journal attending a concert given by her friend, Marchioness Grey which, despite the pleasure it gave her, also brought on a desire to shine in company which she deemed impious:

Soft Musick in a Noble Room where it seem'd every bodys business to appear the best they could, disposes one (till recollection sets it right) to see this World its Vanities & Pleasures in too Considerable a Light, & to think that being Nobody in it is an Evil. I know it is not.

Despite these musings, she went to the concert and indulged herself in the morally suspicious sociability, 'sat & chatted easily & Cheerfully with every body that came in my way & came away in excellent spirits. Why should I not?', she concluded defiantly.¹²⁶ On a similar occasion, she wrote to

Marchioness Grey that she would accept her invitation, but would only sit in an 'obscure corner' to avoid the temptations of luxurious sociability that were in danger of making her forget her shamefaced modesty. Indeed, Talbot's letter is a curious mixture of self-important moral rectitude and intentional self-deprecating humility:

According to your Invitation Dear Lady Grey I attend you this Evening & partake your Concert. But I shall place myself on a Seat behind all the Settees at the very Upper End of the Room, where I can have the full pleasure of seeing & hearing without being heard & seen. A pleasure vastly more unmixed than the other, where to idle minds as Mine half the attention to everything that deserves it is taken off by bestowing it upon ones undeserving self; but in this Obscure corner my Crimson Stuff Gown made by a Cuddesden Manteau Maker will be no discredit to your Pompous Room.¹²⁷

One might also reasonably question how inconspicuous Talbot would have actually been in a bright crimson gown.

Talbot's anxieties arose partly from her heavily religious ethos, but also, in all likelihood, from her diffidence and social anxiety that made polite sociability difficult for her to master. This was apparently the case for many a reticent woman of polite society. For example, Hannah Greig has described the adversities the 'cripplingly shy and deeply depressive' 25-year-old Gertrude Savile faced trying to infiltrate the glamorous London society, despite her flawless pedigree, abundant wealth, and prominent connections. Indeed, as Greig points out, the inability to perform satisfactorily in the polite sphere caused severe anxiety in elite women, and in a very concrete way narrowed down their opportunities in life.¹²⁸ Thus, even though public display offered women possibilities to question the conduct ideals linked to domesticity and female modesty, not all embraced these possibilities. Some viewed public amusements through a critical lens, and their excursions into public spaces were tinted with moral anxiety, as well as fear of performing deficiently.

Beauty and Power

'Far be it from me,' said Lord Orville, 'to dispute the magnetic power of beauty'.
Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (1778)¹²⁹

Beauty can be examined as a case study of sorts that illustrates practically all the problematic issues that revolve around the polite spectacle, gendered gaze, and visibility. Anu Korhonen has described beauty as the conceptual tool that 'fashioned what people saw, and how they looked at others'; it was 'an essential discursive tool for envisioning femininity and masculinity, and indeed women's visibility' in the early modern European urban landscape. Thus, beauty functioned as a means of 'knowing' and 'doing' gender through the practices of seeing and being seen. Beauty was used to naturalise the gendered

positions of the subject and object of the gaze; however, it also underlines the ambiguousness of the relationship between the beautiful (female) object and the gazing (male) subject. As Korhonen writes, beauty was ‘a practice, both observatory and participatory’, in which both parties had their own powers—albeit those powers were not symmetrical ones.¹³⁰

Beauty was a complicated issue with many reference points to politeness and ideal femininity. It was one of the most important characteristics a woman had; it was the emblem and ultimate sign of femininity, and, as such, a primary gendering feature. According to Korhonen, ‘men were beautiful as exceptional individuals, whereas women were expected to be beautiful in kind’. Indeed, according to *The Ladies Calling*, ‘Nature’ itself made a distinction between the sexes through ‘the beauties of their outward form’.¹³¹ Thus, a woman who did not fit the category of ‘beautiful’ was of suspicious gender. Beauty was also an important means of gaining visibility, since it was imagined as naturally meant to be looked at. A beautiful woman thus had a right to receive attention; in fact, she could not help doing so, since beauty was thought to capture the eye naturally and unavoidably. This notion was commonplace enough to provoke humour, as in the case of a man who wrote to *The Spectator* on his encounter with a great beauty on the street: ‘As I was this Day walking in the Street, there happened to pass by on the other Side of the Way a Beauty, whose Charms were so attracting that it drew my Eyes wholly on that Side, insomuch that I neglected my own Way, and chanced to run my Nose directly against a Post’.¹³² Thus, beauty’s inescapable allure proved fateful for the poor man’s physical well-being.

Beauty also highlights the sexual tension that was always present in the act of watching and, indeed, one of the reasons behind the anxiety felt over publicity’s immoralising effect.¹³³ Early modern understandings of emotions that took passions to be automatic reactions to external stimuli still shaped eighteenth-century ideas of beauty—and ‘the passion that beauty produced was love’.¹³⁴ Thus, beautiful women were thought to provoke desire in men just by letting themselves be seen. Men were described to be powerless in the face of great beauty, which made it possible for women to use a certain amount of power over men. Korhonen argues that women who forced their looks on others were active and had authority; they ‘controlled not only their own actions but also the sensations and emotions of others’.¹³⁵

Beauty itself was not a passive quality a woman either did or did not possess. It did not consist only in an ‘oval face’, ‘skin transparent’, ‘firm [and] vermilioned’ cheeks, ‘moderately large’ eyes, and a small bosom, as *The Lady’s Magazine* stipulated; instead, beauty was a bodily practice that was fabricated ‘by clothes, cosmetics, and gestures’—by women’s own ‘actions, skills, and efforts’.¹³⁶ Accordingly, women habitually used external enhancements to increase their beauty, despite much voiced criticism that denounced the use of cosmetics as dissimulation and dishonesty, as well as unnatural or ungodly.¹³⁷ John Bennett, for example, advised women to ‘blush’ at such ‘unseemly practices’ as ‘powders, perfumes, pomatums, cosmeticks, essence of roses, Olympian dew, artificial eyes, teeth, hair’:

Be content to be, what God and nature *intended* you: appear in your true colours; abhor any thing, like *deceit*, in your *appearance*, as well as your character. What must sensible men think of a woman, who has a room, filled with a thousand preparations and mixtures to *deceive* him? What money, what time must be given to this *odious*, insufferable vanity! Under such *unnatural* management, how different must be the female of the *evening* and the *morning*!¹³⁸

The use of cosmetics had well-known immoral connotations through its association with prostitutes and Frenchwomen, but, above all, ‘painting’ went against the polite ideal of transparency, since a woman’s true feelings were impossible to discern under a coat of red and white.¹³⁹ As Mary Wollstonecraft complained, a painted face was not ‘mind-illuminated’, and ‘[t]ruth is not expected to govern the inhabitant of so artificial a form’, and warned that a man who ‘marries a woman thus disguised, he may chance not to be satisfied with her real person’.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Thomas Rowlandson’s caricature from 1792 reflects the fear that even the smoothest skin and rosiest cheeks could turn out to be completely artificial (Figure 4.4). Nevertheless, since beauty was represented as an intrinsic part of femininity, women often aspired towards it with extreme means. Fanny Burney even reported a death in her circle of acquaintances resulting from a cosmetic-induced lead poisoning. The local doctor’s opinion was that a young girl, one Sophy Pitches, ‘killed herself by Quackery,—that is, by *cosmetics*, & preparations of lead or mercury, taken for her Complexion, which, indeed, was almost unnaturally white—he thinks, therefore, that this pernicious stuff got into her veins, & poisoned her!’¹⁴¹

Transparency formed an important context for eighteenth-century understandings of beauty. As the external body was imagined to be directly linked to the internal self, a beautiful body was thought to reflect a beautiful mind. In *Camilla*, Melmond, the eager admirer of Indiana Lynmere, reads from Indiana’s beautiful countenance all her inner qualities:

‘[S]he is beauty in its very essence! she is elegance, delicacy, and sensibility personified!’ ‘All very true,’ said Lionel; ‘but how should you know anything of her besides her beauty?’ ‘How? by looking at her! Can you view that countenance and ask me how? Are not those eyes all soul? Does not that mouth promise every thing that is intelligent? Can those lips ever move but to diffuse sweetness and smiles?’¹⁴²

This rationale was translated into a rhetoric where ‘no Woman is capable of being Beautiful, who is not incapable of being False’; since ‘Pride destroys all Symmetry and Grace, and Affectation is a more terrible Enemy to fine Faces than the Small-Pox’, as *The Spectator* insisted, beauty was thought to tell its unerring tale of a woman’s morality and good nature.¹⁴³ The transparency of the body could also be applied the other way around; if a woman did not fulfil the requirements of virtuousness, moderation, and goodness, she could never achieve true beauty—for it



Figure 4.4 Thomas Rowlandson, *Six Stages of Mending a Face* (London: S. W. Foresc 1792). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

‘is Virtue and Goodness only, that make the true Beauty’.¹⁴⁴ However, despite the implicit connection between beauty, goodness, and transparency, beauty, too, could be put on as a ‘beautiful mask’ to gild the ‘otherwise deformed vice of impurity’ with the help of artificial enhancements.¹⁴⁵ Equating beauty with morality was little more than a rhetoric tactic to frighten women into conformity by threatening that unfeminine behaviour would wither their beauty. Even Melmond’s panegyric on Indiana’s beauty in *Camilla* reveals itself to be, more than anything, a derision of the blind belief in physiognomic correspondence between inner goodness and outer beauty, since the reader knows perfectly well that Indiana’s spoilt character by no means lives up to her good looks. Indeed, since beauty played such an important role in ideals of polite femininity, it was widely used as a discursive whip, forcing women to discipline themselves into propriety and morality in order to preserve their good looks.

Beauty was also an important means of polite self-definition. Hannah Greig has demonstrated that beauty should not be seen as confined to bodily practices, but instead as a social category—an ‘objective acknowledgement of [a woman’s] social status and public profile’.¹⁴⁶ Thus, beauty was a means of articulating social difference; women of polite society were routinely characterised as ‘beautiful’, and beauty was connected to women’s social, financial, mental, and educational features as well as to their physical attributes.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, *The Spectator* declared that a woman ‘who takes no care to add to the

natural Graces of her Person any excelling Qualities, may be allowed still to amuse, as a Picture, but not to triumph as a Beauty'.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, even though physical beauty enticed men, falling for mere 'unintelligent' beauty with no education, finesse, or endowment was considered foolish.¹⁴⁹ However, because physical beauty was such an alluring power, beautiful women could also use their good looks to compensate for lowly social or economic status. Beauty was seen as a woman's commodity that could be exchanged for wealth or rank in the form of a good marriage or a mistress arrangement, occasionally even against the poor victim's better judgement.¹⁵⁰ Thus, beauty could be extremely dangerous for the male gazer. It posed a danger to the beautiful object, as well, since it supposedly attracted lustful men and endangered a woman's chastity.¹⁵¹ Accordingly, Mary Delany wished her niece to have beauty only as much 'as is necessary to give a *pleasing impression*—not a rapturous one, for that may prove more to her *unhappiness* than *happiness*'.¹⁵² Ultimately, beauty was a disruptive force; it shook the foundation of the patriarchal order by forcing men to abandon their rationality and self-control, and especially by giving women active agency and power over men's feelings and actions. Beauty also threatened to crumble the borders of the polite elite, making it possible for anyone to enter that sphere by the force of their looks.

For these reasons, polite society greeted beauty with anxious feelings. Despite its granted importance in delineating femininity, beauty was always presented as a characteristic secondary to moral and mental excellence. Elizabeth Montagu complained to William Friend that 'it is the misfortune of many women to place their vanity upon their beauty & then it will not make one effort towards worthiness'; therefore, Montagu wrote, 'tis of great consequence a girl should not look upon beauty as a meritorious thing but only esteem it as a lucky accident'.¹⁵³ Her husband perhaps saw beauty in a more advantageous light; Elizabeth Montagu wrote to her sister how Mr Montagu was so angry at her brother William 'for marrying a Woman with so little beauty I believe if he was his son he wd disinherit him':

You wd dye with laughing if you was to hear him express his astonishment & disdain, & when I laugh at what he says he concludes, I wish it may end well. I endeavour in vain to convince him that a handsome wife is not one of ye necessities of life, & when I have mollified him as to ye face he begins on ye shape.¹⁵⁴

Montagu also considered beauty to be dangerous; when a Mrs Pope eloped with a Mr Hamilton, Montagu professed being 'sorry for the woman, as her beauty has been her ruin':

She is extremely handsome and foolish; her vanity ruined her circumstances; and pride, poverty, and beauty, are ill advisers, ill suited to conduct safely through a world like this, where the temptations without are sufficient dangers, without the seduction within the mind.¹⁵⁵

Slight of build and often sickly, Montagu herself was no great beauty, and aware of it: 'my countenance has never wounded any man, and heaven forbid it should make a lady miscarry!' she humorously wrote to the Duchess of Portland.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, she was used to compensating her lack of captivating beauty with her wit and learning—qualities that, she harangued, were 'not absolutely needful' when a woman had 'a good complexion'.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, even Montagu paid constant attention to her looks, trying different remedies from bathing to rouge to make her face look less like 'a *memento mori*'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, even though modesty and virtue were celebrated as the characteristics that set Englishwomen apart from their continental counterparts, English polite society still took an immense pride in the international reputation Englishwomen had for their physical beauty.¹⁵⁹

Female Accomplishments: Capturing the Gaze?

Women had other warrants for capturing the polite gaze besides beauty. They could also have recourse to various accomplishments. In a well-known passage in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the haughty and condescending Miss Bingley claims that, in order to be truly 'accomplished'—

A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved.¹⁶⁰

As this passage shows, a good education was ideally compiled of a careful but extensive selection of bodily practices that included not only that ineffable gracefulness of movement discussed in the previous section, but also a wide range of specific skills such as singing, drawing, or dancing, which were called elegant or ornamental accomplishments. Even though the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet then replies to Miss Bingley that, in reality, few if any women fulfil all these requirements, this was nevertheless the didactic ideal that women were expected to pursue. The specific selection of these accomplishments, which formed the bulk of women's education, varied slightly from writer to writer, but most commonly included singing, playing the harp, pianoforte, or harpsichord, drawing, painting, needlework, and other kinds of handicrafts, as well as dancing and modern languages.¹⁶¹ Hester Chapone condensed the list in 1777 into '[d]ancing and the knowledge of the French tongue', which 'are now so universal, that they cannot be dispensed with in the education of a gentlewoman'.¹⁶²

Ann Bermingham has argued that there was a growing emphasis on accomplishments in women's education during the long eighteenth century, deriving from the slow shift in customs of display within the workings of the polite marriage market.¹⁶³ In fact, with the growing commercialisation of leisure, public polite venues started to fill up with a more varied and heterogenous

crowd—despite attempts to regulate the participants of polite pleasures by various measures, such as imposing entrance fees.¹⁶⁴ This increasing inclusiveness led to moralist fears over the degenerative dangers of public places with their increasingly vulgar audiences. According to R. H. Sweet, late eighteenth-century writers started to increasingly define politeness ‘against the vulgarity of Fanny Burney’s Branghtons, rather than Sir Roger de Coverley’s rusticity’. The countryside thus started to acquire connotations of unspoiled purity, unreserved openness, and ideal politeness, ‘undefiled by the vices, social emulation and corruption of urban life’.¹⁶⁵ Populous urban centres became increasingly associated with theatrical politeness for their lack of transparency and openness—contrarily to their early eighteenth-century idealisation. Writing in the 1760s, James Fordyce complained that ‘the heart cannot be unfolded’ in public places, where ‘all is reserve, ceremony, show [...] put on to deceive’, and John Gregory did not think ‘public places suited to make people acquainted together’, because people ‘can only be distinguished there by their looks and external behaviour’.¹⁶⁶ By 1799, Hannah More wanted to rescue women from ‘vapid common places, from uninteresting tattle, [...] from false sensibility, [...] from a cold vanity, from the overflowings of self-love, exhibiting itself under the smiling mask of an engaging flattery, and from all the factitious manners of artificial intercourse’.¹⁶⁷

In terms of polite amusements, then, there was a growing valorisation of the selective, especially during the final decades of the eighteenth century. While visiting Vauxhall or Bath remained popular amongst the elite as well, there was both a rhetorical and practiced preferment of exclusive sociability—subscription balls, private concerts, and restricted clubs—as the seat of refinement and good company.¹⁶⁸ This development also influenced didactic notions of what was deemed appropriate female self-display. Birmingham suggests that the idealisation of the private sphere put an increased emphasis on women’s accomplishments as a means of display that was supposed to take place in the confines of the drawing-room, neatly resolving the moral problem of parading one’s body around the town for the vulgar masses to see.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, elegant accomplishments were meant for making women visible. Young unmarried ladies were supposed to show off their skills in the minuet or behind the pianoforte during assemblies and dinners and, in this way, capture the attention of the fashionable audience—and the eye of potential husbands.¹⁷⁰ Jane Austen described sardonically in the unfinished *Sanditon* (1817) two young ladies who, with ‘the hire of a Harp for one, & the purchase of some Drawing paper for the other’, meant to become universally admired—

[The] two Miss Beauforts were just such young ladies as may be met with, in at least one family out of three, throughout the Kingdom; [...] they were very accomplished and very Ignorant, their time being divided between such pursuits as might attract admiration, [...] the object of all, was to captivate some Man of much better fortune than their own.¹⁷¹

Then again, the very fact that accomplishments brought women visibility made them simultaneously controversial, since female visibility was, as we recall, a matter of great ambivalence. Therefore, Michèle Cohen notes that even though ‘the term “accomplishment” was on the tip of every moralist and educationalist’s pen, there was less agreement than one would therefore expect regarding not only what counted as an accomplishment, but whether accomplishments should be censured, tolerated or approved’.¹⁷² Even if accomplishments were, as Ann Bermingham argues, a means to mitigate the problematics of the spectacle in the sense that they provided women a means for deliberate self-display while masking the fact it was actually happening, and allowed men to disguise their erotic desire as aesthetic interest, the display they enabled was by no means uncomplicated. The proper means and amounts of female self-display were policed in assertions of politeness, tastefulness, and propriety, and seeking attention and praise was deemed to be gauche: ‘Should you exel in any particular accomplishment, or in any branch of knowledge, it is a disgusting Vanity to be always displaying them, in order to extort the praises of others’, warned John Burton; instead, ‘Modest merit will never want for admirers’.¹⁷³ Accordingly, the accomplished woman was a deeply ambiguous figure in the long eighteenth century.¹⁷⁴

Accomplishments also had an important role as cultural signifiers. As Katharine Glover writes, being able to master the pianoforte or speak impeccable French was not only a demonstration of skill but, more significantly, ‘access to a culture that only the polite had time or money to acquire’, bought with money from tutors, governesses, dancing masters, and boarding schools.¹⁷⁵ Accomplishments were thus statements of social status and wealth, and operated as a part of a shared cultural language of taste, fluency in which bought women an access to polite society. They were also difficult skills that required years of diligent practice; therefore, a technical expertise in these fields would indicate not only a high level of education but also a character of industrious meticulousness—a most practical characteristic for a good wife. Indeed, accomplishments supposedly exhibited those feminine skills that promised a happy marriage; especially skills in handicrafts indicated that a woman was diligent, hard-working, disciplined, and well-versed in household chores.¹⁷⁶ An ideal woman did not loll around idly, but was constantly busy with one chore or another; as Hester Chapone declared, ‘[a]bsolute idleness is inexcusable in a woman, because the needle is always at hand for those intervals in which she cannot be otherwise employed’.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the mastery of accomplishments was directly related to a woman’s virtue. A woman incapable of staying at home, content within herself and her accomplishments, was seen as morally suspicious and, accordingly, unfeminine, especially by moralist writers.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, the connection accomplishments were thought to bear to inner virtue also made them an anxiety-provoking skill. Like beauty, a crafty display of accomplishments could supposedly help designing women to dupe men into marrying them under false pretences, and thus provided women subjective power in the marriage market.

As Ann Bermingham stresses, accomplishments were meant to be amateur skills, aimed at ‘finishing-off’ the artistry of others rather than initiating original art.¹⁷⁹ However, women could use them subversively as a means of artistic self-expression and subjectivity. Mary Delany is a case in point, as scholars have recognised her landscape gardens, handicrafts, and especially her cut-paper collages as works of art in their own right, showing original creative genius. Delany certainly took her work very seriously. Accounts on her various art projects occupied a lion’s share of her letters, and she had, in Lisa Moore’s words, ‘a punishing work ethic’.¹⁸⁰ ‘I have worked like a dragon this week at my [shellwork] lustre’, she reported to her sister; in another letter, she wrote having been occupied all week with ‘painting three pictures’.¹⁸¹ Delany tried to schedule her working hours so as not to be interrupted by common everyday sociability; ‘as soon as Lady Chesterfield has made her visit I shall set about painting again, but I don’t care for interruptions when I am at that employment’.¹⁸² Delany’s skills were also noticed by others. Her aristocratic friends ordered paintings, shellwork, and needlework from her to adorn their homes, and Sir Joshua Reynolds was reportedly ‘astonished’ by the force of her crayon drawings.¹⁸³ Mary Delany was thus an example of a woman who effectively used accomplishments as a means to perform her subjectivity through certain forms of art allocated for women.¹⁸⁴ However, using accomplishments rather than ‘serious’ art as an outlet of female creativity and artistic aspirations ultimately served to further subjugate women into the role of the decorous and ornamental rather than allowing them freedom to become professional artists. Indeed, as scholars have pointed out, women’s artistry in these fields has been systematically marginalised and ridiculed; accordingly, Delany’s exquisite floral art has until recently been labelled as ‘quaint’ or compared with ‘samplers’.¹⁸⁵

Interestingly enough, Delany was the only one of the four women discussed in this book to be truly ‘accomplished’ in Miss Bingley’s use of the word. Catherine Talbot had a skill with the crayon and the needle and Fanny Burney with the harpsichord, but their self-display was severely hampered by their diffidence. Elizabeth Montagu, the most celebrated and idealised of the four, emphatically never displayed any elegant accomplishments, but her skills were those of the mind and tongue only. As much didactically emphasised as accomplishments were, then, a lack of them could be compensated with other, especially conversationalist means—such as a knowledge of literature or a witty tongue. In fact, these women are good examples of the ways in which women could use their education subversively—not towards its supposed end of capturing a husband and becoming diligent wives and mistresses of a family, but to gain private satisfaction from learning and scholarly as well as artistic pursuits.

Even the accomplished woman, such as Mary Delany, can be seen as an active agent, especially when she pursued her accomplishments after marriage. Ann Bermingham argues that ‘the accomplishment, which before marriage was intended to signal future connubial bliss, becomes after marriage a source of domestic irritation’, suggesting that married women were supposed to settle into the role of the wife, mother, and ‘prudent domestic manager’, not to waste

their time practicing skills that had already fulfilled their aim.¹⁸⁶ *The Spectator* presented a warning example of a married woman who ‘sings, dances, plays on the Lute and Harpsicord, paints prettily, is a perfect Mistress of the French Tongue, and has made a considerable Progress in Italian’, and, furthermore, is ‘excellently skill’d in [...] Embroydering, and Needleworks of every Kind’—in short, excels in ‘all those Accomplishments we generally understand by good Breeding and polite Education’. The problem was that this excellent wife had now allowed these accomplishments to take over her life:

You are not to imagine I find fault that she either possesses or takes delight in the Exercise of those Qualifications I just now mention’d; tis the immoderate Fondness she has to them that I lament, and that what is only design’d for the innocent Amusement and Recreation of Life, is become the whole Business and Study of hers.¹⁸⁷

This fictional woman resembles uncannily Mary Delany, who excelled in all these arts and continued to dedicate herself to these accomplishments during both her marriages. Her second husband’s particular ‘approving of my works, and encouraging me to go on, keep up my relish to them’, Delany wrote to her sister.¹⁸⁸ Patrick Delany not only approved of her works, but took pride in them, praising her ‘habit of industry’ and particularly her ‘study and practice of painting, in which she singularly excelled, insomuch that she never copied a picture from any master in which she did not equal, and often outdo, the original’.¹⁸⁹ Of course, for Delany—as for the eighteenth-century leisured woman in general—elegant accomplishments had also important practical uses. The scope of women’s lives was much narrower than men’s, and especially women living in the countryside spent most of their time at home in the company of their immediate family and closest neighbours. Therefore, being able to amuse oneself with various occupations was a matter of not only ideal femininity but simply of passing the time agreeably. ‘[I]t is of great consequence to have the power of filling up agreeably those intervals of time, which too often hang heavily on the hands of a woman, if her lot be cast in a retired situation’, wrote Hester Chapone on music and drawing.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the professional extent to which Delany took her skills suggest that she was using accomplishments as independent self-expression, as well as a means of acquiring pleasure, knowledge, and expertise.

The domestic aspect of female accomplishments also made them morally problematic. The home was, on the one hand, increasingly rhetorically fashioned as the retired scene of female modesty and subservience. On the other hand, the accomplishment, meant to be performed within the confines of the genteel home, made it a stage for women’s commercialised self-display. Indeed, as Judith Lewis, Amanda Vickery, and others have demonstrated, the genteel home was a crucial stage for semi-public performances of politeness and refinement.¹⁹¹ This controversy was a continuous source of anxiety for moralist didactic writers. In fact, simultaneous to the growing importance of female

accomplishments, there was also an emerging trend of domesticity in women's didactic literature which promoted the domestic setting as a woman's primary sphere of life. The domestic woman was firstly a good wife, affectionate mother, and a meticulous housewife, and only secondly a sociable subject. An antithesis to the luxurious, morally corrupt aristocrat, an ideal domestic woman was diligent, frugal, modest, composed, disciplined, and chaste. She would submit to her husband's will and strive to enhance his fortune and happiness by dexterous management of the household.¹⁹² However, even though there was thus a discursive move towards the reification of the domestic sphere, Amanda Vickery and Robert Shoemaker have shown that women of the long eighteenth century were, in practice, far from being imprisoned in their houses.¹⁹³ The language of domesticity intermingled in many ways with the discourse of politeness during the latter part of the long eighteenth century, influencing especially internalist readings of politeness—particularly their conceptions of public places as deceptive and morally corrupt, as well as the home as the haven of authenticity, honesty, virtue and sincerity.

The most notable difference between the accomplished woman and her domestic counterpart was, as Nancy Armstrong has argued, that a domestic woman was not on display.¹⁹⁴ The apostles of domesticity—mostly moralists like Hannah More—declared that, in More's words, '[t]his world is not a stage for the display of superficial talents, but for the strict and sober exercise of fortitude, temperance, meekness, faith, diligence, and self-denial'.¹⁹⁵ Accordingly, the ideal woman was not supposed to show herself in public amusements but to contentedly cherish her family at home. Therefore, amusements entering the domestic sphere posed a moral dilemma. Hester Chapone's answer was to encourage women to exert their talents mainly for the benefit of their immediate family:

If you have any acquired talent of entertainment, such as music, painting, or the like, your own family are those before whom you should most wish to excel, and for whom you should always be ready to exert yourself; not suffering the accomplishments which you have gained, perhaps by their means, and at their expense, to lie dormant, till the arrival of a stranger gives you spirit in the performance.¹⁹⁶

Then again, even the act of refraining from bodily display was just another form of display. Hannah More made it clear that the signs of ideal domesticity might not display themselves as clearly as flashy accomplishments, but were nevertheless available to the keen eye—thus calling for an even closer scrutiny of the female body:

To an injudicious and superficial eye, the best educated girl may make the least brilliant figure, as she will probably have less flippancy in her manner, and less repartee in her expression; [...] But her merit will be known, and acknowledged by all who come near enough to discern, and have taste

enough to distinguish. It will be understood and admired by the man, whose happiness she is one day to make, whose family she is to govern, and whose children she is to educate.¹⁹⁷

The full weight of domestic ideals was targeted at married women. After achieving the goals set for showing off their polished bodies, married women were expected to partly replace polite sociability, based on self-presentation, with a more domestic set of polite ideals. However, women by no means abandoned their role as active socialites after their marriage; as Amanda Vickery has highlighted, married wives did not spend the rest of their lives cooped up in their private homes, but instead continued their public performances in polite society.¹⁹⁸ Polite sociability could even be easier for a married woman than for an unmarried one, since a married woman rarely needed a chaperone, but, instead, was able to chaperone others. An unmarried woman was constantly being evaluated by polite society, whereas a wife or an engaged woman could mingle with much more ease and relative freedom.¹⁹⁹ Then again, even married women needed to be ‘attentive, by their exemplary conduct, to render the nuptial state, honourable and of good repute’, since ‘the Husband feels himself disgraced, even by the breath of rumour, where the reputation of his Wife is concerned’.²⁰⁰

Women’s relationship with public attention was constantly debated within the discourse of politeness, because it highlighted many of the inconsistencies of the culture of politeness. What complicated women’s self-display was the fundamental duality of women’s social role. On the one hand, women played an important public and civilising role that subjected them to the theatrical expectations of sociability and exposed them to the gazes of polite society. On the other hand, women’s private role as daughters, wives, and mothers required modesty, reserve, and privacy, making public exhibitionism a threat to their domesticity and chastity. In other words, women’s public and private roles were in constant conflict. A woman’s body was subjected to two sets of demands: it needed to be all at once on display and hidden away, visible and invisible, public and private, polite and demure. The balance between these roles was constantly discursively redefined, which made it difficult to pin down on an individual level. Too much publicity could ruin a woman’s reputation, while too little could make her an old maid.

Rural and Urban Sociability

As my Summer passd like a pleasant dream, & the London life is a busy kind of delirium, I am glad to insert between them that sober solidity of things which one finds at ones Home in the Country.

Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Vesey, 6 October 1769²⁰¹

As Lawrence Klein, Philip Carter, and R. H. Sweet have discussed, urbanity was one of the most characteristic features of eighteenth-century politeness; the

modern free and easy town politeness was contrasted with country manners, represented as rustic, boorish, unpolished, and old-fashioned.²⁰² Fanny Burney's description of a Brighton dinner party, 'consisting of Mr. & Mrs. Shelley of Lewes, who are very civil, good sorts of people; 2 of their Daughters, who, like most other Country misses, are immoveably silent before *the Elders*, &, rudely free before the *Youngsters*', reflects the prejudices felt towards uncouth country manners.²⁰³ Similarly, when Catherine Talbot took a scholar visiting Oxford to see the traditional local Rural Games, she recorded him showing absolutely no 'enthusiasm about the Country'; rather, the 'poor Man [...] was scandalised at the raggedness & awkward boldness of our shepherdesses & the unpoliteness of our Youths I cannot express'.²⁰⁴

Indeed, the division between town and country defined politeness in many ways. According to Philip Carter, the spread of the new egalitarian and informal urban culture of politeness rendered stiff country manners old-fashioned and ridiculous.²⁰⁵ However, despite often-voiced conceptions of urban refinement and countryside boorishness, scholars have shown that the difference between town and country manners in England was, in fact, much less steep than elsewhere in Europe. According to Paul Langford, the uniformity of English manners and customs was a common observation made by continental travellers. What separated Britain from its neighbours was the uniquely pervasive influence that London with its fashions exerted over even the most distant corners of the kingdom. As a result, Langford concludes, not only were there comparatively few differences between different counties, but also 'the country' as a place where one would not meet town people hardly existed.²⁰⁶ Moreover, this delineation between town and countryside was full of controversies and, therefore, far from clear-cut. Countryside could be depicted as the ideal dwelling-place of honesty and sincerity or the Rousseauian cradle of natural manners, while urban culture stood for vice, corruption, and unhealthfulness. If anything, the countryside was in danger of getting spoiled by urban foppery, as Mary Delany complained:

I am very sorry to find here and everywhere people *out of character*, and that *wine* and *tea* should enter where they have *no pretence to be*, and usurp the rural food of syllabub, &c. But the dairymaids wear large hoops and velvet hoods instead of the round *tight petticoat* and *straw hat*, and there is as much *foppery* introduced in the *food* as in the *dress*, the *pure simplicity of ye country is quite lost*.²⁰⁷

The meanings that the town and countryside acquired were also heavily, albeit ambivalently, gendered. On the one hand, honesty and sincerity were feminised qualities, and the peace and quiet of country living was considered to be the ideal frame for domestic female existence, whereas business and public matters called for men's presence in the busy town. On the other hand, urban sociability was defined by women's attendance and conversation between the sexes.

On a much more concrete level, the juxtaposition of the town and the countryside played a central role in elite women's lives. In fact, the often very regular seasonal shifts of physical location between urban and rural dwellings set the pace of women's everyday lives. Those members of the rural elite, who had the wealth and means, rented a house or an apartment in Bath or Brighton for the season, running roughly from October to May, or went to stay in London for a few weeks or months with their relatives or friends. Similarly, urban gentlewomen retired to country estates for the summer, either their own or their families' or acquaintances'. Those who lacked the ability to follow this seasonal rotation were forced to make do with the amusements, urban or rural, they had at hand throughout the year, or to join in only occasionally.

Women's environment very much determined their everyday way of life. In fact, women's rural existence differed radically from their town life. Country life was stereotypically linked to domesticity, sedentariness, and lack of social obligations, whereas the constant buzz of amusements and social engagements characterised women's urban living. Elizabeth Montagu used humour to highlight the stereotypical differences between country and urban life upon leaving for London:

Next Sunday I quit the peaceful groves and hospitable roof of Bullstrode, for the noisy, turbulent city; my books and serious reflections are to be laid aside for the looking-glass and curling-irons, and from that time I am no longer a Pastorella, but propose to be as idle, as vain, and as impertinent as any one.²⁰⁸

Indeed, compared to the non-stop hustle and bustle of the Town Season, country life was significantly quieter in terms of social obligations. However, it was not wholly without them; instead, as Amanda Vickery has shown, the scope of rural entertainments expanded significantly in the early 1700s, and privileged eighteenth-century women's days in the countryside were often filled with non-stop visits from neighbours, various small tea parties and dinners, charity balls, rides and hunts, races and fairs, and other local events.²⁰⁹ The intellectuals and witlings of polite society often sneered at this enforced rural sociability. Elizabeth Montagu derided what she called 'the stupidity of a winter in the country', emblematised by continuous visits from neighbours and their 'very dull' country sociability. '[M]irth here is reckoned madness, gaiety is idleness, and wit a crying sin', she complained to the Duchess of Portland.²¹⁰ By these complaints, Montagu also wanted to emphasise her own urban *bon goût* and fashionable refinement. 'If the country would afford a few reasonable companions, or burthen us with none that are not so, it would really make life a different thing', she grumbled to the Duchess; 'but for me, who have not any sociable instinct, to lead me to creatures merely human, and, I think, scarce rational, it is really not a place of uninterrupted felicity'—

I do hourly thank my stars I am not married to a country squire, or a beau, for in the country all my pleasure is in my own fireside, and that only when it is not littered with queer creatures. One must receive visits and return them, such is the civil law of the nations [...] In London, if one meets with impertinence and offence, one seeks entertainment and pleasure only, but here one commits wilful murder on the hours, and with premeditated malice to oneself becomes *felo de se* for whole days.²¹¹

Women could also greet the rural season as a welcome respite from the urban humdrum and, therefore, view excessive country sociability as a disturbance rather than entertaining. It was considered to be the time for self-improvement, diligent work, and education—in short, when in the country, women were to acquire the skills and learning they could then show off in the sociable arenas of the town. '[T]his Winter of Retirement & leisure is the time in which You should sow & cultivate the seeds of every valuable Quality every amiable Accomplishment', Catherine Talbot reminded her young protégé Julia Berkeley.²¹² For, as Montagu sighed, 'L'embaras de Londres [...] really leaves one no leisure for any thing right reasonable friendly & comfortable'.²¹³ Regional towns were no better, as Montagu complained in Newcastle, as the 'desire of pleasure & love of dissipation rages here as much as in London. Diversions here are less elegant, & conversation less polite, but no one imagines retirement has any comforts'. Montagu dutifully attended all these 'visits, concerts plays & balls' in order not to appear haughty, even though she considered them 'unindear'd, joyless society' that scarcely could 'pay one for the loss of hours which might be spent in the improvement of virtue & knowledge & the quiet pleasures of contemplation'.²¹⁴ Similarly, Mary Delany sacrificed her Monday on the altar of social obligations and 'made visits in Dublin' with her friend Letitia Bushe, 'furiously drest out in all our airs'.²¹⁵

Indeed, women's engagements in town, especially in London, could be considerable. Fanny Burney, for example, recorded visiting eight friends during a single afternoon.²¹⁶ The constant demand to be either 'eternally Dressing & visiting, or appear impertinently ungrateful'²¹⁷ eventually caused Burney to vent her feelings to her sister, and to come up with a plan to reduce her engagements:

I begin to grow most heartily sick & fatigued of this continual round of visiting, & these eternal new Acquaintances. I am now *arranging matters* in my mind for a better plan,—& I mean, hence forward, never to go out *more* than three Days in the Week; [...] I really have at present no pleasure in any party, from the trouble & tiresomeness of being engaged to so many. [...] For my own part, if I wished to prescribe a *cure* for Dissipation, I should think none more effectual than to give it a free course. The many who have lived so from year to year amaze me more than ever, for now more than I [*sic*] ever I can judge what Dissipation has to offer. I would not lead a life of *daily engagements* even for another month.²¹⁸

Burney's intentions never came to fruition, however, as she continued to visit her acquaintances, attend balls, and go to the opera on a daily basis—and drawing no insignificant amount of pleasure from these activities, almost enough to question her sincerity in condemning urban dissipation.

In other words, the juxtaposition of town and country was entwined with the problematic of public and private. Women's attitudes towards town and countryside also reflected connotations of public/private in various ways. They often consciously made use of the moral implications that the diligent domesticity of the countryside had long carried against the leisured and luxurious town. Mary Delany—a London society darling if there ever was one—vaunted her rural inclinations to Jonathan Swift in a self-conscious letter, commenting Princess Anne's wedding: 'All the *beau monde* flock to London to see her Royal Highness disposed of; but I prefer my duty to my mother, and the conversation of a country girl, (my sister), to all the pomp and splendour of the Court. Is this virtue, or is it stupidity? If I can help it I will not go to town till after Christmas'.²¹⁹ Similarly, when Catherine Talbot fretted over the dullness of her journals she took comfort in the fact that the 'pleasantest & Happiest Life is not that which describes the best. Draw an Inference from this if You please that the quietest & most uniform Life *is* the happiest'.²²⁰ Indeed, the town made the 'Mind more dissipated, time more hurried, engagements multiplied' for Talbot, and only a retreat to the country, 'free from the Persecution of wretched Trifles, of Unmeaning Impertinents' provided the 'Wearied Mind' some release. 'I breath'd, I lived anew When I got into the Sweet the Quiet Country', sighed Talbot.²²¹ What is more, town and country received also gendered meanings in eighteenth-century conceptualisations, where the 'innocence and simple virtues of country people' were typically expressed through the 'simple, unaffected sentiment of women' according to Ludmilla Jordanova, whereas the refinement of city culture was perceived as a symbol of a masculine capacity for intellectual genius.²²² This gendered division of urban and rural space naturally contributed to the configuration of the public/private juxtaposition through the assimilation of the feminine to privacy and, correspondingly, the masculine to publicity.

However, women's representations of the town/public and country/private dichotomies follow no straightforward pattern; rather, their writings reflect a continual play between the different connotations of the two. As especially Elizabeth Montagu's letters show, they presented themselves as joyous *pastorellas* just as easily as spectators of the urban world, and picked and utilised the meanings that seemed most suitable to different ends. In their life writing, women both criticised and embraced the privacy and moral domesticity of the countryside, depending on the audience and agenda of a particular text. In fact, Montagu and her friends also recognised the unmodish connotations that the countryside carried, and openly ridiculed the boorish manners of country squires and the narrow parochialism of country ladies in their mutual letters. Thus, even if customs were more uniform in England than in its continental neighbours, there was nevertheless a clear distinction between urban fashionability and rural

uncouthness in the minds of these learned ladies. Mary Delany deliberately maintained a distance between herself and her country neighbours at Delville, noting that 'I may be thought too reserved in our village, but I choose rather to be censured for that, than expose myself to the interruption and tittle-tattle of a country neighbourhood'.²²³ Elizabeth Montagu similarly derided 'a strange kind of animal called a country beau and wit', who had sunk her 'into stupidity' by his conversation: 'Had you seen the pains this animal has been taking to imitate the cringe of a beau, and the smartness of a wit, till he was hideous to behold, and horrible to hear, you would have pitied him; he walks like a tortoise, and chatters like a magpye'.²²⁴ In another letter, she abused the gentry for their lack of intellect and conversation:

We are quite alone here; I am not sorry for it, for I do not like, as some good folks do, every creature that walks on two legs, with a face to look up to heaven or down on the earth, and yet understands neither; an animal that has missed of instinct, and not lit upon reason; one that thinks by prejudice, speaks by rote, and lives by custom; that dares do no good without an example, but dares do evil by precedent, whose conversation is composed of more remnants than a tailor's waistcoat, who snips off every man's superfluous observations to the patching of one sentence [...] I had rather have the dead palsey than such a companion. Any impertinent lively creature is better than these gentry.²²⁵

In fact, Montagu often complained how her yearly retirement to the countryside offered her no expectations of 'conversations' or 'woof of philosophy'.²²⁶ The picture she drew to the Duchess of Portland of a winter in the country was nothing short of desolate:

I am a very swallow, and cannot abide the country in winter. I love peace with pleasure; but I have such a tendency to dullness, that I am afraid of mere tranquillity.—I love to be a spectator of the rapid world [...]; the actions and passions of others keep me awake, without so far disturbing the constant mood of my calm thoughts, as to make me uneasy; but the lullaby of conversation that one's country visitors entertain one with, affects me with a very intolerable drowsiness [...] I assure you it is wonderful, to see people so little admirable so much admired. By the courtesy of Yorkshire, every one is wise and good-natured.²²⁷

Even if country sociability was intolerable to the refined taste of Elizabeth Montagu, the solitary domesticity of rural existence was hardly a better option. Even though Montagu despised her gentry neighbours, the dullness of a solely domestic Yorkshire life made her miserable, as well: 'I cannot boast of the numbers that adorn our fire-side; my sister and I are the principal figures', she complained to the duchess; 'besides, there is a round table, a square skreen, some books, and a work-basket, with a smelling-bottle when morality

grows musty, or a maxim smells too strong, as sometimes they will in ancient books'.²²⁸

In short, despite all her pretensions of enjoying 'rural pleasures', living in the country meant 'sleeping with one's eyes open' for Montagu.²²⁹ Even Catherine Talbot with all her moralist doctrines of self-improvement had an ambiguous attitude towards the countryside. On the one hand, she celebrated the peaceful, hard-working rural life—but on the other hand, all work and no play could prove exhausting, even to a woman with as strong a work ethic as Talbot. 'The days are never long enough. Not but I am generally weary & sleepy before I go to bed, but still there is some Bottom not wound up, some book unfinished, or some figure untraced or some Needlefull unworked that came into my days Scheme', she complained to Marchioness Grey, and revelled in thoughts of soon departing to London and being able to 'be as idle as the day is long'.²³⁰ Moreover, the solitary peace of the countryside also often appeared dull and depressing to her, and when low-spirited, she was not able to make full use of the abundant leisure. Therefore, town excursions could provide welcome refreshment: 'In short this rural Life will make me the idlest gadder in the World & the veriest lounge, so I shall go to the Races next Week to see if they will reform me', Talbot wrote to Marchioness Grey.²³¹

Close reading of women's autobiographical writings thus reveals that they used the contradictory nature of the public/private juxtaposition to their advantage in clever and flexible ways, adopting the language of rural virtue when appropriate, while capable of transforming themselves to urban belles if need be. This chameleon-like flexibility of identity was essentially a hypocritical practice; it allowed women to hide their true feelings and put on pleasing masks to advance their goals. Ultimately, this was, of course, what politeness was all about—adapting oneself to different audiences and settings. In the following final section of this chapter, I will show that women's attitudes towards the semi-public sociability of the salon reveal a similar play with meanings, resulting in the blurring of the public/private dichotomy.

Sociability and the Blurring of the Public/Private Dichotomy

In 1783, Fanny Burney noted down in her journal that 'Mr. Pepys read to us Miss More's *Bas bleu* again'.²³² The poem, written in 1783 and published three years later, celebrated Elizabeth Vesey, Frances Boscawen, and Elizabeth Montagu as the 'Enlighten'd spirits' who had 'prevented the triumph of bad taste in society by instituting elegant conversation'.²³³ Polishing men's manners and their conversation was, as we recall, one of the most important tasks set for women in the discourse of politeness. The bluestocking circles seemed to be formed for this purpose. 'We enjoy the delicacies of Life: refin'd Friendships, agreeable Conversation & rational amusement', wrote Elizabeth Montagu of her coterie, where conversation was aimed at 'pleasing & instructing'.²³⁴

Indeed, the bluestockings were generally hailed for the rationality of their discourse as opposed to 'women's talk' in general which was perceived to be

frivolous and empty. Indeed, many women that came to be known as blue-stockings professed a profound fatigue over conventional feminine sociability with its tea table gossip and continual round of visiting. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, criticised the general course of London sociability, complaining that she was 'running from house to house, getting the cold scraps of visiting conversation, served up with the indelicacy and indifference of an ordinary, at which no power of the mind does the honours; the particular taste of each guest is not consulted, the solid part of the entertainment is too gross for a delicate taste, and the lighter fare insipid'.²³⁵ She deplored the amount of 'nothingisms' that made up much of so-called 'polite conversations'; for 'repetition is a sign of emptiness, yet there are living echoes, where dwells sound without sense or intention'.²³⁶ Therefore, she was resolved to be guided 'by the light of reason to the company I like' rather than by custom and 'the blaze of wax-lights to the house I do not', and to dedicate her time to rational conversation rather than conventional female frivolity.²³⁷

This rational conversation was to be had in mixed company, as it was generally agreed that men's conversation furnished women with rationality, while women provided men with complaisance and agreeableness. The places where this mutually beneficial mixed sociability was to happen were, by definition, semi-public; the salon and the ball 'bridged the divide between the individual and the public domain' and, thus, obscured the distinction of public and private.²³⁸ Conduct writers made a clear distinction between public and private amusements. James Fordyce, for example, warned women of public balls, but heartily approved of private ones—that is, ones 'consisting chiefly of friends and relations'.²³⁹ In other words, private sociability was a space where public and private merged—not open to the indiscriminate presence of everyone, but still not private in the strict, modern sense of the word. In this sense, private sociability shares many of the aspects of letter-writing in terms of public exposure—both were ambiguously hovering somewhere between public and private. Cynthia Lowenthal argues that the letter, 'because it occupies an indeterminate status between public and private', allows a woman 'to cultivate and capitalize on her literary skills without transgressing the boundaries of her class and gender'.²⁴⁰ According to Deborah Heller, the liminal space that the personal letter occupies was crucial for women's subversive behaviour; women were able to operate more freely 'in the middle spaces between the public and private domains, where women's proper role and terms of participation had not yet been rigidly defined'.²⁴¹ I want to suggest that, in a similar way, the ambiguous position of private sociability enabled women to distance themselves from normative gendered conduct expectations.

Scholars have criticised any clear gendered dichotomies that existed between the public and the private sphere, as well as the very terms 'public' and 'private'. However, the fact remains that the eighteenth-century social world was not gender-neutral. Even though there were no distinct 'separate spheres', some putatively 'public' arenas, such as clubs and coffee-houses, were nevertheless more exclusive and generally not accessible to elite women in any large numbers.²⁴² Moreover, women's actions even in mixed-gender public space were policed much

more vigorously than men's. Therefore, the grey area of the private assembly or the literary salon offered women a sphere of freedom where the elision of the public and the private blurred gendered conduct expectations by mixing the participants' public and private roles.

The social life of Elizabeth Montagu illustrates the complex workings of private sociability and the possibilities it offered for women. Montagu was a person who thrived in mixed company and had plenty of close male friends. She was particularly pleased with the sort of free sociability amongst literary women and 'men of reading' that was to be had in such popular watering-places as Tunbridge Wells.²⁴³ '[T]here is more easy and unrestrained conversation in a ball-room at a water-drinking place than in visits in town', she wrote to Elizabeth Carter in 1759. For Montagu, London sociability had

a certain visiting tone, and few dare strike above it: the most fashionable fool in the company sets the tune to the key of their own voice [...]; and it is no matter what is the strength and power of your organs, you are to strain till you scream, or mutter till you are hoarse, as pleasures the leader of the chorus.²⁴⁴

In watering-place society, Montagu was more in her element. She coquetted playfully with men of learning and consequence, and her correspondence with them was often tinted by half-earnest amorous tones—at least on their side.²⁴⁵

Montagu also expected to receive rationality from her male friends in exchange for humorous flash talk, thus positioning herself in the role reserved for women in polite conversation. She looked up to her cousin, William Freind, for advice on proper reading, was guided by Gilbert West in religion and literature, and lamented the departure of her husband, for, as she wrote, '[m]y sister and I shall be a little at a loss for conversation, not that I shall on my part want words, but, like school-boys when they are about their exercises, I may want to borrow a little sense now and then'.²⁴⁶ She rejoiced at the possibility of 'tast[ing] the pleasure' of the poet Edward Young's learned conversation 'in its full force', and benefited from the scholarly guidance of Lord Lyttelton, who performed the function of something of a mentor for Montagu, discussing her literary ideas and coaxing her to study further.²⁴⁷ How much of this humble self-positioning under the guiding light of masculine understanding was conscious self-fashioning for ulterior motives is difficult to say.

Montagu also represented herself in her letters performing the feminine role of soothing men's passions. She wrote to Elizabeth Vesey how she loved to 'spread friendships and to cover heats'.²⁴⁸ Indeed, Emma Major has noted that Montagu was widely hailed for her 'humanising' effect on men's manners, as well as her ability to reconcile disputes between men.²⁴⁹ She also commended Vesey for her feminine pacifying effect:

I delight already in ye prospect of ye blue box (alias Drawing Room) in which our Sylph assembles all the heterogeneous natures in the World, &

indeed in many respects resembles Paradise, for there ye Lion sits down by the Lamb, ye Tyger dandles the Kid; the shy scotchman & ye [illegible] Hibernian, the Hero & Maccaroni, the Vestal [...], the Mungo of Ministry and the inflexible partizans of incorruptible Patriots, Beaux esprits & fine Gentlemen all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph, & are soothed into good humour: were she to withdraw her influence a moment, discord wd reassume her reign, & we shd hear ye clashing of swords, the angry flirting of fans, & St Andrew & St Patrick gabbling in dire confusion in the different dialects of ye Erse language. Methinks I see our Sylph moving in her circle, & by some unknown attraction keeping the whole system in due order.²⁵⁰

The role of the humaniser and soother of men was traditionally reserved for women in mixed society. Not solely a polite task, it was also tinted with religious and political rhetoric; the Protestant idea of English patriotism was directed at the progress of society towards a ‘thousand years of peace’ and civility, and elite women played an important part in this process. Through their pacifying influence, women could forward political consensus and thus participate in politics, albeit indirectly—as, for example, Elizabeth Montagu did by allegedly sweetening the uneasy relations between the Earl of Shelburne and George III.²⁵¹

Thus, in many ways, Elizabeth Montagu performed the traditional feminine role in polite sociability, both by her flirtatious coquetry, soothing influence, and her willingness to be guided by men’s rational conversation. Then again, her intellectual aspirations also exceeded the limits of traditional polite femininity; she corresponded with deans and bishops, conversed with such celebrities as Lord Kames and David Hume, and published a literary critique of Shakespeare. What enabled her to play this double game was the ambiguous position of private sociability as a middle space between public and private. Montagu’s unfeminine intellectual exchange of thoughts took place specifically in the arenas of mixed private sociability, whereas the female chatter over a tea table or more indiscriminating public forms of sociable activities filled her with impatience and boredom. Moreover, Montagu also employed the private letter as a similar medium of crossing traditional gender boundaries, and her long letters often bear close affinity to philosophical studies. Thus, her skilful utilisation of the liminal middle space between public and private was behind her social and intellectual fame as a brilliant conversationalist, scholar, and critic.

Another bluestocking, Catherine Talbot, shared Montagu’s distaste for the humdrum of regular London sociability. For Talbot, the ‘Société, Visites, Messages, un Tourbillon perpetuel’ were frivolous compared to rational company, and she fantasised about hours of conversation with her dearest friends without ‘any fluttering engagement to hurry them away or any impertinent interruption to break in on the conversation’.²⁵² She wanted to ‘Athenianise, Philosophise, Criticise, Debate, Discourse & Laugh’ with her female friends rather than repeat empty nothingisms.²⁵³ Indeed, all-female rational sociability appealed

greatly to Talbot, whereas—contrary to Montagu—mixed sociability caused her grave anxieties. When seated for some hours with a visiting Samuel Richardson, she was ‘really ashamed of having tied down (as it happen’d by his great Civility) so remarkable a Genius to sit Tete a Tete with poor Me for three hours’.²⁵⁴ Talbot was plagued by fears of performing badly, probably partly brought on by her subordinate position in the authoritarian Bishop Secker’s household. Rhoda Zuk argues that Talbot was demoralised by ‘relegation to a round of unvalued employments’ at Secker’s, and that her narrow scope of life was the cause of her disproportionate horror of censure.²⁵⁵ ‘I can argue You see most triumphantly when no body contradicts me’, she wrote in her journal, ‘[b]ut in an actual debate I am so afraid of betraying a good cause by weak arguments, or of disgracing it by talkativeness or an appearance of Obstinacy that I say very little, & that little very ill’.²⁵⁶

The main root for Talbot’s anxiety over mixed sociability, however, was the blurring of the distinction between public and private. Talbot clearly felt confused about the qualities that her company expected of her; she was constantly measuring herself against the conventional domestic model of a polite woman, quiet and meek, and found it difficult to reconcile with the more flashy sociability of a literary salon. In other words, for Talbot, differentiating between a woman’s private and public roles proved problematic, thereby making her settling into her (semi-)public role laborious and awkward. This diffidence was reflected in her un-bluestocking-like reluctance to gain reputation for her body of work; she was notoriously averse to circulating her writings even amongst her friends, and her works were published only posthumously by Elizabeth Carter.

Talbot’s fear of appearing unfeminine caused her to generally shirk away from conversation: ‘I am a poor disputant, & too ready to recede from a right cause for fear of hurting it by Obstinacy that might be misunderstood’, she complained, thus indicating that, even in situations of polite conversation where female speech was welcomed or even sought after, Talbot clung to the domestic ideals of silence and submissiveness.²⁵⁷ In fact, Talbot criticised another young lady severely for the readiness of speech and opinion she herself lacked:

We dined & drank Coffee quite alone, but afterwards had two sets of Company at different hours. In one a Young Lady of 19 Just come out into the World & a little too much her own Mistress. Very Pretty, Tall Slender finely shaped, fine eyes, genteel, & ready to fly out of her fine Skin. So ready to give her Opinion unasked about every thing—such a Critick—talked of Sir Charles with so little feeling—Poor Girl—that She knew how heartily I pity her!²⁵⁸

Rather than endeavouring to shine in mixed conversation, Talbot spent her time and energy contemplating on the ways ‘to keep just the right medium & make a tolerable part of any Company one respects without saying a word too much’.²⁵⁹ And yet, Talbot, as many bluestockings, was keenly aware of her civilising task. ‘I must give a Portion of my Time to [...] such Things as may make me amiable,

and engaging to all whom I converse with, that by any Means I may win them over to Religion and Goodness', she wrote in *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*; 'For if I am always shut up in my Closet, [...] I shall be looked upon as morose and hypocritical, and be disregarded as useless in the World'.²⁶⁰ However, since the ideal polite role to be assumed in the private sociability of a mixed company was not strictly a public one, but also far from private, it is understandable that Talbot found it difficult to know what was expected of her and, accordingly, had problems adapting to a suitable polite role.

In short, the fluidity between public and private could bring women freedom from conventional roles of gendered conduct. Especially the liminal space of private sociability permitted subversive conduct on the part of elite women, who were carefully policed in public space and domesticated in private space. However, the play between public and private, as indeed polite performances in general, required skill—skill that Elizabeth Montagu proved to have in abundance, and Catherine Talbot struggled to master. On a larger scale, the blurring of the distinction between public and private was a part of the project of undermining the evaluative meanings of the interior and the exterior and thus challenging the idea of authentic or natural female identity. Making use of the opportunities for freedom provided by semi-public space is thus linked to the practices of opaque dissimulativeness and hypocrisy, discussed in the previous chapter, as well as to assuming multiple identities, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Indeed, the ability to perform to the company's satisfaction required the acknowledgement of women's multiple social roles to begin with, and a conscious departure from conduct-book idealisations of domestic femininity. Thus, being able to participate appropriately in private sociability, or even to fulfil the first and foremost task appointed to women in the culture of politeness—that of civilising men—was, paradoxically, to be achieved only by renouncing the idea of natural femininity, the key thesis of didactic conduct literature.

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Notes

- 1 Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound', 217–19, 232.
- 2 On Foucault and autonomous subject, see e.g. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 4, passim.

- 3 Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 4.
- 4 Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 1–8, 22–30.
- 5 See e.g. Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, 175–80; Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 1–7, passim.; Moncrief and McPherson, ‘Shall I Teach You to Know?’, 1–6.
- 6 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185.
- 7 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 224.
- 8 Parts of this section have been previously published as an article in *Cultural History* (Ylivuori, Soile, ‘A Polite Foucault? Eighteenth-Century Politeness as a Disciplinary System and Practice of the Self’ in *Cultural History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014), 170–89.) and are reprinted here with permission of Edinburgh University Press. (See Ylivuori, ‘Polite Foucault?’)
- 9 *Spectator*, No. 4, 5 March 1711, I, 20–7.
- 10 See e.g. Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*; Borsay, ‘Health and Leisure Resorts 1700–1840’; Clark and Houston, ‘Culture and Leisure 1700–1840’; Corbin, *Lure of the Sea*, 263–9. On urban politeness and city life, see e.g. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 3–42; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 36–9; Klein, ‘Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere’, 109; Kekäläinen, *James Boswell’s Urban Experience*, 16–19.
- 11 See e.g. Klein, ‘Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere’, 101–2; Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction’, 98–101, 105; Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 7–10; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 9–12, passim.; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, xxvi.
- 12 Kaartinen, ‘Public and Private’, 94–5.
- 13 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 39–47; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 30–2, passim.; Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 202–12; Lewis, ‘When a House Is Not a Home’.
- 14 Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 33. See also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 42.
- 15 Glover, *Elite Women*, 31–2.
- 16 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 49. See also e.g. Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, 212; Butler, ‘Performative Acts’, 403; Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity?”’, 2–3; Lovell, ‘Subjective Powers?’, 35–37. On the performance of everyday social roles, see also Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 13–27.
- 17 D’Ancourt, *Lady’s Preceptor*, 66–7.
- 18 Devereaux, ‘Oppressive Texts’, 337.
- 19 Kaplan, ‘Is the Gaze Male?’, 311; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 104.
- 20 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 195; Poovey, *Proper Lady*, 24–6.
- 21 Rosenthal, ‘Unfolding Gender’, 120; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 1–2, 8–9, 204.
- 22 *Guardian*, No. 109. 16 July 1713, II, 140–5.
- 23 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 38. See also Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 105; Korhonen, *Silmän ilot*, 109.
- 24 Fordyce, *Sermons*, II, 126.
- 25 Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 5.
- 26 See e.g. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 69. See also Brophy, *Women’s Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel*. A good marriage was a matter of great importance to women’s families, as well, for dynastic, economic, and political reasons (Glover, *Elite Women*, 89; Ilmakunnas, *Kuluttaminen ja ylhäisaatelin elämäntapa*, 77–9).
- 27 Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 56.
- 28 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201. For a more detailed analysis of the polite society as a panopticon, see Ylivuori, ‘Polite Foucault?’, 172–8.
- 29 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 199–207.
- 30 Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 55–6.
- 31 *Polite Academy*, xi–xii.
- 32 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 197–8.
- 33 *Spectator*, No. 306, 20 February 1712, IV, 321–7.
- 34 King, ‘Gender and Modernity’, 25.

- 35 Korhonen, 'To See and To Be Seen', 337; *Spectator*, No. 377, 13 May 1712, V, 343–7.
- 36 Burney, *Camilla*, 470.
- 37 *Spectator*, No. 53, 1 May 1711, I, 294–301.
- 38 See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 53, 1 May 1711, I, 294–301.
- 39 Powell, 'See No Evil', 263.
- 40 Powell, 'See No Evil', 271.
- 41 King, 'Gender and Modernity', 34–8.
- 42 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 105, 102.
- 43 See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 53, 1 May 1711, I, 294–301.
- 44 *Spectator*, No. 20, 23 March 1711, I, 109–14. See also e.g. *Pamela*, where Pamela 'cannot bear to be look'd upon by these Men-servants' (Richardson, *Pamela*, 10).
- 45 King, 'Gender and Modernity', 38.
- 46 More, *Strictures*, I, 105.
- 47 Parts of this section have been previously published as an article in *Cultural History* and are reprinted here with permission of Edinburgh University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Polite Foucault?')
- 48 More, *Essays*, 125–6.
- 49 Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 115.
- 50 Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 120 (§64); 110 (§42).
- 51 Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 114–15.
- 52 Skedd, 'Women Teachers', 101–2.
- 53 Woodley, 'Oh Miserable and Most Ruinous Measure', 21–2; Cohen, 'To Think, To Compare', 224, *passim*.; Cohen, 'Familiar Conversation', 99–101; Parland-von Essen, *Behagets betydelse*, 41–50.
- 54 Simonton, 'Women and Education', 36–7; Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 98–101.
- 55 Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 98–101; Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 111–14.
- 56 Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 99; Fénelon, *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, 10–11.
- 57 Jouslin, 'Conservative or Reformer?', 58.
- 58 More, *Essays*, 165. For female piety, see Chapter 3.
- 59 Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 121.
- 60 Fénelon, *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, 6; Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 117–18. See also Fitzgerald, 'To Educate or Instruct?', 182–4.
- 61 Astell, *Serious Proposition*, II, 81; Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 129.
- 62 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 108, 130–1, 201–2.
- 63 Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 99.
- 64 Jouslin, 'Conservative or Reformer?', 54–5.
- 65 *Spectator*, No. 66, 16 May 1711, I, 374–9.
- 66 Jouslin, 'Conservative or Reformer?', 59–60.
- 67 Skedd, 'Women Teachers', 121. On girls' curricula, see also e.g. More, *Strictures*, I, 98–101; Chapone, *Letters*, 233–4.
- 68 Schillace, "'Reproducing" Custom', 113.
- 69 More, *Essays*, 38–9. See also e.g. Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle*, III, 145–51.
- 70 Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 71; Tague, *Women of Quality*, 163.
- 71 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 48–9.
- 72 *Polite Academy*, vi.
- 73 *Polite Academy*, vi.
- 74 *Polite Academy*, 49.
- 75 *Polite Academy*, 89; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 28–29.
- 76 *Spectator*, No. 67, 17 May 1711, I, 379–84. Dance masters often introduced other skills of feminine refinement to young ladies; for example, one satisfied father

- reported that his daughters' dance instructor gave them 'a particular Behaviour at a Tea-Table, and in presenting their Snuff-Box, to twirl, flip, or flirt a Fan, and how to place Patches to the best advantage, either for Fat or Lean, Long or Oval Faces'. Strikingly, the father thought these skills, which some strict moralists might have called artificial manners of luring men, perfectly compatible with innocence and virtue, because 'proper Application this way can give Innocence new Charms, and make Virtue legible in the Countenance' (*Spectator*, No. 376, 12 May 1712, V, 338–42).
- 77 See e.g. *Spectator*, No. 466, 25 August 1712, VI, 389–95.
- 78 *Polite Academy*, 92.
- 79 See e.g. Glover, *Elite Women*, 32. Because the spectacle-like nature of dancing, conduct writers urgently warned women against showing themselves on the dance floor before they had achieved the necessary skills, to avoid 'provok[ing] Laughter' (*Lady's Delight*, 34).
- 80 *Spectator*, No. 66, 16 May 1711, I, 374–9.
- 81 Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, 183–4.
- 82 Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 244.
- 83 *CMD*, I, 97.
- 84 Parts of this section have been previously published as an article in *The Historical Journal* (Ylivuori, Soile, 'Rethinking Female Chastity and Gentlewomen's Honour in Eighteenth-Century England' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2016), 71–97.) and are reprinted here with permission of Cambridge University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Rethinking Female Chastity'.)
- 85 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 110.
- 86 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 39. See also e.g. Burney, *Camilla*, 471–2. On women's public amusements, see e.g. Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 225–60; Greig, *Beau Monde*, Ch. 2.
- 87 Burney's *Camilla* aptly illustrates these concerns—quite possibly prompted by Burney's own continual unease with public sociability. *Camilla's* drama arises from the juxtaposition of Camilla's private, unspoiled domesticity and the dangers that public amusements pose to the idealised 'natural' female character by tempting her to coquetry, luxury, and immorality.
- 88 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 213.
- 89 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 25–6.
- 90 Kelly, 'General Introduction', xlvi. In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Sir Charles illustrates this fear by constantly worrying about the corrupting effect of 'public life' on women; he sees fashionable life as 'fraught with dangers for the morals of young women' (Major, *Madam Britannia*, 109; Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*). See also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 109; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 34; Shirley, *Rich Closet of Rarities*, 182; Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 50, 148.
- 91 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 56.
- 92 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 39–40. See also D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 57.
- 93 See e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, I, 200; *Lady's Companion*, I, 14. On public outings, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 270–1.
- 94 EM to Sarah Scott, 6 November 1758, HL MO 5775.
- 95 For example, on the harmfulness of public balls, see Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 109; pleasure gardens, see CT to Elizabeth Carter, 1 June 1742, *LCT*, I, 16; spa towns, see Burney, *Camilla*, 471.
- 96 Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle*, II, 220.
- 97 Kaartinen, 'Public and Private', 97.
- 98 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 228.
- 99 Korhonen, 'Witch in the Alehouse', 191–2.
- 100 EM to Sarah Robinson, [n.d., 1741?], *LEM*, II, 69.
- 101 Samuel Richardson to Sarah Westcomb, [n.d., 1750?], Barbauld (ed.), *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, III, 315, quoted in Major, *Madam Britannia*, 112.

- 102 Samuel Richardson to Lady Brandshaig, 28 July 1752, Barbauld (ed.), *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, VI, 210–11, quoted in Major, *Madam Britannia*, 113.
- 103 EM to Anne Donnellan, 30 December 1750, *LEM*, III, 138; EM to William Freind, [n.d., 1742], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 98–101.
- 104 EM to Anne Donnellan, 28 December 1747, *LEM*, III, 72.
- 105 EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, Wednesday, 1760, *LEM*, IV, 271.
- 106 MD, ‘Autobiography’, Letter XI, *CMD*, I, 92.
- 107 E.g. MD to Anne Granville, ‘Melancholy Monday’ May 1736, *CMD*, I, 558; MD to Anne Dewes, 26 April 1744, *CMD*, II, 299.
- 108 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [November–December 1782], *JFB*, V, 177.
- 109 FB to Susanna Burney, 30 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 90.
- 110 Samuel Richardson to MD, 29 June 1754, Barbauld (ed.), *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, IV, 88.
- 111 MD to Samuel Richardson, 20 July 1754, Barbauld (ed.), *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, IV, 91.
- 112 On Richardson’s relationships with women, see e.g. Major, *Madam Britannia*, 91–3, 100–7; Clarke, *Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters*, 91–2.
- 113 MD to Anne Granville, 16 September 1729, *CMD*, I, 214–15.
- 114 MD to Anne Granville, 9 December 1731, *CMD*, I, 328; MD to Anne Granville, 4 December 1731, *CMD*, I, 324; MD to Anne Granville, 4 March [1728–9?], *CMD*, I, 191.
- 115 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [2 November 1782], *JFB*, V, 134.
- 116 FB to Charles Burney, 3 November [1782], *JFB*, V, 146. By ‘Omiah’ Burney means Omai, or Mai (c.1751–1780), a young Pacific Islander who came to Europe with Captain Cooke and visited London in 1774–6, where he immediately became a one-man rarity show and a society favourite.
- 117 EM to Edward Montagu, [1753], *QBS*, II, 38.
- 118 FB to Susanna Burney, [25] October – 3 November [1779], *JFB*, III, 405.
- 119 MD to Anne Granville, 4 January [1732–3], *CMD*, I, 390–1.
- 120 MD to Anne Granville, 16 November 1731, *CMD*, I, 313.
- 121 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 240–8; Greig, *Beau Monde*, 66–80.
- 122 *JFB*, IV, 156, note 73.
- 123 MD to Anne Granville, 11 November 1727, *CMD*, I, 144–5.
- 124 MD, ‘Autobiography’, Letter X, *CMD*, I, 84.
- 125 *Spectator*, No. 20, 23 March 1711, I, 109–14.
- 126 *JCT*, 18 December 1751, BL, Add. MS 46690, f. 41.
- 127 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 16 December [1748], BLRA, Wrest MS 3142.
- 128 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 15–17.
- 129 Burney, *Evelina*, 107.
- 130 Korhonen, ‘To See and To Be Seen’, 336–7.
- 131 Korhonen, ‘To See and To Be Seen’, 359; *Ladies Calling*, 3–4.
- 132 *Spectator*, No. 268, 7 January 1712, IV, 94–100.
- 133 On beauty and sexual tension, see e.g. Korhonen, *Silmän ilot*, 117–150.
- 134 Korhonen, ‘To See and To Be Seen’, 342. See also Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 103; Jones (ed.), *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 14–17; Korhonen, *Silmän ilot*, 39–42.
- 135 Korhonen, ‘To See and To Be Seen’, 349.
- 136 *Lady’s Magazine*, April 1772, quoted in Greig, *Beau Monde*, 172. See also Korhonen, ‘To See and To Be Seen’, 352; Snook, *Women, Beauty and Power*, 6.
- 137 See e.g. Bennett, *Letters*, I, 241–4.
- 138 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 241–2.
- 139 *The Christian-Lady’s Pocket Book* (1791) argued that ‘innocence’ acted as the ‘best white paint’, ‘benevolence’ as ‘fine eye-water’, and ‘modesty’ as the ‘best rouge’

158 *Playing with Public and Private*

- (*Christian-Lady's Pocket Book*, 142). On cosmetics and morality, see Greig, *Beau Monde*, 173–4.
- 140 Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 39.
- 141 FB to Susanna Burney, 5–20 July [1779], *JFB*, III, 338. Hester Lynch Thrale was of an opinion that the girl ‘died of a Disorder common enough to young Women the Desire of Beauty; She had I fancy taken Quack Med’cines to prevent growing fat, or perhaps to repress Appetite’ (Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana*, I, 393).
- 142 Burney, *Camilla*, 103–4.
- 143 *Spectator*, No. 33, 7 April 1711, I, 180–6. See also e.g. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 33. On beauty and morality, see Porter, *Bodies Politic*, 70–3.
- 144 Richardson, *Pamela*, I, 15. See also e.g. *Polite Lady*, 166.
- 145 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 98.
- 146 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 169. Beauty with its specific bodily practices was a part of the correct feminine appearance that was important for becoming a part of the elite. Thus, beauty was a significant—though not only—feature of the social elite; women of polite society were routinely characterised as ‘beautiful’, and beauty was connected to women’s social, financial, mental, and educational features as well as to their physical attributes. (See also Glover, *Elite Women*, 42.)
- 147 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 181–9. See also Glover, *Elite Women*, 42.
- 148 *Spectator*, No. 33, 7 April 1711, I, 180–6.
- 149 Burney, *Camilla*, 121.
- 150 See e.g. Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 145–6.
- 151 See e.g. *Lady's Delight*, 14.
- 152 MD to Anne Dewes, [11 July?] 1747, *CMD*, II, 470.
- 153 EM to William Freind, [n.d., 174-?], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 88–9.
- 154 EM to Sarah Scott, 22 [June?] 1760, HL MO 5779, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 155 EM to Frances Boscawen, 16 October 1749, *LEM*, III, 116. On beauty and moral depravity, see also EM to Sarah Scott, [May? 1756], *LEM*, IV, 19–20.
- 156 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 15 January 1741–2, *LEM*, II, 109–10.
- 157 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, [1741?], *LEM*, I, 275.
- 158 EM to [unknown], 30 September [1751], *QBS*, I, 293. See also EM to Elizabeth Carter, 7 June 1759, HL MO 3027.
- 159 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 165; *Spectator*, No. 265, 3 January 1712, IV, 77–81.
- 160 Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 33.
- 161 *Spectator*, No. 328, 17 March 1712, V, 39–44; *Polite Lady*, 4–6, 19–20, 130; Burton, *Lectures*, I, 123–38; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 28–9. On the importance of learning French, Italian and possibly also other modern languages, see e.g. On the importance of learning modern languages, see e.g. Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 15; D’Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 58; *Polite Lady*, 27; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 64–5; Cohen, ‘French Conversation or “Glittering Gibberish”’, 99–100.
- 162 Chapone, *Letters*, 172.
- 163 Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 183–5.
- 164 See e.g. Borsay, ‘Health and Leisure Resorts’, 793.
- 165 Sweet, ‘Topographies of Politeness’, 366.
- 166 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 113; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 65.
- 167 More, *Strictures*, II, 47.
- 168 Borsay, ‘Health and Leisure Resorts’, 793–4; Greig, *Beau Monde*, 66–80; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 289–305.
- 169 Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 183–5.
- 170 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 29. See also Glover, *Elite Women*, 31; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 21–2.

- 171 Austen, *Sanditon*, 72.
- 172 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 64–5.
- 173 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 158–9.
- 174 Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 184–5. This ambivalence is highly prevalent in, for example, Jane Austen’s novels.
- 175 Glover, *Elite Women*, 31. See also Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 266.
- 176 Vickery, ‘Theory & Practice’, 99.
- 177 Chapone, *Letters*, 144. See also e.g. *Ladies Calling*, 162–3.
- 178 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 113.
- 179 Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 186.
- 180 Moore, ‘Queer Gardens’, 49.
- 181 MD to Anne Dewes, 20 October 1750, *CMD*, II, 604; 10 March 1743–4, *CMD*, II, 280.
- 182 MD to Anne Dewes, 3 October 1745, *CMD*, II, 391–2.
- 183 MD to Anne Dewes, *CMD*, II, 529–30; Lady Llanover’s footnote, *CMD*, II, 261.
- 184 Laird and Weisberg-Roberts (eds), *Mrs Delany and her Circle*, esp. Ch. 4 and 5; Moore, ‘Queer Gardens’, 54–68; Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 184.
- 185 Moore, ‘Queer Gardens’, 49; Vickery, ‘Theory & Practice’, 94.
- 186 Birmingham, *Learning to Draw*, 192. See e.g. Austen, *Emma*, 287–8.
- 187 *Spectator*, No. 328, 17 March 1712, V, 39–44. See also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 118.
- 188 MD to Anne Dewes, 22 October 1745, *CMD*, II, 395.
- 189 ‘Character of Maria by Dr. Delany, sent as a Christmas present to Mrs. Dewes’, 25 December 1755, *CMD*, III, 392.
- 190 Chapone, *Letters*, 172–3. See also e.g. *Polite Lady*, 21. On accomplishments as alleviators of boredom, see Vickery, ‘Theory & Practice’, 101–2.
- 191 Lewis, ‘When a House Is Not a Home’; Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 202–12; Greig, *Beau Monde*, 39–47; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 30–2, *passim*.
- 192 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Ch. 2. Armstrong coins the term ‘domestic woman’ as a partner to ‘economic man’; her claim is that these gender ideals paved the way to nineteenth-century bourgeois dichotomist gender roles.
- 193 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 196–202, 225–7; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 305–8. On domesticity, see also Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture*, Chs 1–4. On the growing importance attached to motherhood, see Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 12–13, 33–4.
- 194 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 83–9.
- 195 More, *Strictures*, I, 149–50.
- 196 Chapone, *Letters*, 132–3.
- 197 More, *Essays*, 134–5.
- 198 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 288–293. In the countryside, however, women’s sociable outings were apparently much less frequent than in the city; according to Vickery, married women rarely ventured out unless they had a daughter to marry off (Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 272).
- 199 See e.g. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44–5.
- 200 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 82.
- 201 HL MO 6400, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 202 See e.g. Klein, ‘Politeness for Plebes’, 365; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 54; Sweet, ‘Topographies of Politeness’, 356–8.
- 203 FB to Susanna Burney, 30 May – 1 June [1779], *JFB*, III, 287.
- 204 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 21 August 1747, BLRA, Wrest MS 3126.
- 205 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 54. See also *Tatler*, No. 230, 28 September 1710, IV, 304.
- 206 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 15–16. See also Glover, *Elite Women*, 33–6; Colley, *Britons*, 168.

- 160 *Playing with Public and Private*
- 207 MD to Anne Dewes, 21 June 1745, *CMD*, II, 365.
- 208 EM to William Freind, 29 December [n.d., 1741?], *LEM*, II, 40.
- 209 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 276–7.
- 210 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 10 October 1739, *LEM*, I, 66–7; 5 July 1741, *LEM*, I, 234.
- 211 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 2 October 1742, *LEM*, II, 191–2.
- 212 *JCT*, 14 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 24–5. See also *JCT*, 31 October 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 17–19.
- 213 EM to William and Grace Freind, [n.d., 174-?], BL Add. MS 70493, f. 102.
- 214 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 24 [October 1760?], HL MO 3039, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 215 MD to Anne Dewes, 20 June 1747, *CMD*, II, 467.
- 216 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [11 February 1782], *JFB*, V, 10.
- 217 FB to Samuel Crisp, [18 November 1780], *JFB*, IV, 248.
- 218 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [13 December 1782], *JFB*, V, 219–20.
- 219 MD to Jonathan Swift, 24 October 1733, *CMD*, I, 422. The Princess Royal, Anne (1709–1759), was getting married.
- 220 *JCT*, 21 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 26–7.
- 221 *JCT*, [June 1752], BL Add. MS 46690, f. 64.
- 222 Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 22.
- 223 MD to Anne Dewes, 13 October 1750, *CMD*, II, 602.
- 224 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 5 December 1742, *LEM*, II, 235–6.
- 225 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 31 January [1742?], *LEM*, II, 143–5.
- 226 EM to Elizabeth Vesey, 15 June 1765, HL, HL MO [no number], Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 227 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 30 October [1742?], *LEM*, II, 213–14.
- 228 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 28 November 1742, *LEM*, II, 227.
- 229 EM to Gilbert West, 26 May 1752, *LEM*, III, 184; cf. EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, [n.d., 1733–4?], *QBS*, I, 11.
- 230 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 19 December 1744, BLRA, Wrest MS 3326.
- 231 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 14 August 1747, BLRA, Wrest MS 3125.
- 232 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [late November 1783], *JFB*, V, 412.
- 233 *JFB*, V, 412, footnote 20.
- 234 EM to Anne Donnellan, [n.d., 1741], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 52–6.
- 235 EM to Gilbert West, Thursday [n.d., 175-?], *LEM*, III, 267.
- 236 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 19 September 1742, *LEM*, II, 189.
- 237 EM to Anne Donnellan, 2 December [n.d., 1741?], *LEM*, II, 34–5.
- 238 Clark, *Sociability and Urbanity*, 19. See also Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 306–8.
- 239 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 109.
- 240 Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 3. See also Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 3–6.
- 241 Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound', 225. See also Eger, 'Noblest Commerce of Mankind', 289–90; Eger, Grant, Ó Gallchoir and Warburton, 'Women, Writing and Representation'.
- 242 Cowan, 'What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere?', 146. See also e.g. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation'.

- 243 Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 179.
- 244 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 24 [August? 1759], *LEM*, IV, 200–1.
- 245 See e.g. William Pulteney, Earl of Bath to EM, December 1760, *LEM*, IV, 334–5; EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, 31 October 1760, *LEM*, IV, 321; EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, 1 August 1764, BL RP 2377/3; EM to Messenger Monsey, 4 August 1757, *LEM*, IV, 137–8; EM to William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, Saturday morn [December 1760], *LEM*, IV, 336–7.
- 246 EM to William Freind, [n.d., 174-?], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 84–7; EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 30 October [1742?], *LEM*, II, 217; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 179–81.
- 247 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 3 September 1745, *LEM*, III, 12–13; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 186.
- 248 EM to Elizabeth Vesey, [n.d., 1773], Blunt (ed.), *Mrs. Montagu, 'Queen of the Blues'*, I, 278. Elizabeth Vesey (c.1715–1791), literary hostess, was one of the founding members of the Bluestocking circle—indeed the one who coined the name in the first place. Not being a writer herself, she depended on her vivacious and captivating personality for her social and intellectual success.
- 249 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 166.
- 250 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 4 September 1772, HL MO 3304. Vesey was commonly known amongst the bluestockings as the ‘Sylph’.
- 251 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 166, 167–73. On women’s political participation, see also e.g. Chalus, ‘My Minerva at my Elbow’; Chalus, ‘To Serve my friends’; Chalus and Montgomery, ‘Women and Politics’; Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre*; Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*; Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*; Lewis, ‘1784 and All That’.
- 252 *JCT*, 7 May 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 3; CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 19 June 1751, BLRA, Wrest MS 2906.
- 253 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 3 November 1750, BLRA, Wrest MS 2895.
- 254 *JCT*, 20 November 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 35.
- 255 Zuk, ‘Introduction’, 3–4.
- 256 *JCT*, 18 December 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 33–5.
- 257 *JCT*, 6 November 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 32.
- 258 *JCT*, 3 February 1754, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 36–7.
- 259 *JCT*, 12 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 20–3.
- 260 Talbot, *Reflections*, 7–8. See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 88.

5 Multiple Identities

Despite enthusiastic didactic attempts to define polite femininity, politeness was not a monolithic regime of identity. Instead, women could choose different polite roles to suit their different needs and situations—from different phases of life to different times of the day. As Amanda Vickery has shown, mixed urban sociability provided women with a growing number of identity positions through such developments as the rapidly expanding culture of female literariness, and the sheer explosion of sociable activities and venues, for example.¹ Thus, the scope of respectable female life expanded considerably during the eighteenth century, offering elite women polite roles as salonnières, novelists, women of letters, women-about-town, patrons of art and music, and much more, in addition to the traditional roles of the wife, the mother, and the mistress of the family. The emerging culture of idealised domesticity can be seen as a response to this, an attempt to keep women at home, away from the enticing and ever multiplying pleasures of urban sociability. Women were, however, adept in manipulating representations of their behaviour to their own advantage; as Ingrid Tague has noted, women of polite society used the rhetoric of politeness in a creative way as a means of making their ambitions appear legitimate and achieving their targets, such as social power.² In this chapter, I will take this argument further by showing that women could also assume different kinds of subject positions within the polite sphere—that of a dutiful mother, patriotic wife, fashionable lady of town, and so forth—and swap them according to different situations in order to facilitate their navigating in the polite social world.

In other words, politeness offered women a possibility of ‘plurality of the self’—a chance of multiple identities which could be tried on and put aside at will.³ They could be caring mothers, efficient housewives, or dutiful daughters at home during the day, only to change into the roles of fashionable socialites or queens of the ball in the evening.⁴ ‘You will *then* have attained the *perfection* of your character’, wrote John Bennett, ‘when you can, one night, be distinguished at a ball, and the next, want no other entertainment, than what the shade, your family, a well chosen book or an agreeable walk are able to afford’.⁵ Women could thus use politeness flexibly, adapting themselves to different situations of life by negotiating different politeness ideologies and ideals.

As we shall see later in this chapter, these flexible adaptations of identity could also be potentially anarchistic, little by little redefining the line that separates the normal from the abject. In this way, adopting multiple polite identities and switching between them flexibly and creatively also provided women potential for freedom.

Subversive use of politeness through assuming multiple identities was, of course, using politeness against the grain. The manifest goal of politeness was to produce normative female subjectivity—and despite acts of resistance, women were permeated with its power. In this sense, politeness engaged women in a Butlerian process of performative gender identity construction that was focused around iterative bodily practices. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, politeness cannot be separated from voluntary theatrical performances either; individuals used politeness willingly and strategically to indicate their status as gentlewomen and to enforce a difference between the polite and the non-polite. Politeness thus showcases how performance and performativity effectively leak into each other in all human practices of identity construction. How is an act of curtsying, for example, neatly categorised as one or the other, when it is impregnated with both conscious meanings of politeness and social identity as well as subconscious meanings of gender, both expressed in terms of gracefulness, elegance, and easiness? Thus, when individuals chose to perform politeness to distinguish themselves as members of social elite, they simultaneously engaged in an involuntary process of constructing a gendered self. This process of negotiating polite femininity can be traced through women's journals and letters, which operated as textual means for trying out different polite roles, playing with them, and also inevitably working to internalise them.

This discursive polite femininity did not, of course, remain stable during the long eighteenth century. Old aristocratic modes of politeness declined slowly throughout the century, and started to seem dated and decadent in the eyes of the post-1789 generation. Similarly, the cult of sentimentalism and the rise of domesticity both worked together with the idea of inward politeness to shape ideas of what it was to be a polite woman—increasingly so during the latter half of the century. Despite these historical shifts, the goalposts of women's conduct norms were not moved as much as one might expect from the massive conceptual changes that were going on in philosophical, medical, and scientific thought, let alone the political landscape of Europe. Rather than significant redefinitions of polite femininity, the long eighteenth century witnessed new ways of justifying old norms and ideals. What had once been God's will was now increasingly framed as a dictate of nature, and notions of gendered personal qualities relied more and more on men's and women's fundamental incommensurability instead of their different humoural balance. Moreover, there were always those who, even in the early 1800s, found the finesses of external politeness *à la* Chesterfield more appealing than inward politeness, sincerity, sentimentality, or taciturnity—or preferred to spend their days in search of public amusement rather than discreetly managing their children at home.

Autobiography and Identity

Politeness operated through a continuous interplay between naturalness, transparency, and honesty on the one hand, and artificiality, opaqueness, and dissimulation on the other. Women's multifaceted ties with naturalness made their politeness particularly precariously balanced between these extremes. This problematic juxtaposition was perhaps most clearly materialised in the discourses and practices of female self-discipline, and the way in which women's self-fashioning needed to be carefully hidden from sight. Indeed, politeness can be, and often has been, seen as a disciplinary system that creates normative identities and forces people to fashion themselves according to these identities. However, constructionist and feminist criticism has recently focused increasingly on the fact that identities are not constructed solely through a normalising power that imprints passive individuals with its codes; their main criticism has been that this model does not take the construction of identity from an individual's perspective sufficiently into account. Felicity Nussbaum, for example, defines subjectivity as not only 'the way an individual being is [...] subject to someone else's control and, within limited freedom, positioned within authority relations', but also as the way this individual then 'becomes subject to its own identity, held within a given self-knowledge—believing that it is free, responsible, and the agent of its own actions'.⁶ Thus, politeness can also be seen as an enabling set of practices that an individual uses to create her own ethical and responsible selfhood. In Foucauldian terms, it is a technology of the self that requires a specific kind of working on oneself that is not meant to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behaviour.⁷ So, the polite self-fashioning that women perform is not merely disciplinary; rather, it is also a practice that enables forms of individuality. It brings individuals a feeling of control over their own identity, and a sense that the identity they create is, in fact, a manifestation of their true inner self, instead of an external, normative one.

Women's letters and journals played an integral part in the process of creating an ethical selfhood. They provided a locus for gathering knowledge, reflecting on that knowledge, and integrating it into an individual's subjectivity. In fact, Nussbaum has argued that eighteenth-century women's autobiographical writing can be seen as a Foucauldian 'technology of the self', or, a 'way of regulating interiority' with the end of the constitution of oneself.⁸ Nussbaum parallels autobiographies with *hypomnemata*—'notebooks' which Foucault defines as 'a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation', as well as 'raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and means by which to struggle against some defect'. Foucault writes that *hypomnemata* are 'explicitly oriented to the care of oneself, toward definite objectives such as retiring into oneself, reaching oneself, living with oneself, being sufficient to oneself, profiting by and enjoying oneself', and, as such, a part of training of oneself by oneself in order to gain self-control and to

become an ethical subject.⁹ In other words, women's autobiographical writing can be interpreted as a moral technology of the self that constitutes and transforms the subject's 'thoughts, behavior, body, and "self"' as individuals submit themselves to a subjectivity-forming authority—of divine agency in Nussbaum's argument, and in mine, the culture of politeness.¹⁰ In other, less theoretically oriented historical research, autobiographical writing has generally been viewed as a way of creating narratives of the self and, in that way, constructing a coherent selfhood.

Politeness has not been previously studied as a Foucauldian technology of the self; in this sense, this book is treading on pristine ground. Felicity Nussbaum's research focuses on the use of autobiography as a technology of the middle-class self and, as such, does not address politeness. Lawrence Klein touches on the subject of Foucauldian self-care—albeit not in explicit terms—within the context of politeness in *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, where he describes the troubles the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1670–1713) had when trying to overcome his doubts and difficulties about becoming a polite subject. Shaftesbury's problem was the conflict between the autonomous self and the sociable self; he was afraid of letting his desire to please others steer him away from his true self. Shaftesbury was torn between the requirements of politeness on the one hand and the obligations to the self on the other; he often worried that self-love would make him sacrifice his autonomy and turn himself into a polite display.¹¹ As a solution, Shaftesbury proposed the enhancement of one's moral autonomy through the expansion of the self's interiority—or in other words, he saw his interior space as a sphere of control and wanted to filter, examine and appraise every outer influence through that sphere. The result of this process would be a truly internalised new kind of politeness—rational sociability—that would not be based on external impulses, but on a stable core of the rational self.¹²

In Foucauldian terms, what Shaftesbury proposed to do was a process of self-formation; with careful self-examination, self-knowledge, and vigorous training, he aimed to make himself an ethical polite subject rather than acting either out of external pressure or the uncontrolled passion of self-love. This was not to be done because of a disciplinary system forcing its ideals on individuals; it had to be done in order to resolve the problem of the self—to live truthfully and to become a moral subject instead of a hypocritical actor. And yet, the aim of the process was not self-discovery, but self-fashioning; Shaftesbury was all the time aware that he was 'replacing an untoward disposition with another more advantageous one'.¹³ To achieve this end, Shaftesbury kept notebooks that he named *askēmata*, 'exercises', where he meticulously wrote down his thoughts and doubts about politeness, subjectivity and becoming an autonomous individual. Klein calls these notebooks a part of the therapeutic process that was aimed at advancing moral transformation through self-reflection.¹⁴

Practically all eighteenth-century elite women—as well as men—kept some kind of journals. It could even be said that the ethos of polite society strongly

recommended journalising.¹⁵ These journals and their forms vary a great deal, and they mostly do not use the explicit language of self-care that Shaftesbury's *askēmata* do. Journals were often merely short memoranda of family events or places visited; sometimes they included lists of books read or plays recommended. Then again, *hypomnemata* as Foucault describes them were not even supposed to be intimate diaries, but merely aides-memoire where people would enter quotations, events, and reflections they wanted to contemplate later.¹⁶ Many of the journals I use as sources in this study are rich documents that depict their authors' keen observations on the people they meet and their conversations, moral and philosophical musings on their behaviour and actions, as well as aesthetic evaluations of books, plays, and music. In other words, they very much serve the purpose of classical *hypomnemata*.

In addition to autobiographies, diaries, and journals, letters were an equally important means of 'writing the self into existence'.¹⁷ The difference between a letter and a journal or an autobiography was often blurred in the eighteenth century. In many cases, women actually wrote their journals in the form of letters to their relatives or friends—such is the case with Fanny Burney and Catherine Talbot, for example. Mary Delany addressed her autobiography to the Duchess of Portland, maintaining that the duchess's express request was the sole motivation behind the project in the first place. Elizabeth Montagu's long, often philosophical letters resemble journals in their intimate soul-searching overtones. Letters, as well as journals, are also noted for their ambiguous stance between revealing and masking the self. Notions of autobiographical writing as a window to one's genuine self persist, even though letters and journals are recognised to be fictive reworkings of an individual's life, thoughts, and experiences. As self-conscious narratives that 'neither guarantee self-knowledge nor prevent self-deception', they have been seen to offer means of creating multiple identities as masks.¹⁸ In its most basic form, the conscious use women made of their letters in their self-fashioning is displayed by their handwriting. For example, Elizabeth Montagu clearly had the option of choosing between different hands depending on the purpose and recipient of her letter. Edward Montagu often received everyday scrawls, while letters to Gilbert West or Lord Lyttelton were carefully planned and copied out several times, possibly partly by companions, before the final version being written in her most elaborate hand (Figure 5.1). Similarly, Mary Delany confessed that she reserved her small handwriting—in order to fit in most subject matter—to her sister Anne, who was her closest friend and favourite correspondent, while her more distant acquaintances had to make do with 'three sides' of a quarto written 'in *my large hand*'.¹⁹

For eighteenth-century polite women, assuming different masks was a sociable commonplace. 'What farces, what puppet-shows do we act!' exclaimed Elizabeth Montagu, describing a morning visit characterised by a carefully hidden mutual dislike between the visitor and the *visitée*. 'Madam, contrary to her usual manner, acted the part of the obliging; I, as much against my former sentiments, personated the obliged', she ironically wrote to her sister; 'some

To Gilbert West Esq. ^{Still Street #.}
~~my seat~~ Wednesday the 16th 1754

My most Inestimable Cousin

I am much more satisfied now I find that your Indisposition was owing to the ren-
 :contre of salt fish, milk, and a strange olio of Diet;
 than when I imagined it was the gout, in your Sto-
 :mach. But pity which sometimes subsides into soft
 :passions, on this occasion warms and hardens into
 :anger. Why when an invalid would you be so care-
 :less of your diet? indeed I could chide you with all
 :my heart, but will forget the past if you promise to
 :be more cautious for the future. When I wrote last I
 :had Visions of the Elysians fields of Wickham, but
 :for my Sins must at present remain in this Wicked
 :Town. Mr. Montagu has got a cough, and this change
 :of Air is a remedy, I know it would be in vain to dissuade
 :him to change his habitation. However difficult it
 :may be, to the strong temper of ^{myself} budge Doctors of the
 :Stoic sect, to run mad with discretion, I assure

Figure 5.1a Elizabeth Montagu's letter to Gilbert West (a, b, c), 16 January 1754, MO 6712; and to Edward Montagu (d), 8 August 1757, MO 2335. Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

little machine behind the scene moves us and makes the puppet act Scrub'.²⁰ Montagu's acknowledgement of her dissimulative behaviour becomes contrasted with the straightforward honesty with which she admits it to her sister; indeed, as she wrote later to her friend, William Freind, she believed that in her private letters she could shed her masks and reveal her true self:

5
 To Mr West
 My most Venerable Cousin!
 Wednesday
 24-16

I am much more satisfied ^{now I find} ~~was I find~~ ^{reasonable} that your indisposition was owing to the ~~quantity~~ ^{quantity} of salt fish milk, & a strange sto of diet; than when I imagined it was the goat in your stomach. But pity which sometimes subsides into soft pities, on this occasion warms & hardens into anger, why when an invalid would you be so careless of your diet, indeed I could chide you with all my heart, but will forget the past if you promise to be more cautious for the future. When I wrote last I had visions of the Elysian fields of wickham, but for my sins must at present remain in this wretched town. Mr Montagu has got a cough, & tho change of air is a remedy, I know it would be in vain to sollicit him to change his habitation. However difficult it may be to the strong temper of the bridge doctors of the stoic furr to run mad with discretion, & upon it is not impossible to the gentle Dame

Figure 5.1b (Continued)

I don't know whether it is not conceited to imagine, you will like me better while I am most myself, than when I am moulded by fashion into other people's form; [...] I have always accustomed myself to appear to you without those disguises which we wear as ornaments with our acquaintance, and as armour with our enemies. But amongst friends, truth may appear with no other clothing than la bienséance.²¹

However, the privacy of letters was questionable, to say the least. Letters and journals were rarely read solely by the people they were addressed to; instead, they were commonly circulated amongst family and friends. Fanny Burney often

My most ^{to Gilbert West} invaluable Friend
 I am much more satisfied now I find
 that your Indisposition was owing to the rencontre
 of Salt-fish, Milk, and a strange Olio of Diet, than what
 I imagined it was, the Gout in your Stomach. But pitty
 which sometimes subsides into soft Passions, on this
 occasion warms and hardens into anger; Why when an
 invalid would you be so careless of your Diet? indeed I could
 chide you with all my heart, but will forget the past if
 you promise to be more cautious for the future. When I
 wrote last I had visions of the Elysian fields of Wickham
 but ^{my} sins must at present remain in this wicked
 Town. Mr. Montagu has got a Cough, and tho' change of
 Air is a remedy, I know it would be in vain to sollicit
 him to change his Habitation. However difficult it
 may be to the strong temper of the Bridge Doctors of the
 Stoic furr... to run Mad with Discretion, I assure ^{you} it is not
 impossible to the gentle Dame in Blonde lace and Paris
 Hoop; I followed the precepts of the tres precieuse Lady

Figure 5.1c (Continued)

felt exasperated by the little regard her family and friends showed for her privacy by allowing neighbours and casual acquaintances to read her intimate thoughts; 'I am very concerned, nay & hurt & half angry that this lady, whose name it seems is Lee, should have seen any of my Letters,—It is not fair, & I am sure it is not pleasant', she complained to her sister upon encountering a total stranger in Bath who had been allowed to read her journal-letters.²² Moreover, women's correspondence could be liable to being inspected by their guardian—father, mother, or husband. Elizabeth Montagu specifically assured the Duchess of Portland that they could be free in their words, since, contrary to custom, her husband allowed her letters to pass uninspected.²³ Thus,

My Dear Sir
Bath Easton

I have just received the kind favour of y^r &
Mrs Meadows acct of our misfortunes in Hanover which
is ye most authentick acct I have had of our disasters
these I fear indeed ye next news will be worse nothing
promises well but our harvest. Lady Bath has been so
much indispos'd we were oblig'd to put off our journey
to Kings Weston, she is better will take a good ride
to morrow & on wednesday we go thither, we cannot
return till Sunday evening, I must rest my losses
on Monday & cannot get home till Tuesday which
mortifies me very much but you are so good as
to say you permit me to stay a day or two longer
rather than hurrying myself. I am infinitely oblig'd to
you for y^r kind care all the small pox indeed it is
your care next to the good help of providence that I

Figure 5.1d (Continued)

women's letter-writing did not consist of opening one's true self to a private and discreet friend; instead, it was a form of sociability that required adopting masks, assuming different identities, and often hiding one's true feelings and opinions. In this way, letter-writing was consistent with the practices of polite sociability, where polite identities were not uniform but multiple, and assuming different masks, roles, and identities was an essential part of politeness.

In short, journalising and letter-writing played an integral role in the self-constitution of the individual. Moreover, these textual practices were complementary to and inseparable from social and bodily practices.²⁴ Since we cannot witness the bodily performances these women engaged in, our only sources through which to track them are these letters and journals. Therefore, they are more than textual devices for writing the self; they are also documents

that describe, in written form, the constitutive bodily practices that formed these women's subjectivity.

Fanny Burney's Self-fashioning

[Mr. Twiss asked:] 'Don't *you* love Dancing, Ma'am?'

'Me, Sir?' said I—'O, I seldom Dance—I don't know—'

'What Assemblies do you frequent, Ma'am?'

'Me, Sir?—Lord—I never Dance—I go to none!—'

Journal of Fanny Burney (1774)

the Ball [at Gloucester assembly room] proved very lively & agreeable. We did not break up till near 2 o'clock, & then we went Home in Chairs two abreast [...] It was 2 o'clock in the morning ere we sat down to supper. Mr. Berkeley & Captain Coussmaker were of our party. We were all in prodigious spirits, & *kept it up* till near 5 in the morning.

Journal of Fanny Burney (1777)²⁵

Fanny Burney's autobiographical texts provide an exceptional window into the practice, negotiation, and assimilation of the many, often contradictory roles the women of polite society played in their social lives. Burney kept a journal for most of her life; in fact, her journals, often written as long 'letter-paquages' to her sister Susan, can be seen as her main body of literary work.²⁶ Burney used her journals to write down her thoughts about books, people, anecdotes, or events. These thoughts were closely connected to polite society and her place in it; they touched upon women's relations towards men, ideal femininity, the proper modes of entertainment and leisure, and maternity and filiality, among other things. Burney's journals offered her a place to reflect on different polite roles and to construct herself a true polite identity—or, in fact, many identities. Throughout her extensive journal-letters, Burney can be seen musing on several different idealisations of polite femininities. Indeed, Burney used her journals as a means of identifying different polite roles, negotiating the roles into her own identity, observing her success at performing these roles, and disciplining herself into a more thorough internalisation of the proper polite identity. Moreover, through her journal-letters she also actively reflected that identity to others, and created the sort of image of herself she wanted others to see.

Burney most often presented herself in her journals as a domestic, chaste, and quiet young woman. In other words, she seems to have been inclined to assume the ideal feminine character promoted by such noted moralist conduct writers as, for example, Hannah More or James Fordyce.²⁷ As a true Fordycean female, Burney often mused on her aversion of public amusements and preference for domestic pleasures:

To be sure I am not frequently from Home, on the contrary, I seldom quit it, considering my Age & opportunities; but why should I, when I am so



Figure 5.2 Charles Turner after Edward Francisco Burney, *Fanny Burney* (1840). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

happy in it? I never can want employment, nor sigh for amusement—we have a Library which is an ever lasting resource when attack'd by the spleen—I have always a sufficiency of work to spend, if I pleased, my whole Time at it—musick is a Feast which can never grow insipid—& in short, I have all the reason that ever mortal had to be contented with my lot—and I *am* contented with, I *am* grateful for it!²⁸

Thus, Burney presented her ideal self in her journals as hardworking, well-read, and accomplished—a true domestic treasure.²⁹ Being born in to a music family, she was especially fond of music and a decent harpsichordist, but she acknowledged the conflict between the shy, domestic feminine ideal and the competing polite ideal of an outgoing socialite, accustomed to attention. Because of her shyness, Burney was unable to perform publicly. She abhorred drawing attention to herself and having people look at her, as she often complained in her journals. Nevertheless, she still recognised the sociable role that polite society presented for elite women, and the need to be able to assume the role of female musical entertainer, and tried to push herself to overcome her fears. Accordingly, she wrote of a dinner party:

Mr Lattice & the Russian most furiously attacked me to play—I really recollect with pain the earnest entreaties of the latter. Yet I could not—I did not dare to comply. [...] From the moment I entertained the slightest idea of playing, my knees shook under me, so much that I could hardly support myself. [...] such extreme *hipishness*—I can use no better word—as mine serves only to make myself troublesome to others & uneasy to myself—however, I take all the pains I can to overcome it.³⁰

Excessive shyness seems to have been more generally a problem for Fanny Burney. Indeed, her father described her in his notebook as ‘silent, backward, and timid, even to sheepishness’ when in company.³¹ Burney herself acknowledged this, and tried to reason with herself to conquer it. In fact, she was constantly afraid that her silence and timidity would cause her friends to dislike her. Especially after the publication of her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), her sensitivity turned into an acute problem, since she became something of a celebrity. When her name appeared in a pamphlet as the authoress of the novel, she noted having been, ‘for more than a week, unable to Eat, Drink or sleep for vehemence of vexation’—and having also been ‘furiously Lectured’ for her *folly*. Therefore, she wrote, ‘I have [...] struggled against it with all my might, & am determined to *aim*, at least, at acquiring more strength of mind.—Yet, after all, I feel very forcibly that I *am* not—that I *have* not been—& that I never *shall* be formed or fitted for any business with the *Public*.³²

Burney negotiated also other feminine identities in the pages of her journals. One of her roles was the dutiful daughter; another, the affectionate sister.³³ She generally presented herself being very reserved with men, as the morally guarded woman of the moralist conduct book should be. She referred to herself as a

‘known prude’, and, as moralist conduct writers generally did, assimilated absolute sexual purity of thought and deed with femininity. For example, when she was writing *The Witlings* for the London stage in 1779, her friend Samuel Crisp warned her that writing comedies could be very risky for a woman, since they very easily compromised her reputation. Burney replied that she would ‘a thousand Times rather forfeit my character as a Writer, than risk ridicule or censure as a Female. I have never set my Heart on Fame, & therefore would not if I could purchase it at the expence of all my own ideas of propriety’. She concluded: ‘You who know me for a Prude will not be surprised, & I hope not offended by this avowal’—and indeed, *The Witlings* was never performed.³⁴ Burney also continually expressed her concern of being inadvertently seen in what she considered a compromising situation—mostly meaning that she was entertaining a private conversation with a man, no matter on how innocent a subject. Maidenly demure and chaste appearances were, according to many conduct writers, essential for women’s honourable reputation, and Burney indeed seems to take this very seriously.

In fact, Fanny Burney can be seen on the pages of her journals to separate herself from all amusements that could be interpreted as indelicate for a woman. She made a point of never playing cards, danced seldom, and when her stepmother—who was socially quite unsophisticated, which often distressed Burney—made her go to Ranelagh, the famous pleasure garden, she haughtily wrote that ‘I saw few People there that I knew, & none that I cared for’.³⁵ Moreover, she often pointed out how she could have no connection whatsoever with any women of questionable character, in order to avoid risking her own reputation. For example, she was extremely hesitant whether she should meet the singer-actress Jane Barsanti in private, just in case Barsanti would lose her chastity, as so many actresses did.³⁶ Burney often addressed the issue of Barsanti’s reputation, writing that ‘really she continues so good a Girl, living wholly with her mother & being almost always at Home, except when obliged to be at the Theatre, that I think she deserves calls, the attention & kindness which can be paid to her, & upon this consideration, I have at length given up my former *delicacy* of not visiting her privately’.³⁷ In other words, Barsanti had not, in fact, committed any kind of indiscretion, but her profession alone was enough to put Burney on her guard. Later on, Burney records an encounter with Miss Lalauze, a notorious actress, in the park:

We also saw poor Miss Lalauze [...] we Walked on, wishing to avoid speaking to her: but when we were at Spring Garden Gate, she just touched my shoulder, as she came suddenly behind us, & said ‘Miss Burney! —how do you do, Ma’am?’ I answered her rather coldly—& Hetty turned from her abruptly. I was afterwards very sorry that I did not speak with more kindness to her, for Sukey says that she looked greatly disappointed. It is, however, impossible & improper to keep up acquaintance with a Female who has lost her character, however sincerely they may be objects of Pity.³⁸

This extreme cautiousness can, at least partly, be explained through the precarious social status of the Burney family. Fanny Burney's father, Dr Charles Burney, was a musician and music historian who earned his living, among other means, by teaching music to the children of the fashionable and the rich. Therefore, as the Burney family was just about 'struggling to enter the situation of the middling sort', the Burney girls would have felt a heightened need to compensate for their social status by a meticulous adherence to the norms of politeness and decorum, because they had few other resources to maintain their status among polite society. As Betty Rizzo argues, without money and birth, Burney had to 'exhibit moral virtues' instead to enter the new meritocratic class system.³⁹ Moreover, Charles Burney's livelihood depended on the patronage of the social elite, and therefore required an impeccable reputation. Since women were especially burdened with the task of maintaining the family honour by their own sexually untarnished reputation, Fanny Burney may have felt the added constraint this put on her behaviour.

Despite these scruples and her prudery, shyness, and preference for domesticity, Burney could, and often did, assume the role of a socialite, salonnière, or a cosmopolitan woman of letters. She could occasionally party through the night, and she often recorded conversing deftly with celebrated social figures on polite subjects, and in different languages. Samuel Johnson, for example, was her close friend. Indeed, she often noted being praised for her conversation, as well as her knowledge of French and Italian.⁴⁰ She described a dinner party with some French and Italian guests, writing how 'very good friends' they all immediately became, '& talked *English, French & Italian* by *commodious* starts'.⁴¹ This is somewhat striking when we consider that a couple of years earlier she had actually declared, very much in the train of moralist conduct writers, that she had taught herself French only 'for the sake of its bewitching authors', and that she would certainly 'never want to speak it'. Indeed, she had taken pride in her father calling her '*Fanny Bull*' for this reason.⁴² These kinds of inconsistencies show Burney trying on different identities and choosing the ones she then deemed to be the most advantageous or appropriate for different events or situations in life. If individual identity is not taken to be a stable entity but a site of contest and multiplicity, it is possible to read Burney's journals, as indeed any autobiographical writing, as a 'textual location' where women privately and publicly 'experiment with interdiscourses and the corresponding subject positions to broach the uncertainties of identity'.⁴³

Negotiating different feminine roles also included assessing other women's personae with a critical eye. In her journals, Fanny Burney analysed the beauties of virtue and politeness as well as the effects of a vulgar address, a sullied reputation, or bad personal hygiene in the women she met.⁴⁴ External appearance, being indeed the foremost fortification of a woman's polite persona, was constantly under her scrutiny. For example, when Burney saw the famed public figure Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire in the park, 'walking in such an undressed & slatternly manner' with her hair and dress untidy, she wordily declared feeling 'quite sorry she should be so foolishly negligent of her

Person'.⁴⁵ Indeed, whenever Burney observed women straying from polite feminine ideals, she looked on them with a critical eye—and strove to avoid such mistakes herself. A Miss Fitzgerald earned her disapproval by laughing 'louder than a man', poking 'her Head vehemently', dressing 'shockingly', and having 'a carriage the most ungain that ever was seen'.⁴⁶ Then again, another miss was condemned for being exactly the opposite: wearing a dress too modish, having too affected manners, and, in short, being altogether too fashionable.⁴⁷ Her own polite successes Burney noted down carefully. She recorded with complacency the universal approval of her own dress, and kept her family well informed of the praise her behaviour received in the salons of the *beau monde*, writing how her '*manners*' were deemed 'extraordinarily pleasing, & her *Language* remarkably elegant; that she had as much virtue of *mind*, as knowledge of the *World*; that with all her *skill* in human nature, she was at the same Time as *pure* a little creature'.⁴⁸

Besides criticising women falling short of polite femininity, Burney often also expressed her admiration for those who appeared to her to have successfully internalised the polite feminine norms. More interestingly, though, she also approved of many women who in different ways stretched the definition of ideal femininity. Most notably, she had boundless admiration for Hester Lynch Thrale, who was, in many ways, antithetical to moralist notions of acceptable femininity; Thrale was known for her forwardness, sharp wit, and lack of tact. In fact, Burney saw Thrale's immoderate amount of wit as her worst fault—which did not, however, prevent her from idolising Thrale.⁴⁹ Witty women were, indeed, generally considered unfeminine and frightening. Another such character was Frances Bowdler, whom Burney met at Teignmouth. Bowdler was known for her complete lack of attention to appearances, and seems to have acted in everything according to her own fancy with no consideration of other people's opinions. As such, she was a character quite opposite to Burney herself, and also, in this sense, something of a social rebel. Burney writes:

I was also Introduced [...] to Miss Bowdler, a young Woman who bears a rather singular Character: she reckons herself superiour to the opinion of the World, & to all common Forms & Customs, & therefore lives exactly as she pleases, guarding herself from all *real* Evil, but wholly regardless & indifferent of appearances. [...] she finds the Company of Gentlemen is more entertaining than that of Ladies, & therefore without any scruples or punctilio, indulges her fancy: she is perpetually at Mr Crispen's, notwithstanding a very young man, Mr Green, Lives in the same House; not contented with a *Call*, she very frequently *sups* with them: [...] she does this in the fair face of Day, & speaks of it as openly & commonly as I should of Visiting my sister.⁵⁰

Despite this very unfeminine lack of propriety, Burney and Bowdler surprisingly became lifelong friends.

In fact, Burney had an ambiguous relationship with moralist ideal femininity. She occasionally recorded herself engaging in unfeminine activities, and used

her journals to reason her behaviour to herself, and others, within the matrix of politeness. Despite her avowal never to play cards she, in fact, did so quite often—but, as she explained, only in private. She also forbade her friends from making her card skills public knowledge.⁵¹ When Burney's friends reproached her—the self-professed paragon of domesticity—for her *'incessant'* social engagements, she blamed the *'visiting system'* of polite society that simply forced her to spend all her waking hours either visiting or preparing clothes for visiting.⁵² Moreover, as her journals show, Burney herself was a critic of a remarkably sharp wit, which she justified by her desire to be femininely honest and transparent in her opinions. In this way, Burney used her journals to negotiate controversial roles into her identity. She assumed different kinds of subject positions within the polite sphere and swapped them pragmatically according to different situations in order to facilitate her navigation in her changing social surroundings; she could be a domestic daughter in the morning at her father's house, a witty bluestocking visiting Hester Lynch Thrale's salon in the afternoon, and a belle of the ballroom during the night.

Elizabeth Montagu's Play with Masks

Elizabeth Robinson Montagu was a woman of many faces. In Emma Major's words, she played the roles of *'fashionable lady, polite paradigm, brilliant conversationalist, scholar, critic, Amazon, Minerva, sibyl, muse, apothecary, educator, literary and religious patron, philanthropist, farmer, hostess, business partner, coalmine owner, literary witch, Lady Bountiful, Queen, literary and political hostess, landowner and land developer, interior designer'* more or less successfully during her life, which spanned almost the entire eighteenth century.⁵³ Other roles, such as moralist, flirt, and pious Anglican, might be added to the list. Montagu is thus an extreme example of the versatility of social roles women could or needed to adopt during their life.

Ever since her childhood, Montagu was deeply aware that different situations of life and surroundings required different approaches. After returning from gay London to her family's estate in Kent, the 20-year-old Elizabeth wrote to her friend:

I arrived at Mount Morris rather more fond of society than solitude. I thought it no very agreeable change of scene from Handel and Gaffarelli, to woodlarks and nightingales; it seems to me to be something like the different seasons of youth and age; first, noise and public shew, and then after being convinced that is vanity, retirement to shades and solitude, which we soon find to be vexation of spirit. [...] the one succeeds the other, as darkness does light, and especially in the women; the young maid is all vanity, and the old one all vexation.⁵⁴

Indeed, in her letters, Montagu acknowledged her play with masks and the need to adapt the self to different social roles and situations. She wrote to Elizabeth



Figure 5.3 John Raphael Smith after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Elizabeth Montagu (1774).
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Carter in 1761 that through the mere change of location she had shed her urban self and taken on a pastoral identity:

I told you in my last that I was going to take a flight into Berkshire; & here I have been ever since Friday evening, leading a pastoral life in the finest weather I ever saw. Tho the most sage Horace says we change our climate without changing our disposition, I must be of another opinion, for by only the difference of latitude and longitude between Hill-street and Sandleford, I am become one of the most reasonable, quiet, good kind of Country Gentlemen that ever was. In the days when misses employ'd their crimping and wimpling irons upon cheesecakes and tarts, not on flounces and fur-belowes, and Matrons used no rouge, but a little cochineal to give a fine colour to a dry'd neats tongue; they could not be further from the temper, qualities & conditions of a fine Lady than your humble Servant at this present writing.⁵⁵

When she was then travelling in France with Carter she wrote to Elizabeth Vesey to describe the 'metamorphosis of Mrs Carter': the famous scholar 'now began to consider Greek was a dead language, & that french words, & a little coquettry, would do better at Spa'. Accordingly, 'with the same facility with which she translated Epictetus from greek into english, she translated her native timidity into french airs, & french modes; bought robes trimmed with blonde [illegible], Colliers, bouquets, *des engageantes* & all the *most* labour'd ornaments of dress' and proceeded to parade around in the best manner of 'that agreeably frivolous nation'.⁵⁶ Montagu was thus both amused and pleased with the manner in which her learned friend adapted herself into her new environment. In another letter, Montagu spelled out her thoughts on social adaptability quite clearly. 'Happy the animal that can live in all elements, though it dignifies, or is dignified by none!', she declared, for 'they are at liberty to add themselves to a gay assembly, a philosophical lecture, be present at a reasonable conversation, or go with the crowd to see Harlequin in a bottle'.⁵⁷ In other words, Montagu saw sociability as an exercise of chameleon-like adaptation of the self to a series of changing scenes, all of which were to be met with uniform easiness and pleasantness, and none of which were to be given the power of transforming the innermost core of the self.

Accordingly, Montagu despised 'persons of delicacy' who could 'be pleased only with some particular system of life'; for her own part, she writes, 'I have endeavoured always to move easily and chearfully on the sphere I am placed in'.⁵⁸ As the wife of a wealthy Whig landowner and a member of the Parliament, she indeed often found herself in spheres not of her own choosing, or to her own liking. Elizabeth Montagu's—as any married woman's—daily life was dictated by her husband's engagements and fancies. She was, for example, often obliged to join her husband on his business trips to his coal mines in Northumberland. Even though she thought the Northumbrians 'little better than Savages', she nevertheless adapted herself to her role as a 'Cole owner' and found satisfaction in it:

*Cold & raw the north doth blow,
and all the Hills are coverd with snow.*

Such is my sad ditty, & I beg you to set it to melancholly musick, & sing it pathetically till I come & sing, *London is a fine Town* &c. I hope to set forward tomorrow sennight but my other half is as pleased here as if he was in the Garden of Eden fanned by zephyrs & incensed by Flora.⁵⁹

Montagu was also often forced to spend the winter months alone in her country estate, generally with no other company than servants and books, while her husband took care of his business responsibilities elsewhere. Even when she had the company of her husband, she could 'pass seven or eight hours every day entirely alone' while he worked or studied.⁶⁰ Edward Montagu did not enjoy the fashionable leisure towns, but instead preferred the privacy of Sandleford, his country estate. This often gave Elizabeth Montagu cause to grumble to her friend Gilbert West:

You cannot imagine that I should not be glad to come to Tunbridge, where I have always improved my stock of health, and have acquired such valuable friends; the manner of life there too, was very agreeable to me, but Mr. Montagu is happier here, and I ought to make his happiness my principal object. My constitution is not so strong, that it would not receive benefit from the waters, but I cannot say I am ill, and must content myself with the advantages of air and exercise which this situation affords. [...] I am to go to Hatchlands to Mrs. Boscawen, on Thursday, and shall stay a week; you may suppose I am very happy to have leave for this expedition.⁶¹

To some extent, then, the adaptability of the self was a necessity of elite women's life; having little say in their everyday actions and whereabouts, women needed to be flexible in order to manage their lives and find contentment. Elizabeth Montagu's scholarly abilities, for example, were necessary to help her through long solitary Berkshire winters; '[f]ive months are to pass, before I return to the land of the living, but I can amuse myself in the regions of the dead: if it rains so that I cannot walk in the garden, Virgil will carry me into the Elysian fields, or Milton into Paradise'.⁶² As she wrote to her father, 'ye love of reading is hardly so necessary for [Men] as for Women, to whom retirement is always safe, & sometimes necessary. As they are not to chuse where or how they will live, it is happy to have a taste that may be gratified in any situation or any circumstances'.⁶³ Then again, a quite different set of polite skills were required in the sociable urban life in London, where Montagu was required to assume the roles of a polite society figure, an urban wit, and a literary hostess.

Montagu's letters highlight her skilful play with masks. She used her letters to show herself to her correspondents in different roles, according to her

respective needs and aims. She could be serious with the serious, learned with the learned, and nonsensical with the nonsensical. To the Duchess of Portland she wrote merry letters, displaying her wit; to her cousin, Reverend Freind, sober and philosophical letters, showing her capacity for pious reflection. To her husband, she wrote in the role of a respectful and subordinate wife; and to Lord Lyttelton, as a scholar and a woman of reason. As Emma Major notes, she balanced her luxurious urban lifestyle by rhetorical means—by emphasising her preference for simple country life.⁶⁴ For example, Montagu claimed in a letter to the author Gilbert West to ‘have for many years had a taste for rural pleasures, which people seldom find during their youth and gay season of life’.⁶⁵ Her true sentiments, however, seem to have been almost entirely the opposite. She often complained how the dullness of countryside ‘sunk [her] into stupidity’, and complained in a straightforward manner to the Duchess of Portland of having to repress her gay and witty self to adjust to the country decorum:

It is not usual to have [...] sudden occasions of joy in the country; if we are a little brisker than what is called very dull, it is sufficient; mirth here is reckoned madness, gaiety is idleness, and wit a crying sin. The parson preaches to its annoy, and much in its contempt; the justice magisterially condemns it, the young squire, like a true Briton, hates it as foreign [...] the witty, they carry such a dangerous spleen they are not to be suffered in a civil society.⁶⁶

In other words, Montagu told her correspondents what she thought they wanted to hear, revealing her true sentiments only occasionally, and, in this way, acted as a true disciple of Lord Chesterfield. Montagu was thus, in practice, a prime example of someone applying external politeness in her social behaviour. Whether she saw herself as insincere in her adaptations of the self, is another matter. She certainly portrayed herself as someone who abhorred all deceit in herself, and condemned hypocrisy as an ‘abominable vice’.⁶⁷ Indeed, appearing without ‘disguises’ amongst true friends can be seen as one of her many social roles, which she could very well have assumed with the utmost sincerity.

Montagu’s skilful role play payed off, and she was universally hailed as a model of polite female excellence. However, as Emma Major has pointed out, Montagu started to lose her unquestionably admired status amongst the polite during the 1790s, when her ostentatious politeness started to feel dated. The same goes for Montagu’s flexible play with different social masks; according to Major, Montagu’s ‘diversity, her chameleon changes of epistolary and sociable personae’ were relegated ‘to an old eighteenth century, one of shallow politeness and corruption’.⁶⁸ The theatricality of identity was, as Dror Wahrman has argued, a feature of an early modern conceptualisation of identity and self, and thus a part of a system of thought that was slowly getting replaced by modern ideas of authentic selfhood.⁶⁹ Both theatrical politeness and the easy multiplicity of identity were thus being rejected as examples of old-fashioned and insincere external politeness.

Phœbus in Petticoats: Elizabeth Montagu's Breeches Roles

In the light of Elizabeth Montagu's reputation as the paragon of ideal polite femininity, it is noteworthy that many of the roles Montagu adopted were traditionally considered masculine. She had long taken an interest in her husband's business affairs, and after Edward Montagu's death in 1775 she took on her new responsibilities as the heiress of his estates. She embarked on a programme of improving the grounds and buildings at Sandlesford, her primary country estate, and travelled to Yorkshire and Northumberland to inspect her tenants like 'a Country Gentlewoman of ye last Century'.⁷⁰ She also took pleasure in 'the practices and profits of a savvy entrepreneur', as Elizabeth Childs argues.⁷¹ Montagu was a talented scholar, knew Latin, and wrote treatises on art and morality; she also corresponded with many of the most learned men of her time over questions of religion and philosophy. She had a reputation for being a great wit—an allegedly dangerous and unpopular quality for a woman to possess. Thus, many of Montagu's interests were unquestionably considered unfeminine from the perspectives of discourses of politeness; furthermore, Montagu's utilisation of theatrical politeness was, according to didactic writers, in itself a masculine mode of conduct, whereas femininity was associated with the sincerity and naturalness of inward politeness. Curiously enough, Montagu herself emphasised her masculine traits and roles. She deliberately represented herself to her correspondents as a woman doing men's work; according to Major, she described herself in her letters as a 'Farmeress', a 'learned lady', and 'great she schollard', sometimes underlining her words for emphasis, and was 'conscious of the ways in which her roles might conflict with or balance one another'.⁷² Many of these depictions were written in a playful or ironic tone, as if to soften the message, which further indicates that Montagu was aware of the exceptional nature of her masculine activities.

Such deliberate posing in masculine positions seems surprising when held up against the discursive ideals of soft and submissive femininity, which depicted masculine women as horrendous, unnatural Amazons. Even more surprising is contemporary opinion, which uniformly celebrated Montagu as the jewel of her sex despite such deviations from discursive femininity.⁷³ To be sure, Montagu was, in many ways, an exceptional woman in an exceptional social position. She was wealthy and influential; accordingly, the passionate admiration shown for Montagu by various conduct writers could have been inspired simply by her role as their patron. However, the fact that their opinion was shared by many people who were wholly independent of Montagu's financial support seems to suggest, at the very least, that masculine traits could be overlooked if the subject had sufficient status and power. More importantly, as I will argue below, Montagu also took care to balance her masculine roles with feminine ones, which were often influenced by discourses of piety and chastity besides politeness.

Elizabeth Montagu distinguished herself especially as an erudite and a scholar—one of the most controversial positions for a woman to inhabit in the eighteenth century. In fact, unfeminine erudition was what the bluestockings were eminently

known and celebrated for, despite the fact that conduct writers unanimously categorised 'Learned women' as 'a proverb of reproach, feared by their own sex, and disliked by ours'.⁷⁴ Keen intellects and good understanding were considered to be masculine characteristics, whereas the sphere of imagination was a privileged feminine territory.⁷⁵ Therefore, a woman scholar broke the traditional gender stereotype of a weak feminine mind, thereby making her femininity questionable. A woman's intellectual superiority was threatening to the patriarchal system on which society was organised; therefore, men were thought to 'look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding'. Women were thus advised to keep their learning 'a profound secret'.⁷⁶ Learning was also thought to distance women from their natural domestic and emotional sphere, as well as to make them vain and insufferably superior company.⁷⁷ In fact, conduct book writers acknowledged that women were faced with a dilemma: how to act to 'avoid the imputation of pedantry on the one hand, and ignorance on the other'. For, even though female erudition was considered to be formidable, women were also commonly accused of being 'so ignorant, frivolous and insipid, as to be unfit for friendship, society or conversation; that they are unable to amuse, entertain or edify a lonely hour, much more to bless or grace that connexion, for which they were principally formed'.⁷⁸ For John Bennett, there was 'a narrow, *middle* path betwixt these extremes'. To avoid becoming '*viragos* in their knowledge', women should concentrate their learning on feminine subjects and cultivate 'such studies, as lie within the region of sentiment and taste'. In this manner, they should let their 'knowledge be feminine, as well as [their] person'. For, as Bennett reminded his readers, it was men's task, with 'solid judgement and a superior *vigour*', to 'combine ideas, to discriminate, and examine a subject to the bottom', whilst women existed in the world to 'give it all its *brilliancy* and all its charms'.⁷⁹ Bennett then proceeded to recommend the study of natural history, botany, and astronomy as particularly suitable for women, whereas 'Machiavel, Newton, Euclid, Malebranche or Locke' were to be avoided, since they 'would render you *unwomanly* indeed' and 'damp that vivacity and destroy that disengaged ease and *softness*, which are the very *essence* of your graces'.⁸⁰

Then again, there were also more benevolent reactions towards female erudites. Some writers even recommended the study of Latin for girls on the grounds that it would make the lonely hours at home which were a necessary part of an elite woman's life more pleasant.⁸¹ Nevertheless, politeness had, in the end, a strong generalist ethos, the spirit of the amateur as opposed to professionalism and erudition.⁸² This influenced especially ideas of female excellence, since breaches of normative gender roles were deemed particularly appalling for women. 'But after all this recommendation of different studies, do not mistake me', wrote John Bennett; 'I do not want to make you a fine writer, a historian, a naturalist, a geographer, an astronomer, a poet, a painter, a connoisseur, or a virtuoso of any kind'.⁸³ Elizabeth Montagu, however, managed to reconcile precisely these masculine roles with her feminine exemplarity. Especially her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (1769), directed against Voltaire's critique, was, in Elizabeth Eger's words, an 'intervention in a

public and nationalist literary debate' that demonstrated her 'appropriation of masculine cultural authority'.⁸⁴

Montagu was not only keen herself to engage in masculine activities—she also encouraged other women in them. When Elizabeth Carter was contemplating publishing a book of poetry, Montagu wrote to her to coax her on: 'so, my dear Urania, away with your lamentations, sit down, revise, correct, augment, print, and publish'. Montagu especially delighted in the idea of Carter displaying her natural intellect, deemed a masculine trait: 'My inferior soul will feel a joy in your producing such proofs of genius to the world; let it see that all your advantages are not derived from study. The envious may say you brought your wisdom from Athens, your wit is your own.'⁸⁵ Similarly, she benevolently teased Carter for showing off her wit in Bristol: 'I suppose by this time you are famous there for the fluency of your small talk, the pertness of your repartee, and the flippancy of your dialogue; nay, for what I know, you may shine in equivoque and double entendre.'⁸⁶ To the Duchess of Portland, Montagu described in an approving tone a visit she made to a local female erudite:

I have been petrifying my brain over a most solid and ponderous performance of a woman in this neighbourhood; having always loved to see Phœbus in petticoats, I borrowed a book written by an ancient gentlewoman skilled in Latin, dipped in Greek and absorbed in Hebrew, besides a modern gift of tongues. [...] really I believe she is a good woman, though but an indifferent Author. She amuses herself in the country so as to be cheerful and sociable at threescore, is always employed either reading, working or walking; and I don't hear that she is pedantic. What use she makes of her Hebrew, I cannot tell; but it is a strange piece, not of female, but of male curiosity, to learn it.⁸⁷

Then again, all modes of masculine behaviour in women were not tolerable in Montagu's eyes; she commented on Laurence Sterne's sister who had finally become 'quite well behaved' after having abandoned her deplorable 'Hoyden' manners.⁸⁸ Moreover, Montagu also often denounced mixing of genders. She thought that a military career was 'excellent in making our Men less effeminate', but, judging from 'ye military air & dress of many of ye Ladies' sociably involved with the officers, she feared that 'they make our Women more masculine', meaning that 'the male & female character which should ever be held distinct will be more [similar] than they have been'.⁸⁹ Thus, there clearly was a difference in Montagu's mind between acceptable and improper masculine behaviour in a woman—and it seems to have been tied to women's intellectual abilities.

Indeed, Montagu limited her positive appraisal of women's masculine roles to bluestockings, wits, and other women of intellect. For women falling outside these limits, she advocated traditional female roles. She took a keen interest in her young niece's education and future, but focused her attention on the girl's domestic tendencies; 'I think I see in her disposition all the elements of which a good Daughter, Wife, Mother, Sister, Mistress of a family, are composed, &

from whence I prognosticate, that she will make others happy & be so herself', Montagu reflected in her letter, thus naming the traditional female roles as the source of a woman's general happiness.⁹⁰ Apparently Montagu's niece lacked the intelligent brilliance Montagu thought was required from a woman wishing to act successfully outside discursive femininity; to her, her niece seemed 'to be a sensible amiable girl, & to have the disposition & qualities which render domestic life peaceable & chearfull'.⁹¹ Thus, Montagu arguably believed that women could choose controversial masculine roles over traditional feminine ones, but only if they had the mental capacity to support them.⁹² Elizabeth Montagu herself had lived through a short period of domestic bliss, prompted by the birth of her son in May 1743. During this time, her thoughts seem to have been turned towards adopting a more traditional female role:

I hope I shall find happiness in acquitting myself justly of the humble duties of a private family; I shall aspire to no higher character than that of a good woman. Those who endeavour to reconcile the good wife with the reputation of a beauty, a toast, a wit, and I know not what, have the art of bringing together things in their natures contrary. To be very serviceable to one's family, with spending only the hours of sleeping in it, may be above my art; my heart will always be open to my friends, my house to the agreeable, and I will take a moderate share of diversion abroad; but my attention is to my own fire-side, and this, I assure you, is merely my own inclination; for though Mr. Montagu does every thing that can make my home agreeable, he has never by the least hint recommended to me to stay in it.⁹³

These domestic aspirations were extinguished by the death of Montagu's son in September 1744. Montagu never had more children, and she turned her ambitions to her social, intellectual, and economic pursuits.

Even in cases where wit and genius were bountifully supplied, the life of a female wit was a constant balancing act. Montagu expressed such thoughts in a letter to Lord Lyttelton, who lamented that his daughter was 'not a beauty and a genius'. '[D]id you know the vexations of vanity, and the languors of pride in retirement, you would thank the gods for not having given her too many charms, and too many pretensions to admiration', Montagu remonstrated; 'I have known very few women in my life whom extraordinary charms and accomplishments did not make unhappy'.⁹⁴ In a later letter she praised Miss Lyttelton for her traditional domestic virtues:

Your Lordship's account of Miss Lyttelton rejoiced me on your account and hers. I congratulate you that your son is fit to grace public life, your daughter to bless domestic. Your Lordship's forming care will polish her virtues, till they are smooth and soft, and never idly wish to make them bright and dazzling. Extraordinary talents may make a woman admired, but they will never make her happy. Talents put a man above the world,

and in a condition to be feared and worshipped; a woman that possesses them must be always courting the world, and asking pardon, as it were, for uncommon excellence.⁹⁵

Montagu seems to speak with a vengeance; perhaps she had personally come to notice that extraordinary talents and breaking traditional feminine roles, which she herself always seemed able to manage successfully, could nevertheless be taxing. Therefore, Montagu herself was cautious in her display of unfeminine qualities, and carefully selected the audience to whom she could express them:

There is a mahometan Error crept even into the Christian Church that Women have no Souls & it is thought very absurd for us to pretend to read or think like reasonable Creatures; & therefore not to appear presumptuous I wou'd not, till I was very intimate with a person, own to them I had ever read any thing but my Grand mothers receipts for puddings & Cerecloths for sprains with just as much housewifery & quackery as my capacity might be capable of receiving.⁹⁶

Similar reserve seemed necessary to Fanny Burney, who, for fear of being thought '*studious*, or *affected*', instead of 'making a *Display* of Books', always tried to '*hide* them' and avoid being caught reading. As Sylvia Myers has shown, many learned women shared similar fears of being thought affected, and advised their friends and relatives not to educate their daughters for the fear of social condemnation—despite the pleasure they themselves received from their learning.⁹⁷ Indeed, as Hester Lynch Thrale noted, a female wit needed to take infinite care not to be thought 'Bookish'; for, as she explained to Burney, 'you will be *watched*, & if you are not upon your Guard, all the misses will rise up against you'.⁹⁸ Thus, not only men, but also women were eager to chastise those women not conforming to polite feminine norms.

Montagu's success in gaining public approval for her masculine endeavours was greatly based on her chameleon-like persona; her skilful use of external politeness enabled her to become the emblem of polite feminine perfection in her contemporaries' eyes despite her masculine traits. In fact, Montagu's flexible adaptation of different roles can be seen as clever image-control in addition to pragmatic manoeuvring. She balanced her unfeminine activities with a careful display of religious piety, wifely submission, and other such characteristics labelled properly feminine.⁹⁹ External politeness thus offered women more possibilities than inward politeness—not least because of the intimate links that existed between inward politeness, domesticity, and the rising middle-class gender roles.

Mary Delany's Image Control

Like Montagu, Mary Delany was deft in playing different roles during her long and eventful life. She cheerfully distinguished herself as high society belle, pious

widow, ingenious female artist, femme fatale, industrious housewife, loyal friend, flippant gossip, and most of all—independent woman. She managed to make the most of various difficult circumstances, all thanks to her ability to deftly perceive what was expected from her and to act accordingly. In fact, her life is a testament to what an intelligent woman could achieve with skilful image control. Her dissimulative skills enabled her to overcome her first husband's sullen jealousy, his housekeeper-sister's antipathy, and her own aunt Lady Lansdowne's troublesome attempts to set her up with a lover.¹⁰⁰ Her clever application of politeness and endeavour 'to be very civil to all' soon gained her Pendarves's family's favour, 'who were not at first inclined to receive me well'.¹⁰¹ Because of Alexander Pendarves's compulsive suspiciousness, she was extremely cautious of showing herself outdoors and socialising with men, guarding the image of herself as the pious, chaste, and devoted wife. Her strict image control was successful: Delany noted that Pendarves seemed to be 'very happy and well satisfied with my behaviour', and indeed, she managed to ingratiate herself well enough to her disagreeable husband as to make him promise to make her his heir—only for him to die the night before signing his new will, thus leaving her practically penniless.¹⁰² Regardless, she considered her release as a blessing, as it restored her to 'a state of tranquillity I had not known for many years' with a fortune that, even though 'very mediocre', was '*at my own command*'.¹⁰³

Thus, like Elizabeth Montagu, Delany became independent when her husband died; the only difference was that she had a significantly smaller fortune to practice her new-found freedom with. She was thus again confronted with less than ideal circumstances. However, she rallied once more; making the most of her limited finances, she resided mainly with her female friends, Duchess of Portland and Anne Donnellan, as well as her brother Bernard 'Bunny' Granville, cheerfully attending the Court, theatre, opera, and other London amusements. Wiser for her early experience with matrimony, Delany seems to have spent, in the words of Janice Farrar Thaddeus, the next twenty years of her life 'toying with love and resisting marriage'.¹⁰⁴ Instead of accepting any of her many aristocratic suitors, Delany contentedly claimed that 'I live just as I could wish to do; have much business, many amusements, a pleasant house, charming fields, and a companion that [...] crowns all by his friendly and agreeable manner'—meaning her brother.¹⁰⁵

During this time, probably around 1740, she wrote an autobiography of her early life and marriage with Pendarves. The autobiography was written in letters to the Duchess of Portland—and probably circulated around her circle of friends—and is a powerful demonstration of Delany's skill in controlling her public and private image. Janice Farrar Thaddeus draws a link between Delany's autobiography and the canon of so-called scandalous memoirists, who by publishing their side of their story wanted to present themselves as many-sided personalities and, in Felicity Nussbaum's words, 'disrupt conventional paradigms of [the] female character'.¹⁰⁶ In other words, through her autobiography Delany wanted to rewrite her image—particularly, it seems, to fend off



Joseph Brown, sc.

MARY GRANVILLE,

(M^{rs}. Delany.)

*From an original Portrait by Opie,
in the possession of the R^{ts}. Hon^{ble}. Lady Llanover.*

London: Richard Bentley, 1861.

Figure 5.4 Joseph Brown after John Opie, *Mary Delany* (1861).
© National Portrait Gallery, London

suspicious of duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. She assured the Duchess that the autobiography was entirely truthful: 'I promised not to disguise any part of my conduct or even my sentiments from you; and I will rather run the hazard of losing some part of your good opinion, than hide myself from you, under the veil of any kind of deceit'.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, throughout her account, Delany emphasises her open and plain dealings with her detested husband, claiming that she only deceived him in the extent of her repulsion towards him by hiding her tears of despair—and that even this dissimulation was 'painful' to her sincere nature.¹⁰⁸ She assured that her 'honest heart' would let her show 'no delight in being in his company', which she compensated for by taking care 'he should have no reason to accuse me of preferring any other to it'.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, a number of men seem to have gone crazy with love for the young and beautiful Delany—apparently with no encouragement on her part. Indeed, she paints a picture of herself as the innocent victim of their debauched advances. Yet, her character obviously was a flirtatious one, and after Pendarves's death she was toying with several men's (and possibly women's as well) love simultaneously.

Delany also put on a cloak of sensibility. Even though Pendarves's death in 1724 came as a joyous release from her 'jailor', she claimed that it nevertheless shocked her sensibilities profoundly and adamantly denied being 'hypocritical in the concern I showed'.¹¹⁰ After his death, Delany displayed what Janice Farrar Thaddeus calls well-honed 'eighteenth-century double-think' by looking back with compassion and reproaching herself for her 'ingratitude' in 'not loving a man, who had so true an affection for me'; indeed, Delany claimed that this was 'a most painful reflection, and has frequently added to my anxieties'.¹¹¹

In addition to her autobiography, Mary Delany also had two written 'characters' drawn of her by her friend Anne Donnellan and second husband Patrick Delany, which shed some light into her deft image control. Even though these descriptions share many characteristics—both acknowledge her exceptional accomplishments and industry—they also have interesting differences, which reflect the different roles Delany assumed at different stages of her life, but also the different ways she chose to retell her history to these two people. Written in 1742, Anne Donnellan's account is revealingly named 'Aspasia's Picture', referring to Delany with the name of Pericles's mistress which she had adopted amongst her friends, fully aware of the erotic connotations of the name.¹¹² Donnellan portrays Delany as someone who had 'naturally a *great deal of vivacity* and liveliness of temper' and even a 'tendency towards gaiety', although this was checked by '*innate modesty* and *early prudence*'. However, Donnellan is quick to note that Delany's modesty was 'not that unbecoming bashfulness' but 'the *modesty of the mind*' which, instead of causing awkward behaviour, 'adds a grace to everything that she says or does'. Neither did Delany's prudence consist '*in formality* or reserve', but left her behaviour easy and unceremonious. To avoid portraying Delany as a downright fun-loving, popular flirt, Donnellan then thought it prudent to add that 'the easiness of her behaviour proceeds from the purity of her heart, not the levity of her mind'.¹¹³

Patrick Delany's portrait from 1755, originally written to be published in his periodical *The Humanist* under the title 'Maria', paints a much more modest and retiring picture of the young Mary Delany before and during her first marriage. He describes her as 'bashful to an extreme, [...] even blameably so'. Delany's utmost diffidence supposedly prevented her from ever dancing in public, 'where she would be the distinguished object of observation':

The case was the same in her playing as in her dancing, for though she had confessedly the finest hand and execution that ever was heard, she never let anybody but her intimate acquaintance hear it. She could not bear the attention of others to her, and whenever she found she was attended to in a very extraordinary manner, she blushed and fluttered herself into a confusion which quickly forced her to give over.¹¹⁴

Regarding the abundant male attention Delany attracted, D.D. asserts that her native dignity 'kept all admirers in awe, insomuch that she was the woman in the world to whom that fine description of Solomon could best be applied: *fair as the moon clear as the sun, but terrible as an army with banners*'. The interval between Delany's two marriages which she, based on her letters, seemed to spend in light-hearted amusements and toying with various suitors, is in Patrick Delany's account acquitted with a single sentence, stating that she employed it 'in various works of genius, particularly in the study and practice of painting'.¹¹⁵

D.D.'s characterisation of Delany was, of course, originally intended for publication in a moralist periodical and, therefore, written to a very different audience from Donnellan's version, which was for the eyes of Delany and her friends only. There are also more than ten years between the two accounts. However, Donnellan's more gay portrayal of Delany bears a much closer resemblance to the Mary Delany we meet in her own letters—fun-loving, flirtatious, high-spirited. As Janice Farrar Thaddeus notes, Delany was born 'at the beginning of the century, and formed by its looser mores', which made her 'much less inhibited than her younger friends'.¹¹⁶ Especially D.D.'s claims of Delany's extreme diffidence and wish to avoid attention seem—even though supposedly describing her youth—particularly implausible characterisations of a woman who boasted about going to 'the ball at St. James's' and the attention her art and accomplishments drew from the Viceroy of Ireland.¹¹⁷ And yet, Delany certainly also relished her domestic pleasures. She enjoyed playing the mistress of the house, preserving relishes and pickles, supervising workmen, sprucing up her home and garden, and administering medicines to her family, servants, and friends. This was partly a natural consequence of aging; as she wrote to her sister,

it is very happy that as our season of life changes our taste for pleasures alter. In the spring and summer of life we *flutter and bask* in the sunshine of diversions—it is true we run the hazard of being tamed and seldom escape it; in the autumn and in the winter of life we by degrees seek for shade and shelter.¹¹⁸

The glaring discrepancies between these two accounts—both idealising Delany in their own ways—demonstrate the ease and skill with which Delany played different polite roles. What was commendable for the single and carefree 32-year-old Mary Delany differed from the role that was required from the married 45-year-old matron of the house. To what extent either of these portrayals, or her autobiography, capture the ‘true’ Mary Delany, remains questionable.

Identity and the Self

The multiplicity of social roles, masks, and identities women such as Elizabeth Montagu and Mary Delany routinely assumed calls attention to larger questions of identity’s genuineness and internality as opposed to external influence and theatricality. Eighteenth-century understandings of identity have been under some recent scholarly scrutiny. Much of this work has challenged views of the Enlightenment subject as a fully centred, unified individual with a core of stable, continuous identity. Instead, eighteenth-century identity has been presented as something that was perceived as multiple, changeable, and malleable, to be assumed and shed at will according to the requirements of polite sociability. Indeed, several scholars have argued that eighteenth-century identity construction should be understood instead as a social masquerade that allowed individuals to ‘be in some degree whatever character we choose’, as James Boswell asserted.¹¹⁹ For this reason, as Kathleen Wilson notes, ‘personal identity could seem for some to be as much a product of choice as of birth’.¹²⁰ James Boswell himself with his chameleon-like persona has been portrayed as a case in point. Felicity Nussbaum has argued that Boswell’s autobiographical texts, portraying him with various and contradictory identities, reflect contemporary ‘linguistic and cultural confusions about ideologies of self’, where an idea of ‘an essential self’ competed with ‘an equally dominant one that identity is perpetually in flux’.¹²¹

Here, however, lies a problem. Most scholars, like Nussbaum or Wilson, do not conceptually differentiate identity from the self—thus justifying Brubaker and Cooper’s critique of the loose use of these concepts.¹²² Yet, an individual’s identity and self were not necessarily understood to be synonymous in eighteenth-century England, even if they were sometimes used interchangeably. Dror Wahrman has offered a detailed analysis on the development of the relationship between identity and self in the eighteenth century. His argument is that the early modern understanding of identity as ‘mutable, assumable, divisible, or actively malleable’ was quickly replaced in the 1780s and 1790s by the modern idea of identity-as-self—immutable, internalised, and essential.¹²³ In other words, identities collapsed into the self and became truthful emanations of an individual’s internal, uniform reality. Wahrman argues that, in early modern understanding, there was no conception of a ‘true essential self’, and that any attempt to discuss early modern personal identity in such terms is inevitably anachronistic. Indeed, Wahrman claims that what made views about multiple and migrating identities possible in the first place was a ‘non-essential notion of

identity that was not anchored in a deeply seated self'.¹²⁴ This is exemplified by the literalness with which dress was thought to make identity, rather than merely signify its preceding existence.¹²⁵ As Wahrman writes, the assumed power of clothes to permeate and shape their wearer's identity indicates that 'the *ancien régime* of identity lacked that key characteristic of the modern understanding of self, its depth'. Accordingly, early modern personal identity cannot be fitted into the surface/outside versus depth/inside scheme that shapes modern thinking about an essential, constant self. For Wahrman, if the modern 'self' is inwardly turned, the early modern 'self' appears as 'outwardly or socially turned'—but, as Wahrman quite correctly asks, is it then still a 'self'?¹²⁶

If we are to accept Wahrman's account, the emergence of inward politeness can be seen as a phenomenon directly related to this gradual shift in conceptualisations of identity from theatrical to essential. The idea of internal politeness also represents a view where identities—in this case, polite identities—are transformed from multiple and volitional to singular and unavoidable, the body reflecting one's essential self transparently and truthfully. This also offers a possible explanation for the change in perceptions of Elizabeth Montagu's feminine exemplarity that occurred in the 1790s; her utilisation of multiple identities can be seen as an early modern polite tactic which clashed with the emerging modern ideals of a uniform self. In fact, the conceptual change Wahrman proposes would mean that women's possibilities to manoeuvre in polite society with the help of multiple polite identities became increasingly narrower the further the long eighteenth century progressed. As the tide then turned more and more to favour ideas of a uniform self and, respectively, inward politeness, women would have found it increasingly difficult to perform their various roles in a socially accepted manner. Thus, what was a regular feature of early eighteenth-century politeness—that is, assuming different identities as social roles, masks, or personas—would have become a hypocritical practice by the end of the period.

Wahrman's account is insightful, but also leaves some questions unanswered—especially concerning early modern ideas of the self. If the notion of an essential self only appeared quite late in the eighteenth century, why does the *OED* then show that the term then used already in 1670s to denote 'A Secret self I had enclosed within, That was not bounded with my Clothes or Skin'?¹²⁷ It would appear that either the shift Wahrman outlines had started gradually already at the end of the seventeenth century, or the early modern understanding of malleable identity also included some sort of conception of an internal self. While Wahrman's timeframe is certainly much too narrow and the shift should rather be seen as a gradual change where both models of thought coexisted alongside each other from at least the end of the seventeenth century, the latter option is also plausible.¹²⁸ In fact, John Jeffries Martin has suggested that the importance attached to self-presentation, performance, and theatricality in early modern conceptions of the self does not necessarily rule out the possibility of an individual self-consciousness about interior experience or inwardness, or the tension between the two. According to Martin, a certain experience

of inwardness can even be seen to be a crucial cultural and intellectual early modern development. Even though Renaissance men and women had little sense of the self as a neatly bounded or well-demarcated thing—indeed, Martin argues that they experienced the self as highly fluid, at every moment ready to change its shape or to slip through the porous body—they still had an acute sense of interiority.¹²⁹ Of course, this interior self was not essential in the modern sense; in fact, Martin emphasises that the early modern self should not be approached as a thing (such as the soul or the mind) but rather as a relation between the individual experience of inwardness and externality, where the body as the ‘privileged frontiere’ between the two plays an integral role.¹³⁰

Even if women such as Elizabeth Montagu embraced the multiplicity of identity displayed by Boswell, they appear nevertheless to have thought that, underneath all polite role-playing, there remained a stable, unchanging, non-discursive core of self. This is visible, for example, in Montagu’s letter to William Freind:

I am now resolved to write you a long letter while I am your plain downright country cousin before I have breath’d the London air or have lost the least part of my Arcadian sincerity & sobriety. I don’t know whether it is not conceited to imagine you will like me better when I am most my self or when I am moulded by fashion into other peoples form.¹³¹

Montagu appears to think that the roles she assumes are not her ‘true’ self, but something that is added on top of it by polite adaptation to a changing social environment. Thus, it would seem that, at least for Montagu, changing identities were not thought to interact with one’s self, and it was always possible to return to one’s true, authentic subjectivity after a polite play with identities.

Early modern understanding of the exact nature of identity itself is another interesting question. Identity could be—and often was—seen, in Dror Wahrman’s words, as ‘the mutable and non-essential nature of what can be assumed or shed at will’, and identities were thus understood as performed—that is, as deliberately assumed and changed. However, even though identities were easily exchanged, they were, at the same time, also deeply inhabited; just as clothing was easily put on or taken off, it was nevertheless thought to very literally *make* identity. Therefore, identities, multiple and exchangeable as they were, were perhaps not only superficial masks to be picked up and put down lightly; instead, they can be seen to have, to some extent, interacted with an individual’s inner self and shape the self or some part of it, if only temporarily. Indeed, as Elizabeth Montagu writes above, her understanding of assuming an identity literally means being ‘moulded by fashion into other peoples form’; what exactly she means by this in terms of the integrity of the self remains unclear.

The long eighteenth century thus stands, again, in the midst of a confusion of old and new ideas; in the words of Isabel Karremann, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of both ‘the notion of an essential, inner self and the notion of a self as a bundle of perceptions retrospectively labelled “I”’.¹³² Early modern

understandings, still influential during the eighteenth century, included a notion of inwardness, if not strictly a self. However, doubts have also been raised about the supposedly unchangeable nature of the emerging Enlightenment idea of the self, as well as the whole existence of a uniform 'Enlightened selfhood' altogether. In fact, according to Udo Thiel, the eighteenth century harboured a number of discordant philosophical views of the origin and nature of 'personal identity', mostly dependent on interpretations of the nature of the human mind. Most immaterialist philosophers of the mind argued that personal identity—or, the self—consists in the 'identity of a mental substance' and that 'the identity of a mental substance is a direct consequence of its immaterial nature'; therefore, because of its immateriality, the mind—and, thus, personal identity—'is not subject to change and remains the same through time'.¹³³ Materialist philosophers typically placed personal identity in consciousness or memory, and their attitude towards the possible changeability of the self is more ambivalent. Locke's theory of personal identity being based on consciousness left open the possibility of the self being changed through time and life experiences; an even more radical stance was adopted by David Hume, who, as Thiel claims, thought that a person's inner experience reveals that 'the self or person is not identical through time'.¹³⁴ In fact, Hume maintained that the mind was 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement'; and that 'there is properly no identity' of the mind at different times.¹³⁵ Thus, for Hume, the fact that people have a natural tendency to ascribe unity and stability to the self was caused by the imagined causal connections of one's perceptions, preserved by memory. These causal connections 'lead the imagination to "feign" an identical self to which those causally related perceptions belong'.¹³⁶ Accordingly, as Hume wrote, 'the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one'.¹³⁷ Incidentally, Hume's ideas resonate powerfully with postmodern understandings of identity and selfhood. Foucauldian theorists hold the idea of an authentic interiority as purely fictional, since all subjectivity is produced, or at least enabled, by discursive power. The self is seen as endlessly performative, birthed through unceasing citational identifications. From this point of view, the eighteenth-century play with identities can be seen as a superficial phenomenon in the face of a more comprehensive understanding of (personal) identity as a non-volitional performative fiction. The subject can choose to perform different mask-like identities in order to adapt herself to different contexts in life; those performances, however, take place within a matrix of power that preforms and conditions them. Therefore, they are always partly non-volitional—and, moreover, they always also profoundly constitute the individual as a subject that imagines herself to be autonomous and to have a stable, internal core of a self.

Eighteenth-century practices of the self can also be seen to be targeted towards shaping an individual's personal identity, thus indicating that the members of polite society did not necessarily see the self as an unalterable entity. As I will discuss in the final chapter of this book, the practices of self-

care, self-knowledge, and self-discipline that polite individuals engaged with can be viewed as an attempt to solve the problem of hypocrisy embedded in politeness; through internalising polite normativity as an authentic part of the self, individuals aimed to become autonomous, ethical subjects instead of hypocritical actors.¹³⁸ As I will show, Catherine Talbot embarked on a strict regime of self-control with precisely such a target in mind—an ethical and moral transformation of her personal identity. The eighteenth-century idea of the self as an object of control and ethical self-fashioning sits uneasily with the belief that the self was somehow authentic, but becomes perfectly understandable if we take early modern and eighteenth-century conceptualisations of the self to be, as Michael Schoenfeldt has aptly written, ‘a vibrantly inconsistent but brilliantly supple discourse of selfhood and agency’ rather than a homogenous entity.¹³⁹ Double feeling and malleability of the self certainly were terms often used in definitions of eighteenth-century conceptualisations of personal identity. The eighteenth-century understanding of the human nature still relied in great part on a ‘dualist concept of a split human nature that is paradoxical and even inconsistent’; indeed, according to Charles Taylor, the notion of authenticity was a child of the Romantic period, born out of criticism towards the disengaged rationality of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, in many eighteenth-century conceptualisations, ‘inconsistency is necessarily Man’s lot: to expect consistency from him is to deny by implication the paradoxical dualism that makes him a man’, as Paul Fussler claims.¹⁴¹ To many eighteenth-century polite subjects, then, not only were identities malleable, but even the inner core of the self could be fashioned, at least to some extent.

Ironic Citations: Politeness as Camp

Camp, by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles, and, in particular, sex roles, are superficial—a matter of style. Indeed, life itself is role and theater, appearance, and impersonation.

Jack Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’ (1993)¹⁴²

Assuming different roles and masks was thus an everyday practice for polite women. However, the utmost consciousness and deliberation with which these roles are sometimes put on almost generates a parodic impression. For example, when Fanny Burney describes how ‘Susan Thrale had just had her Hair turned up, & powdered, & has taken to the *Womanly Role*’, and how ‘Dr. Johnson, sportively gave her instructions how to encrease her consequence, & to *take upon her* properly’, the reader is struck by the make-believe feeling of the scene—as if everyone present is consciously acting and conscious of everyone else’s acting, including Burney, later reporting the incident.¹⁴³ Many of Burney’s journal entries describing the polite roles she assumes share a similar ironic tint. ‘Mr. Pepys & I then began a *mutual* flash, I assure you, & wondrous sprightly we were’, she writes of a ‘*Blue*’ party.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, many of the descriptions that Elizabeth Montagu gives about her actions and roles are delivered from a

decidedly ironical distance. For example, her account of her transformation into 'the most reasonable, quiet, good kind of country gentlewomen that ever was' by a change of location betrays a distinctly ironical attitude, as do her many similar self-categorisations, quoted earlier in this chapter.¹⁴⁵ Also Catherine Talbot's letters reveal openly satirical tones, displayed deliciously by her description of her visit to the court:

You perhaps [do not] suspect how peculiarly well I am cut out for a Courtier. I have contrived to have in that one day no less than two private Audiences of the Heir Apparent, & beside that, have eat Royal Cake & drank royal Caudle (& very excellent indeed) in Public with universal Approbation. 'Tis prodigious how young I am grown & how Gay. [...] Shall I accept the place of a Maid of Honour if it should be offer'd me when any of the present set Marries off? I like the loitering in a Drawing room of all things, & was pull'd out of it at last by meer Compulsion before I had seen half enough of a Scene so new & so amusing to me. Lady Egremont was diverted beyond measure to see me so Girlishly earnest to stay to the last minute.¹⁴⁶

Such open irony seems to make the performances of some of the polite feminine roles that Burney, Montagu, and Talbot engage in deliberately parodic.

Parody is a powerful strategy of subversive repetition of normative social roles, as Judith Butler, among others, argues. Subjectivity or identity cannot be taken as genuine expressions of an individual's stable core; instead, they are constituted through self-representative practices, both textual and bodily. In other words, the individual experience of genuine inwardness is a fabrication. There is no authentic interiority of polite femininity—only a discursive representation where women's supposed internal features control the ways in which their bodies act. The discursive creation of a natural interior serves a purpose; according to Butler, 'inner' and 'outer' are 'tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control'. Their juxtaposition constitutes a 'binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject'—or, in other words, creates normative identities and produces docile bodies.¹⁴⁷ However, as Butler notes, individuals can resist this process of normalisation by shaking the authority of this inside/outside-division in different ways—for example, by means of parody. For Butler, performing gendered identities from an ironic position reveals the naturalised authenticity of these identities to be fictive.¹⁴⁸ Thus, parody is a tool for destabilising existing conduct expectations; as such, it can be analysed as a practice of freedom elite women used in the context of eighteenth-century politeness. Women can be observed to use politeness in self-conscious and ironic ways to question and challenge the gendered conduct expectations the politeness regime set them. This parodic citationality is also a defining feature in camp—and, indeed, such uses of politeness bear some resemblance to camp.

Even though 'camp' is a twentieth-century term and, as such, obviously not used by eighteenth-century subjects, I want to argue that, as an analytical

concept, camp reveals to us something important about eighteenth-century politeness. Camp, as an adjective, goes back to at least 1909, when it was defined as ‘actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis’¹⁴⁹ or ‘pleasantly ostentatious or, in manner, affected’.¹⁵⁰ Since then, it has picked up an affinity to homosexual aestheticism and irony, recognised by, for example, Susan Sontag in her famous essay ‘Notes on “Camp”’ (1964), the first text to analyse camp as a cultural phenomenon. In recent scholarship, camp has been examined as a critical aesthetic and political practice for gay men and, lately, increasingly also for lesbian and straight people. Camp has become an especially important tool for postmodern deconstructions of gender, sex, and identity, due to its ability to both legitimate and subvert that which it parodies.¹⁵¹

Camp, when defined loosely as a postmodern practice based on deliberate parody and self-acknowledged theatricality, rather than an essentially gay sensibility, is generally understood to build on irony, aestheticism, and theatricality. Firstly, the irony of camp is born out of an incongruous contrast between an individual and her context; it is constructed on the oppositional play between ‘appearance’ and ‘essence’, revealing the fictive nature of the inside/outside juxtaposition.¹⁵² Camp is a ‘form of ironic representation and reading’ of the incongruity present in conduct norm—such as the contrasting of masculine/feminine, youth/old age, or high/low status.¹⁵³ Irony is thus understood as a consciously distancing attitude towards a norm, whereas an ironic performance of the norm construes as parody. Secondly, camp is defined by its privileging of aesthetics over substance, or style over content; it relies largely upon ‘arrangement, timing, and tone’, and, as such, is based on fashioning the exterior. It cultivates the aesthetics of the exaggerated, the ostentatious, and the outrageous, which render it a spectacle.¹⁵⁴ Thirdly, camp is essentially theatrical; it embraces the idea of ‘life-as-theater’ and highlights the juxtaposition of ‘being versus role-playing’, or reality versus appearance. By focusing on the outward appearances of role, camp implies that roles are ‘superficial—a matter of style’.¹⁵⁵ These three aspects are also prominently present in the conscious performances of politeness produced and recorded by Montagu and other women examined here.

Elizabeth Montagu was a queen of subtle parody. She wrote to Elizabeth Carter, who was ‘flaunting it’ in Bristol, a letter appropriate for someone appearing in the role of a ‘Bristol belle’:

I hope you will write to me soon, and pray tell me whether you like pompons or aigrettes in the hair; if you put on rouge, dance minuets and cotillions, that I may describe and define you in your Bristol State. I ask a thousand pardons for detaining you so long from the pump room, but I hope it will make you some amends if I tell you Lord Northampton had a fine suit for the birth-day. The waistcoat silver and gold, the coat gold and silver. These must be interesting subjects to a Bristol belle.¹⁵⁶

Montagu also wrote sardonically of her own need to assume the proper appearance for an urban lady when arriving at the metropolis; ‘I look like a

country Joan, and I must not shew such a jolly countenance at London, lest it should be thought that I am too grossière ever to have [...] had the vapours'.¹⁵⁷ When in country, she would adopt the role of an 'antiquated Dowager' with a mock sincerity: 'I have improved upon Lady Grale's plan of doing every [thing] soberly, I have been serious & solemn, & retired, & have sat as quietly at my fireside as any antiquated Dowager when her quadrille party was gone'.¹⁵⁸

Mary Delany's autobiographical embracing of the theatrical came close to camp, as well. Janice Farrar Thaddeus has examined Delany's epistolary practices as a means of controlling her own image through assuming various masks. Delany had a habit of adopting pet names both for herself and her friends—often with piercing accuracy, as naming her uncle 'Alcander' or the Honourable Henry Hervey 'Apollo's Imp' shows. Delany herself adopted the name 'Aspasia' after the beautiful and accomplished 'center of Athenian literary and philosophical life'; however, as Aspasia was also Pericles's mistress, the name was open for a less spiritualised interpretation.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Delany's letters and especially her autobiography are characterised by self-dramatisation that makes them read like fiction. Her use of novel-like dramatic devices, such as fictional (and intertextual) names and dialogue effectively serve to position herself as the innocent heroine and to inform her reader of the trope her adventures are to be contextualised with. The most glaring fictional allusion is her representation of Alexander Pendarves's courtship, which, as Thaddeus observes, bears uncanny similarities with Clarissa Harlowe's experiences in *Clarissa* (1748). It is possible that Delany even revised her original account after the publication of Richardson's novel.¹⁶⁰ Even though the easiness with which Delany moved in and out of fiction in her self-representation was particularly pronounced, Thaddeus claims that it was nothing unusual for the early eighteenth century.¹⁶¹ Indeed, the *ancien régime* of identity suggested that the self was a mask to be fashioned and a trope to be enacted. It is noteworthy that the two women who seem to have embraced the theatrical and parodic opportunities available in politeness with particular rigour and skill, Montagu and Delany, are the ones who were brought up in the early decades of the eighteenth century and had also the closest connections to the high society and its courtly, dissimulative politeness tradition.

The theatricality of a campish parody resonates deeply with eighteenth-century conceptualisations of identity and formulations of external politeness. Moreover, the aestheticizing attitude towards the body, a central feature of camp-like parody, is something that, as we remember, was a fundamental operating principle of politeness. Politeness was based on the stylisation of the body, executed through exercising, fashioning, and disciplining the body into normative appearances and manners. As Elizabeth Montagu's sarcastic description of the role of 'a pretty sort of a woman' shows, women were well aware of this:

If any one wishes to assume that character, they have only to pervert their sense, distort their faces, disjoint their limbs, mince their phrases, and lisp

their words, and the thing is done. Grimaces, trite sentences, affected civility, forced gaiety, and an imitation of good nature, complete the character.¹⁶²

The privileging of style over content was also a dominant feature of external politeness, which, as I have argued, was paramount for women who wanted to use politeness flexibly to navigate in polite society in a successful way.

Camp also offers a model for critique of gender roles. When understood as parodic mimicry or feminine masquerade, it functions as a form of gender parody. Accordingly, consciously ironic enactments of polite feminine roles can be interpreted as denaturalising normative representations of women; they can be seen to have the potential of revealing to the subject that not only are parodic roles fictive fabrications, but the polite feminine models they are constructed on are no more natural or essential, and that the ‘self’ of the polite subject is always a construction. The masculine roles Elizabeth Montagu assumed, as well as the emphatically feminine roles she balanced them with, can be seen as a form of this kind of campish parody. Joan Riviere’s essay ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’ (1929), which has been taken up in feminist theory as a ‘divining rod pointing to the “performative status” of the feminine, describes intellectual women who take on a masculine identity to ‘perform in the intellectual sphere’, and then put on a ‘mask of womanliness’ as a defence to ‘avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men’.¹⁶³ This resonates with bluestockings’ adoption of the feminine role as a compensation for their literary ambitions. By masquerading as the obedient wife or the innocent *pastorella*, Montagu can be understood to have appeased the potential consternation she feared her intellectual pursuits would cause in the polite public. At the same time, however, Montagu’s play with roles also demonstrates to us that the womanliness she portrayed was no more authentic than the masculine roles she took on; in the masquerade, ‘the woman mimics an authentic—genuine—womanliness but then authentic womanliness is such a mimicry, *is* the masquerade’.¹⁶⁴ Performances of exaggerated femininity, such as Montagu’s ‘Bristol belle’ letter to Carter, form a critical, self-conscious distance between Montagu’s self and the stereotypical role she assumes; when Montagu parodies herself through the role she is expected to assume in earnest, she demonstrates her recognition of herself as a trope. By the parodic excessiveness of her performance, she underlines the ‘discrepancy between gesture and “essence”’, making the allegedly natural suddenly appear unnatural.¹⁶⁵

This is not to say that politeness was always or essentially parodic. Instead, I want to suggest that politeness was based on such features as theatricality and the aesthetics of the exterior, central in camp, which enabled the occasional parodic citations of politeness. Women’s deliberate and parodic performances of polite feminine roles could, then, offer them a way out of the essentialising and naturalising rhetoric of the politeness discourse by questioning the whole juxtaposition of internal/natural/essential and external/affected/performed. As David Bergman writes, ‘the hyperbolic, parodic, anarchic, redundant style of camp is the very way to bring heterosexist attitudes of “originality”,

“naturalism”, and “normality” to their knees’.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, even though these women’s polite performances were certainly not ‘camp’ in the sense that they themselves would have called them such, these theatrical, self-consciously parodic performances of polite roles, reminiscent of camp, can be seen as an individual strategy of freedom. It is certain that these women recognised the roles they were both acting and that were expected of them, and often approached them from an ironical distance. As such, parodic polite performances challenge ideas of a uniform, internalised identity and, as such, operate in line with eighteenth-century conceptualisations of flexible identities. Furthermore, parodic uses of politeness also undermine the ideals of openness and transparency that were regularly promoted as essential characteristics of the female nature.

However, the subversive and freedom-providing potential camp-like parody offers is, in the end, limited. Like self-discipline, self-care, and other practices of the self, parodic performances of polite gender identity operate to simultaneously reinforce gendered behavioural ideals while undermining them. They reveal the performative status of gender identity, but cannot effectively dismantle that gender identity.¹⁶⁷ Judith Butler’s analysis of drag applies also to other forms of parodic masquerade of gender roles; like drag, they are subversive only to the extent that they reflect on the ‘imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and [dispute] heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality’.¹⁶⁸ Ironic citations of the norm are, in the end, citations all the same, and therefore reinstate the norm.

Notes

- 1 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 287–8.
- 2 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 214.
- 3 Kekäläinen, *James Boswell’s Urban Experience*, 28.
- 4 Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 288–293.
- 5 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 236–7.
- 6 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, xi.
- 7 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 27.
- 8 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, xiv.
- 9 Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’, 363–5.
- 10 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, xiv–xv.
- 11 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 74–8.
- 12 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 81–5. For a more detailed analysis, see Ylivuori, ‘Polite Foucault?’, 178–80.
- 13 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 84.
- 14 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 81–2.
- 15 Nussbaum argues that journalising was a distinctively bourgeois method of self-invention and self-regulation, and ties it to emerging market economy (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 37–8, 52–3).
- 16 Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’, 364–5.
- 17 Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 19.
- 18 Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 20. See also Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 19, passim. On eighteenth-century letter-writing, see e.g. Abbott, *Diary Fiction*; Delafield, *Women’s Diaries as Narrative*.
- 19 MD to Anne Dewes, 26 July 1744, CMD, II, 319.

- 20 EM to Sarah Robinson, [n.d., 174-?], *LEM*, I, 127–8.
- 21 EM to William Freind, 29 December [n.d., 174-?], *LEM*, II, 36. On Montagu's relationship with William Freind (1715–1766), dean of Canterbury, see Clemenson (ed.), *Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of Blue-Stockings [QBS]*, I, 30.
- 22 FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 59.
- 23 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 19 September 1742, *LEM*, II, 188.
- 24 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.
- 25 *JFB*, 30 March 1774, II, 20; [April–July] 1777, II, 261–2.
- 26 Susan, or Susanna Burney (1755–1800), was Fanny Burney's closest friend and ally to whom she confided in all her personal affairs as well as literary enterprises.
- 27 E.g. More, *Strictures*, II, 65, 111, 116, 201; Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 90; II, 137.
- 28 *JFB*, [February–April] 1769, I, 60–1. See also e.g. *JFB*, 22 May 1769, I, 68: 'Younger sisters are almost different Beings from Elder one's, but thank god it is quite & unaffectedly without repining or envy that I see *my* elder sister Gad about & visit, &c—when I rest at Home'.
- 29 See also e.g. *JFB*, 16 February 1769, I, 58: 'I pass my time in Working, Reading, & *thrumming* the Harpsichord.'
- 30 *JFB*, 3 February 1772, I, 188–9.
- 31 Burney (ed.), *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, I, 168.
- 32 FB to Samuel Crisp, [c. 7 January 1779], *JFB*, III, 211.
- 33 E.g. *JFB*, [19 March – 4 April] 1770, I, 128; 25 February 1773, I, 243; FB to Samuel Crisp, [15 May 1775], *JFB*, II, 125–8.
- 34 FB to Samuel Crisp, [c. 7 January 1779], *JFB*, III, 212.
- 35 *JFB*, 20 April 1771, I, 146.
- 36 See e.g. Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 27, 93–7.
- 37 *JFB*, [2–3 March] 1775, II, 81.
- 38 *JFB*, 9 June 1775, II, 153. Hetty and Sukey are Burney's sisters Esther Burney and Susanna Burney. For similar cautiousness, see e.g. FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [8–22 December 1783], *JFB*, V, 449. See also Skinner, 'An Unsullied Reputation'.
- 39 Rizzo, 'Burney and Society', 131–2, 135.
- 40 E.g. *JFB*, 15 November 1768, I, 49; 3 February 1772, I, 185; [April–June] 1774, II, 33; 4 March 1775, II, 86.
- 41 FB to Susanna Burney, [4 December 1778], *JFB*, III, 184.
- 42 *JFB*, [November] 1770, I, 139; 3 February 1772, I, 185.
- 43 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 37.
- 44 E.g. *JFB*, 15 November 1768, I, 44; FB to Susanna Burney, [1 August – 17 September 1773], *JFB*, I, 276–7; FB to Susanna Burney, [?17–29] September [1774], *JFB*, II, 51–2; *JFB*, [October–November] 1774, II, 55; 28 February 1775, II, 70.
- 45 FB to Samuel Crisp, [1–4] April [1776], *JFB*, II, 203–4.
- 46 FB to Samuel Crisp, 2 December 1776, *JFB*, II, 211.
- 47 FB to Susanna Burney and Charlotte Burney, [24] May [17]80, *JFB*, IV, 115.
- 48 FB to Susanna Burney and Charlotte Burney, [late August – early September 1781], *JFB*, IV, 469–70. On dress, see e.g. FB to Susanna Burney, 23–[30] August [1778], *JFB*, III, 98.
- 49 In Felicity Nussbaum's interpretation, Hester Lynch Thrale's unbounded wit, non-dependent on social legitimacy, ended up placing her at the margins of polite society (Nussbaum, 'What Trace of the Wit?').
- 50 FB to Susanna Burney, [1 August – 17 September 1773], *JFB*, I, 276–7.
- 51 FB to Susanna Burney, 7 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 26; FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 36.
- 52 FB to Samuel Crisp, 22 January [1780], *JFB*, IV, 6–7.
- 53 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 75.

- 54 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, December 1738, *LEM*, I, 51–2.
- 55 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 23 June 1761, HL MO 3045. The Montagus owned a fashionable town house in Hill Street, and Sandford was their country estate in Berkshire.
- 56 EM to Elizabeth Vesey, 14 July 1763, HL MO [no number], Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 57 EM to Gilbert West, 21 January 1753, *LEM*, IV, 227–8.
- 58 EM to Gilbert West, 3 July 1755, *LEM*, III, 301.
- 59 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 31 May 1766, HL MO 3171; EM to Frances Boscawen, 21 [December? 1766], HL MO 577, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 60 EM to Gilbert West, 26 June 1755, *LEM*, III, 294–5.
- 61 EM to Gilbert West, 13 July 1755, *LEM*, III, 309.
- 62 EM to Gilbert West, 26 June 1755, *LEM*, III, 294–5.
- 63 EM to Matthew Robinson, 19 July 1768, HL MO 4765, Sairio (ed.), *Bluestocking Corpus*.
- 64 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 74.
- 65 EM to Gilbert West, 26 May 1752, *LEM*, III, 184.
- 66 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 5 December 1742, *LEM*, II, 235–6; EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 5 July 1741, *LEM*, I, 234.
- 67 EM to William Freind, 26 October 1744, *LEM*, III, 3.
- 68 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 74–5.
- 69 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 164–5, 218–19, *passim*.
- 70 Schnorrenberg, ‘Montagu, Elizabeth’; Major, *Madam Britannia*, 76; EM to Mary Robinson, 10 July 1775, BL Add. MS 40663, [f. 50–6?].
- 71 Child, ‘Elizabeth Montagu, Bluestocking Businesswoman’, 160.
- 72 Major, *Madam Britannia*, 75; EM to Elizabeth Vesey, [n.d., c. 1780?], HL MO 6554.
- 73 See e.g. Hannah More’s dedication of her *Essays* to Elizabeth Montagu (More, *Essays*, [ii]). See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 72–4.
- 74 Eger, *Bluestockings*, 129–133; Eger, ‘Introduction’, iv–lvi; Bennett, *Letters*, I, 166. See also Bennett, *Letters*, II, 56.
- 75 Chapone, *Letters*, 177–8.
- 76 Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, 19.
- 77 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 166–7. Fanny Burney’s *Camilla* (1796) parodies women’s erudition through the juxtaposition of the characters of Eugenia Tyrold and Indiana Lynmere, the latter of which ‘could never cope with so great a disadvantage as the knowledge of Latin’ (Burney, *Camilla*, 46).
- 78 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 166–9.
- 79 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 166–9.
- 80 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 198–201; 168–9.
- 81 Glover, *Elite Women*, 46. See also e.g. *Spectator*, No. 37, 12 April 1711, I, 203–8.
- 82 Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation’, 875–6.
- 83 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 230.
- 84 Eger, ‘Introduction’, lxxvi–lxxvii.
- 85 EM to Elizabeth Carter, [n.d., c. 1760?], *LEM*, IV, 345 [sic].
- 86 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 7 June [1759], *LEM*, IV, 189.
- 87 EM to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 8 December 1743, *LEM*, II, 282–3.
- 88 EM to her mother, Elizabeth Robinson, [n.d., 1744], *QBS*, I, 180.
- 89 EM to Mary Robinson, 3 October 1778, BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 79–84.
- 90 EM to Mary Robinson, [7/9] July 1777, BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 61–4.
- 91 EM to Matthew Robinson, [7/9] June 1777, BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 57–60.

- 92 Tania Smith has argued that Montagu's study and command of rhetorical means was a key factor that enabled her to stretch her identity beyond traditional gender boundaries (Smith, 'Elizabeth Montagu's Study').
- 93 EM to Anne Donnellan, 5 December 1742, *LEM*, II, 243.
- 94 EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, Wednesday 1760, *LEM*, IV, 271.
- 95 EM to George, first Baron Lyttelton, 21 October [1760], *LEM*, IV, 311.
- 96 EM to William Freind, [n.d., 174-?], BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 79–81.
- 97 Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 4–5.
- 98 FB to Susanna Burney, 26 September [1778], *JFB*, III, 172.
- 99 Megan Matchinske has made a similar argument concerning women's social roles in the seventeenth century, writing that 'outward conformity to custom' and 'decorous behaviour and speech' provided women leverage within the community, simultaneously leaving them free to negotiate a space for an actively subversive female identity (Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State*, 20).
- 100 Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 171–3.
- 101 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VII, *CMD*, I, 50–1.
- 102 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VIII, *CMD*, I, 55.
- 103 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter XIV, *CMD*, I, 109.
- 104 Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 126.
- 105 MD to Anne Dewes, 10 September 1742, *CMD*, II, 189.
- 106 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 179; Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 121, 135.
- 107 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VIII, *CMD*, I, 56.
- 108 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VI, *CMD*, I, 33–4.
- 109 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VIII, *CMD*, I, 55.
- 110 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter V, *CMD*, I, 31; Letter XIV, *CMD*, I, 109.
- 111 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter VIII, *CMD*, I, 55; Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 123.
- 112 Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 123–4.
- 113 'Aspasia's Picture, drawn by Philomel, in the year 1742', *CMD*, II, 176–80.
- 114 'Character of Maria by Dr. Delany, sent as a Christmas present to Mrs. Dewes', 25 December 1755, *CMD*, III, 388–9.
- 115 'Character of Maria by Dr. Delany, sent as a Christmas present to Mrs. Dewes', 25 December 1755, *CMD*, III, 387–93.
- 116 Thaddeus, 'Mary Delany', 113.
- 117 MD to Anne Dewes, 19 January [1742?], *CMD*, II, 168; 22 October 1745, *CMD*, II, 395–6.
- 118 MD to Anne Dewes, 11 January 1745–6, *CMD*, II, 411.
- 119 Pottle (ed.), *Boswell's London Journal*, 47.
- 120 Wilson, *Island Race*, 2. The idea of an individual's self-fashioning has its roots in Renaissance understandings of identity, as Stephen Greenblatt has influentially argued (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1–9, Ch. 4, passim.).
- 121 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 106. See also Kekäläinen, *James Boswell's Urban Experience*, 27; Manning, 'This Philosophical Melancholy', 131.
- 122 Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', 7.
- 123 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 274–8, 275. See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, esp. Ch. 9.
- 124 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 176.
- 125 See also Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 11–14.
- 126 Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 179.
- 127 'Self, pron., adj., and n.' *OED Online*. December 2014. (Accessed 24 February 2015.)
- 128 Thomas King, for example, suggests that the shift in understandings of identity and self happened already in the end of the seventeenth century (King, 'Performing "Akimbo"', 23). Moreover, Wahrman argues that the shift is intrinsically connected to the similar change in conceptualisations of sex, which has generally been

- seen to have occurred over a much longer period of time Wahrman claims (see Chapter 1).
- 129 Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, 16–19.
- 130 Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, 14–15.
- 131 EM to William Freind, 29 December [n.d., 174-?], *LEM*, II, 36; see also BL, Add MS 70493, ff. 84–7.
- 132 Karremann, ‘Mediating Identities’, 3.
- 133 Thiel, ‘Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity’, 296.
- 134 Thiel, ‘Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity’, 301; Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 252.
- 135 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 253.
- 136 Thiel, ‘Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity’, 301–2.
- 137 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 259. Hume does not, however, explicitly deny the existence of an unchangeable, essential self; he merely states that we cannot know anything about it (Thiel, ‘Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity’, 303).
- 138 See e.g. Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 74–85; Ylivuori, ‘Polite Foucault?’, 178–80.
- 139 Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 11.
- 140 Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 30; Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 25.
- 141 Fussell, *Rhetorical World*, 121.
- 142 Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’, 24.
- 143 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [December 1782 – January 1783], *JFB*, V, 226. Susan Thrale (1770–1858) was one of Hester Lynch Thrale’s daughters.
- 144 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, late December 1783 – early January 1784, *JFB*, V, 464.
- 145 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 23 June 1761, *LEM*, IV, 340–50.
- 146 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 28 August 1762, BLRA, Wrest MS 769/675.
- 147 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 182.
- 148 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 182.
- 149 ‘Camp, adj. and n.s.’ in *OED Online*. March 2015. (Accessed 19 February 2015.)
- 150 Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 3.
- 151 Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism*, 97.
- 152 Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’, 20; Shugart and Waggoner, *Making Camp*, 31–2; Butler, ‘From Interiority to Gender Performatives’, 361–8.
- 153 Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 4; Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’, 20–1; Shugart and Waggoner, *Making Camp*, 33.
- 154 Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’, 21; Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 3.
- 155 Babuscio, ‘Camp and the Gay Sensibility’, 24.
- 156 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 7 June [1759], *LEM*, IV, 191–2.
- 157 EM to Gilbert West, 5 November 1754, *LEM*, III, 276.
- 158 EM to Mary Robinson, 19 January 1771, BL Add. MS 40663, ff. 24–6.
- 159 Thaddeus, ‘Mary Delany’, 123–4.
- 160 Thaddeus, ‘Mary Delany’, 125.
- 161 Thaddeus, ‘Mary Delany’, 135.
- 162 EM to Sarah Robinson, [n.d., 1741], *LEM*, II, 57.
- 163 Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 11; Riviere, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, 35.
- 164 Heath, ‘Joan Riviere and the Masquerade’, 49.
- 165 Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 12.
- 166 Bergman, ‘Introduction’, 11.
- 167 Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 11.
- 168 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125.

6 Discipline and Subversion

In addition to active practices—dancing with grace, walking with poise, conversing with ease—a membership of polite society required also passive restraint. The ideal polite woman was supposed to suffocate her anger, mortify her lust, and curb her appetite through a strict regime of self-control. In other words, the culture of politeness was essentially built on individuals' self-monitoring and self-discipline, targeted at limiting unwanted bodily characteristics and practices and hiding them from sight. This requirement of self-discipline was a central but ambivalent feature of politeness. On the one hand, all politeness was fundamentally constructed on controlling certain (natural) impulses while cultivating others. On the other hand, the all-embracing ideal of easy naturalness, free from effort and restrictions seems to suggest that discipline was, in some ways, deeply antithetical to the ideals of politeness.

Women had a particularly troubled relationship with self-discipline. Invocations of 'female nature' and its capability to self-restraint were glaringly contradictory. There was a long tradition of seeing women as incapable of rational self-control, at the mercy of their wandering womb or, later on, defenceless against their strong sensibilities, which to some extent persisted throughout the long eighteenth century. At the same time, the female body could also be described as naturally more passive and temperate than the male body, and therefore more easily governed. Questions of women's capability of self-control were further complicated by the requirements of their national identity and social status. Didactic writers praised English women for their propriety, restraint, and sexual self-control which supposedly set them apart from their continental sisters (let alone non-European women), and self-mastery was crucial for the self-definition of polite classes.¹ Elite women were thus trapped between three contradictory sets of ideals—those of gender, nation, and class. The juxtaposition of naturalness (or, the construction of natural-seeming gender roles) and control (or, individuals acting out these gender roles) was a core feature of women's politeness, and the ensuing ambiguity unravelled itself in constant anxieties over female dissimulation and hypocrisy, as we have seen.

Even though politeness thus had a strong disciplinary aspect, this chapter will underline the fact that discipline was not solely a repressive regime, but also an essential means to acquire autonomy and freedom. Michel Foucault describes

the enabling and freedom-providing potential of discipline in his later work, especially in the last two parts of *History of Sexuality*. Indeed, according to Foucault, self-discipline could be used by an individual as a means of self-knowledge, independent identity, and freedom. Similarly, the self-control required by everyday practices of politeness offered women freedom within and from the matrix of ideal polite femininity—both through a feeling of self-mastery and autonomy, and in the form of actual social power. A woman who knew the rules of propriety and politeness could bend them fairly extensively without actually stepping over the line and becoming impolite. In this way, women who were skilled in politeness could use it for their own ends and gain relative freedom from the restrictive idealised femininity.² Moreover, such concrete skills of the body as dancing a graceful minuet or playing the piano, refined through diligent practice and self-discipline, brought women not only feelings of satisfaction, mastery, and achievement, but also wielded concrete results in the form of securing and elevating one's status within polite society.³

Thus, self-discipline gave women power over their own lives; it was, at least to some extent, a means of taking control of their own future. Accordingly, this chapter examines the potential for freedom that is inherent in practices of self-discipline. Through an analysis of the forms of control women used in regulating their emotions, food habits, speech, and sexuality, I aim to show that by abiding by polite norms in certain areas of life, they could acquire freedom in others. Thus, it was possible to compensate breaches of feminine decorum—such as immoderate talking or love of food—through rigorous self-discipline in, say, chastity or dress. Moreover, by closely analysing Catherine Talbot's careful, almost morbid self-monitoring, I examine the close connections between discipline and freedom in eighteenth-century thought, arguing that care of the self could bring the individual possibilities to gain power and control over her identity and life.

Discipline and Gender

The very first thing I should recommend [...], as absolutely essential to your private comfort, is self-government in the fullest sense of the word.

John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789)⁴

Ever since Norbert Elias famously formulated his theory of the civilising process around the hypothesis of increasing self-control, self-imposed discipline has rightfully played a central role in analyses of the development of manners and politeness.⁵ Indeed, discipline remained, in many ways, a central element of politeness throughout the long eighteenth century. *The Lady's Preceptor* (1743) aptly described the adoption of a polite identity: 'There are Rules for all our Actions, even down to Sleeping with a good Grace. Life is a continual Series of Operations, both of Body and Mind, which ought to be regulated and performed with the utmost Care'.⁶ Self-control had long roots in early modern thought. As Anna Bryson has noted, early modern literature on manners emphasised the discipline of the self that was needed to 'transform the natural

into the social being'. Discipline was especially needed in bringing up young children to 'break their natural rudeness and stubbornness' and thus to 'mould them into some form of civility'. During adult life, discipline took the form of self-regulation and self-improvement.⁷ The Hobbesian view of men and women as naturally unsociable creatures lay at the core of the requirement of discipline; Bernard Mandeville's definition of vices as natural human appetites, and virtues as the control of those appetites, made discipline and polite sociability practically synonymous.⁸ However, the requirement of regulation was by no means unfamiliar to the anti-Mandevillian proponents of inward politeness. The Earl of Shaftesbury, for example, shared Mandeville's ideas of passions and appetites that needed to be conquered; as Lawrence Klein points out, Shaftesbury's aim was an 'inward Economy', or 'right Discipline, Conduct & Economy', that he meant to achieve by regulating his 'governing Fancys, Passions, and Humours'.⁹ Thus, despite views of men's and women's natural sociability, they were still prone to anti-social vices, or, undesirable modes of conduct, which, left uncontrolled, would make them impolite.¹⁰

Politeness could be seen in terms of the mind's battle over the body, where the mind represented all that was civil, refined and controlled, and the body received savage, barbaric, and unlawful epithets.¹¹ Therefore, controlling bodily desires was the duty of every civilised subject. On the other hand, mind and body were but rarely distinctively separated in polite thought; instead, they were often seen to be intricately linked. This belief was founded on the Galenic conception of the body, where temperament depended on the composition of the body and its fluids. A good character was thus thought to be largely a result of a healthy and balanced body—and a bad one, likewise, a consequence of a corrupted body. This meant that one's character could be improved through bodily discipline; as John Burton acknowledged, a 'good temper is not always constitutional: And though some have more favourable propensities than others, yet every disposition is susceptible of improvement. A bad temper may be reformed by seasonable discipline: And a good one may be corrupted by neglect.'¹² As a consequence, those 'who are desirous of acquiring and preserving a good [Character], must regulate their temper in early life; and bring the mind to habits of virtue and goodness'.¹³

Even though the requirement of self-discipline as the cornerstone of politeness was mandatory for both sexes, it was often represented to be of particular importance to women. For example, John Burton claimed that since 'social and domestic happiness so much depends on the tempers and dispositions of the female Sex', it was 'a duty particularly incumbent on them to order their affections aright'.¹⁴ Indeed, even though many of the principles of self-control I discuss in this chapter were, as such, advocated in men's conduct literature as well, the authorising rhetoric behind the requirement of female self-discipline was deeply gendered, drawing from such notions as 'the female nature'—whereas undisciplined women were often linked to beasts. Since women were seen first and foremost as representatives of their sex, instead of being representatives of their social status, wealth, or rank like men were—let alone

individuals—the requirements of self-control for women were, as a rule, based on their gender.¹⁵ Women’s so-called natural essence could be negotiated in multiple ways to legitimise the demands of female discipline. On the one hand, women were seen to be naturally of a passionate constitution and, therefore, more prone to idleness, dissipation, and luxury than men—and therefore in more need of conscious discipline.¹⁶ On the other hand, the completely opposite Galenic view that nature had ‘befriended women with a more cool and temperat constitution, put less of fire and consequently of choler, in their compositions’ and thus made them naturally virtuous and regulated was equally popular, making women’s lapses of discipline ‘adventitious and preternatural’ and uncontrolled women ‘despised and abhor’d’.¹⁷

Women’s subordinate position in society called for special self-control, as well. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued in *Émile* (1762), which was widely read in England as well, that girls should be ‘early subjected’ to ‘habitual restraint’ in order to avoid dissipation, levity, and inconstancy, and to be able to submit entirely to the will of their future husband. Learning to ‘lay a due restraint on themselves’ was to be ‘inseparable from their sex’.¹⁸ For Rousseau, as for so many English writers, female restraint was needed first and foremost for women’s domestication. This sort of reasoning became more influential during the second half of the eighteenth century through the growing influence of domesticity. The domestic ideals were heavily influenced by Protestantism, many of the domesticity enthusiasts being clergymen or moralists.¹⁹ These writers placed a considerable emphasis on the domestic woman’s moral character. Morality and discipline were thought to be mutually productive: high morals were seen to both make bodily control possible and be the result of that control. In *Camilla* (1796), for example, Mrs Berlington’s lack of ‘any practical tenets either of religion or morality’ was given as the reason for her having ‘no preservative against what was wrong’ and consequently sinking into immoral liaisons and gambling.²⁰ In other words, morality was thought to produce the capacity to discipline. Then again, the writer of *The Lady’s Preceptor* (1743) thought that ‘[a]s we bring along with us into the World an infinite number of Weaknesses and Defects, we should endeavour to conquer them by means of a good Education, and the Effort which Reason makes to throw them off’, claiming it to be the way how ‘a good Disposition, or Temper of Mind, is acquired, which is the Foundation of all the moral Virtues and Devoirs of Civil Life’.²¹ That is to say, bodily discipline was simultaneously thought to form the basis of morality.

Women were seen as particularly well formed for piety and morality by their nature; their minds were ‘more aptly prepared in their early youth for the reception of serious impressions than those of the other sex’, and their hearts ‘naturally more flexible [and] soft’.²² Moreover, women’s position in the society, by allowing them ‘fewer opportunities, fewer temptations to sin’, made them ‘most eminent for religion and virtue’.²³ Thus, women of polite society were told that there were ‘moral distinctions between the sexes’, and that theirs was the more moral one, by reasons of both nature and society.²⁴ Women’s moral discipline was also thought to have broader consequences. The domestic

woman had a duty to her husband and family to bring up her children into responsible citizenship or pious housewifery, to set an example to her servants and guide them in their religion, and to manage the household with frugality and diligence. Therefore, as the whole English nation was thought to rely on women's moralising effect, unblemished morality became practically a civic duty for all elite women, as well as a natural quality. As *The Lady's Preceptor* put it, a 'young Lady without Piety' was 'a kind of Monster in the World'.²⁵ In reality, however, these monsters arguably populated the polite society, since conduct book writers repeatedly expressed hopes that elegant ladies would pay more attention to their religion and morals, and proceeded to threaten women with the much-used argument that no man would want to marry an impious woman, since piety was the only guarantee of women's faithfulness and subservience to their husbands.

If exercising the body in polite accomplishments can be deemed an active practice, discipline can be described as a passive practice of politeness. Compared to active practices, discipline was more about abstaining from improper activities and movements. In terms of eighteenth-century economy of gender, women were seen as the passive sex, whereas men were viewed as the active ones; therefore, women could be claimed to have a natural affinity to self-control. Hester Chapone informed women that the 'same degree of active courage is not to be expected in woman as in man; and, not belonging to her nature, it is not agreeable in her'; instead, women should aspire to achieve 'passive courage—patience, and fortitude under sufferings—presence of mind, and calm resignation in danger'.²⁶ Many critics also resisted such gendered views of the female character; for example Mary Wollstonecraft attacked in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) popular gendered dichotomies where women were only expected to have 'negative virtues', such as 'patience, docility, good-humour, and flexibility'. Wollstonecraft also famously criticised Rousseau for his views of female restraint, claiming that mere unintelligent habitual restraint was 'not the true way to form or meliorate the temper', and that all true discipline should be applied through rational reflection.²⁷

Thus, bodily discipline was entwined with discourses of morality, piety, domesticity, and passivity, which were all predominantly associated with the feminine sphere of life, or at least deemed especially appropriate, important, and useful for women. In this way, discipline can be said to have been particularly expected from women. Nevertheless, discipline was also often viewed from a completely opposite angle—as decidedly unfeminine or masculinising in a woman. Especially the kind of rational discipline advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft was traditionally seen to be an essentially masculine domain, whereas automatised habitual restraint was perceived as more suitable for women's feeble minds. Women with rational capacity were called viragos with 'masculine understanding'.²⁸ Women were, after all, dominantly seen as the sentimental sex, naturally prone to both emotional and physical weakness.²⁹ Even women's very capacity for self-discipline in the first place was often questioned. Eighteenth-century physiological understanding still partly retained—though

framed with a new interest in nerves—the early modern notion of the female body as dominated by the uterus, a mysterious organ full of toxic fumes that caused hysteria and excessive sensibility. Since the uterus could, at any moment, release these fumes and take control of the female body, thus making the woman incapable of any rationality, women were seen as unpredictable and inconsistent by their very nature, under the control of their ungovernable and irrational bodies.³⁰ Therefore, complete self-control in a woman would, in fact, make not only her gender but also her sex questionable. In other words, even though women were told to regulate themselves, it was, at the same time, implied that total control was not desirable. For ideal femininity, too much bodily control was just as big a *faux pas* as too little.

The concept of discipline within the discourse of politeness was thus loaded with deeply rooted and gender-based ambivalence. The contradictory norms of ideal femininity also proved difficult to reach on an individual level, thus leading to potential disruptions between discursive ideals and reality—or, in other words, dissimulation and hypocrisy. As Mary Wollstonecraft argued, recommending gentleness to a creature ‘whose natural disposition admitted not of such a fine polish’ would only produce affectation. Therefore, Wollstonecraft claimed that forging naturalised and universal feminine norms was a practice that forced women to sacrifice ‘solid virtues to the attainment of superficial graces’.³¹ Wollstonecraft was thus amongst the first writers to denaturalise the passive and gentle ‘feminine’ character and to reveal it as artificial. According to Jenny Davidson, during the eighteenth century ‘the most popular and persuasive arguments in favor of dissimulation, including forms of politeness that might be alternately labeled “address,” “tact” or “self-command,” would increasingly come to apply primarily, indeed almost exclusively to women’. Thus, discipline was, in itself, a form of dissimulation, effectively making politeness a practice of dishonesty. Furthermore, Davidson suggests that this dissimulation/discipline was mainly allocated to women. In fact, she claims that ‘by mid-century, women had come to be seen to bear the chief burden of self-restraint’.³² In other words, women were expected to regulate themselves in order to achieve ideal polite femininity, but, at the same time, that regulation was deeply problematic, since it could be seen as dissimulation. The same goes, of course, for active rehearsing of the body, which basically was just a means of transforming the appearance of the body from its ‘natural’ state towards a discursively defined norm. The rhetoric of naturalness was an effective means to mask the demands of disciplining or rehearsing the body. Moreover, appealing to nature made it possible to chide women for both their lack of discipline and their practice of it.

Passions and Reason

Nature will indeed always operate, human desires will be always ranging; but these motions, though very powerful, are not resistless; nature may be regulated, and desires governed.

Samuel Johnson in *The Rambler* (1751)³³

Didactic literature discussed women's self-discipline at length, telling women exactly how to control their urges, regulate their behaviour, and refrain from bodily gestures or deeds they deemed unfeminine or impolite. Even though discipline was authorised through different means and linked to multiple discussions—the most important ones relating to morality, piety, domesticity, and passivity—specific disciplinary ideals remained notably similar throughout the long eighteenth century. The province of the mind was the first area of regulation, serving as a foundation on which all discipline of the body was to be based. Especially the proper control of feelings, sentiments, and passions was deemed crucial for women as the more emotional sex. Therefore, the proper control of women's imagination (which was associated with producing and manipulating emotions), temper, and affections were exhaustively discussed by conduct writers.³⁴ Their dictates also had real-life significance. Reading the letters of Mme de Staël, Elizabeth Montagu, for example, confessed herself unable to 'love Madame de Staal well enough to pity her so much as her misfortunes deserve; adversity mends her head, but not her heart; her reason is improved, but not her temper'. Montagu herself claimed to be 'a severe critic in temper'—for, as she wrote, 'all people have it in their power in a great degree to mitigate the faults of temper; the wise should do it that they may be loved, the foolish that they may be endured'.³⁵ In other words, Montagu subscribed—or at least claimed to subscribe—to the discursive requirement of women's emotional self-regulation.

Didactic writers warned that women were 'under the impulse of affections, either judiciously regulated, or immoderately indulged', and that ungoverned passions were not only injurious to the society but utterly incompatible with ideal polite femininity.³⁶ Anger was most of all to be avoided, since it was deemed incompatible with female softness and meekness; a 'ruffled, angry, scolding woman is so far *vulgar* and disgusting, and, for the moment, a sort of *virago*', wrote Bennett.³⁷ Passions needed to be controlled to maintain polite sociability and reciprocal pleasing—and anger in a woman was apt to 'set on fire, the Tongue, that unruly Member' and destroy pleasant conversation.³⁸ Many writers found appealing to women's vanity an effective argument: a 'sour or an angry look is more destructive to *female* charms, than a high scorbutick flush, or the small pox', claimed one writer, while another assured that he 'never knew an angry Woman preserve her beauty long'.³⁹

Not only anger, but practically all negative emotions were deemed inappropriate for women, whose natural character was described in terms of gentleness, softness, and cheerfulness.⁴⁰ Accordingly, caprice, sullenness, 'ill-humour', and melancholy were strictly denounced. Indeed, Bennett claimed that a 'gaiety of heart, equally removed from a thoughtless levity or a moping gloom, is a most desirable quality in women. *Men* are perplexed with various anxieties of business and ambition, and are naturally more thoughtful, profound, and melancholy; women certainly were formed to *sooth and to enliven*'.⁴¹ These qualities were so essential for women that if they did not come as naturally as could be wished, they needed to be habituated. 'Endeavour that

Chearfulness, Sweetness, and Modesty be always blended in your Countenance and Air, and let them be so habitual to you, that there mayn't appear any thing of Affectation in it', advised one writer.⁴² Femininity was constructed within these texts as an opposite to masculinity, thus setting women in a context of peaceful, domestic pleasures that were contrasted with the bustle and stress of men's presumed sphere of business. As Thomas King argues, heterosocial eighteenth-century society was based on the idea of gender complementarity, which was epitomised in the ideal of companionate family, where husbands and wives would—in the words of *The Spectator*—act as 'Counterparts to another, that the Pains and Anxieties of the Husband might be relieved by the Sprightliness and good Humour of the Wife'.⁴³ Within this framework, women's place in society called for diligent control of unwanted emotions, and an effort to replace those emotions with correct ones, defined as feminine.

Betraying uncontrolled passions was not only unfeminine, but also unladylike, since lack of control was associated with the lower ranks. A polite woman needed to separate herself, not only from the opposite sex, but also from those below her. Bennett urged women to hide their discontentment, since it would be 'a pitiful condescension in a woman of fortune' to make a racket of 'every little cause of complaint'.⁴⁴ In *The Spectator*, Richard Steele advised elite women to nurse their infants themselves, instead of giving them to a wet-nurse of lower social status, since he was afraid that the nurse would transfer 'her Qualities and Disposition', including her 'Passions and depraved Inclinations [...], as Anger, Malice, Fear, Melancholy, Sadness, Desire, and Aversion'.⁴⁵ Then again, lower ranks were not the only ones to be reproached for their lack of discipline—for the aristocracy had become a notorious symbol of luxury, lewdness, and absence of moral control.⁴⁶ As *The Lady's Preceptor* cautioned, '[m]ost part of your People of Quality, both Men and Women, are above being under any Constraint, or keeping up nicely to the Rules of true Politeness in their Behaviour'.⁴⁷ Therefore, proper regulation of the body was also perceived as a trait of modern urban politeness as a distinction from courtly norms of conduct.

Reason, sense, and rationality were promoted as the guardians against unruly passions—even though some conservative or otherwise misogynist writers (such as Rousseau) continued to present women's very capability of rational thinking as doubtful. Sense was important also in understanding and accepting the limits patriarchal society set on women's behaviour and the restraint they required; '[g]ood sense', Camilla's sage father advised his daughter in Fanny Burney's *Camilla*, 'will talk to you of those boundaries which custom forbids your sex to pass, and the hazard of any individual attempt to transgress them. It will tell you, that where allowed only a negative choice, it is your own best interest to combat against a positive wish'.⁴⁸

Women of polite society were, on the one hand, thus discouraged from showing negative or enthusiastic emotion while, on the other hand, encouraged in display of extensive sensibility. Therefore, what was called for was the channelling of passions and emotions towards an acceptable emotional language—the language of soft sensibility instead of raw emotion. As John Bennett

explained, '[t]rue feeling [...] even when it is most genuine and poignant, it will never be a guide, safely to be trusted, till it is governed by reason, checked by discretion, and moulded by [...] religion'.⁴⁹ Bennett also presented his readers with a parallel of two ladies:

Flavia lies in bed till noon; as soon as she rises, she opens a novel, or a play-book; weeps profusely at *imaginary* distress, sips strong tea, till she is almost in hysterics; concludes, that sensibility is all her own, and is perpetually complaining how her feelings are shocked with such a room, or such a prospect, the coarseness of *this* character, and of *that* conversation, and how the sight of a poor beggar gives her the *vapours*.

Emily never says a word about her feelings, rises with the dawn, endeavours to fortify her body with air and exercise, and her mind with devotion; is oftener seen with her *bible*, than any other book; seems pleased with every person and every object about her, and puts on a cheerful smile, when her bosom is *really* throbbing with pain, for the distresses of her fellow-creatures.⁵⁰

Of these two characters, Emily, with all her conscious bodily exercises and regulation of feelings, portrayed the perfect model of a polite woman, whereas Flavia caricaturised the dangers of luxury and self-indulgence. Strengthening the body, indeed, was an important method of gaining control over one's passions. Not only did exercise balance the humours that gave birth to passions in the first place, but there was also the deep-seated belief in the correlation between the mind and the body to be considered.⁵¹ Thus, strengthening the body would have similar effects on the mind, whereas a weak body could not be expected to regulate itself.

Temptations of the Tea-table

Regulation of the mind was only one aspect of the bodily discipline demanded from elite women. There were also other areas of control, more connected to actual manners and behaviour. The area of food and drink was particularly much discussed from a regulatory point of view. Scholars have argued that women have had throughout history a particularly complex relationship with food. Women and their bodies have been seen, for many reasons, 'inescapably implicated in a cycle of production and consumption' and connected to the production, preparation, and rationing of food.⁵² Moreover, as Caroline Bynum has influentially shown, there is a long tradition of imagining the female body itself as food and the female nature as fleshy; this view translates directly into the traditional dichotomy where the feminine symbolises the 'physical, lustful, material, appetitive part of human nature', while the masculine stands for the 'spiritual, or rational, or mental'.⁵³ Women's affinity to food has been interpreted in different ways, and it has served as a source of both empowerment and subjugation for women in different times and contexts.⁵⁴ Women's eating, however, has always been a particularly complicated and much debated issue.

Eighteenth-century didactic writers certainly advocated a regime of careful regulation of women's eating habits. Gluttony was commonly seen as one of the grossest forms of lack of control that a woman could be guilty of. 'The luxury of eating', John Gregory wrote, 'is a despicable selfish vice in men, but in your sex it is beyond expression indelicate and disgusting'.⁵⁵ Thus, again, gender was employed as the organising principle of regulation, and the other way round: regulation was used to construct an ideal picture of a polite woman, who would keep her lust for food strictly under control. Eating involved many aspects perceived as hazardous to politeness and discipline, which were all discussed in conduct literature. Immoderate eating was connected to reprehensible luxury, not to mention that gluttony was, of course, one of the seven deadly sins. Since eating was linked to luxury, it was, interestingly enough, often coupled with dress in the conduct literature. Women were forbidden from spending too much time 'in eating and dressing', since '[m]oderate food and apparel distinguished the first Christians'.⁵⁶ Advice was offered in the proper way of setting up a table, as well as sitting at it. A genteel table was decorated with '*propriety and neatness, or, if your state demands it, elegance, rather than superfluous figure*'; indeed, according to Hester Chapone, to go 'beyond your sphere, either in dress or in the appearance of your table, indicates a greater fault in your character than to be too much within it'.⁵⁷ While sitting at a dinner table, the utmost decorum was to be exercised not to appear greedy or otherwise not in control of one's appetite:

Being at the Table in your due place, observe to keep your Body strait, and lean not by any means with your Elbows, nor by ravenous Gesture discover a voracious Appetite: Knaw no Bones, but cut your Meat decently with the help of your Fork; make no noise in calling for any thing you want but speak softly to those that are next, or wait to give it [...] take not in your Wine or other Liquor too greedily, nor drink till you are out of breath, but do things with decency and order. [...] be not over desirous of Sawce, nor of another sort of Meat, before you have dispensed of what is on your Plate. Put not both your Hands to your Month [*sic*] at once.⁵⁸

Neither was it appropriate to 'speak at the Table, unless you are asked a question, or there be some great occasion', especially for a young woman, and talking about food in general could be deemed unsophisticated.⁵⁹

In fact, every excess regarding food—be it either consuming it or talking about it—was suspicious, since it indicated a mind prone to luxury and lacking control, therefore directly producing a non-disciplined, licentious body liable of being seduced to every other sin as well. *The Ladies Library* saw a direct connection between eating and immorality, concluding that a 'spare diet, a thin coarse table, seldom refreshment, frequent and real fastings, are of some profit against the spirit of fornication'.⁶⁰ Thus, as in the Christian abstinence tradition, disciplining the body was seen to have a direct impact on the discipline of the mind.⁶¹ Furthermore, not only was bodily discipline thought to benefit the

soul, but it was seen to have direct beneficial effects on the body itself. According to early modern ideas, temperance in food was a matter of life and death, since immoderate indulgence in eating could impair the balance of the body.⁶² A well-disciplined body would be healthy, energetic, and beautiful, whereas an idle and dissipated body would lose its good looks and be prone to all kinds of illnesses.⁶³

Much like in the present day, failure to keep in moderation in one's eating was condemned particularly harshly in women's case. Fanny Burney described to her sister a tea party where a certain Miss Boone was invited 'purposely that I might see her'. Miss Boone was reduced into such a remarkable spectacle by her friends because of her food habits:

you may want, therefore, to know what is her particular attraction,—why simply & merely SIZE!—She is *so Tall*, so fat, so large, that she might be shewn for *the great Woman* at any Fair in England. [...] In regard to *Character*, she is as much a Female Falstaff, as she is in regard to *Person*,—for she loves nothing so well as Eating & Drinking.⁶⁴

In other words, Miss Boone was invited solely to 'divert' Fanny Burney 'as some thing *strange & preposterous*'; her exceptional size and appetite were enough to make her a curiosity. While Burney found Miss Boone 'very handsome' and 'so sensible & so intelligent, that the diversion she gave me was all such as redounded to her own Honour', she seems to have been in the minority. Hester Lynch Thrale described her as 'a strange Woman, fat, sensual & gross', and recorded that 'the Men [...] as I am told now—call her *Baboon*'. Intriguingly, though, Miss Boone seems to have used notable self-discipline in other areas of her life to compensate for her size. Burney openly admired her for her accomplishments: 'She is also very ingenious,—Draws, paints, takes likenesses, & cuts out Paper Figures & devices remarkably well', and even Thrale was forced to admit that Miss Boone was 'accomplished enough as to painting, Working, making Wax Models &c: and is surprisingly handsome too, her immense Magnitude considered'.⁶⁵ Accordingly, her disciplined practice in female accomplishments brought her the admiration of polite society, even if it was grudgingly given.

Then again, women could describe their food habits in terms of excess while still maintaining their idealised polite femininity. Mary Delany, who so often transgressed the bounds of normative femininity in a flippant and self-conscious manner—by, for example, admittedly being 'too gay' or 'too lively and unruly'—managed to politely outdo herself in eating, as well.⁶⁶ 'On Tuesday we had a party [...] to my *gout*', she wrote to her sister from Dublin in 1732. After dancing the evening away, Delany's party proceeded to a friend's house, where they—around 2 am—'devoured as much as possible [...] cold fowl, lamb, pigeon pye, Dutch beef, tongue, cockells, sallad, much variety of liquors, and the finest syllabub that ever was tasted'.⁶⁷ In another letter, she humorously described 'a *petite* assembly' where 'at ten o'clock we have a very pretty tray

brought in, with chocolate, mulled wine, cakes, sweetmeats, and comfits; cold partridge, chicken, lamb, ham, tongue,—all set out prettily and ready to pick at'.⁶⁸ She often gave in her letters to her sister—and after Anne Dewes's death, to her niece—detailed accounts of the courses of the dinners she had either given or eaten.⁶⁹

For Delany, liberty—not missish rules of decorum—was '*the great happiness of society*', and she rejoiced whenever being able to follow her whims in this respect and to devour 'chocolate, tea, coffee, toast and butter, and caudle, &c [...] without mercy'.⁷⁰ Of course, the very fact that she meticulously followed the norms of polite femininity in other areas of life allowed her these occasional freedoms regarding food; similarly, her high social status enabled her to take more liberties than would have been possible for, for example, someone like Fanny Burney or her family, whose status in polite society was already precarious due to her father's imprudent second marriage.

If inconsiderate eating was thought to be unfeminine and linked to sins of the flesh, intemperate drinking was the height of female indelicacy. Richard Steele, for example, upbraided those 'she-bullies' who, in their attempts to imitate men, took up the masculine vice of drinking, 'a vice detestable in all, but prodigious in women', and by this means 'put a double violence on their nature, the one in the intemperance, the other in the immodesty'. For Steele, as for so many other writers, nothing human was 'so much a beast as a drunken woman'.⁷¹ Drinking was not only detrimental in itself, but, as it led to the loosening of senses, it served as the gateway to all immoral behaviour. For women, this was especially dangerous, since it was a direct threat to their chastity—the most valuable quality a woman was said to possess. 'She who is first a prostitute to wine will soon be to lust also', warned *The Ladies Library*; 'she has dismissed her guards, discarded all the suggestions of reason as well as religion, and is at the mercy of any, of every assailant'.⁷² Fictional educational examples of licentious and debauched women were as a rule presented as enjoying their drink, whereas a fine lady was supposed to 'have a weak head', not being 'accustom'd to drink any thing strong'.⁷³

In addition to the imminent danger of lost virtue, drinking was seen to inevitably lead to every kind of moral and domestic lewdness; 'its effects must be extremely injurious; because the domestic government of a family must, by such a practice, be totally deranged—waste, extravagance and ruin must inevitably follow'.⁷⁴ This fear was not limited to drinking alcohol—indeed, other stimulants were accused of enervating women, as well. Tea was one of the drinks most keenly linked to luxury, dissipation, and bad habits. John Bennett, for example, lamented the poor state of luxurious women's feeble nerves which could be cured by 'cautiously abstain[ing] from tea, particularly in mornings', since '[h]owever agreeable this beverage may be, it is, doubtless, the source of weak nerves, hysterical and hypochondriack affections, and of half those dreadful, *paralytick* symptoms, which have lately become so general and alarming'.⁷⁵ Chocolate was associated with excessive sensibility and danger of losing control, as well; in the famous issue of *The Spectator* on the Month of

May, playfully advising women on sexual abstinence despite the annual springtime craze, Mr Spectator urged women to be ‘careful how they meddle with Romances, Chocolate, Novels, and the like Inflamers’, which could rouse their passions.⁷⁶ The tea table was, as scholars have recognised, not only an especially feminine venue of sociability, but an epitome of female dissipation, connected with gossiping, scandal, slander, and other decisively feminine vices.⁷⁷ A typical caricature of a useless, overly fine, non-domestic woman was one who got up at noon, spent the whole afternoon visiting her friends’ tea tables, and the evening going to the theatre or the masquerade. This kind of life was labelled ‘most useless and insipid’, and tea parties were only to be tolerated to a limited extent as a means of meeting ‘people of fortune’.⁷⁸ Thereby, all-female sociability was, by the association of the tea table with luxury and enervation, presented in a questionable light, as a possible danger to women’s morality and self-control, whereas heterosocial sociability was promoted as the source of self-improvement and morality. As Bennett explained, the ‘generality of men are so much undomesticated, [...] that they are but seldom to be met with in these [tea] parties’; therefore, as ‘it is, I conceive, in mixed companies alone, that conversation has its proper interest, flavor or improvement’, tea parties did not aid the progress of politeness.⁷⁹

The question of tea, or indulgent eating and drinking in general, can be seen as a part of more general arguments against luxury and bodily comfort. Despite politeness’s close ties to urban leisure, many conduct writers nevertheless criticised modern ways of urban life as artificial, unhealthy, and detrimental to morality. Urban dissipation was thought to be especially harmful to women’s constitutions, since they, as domestic creatures, had a narrower range of opportunities to take them abroad in a meaningful and healthy way. John Bennett was one to express his concern on ‘fine, enervated ladies’ of the present age who spoiled their constitution by inactivity and over-indulgence: ‘We almost *dissolve* in hot, carpeted rooms, instead of continually exposing our bodies to the open air. We go to sleep, when we should be rising. We invent *artificial* methods of provoking an appetite, which can only be excited, in a proper manner, by labour and application’. Thus, Bennett saw such quintessentially feminine illnesses as hysteria or weak nerves as a result of urban luxury, not as an automatic result of female bodily frailty. As weaker creatures, women needed to resist luxury and return to more natural ways of (non-urban) life by taking disciplined care of their bodies—for if they allowed their ‘nerves’ to get relaxed, their spirits could not ‘fail to be affected in proportion’. Bennett’s solution to curing female hysteria included a versatile program of bodily discipline and exercise, of which abstaining from drinking tea was only one aspect:

You must not dissolve on *downy* pillows, till your frame is almost thrown into convulsions. You should rise with the *dawn*, and exercise gently, in the open air, particularly, on horse-back. [...] Above all, if you wish a removal of your present indisposition, you must cautiously abstain from tea, particularly in mornings. [...] Instead of *languishing* in elegant rooms, you

should frequently be strolling into the fields or garden [...] Your *diet* should be simple and moderate, confined to one dish, and that rather animal, than vegetable. You should eat sparingly, but *often*, and ‘use a little wine for your stomach’s sake, and your, often, infirmities’.⁸⁰

However, as so often in the discourse of politeness, there were limits, even to regulation. Even though abundance of heavy food and strong drinks was thought to be extremely harmful to the body, excessive discipline could be just as injurious—or even more so, as *The Polite Lady* (1760) pointed out:

I don’t mean to recommend to you too great an abstinence, which doctor G—, our physician, has frequently told me is still more dangerous than a little intemperance: for, though the latter naturally tends to load and overcharge the body with a superfluity of bad humours, yet these he says, [...] may be easily carried off by physick and a proper regimen: whereas the former deprives the body of its natural nourishment, dries and shrivels up the finer vessels for a want of a proper supply of juices, and wastes and emaciates the whole habit to such a degree, that, he assures me, it is almost oat [*sic*] of the power of medicine to apply an effectual remedy.⁸¹

Within the Galenic framework, getting rid of excess humours brought on by indulgence was a much easier task than trying to re-energize a body shrivelled as a result of too diligent abstinence. Thus, moderation was, again, the key to proper politeness, proper discipline, and proper balance of humours.

Disciplining the Female Tongue

Certain it is without Speech no Society can subsist [...] If you cannot Discourse well, or want a good Utterance, either be silent, or know what Company you speak in.

The Lady’s Delight [1740?]⁸²

Speech occupied a central place in the imagery and articulation of politeness. Speaking was intimately linked to conversation—the primary forum of polite sociability. Lawrence Klein has argued that conversation was ‘the paradigmatic arena for politeness’, and words possessed a special importance in polite sociability.⁸³ As Michèle Cohen’s study on fashioning masculinity through language has shown, speaking was also an important means of constructing gender identity; Cohen uses the double meaning of tongue as both the language and the organ of the speaker to emphasise the multiple ways in which speaking and non-speaking shaped images of elite identities.⁸⁴ The tongue of a gentlewoman was a complex and contested site, since it served as a meeting place for discourses of gender, nationality (and race), social status, and politeness. Hence, questions of normativity were often addressed through the language of the tongue; in which tongues should women converse, how should they formulate

their thoughts, or should they, indeed, hold their tongues altogether and remain silent? Thus, the problematic surrounding the tongue(s) is one of the central aspects of politeness, and also one of the most complex and ambiguous ones.

Conversation was regarded as not only a source of amusement, refreshment, or relief; it was also essential in improving one's manners and character, and 'absolutely necessary to form a sound understanding'.⁸⁵ Like acts, gestures, and appearances, conversation was also a direct indicator of an individual's level of politeness, as well as their social status and gender. As *The Lady's Preceptor* noted in 1743, 'Conversation is not only the Cement and Soul of Society, but it is likewise the Touchstone of Merit, Wit, and Judgment', which was why it was paramount for women never to 'appear speechless and disconcerted, like your young Creatures just come to Town from a Country Boarding School, who resemble Birds got loose from a Cage, that know not where they are, or how to dispose of themselves'.⁸⁶ A truly polite conversation consisted of myriads of little details, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, tone and volume of voice, manner of speech, and choice of subject. The most important principle of good conversation was mutual complacency. Accordingly, conversation needed to be easy, natural, free of constraints, formality, or specialist jargon; most of all, it needed to please.⁸⁷ Women were supposed to possess these traits naturally, which is why their conversation was so beneficial for men, who were thought more prone to pedantry, coarseness, or taciturnity. Therefore, women's conversation was often hailed as the epitome of urban heterosociability. Elizabeth Montagu recommended the inimitable conversation of Anne Pitt to her friends as a universal remedy for leisure town boredom:

I must [...] desire you to take the first opportunity to present yourself to a most amiable and valuable friend of mine, who by this time is at Bristol; I mean Mrs. Pitt. [...] the only fault I have found in her, is, that when one is accustomed to her conversation, one knows not how to part with it, or change it for others. You will be afraid of her because she is a court lady. Her manners indeed are of a court, her sentiments still of higher extraction, and for wit, I doubt whether all the academies of belles lettres in the world can furnish so much. But it is your fault if you perceive it is wit; for my part, I always think I should have said what she did, if she had not by accident spoke it first; and she will say in three words what would fill a volume. Pray take her for your health and pleasure, she will revive you.⁸⁸

Women were also thought to possess natural submissiveness that made them avoid the sort of egoism and wish to show off one's personal brilliance that made conversation unbearable.⁸⁹ According to Richard Steele, to be 'always talking in company is assuming an insufferable superiority over it'.⁹⁰ Indeed, the ability to stay quiet was as important for a polite conversation as the ability to speak well. The 'great art of pleasing in conversation' was, not only to please others, but to make 'the company pleased with themselves'—and this was sometimes most effectively done by silence.⁹¹ Therefore, a good conversation

required constant self-discipline; besides being able to remain silent, an individual needed to check all impolite impulses in order not to shock, embarrass, displease, or offend her company when actually opening her mouth.⁹²

Even though women were supposed to be naturally perfect conversationalists, there was a wide array of advice and regulations specifically targeted for women. Even though women's gender was thought to bring them many advantages in conversation, it was paradoxically also the source of some of the grossest violations of the rules of polite decorum. Womankind was simultaneously seen as essential for good conversation and a danger to it. Indeed, the volume, tone, and quantity of women's speech were often seen to be in need of adjusting. *The Ladies Calling* (1673) asserted that a woman's tongue 'should indeed be like the imaginary Music of the spheres, sweet and charming, but not to be heard at distance', while *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities* (1687) advised women not to 'Tautologies or affected words or lispings; neither [to] speak with a Tone'.⁹³ Excessive talkativeness was a particularly stereotypical feminine flaw; women were constantly displayed in the discourse of politeness as endless talkers, gossiping frivolously around the tea-table, and monopolising the conversation in a most impolite manner. 'What words can express the impertinence of a female tongue let loose into boundless loquacity? Nothing can be more stunning', reproached James Fordyce.⁹⁴ Even though the popular stereotype of female loquaciousness has age-old roots, scholars have emphasised that claims of women's frivolous wordiness do not necessarily tell us anything of women's actual speech, the seriousness of its subject matter, or its amounts; rather, they tell us about the cultural meanings attached to women's talk. Anu Korhonen has argued that female speech was interpreted as a display of female independence in early modern times—and, as such, a rebuttal of the patriarchal order.⁹⁵ Therefore, men felt threatened by women's tongues; according to Bernard Capp, women's talk was stigmatised as gossip not because it differed in character or volume from men's, but because 'it was perceived as the subversive behaviour of subordinates'.⁹⁶ In the early modern imagination, the tongue was perceived as an essentially feminine organ, and its association with the feminine was central to its subsequent association with unruliness.⁹⁷

In fact, as the civilising agents of polite sociability, women's speech was considered simultaneously deeply meaningful and ultimately frivolous.⁹⁸ Women's tea table talk was a popular topic of satire, and gossiping was a characteristically feminine vice, especially associated with spinsters.⁹⁹ While women's idle prattle was criticised, it was, however, simultaneously seen as a trait so characteristically feminine that it was not only tolerated, but even expected of women as their innate quality. In James Fordyce's words, gossiping was 'a weakness which cannot be justified, but which perhaps must be, in some measure, forgiven to your sex'.¹⁰⁰ The female role in polite sociability was to provide men with easy, cheerful, and light conversation, whereas men were the ones of whom a certain amount of gravitas was required. According to Hannah More, women were well aware of this and even tried to 'make [men's] court by

lending themselves to this spirit of trifling; they often avoid to make use of what abilities they have; and affect to talk below their natural and acquired powers of mind'.¹⁰¹ Thus, in More's opinion, women were well capable of rational talk, but pretended otherwise to fill the stereotypical feminine role reserved for them.

The anxiety surrounding women's speech arose also from the fact that the act of speaking was an active procedure that commanded attention; it was a spectacle, meant to make a woman visible and audible. Simply by taking part in a conversation, a woman would step out of her supposedly natural sphere of humbleness and modesty, and enter an arena of active subjectivity, traditionally reserved solely for men. Indeed, as Korhonen points out, speech was considered indicative of a person's mind and identity; therefore, allowing women the right of unimpeded speech would have come dangerously close to recognising them as rational subjects whose words and opinions carried weight and meaning.¹⁰² The fact that polite conversation took place in public venues, often in front of strangers, emphasised the audacity of a woman who dared not only to let herself be seen in public, but also demand attention by speaking. Accordingly, women's speech was ridiculed, condemned, and silenced. As Michèle Cohen asserts, women's conversation was ideally represented as 'a disciplined, a contained tongue'.¹⁰³ Polite discipline of the tongue was constructed by creating gendered dichotomies; women's loud speech and laughter were condemned as too masculine—'an unnatural Sound' that 'looketh so much like another Sex, that few things are more offensive'.¹⁰⁴ Clamorous women were called 'speaking brutes' and compared to barking dogs; their tongues were referred to as 'the feminine weapon', always ready to cause trouble and molest men's ears.¹⁰⁵ Wrong mode, tone, volume, or topic of speech was also connected to the lower classes; 'boisterous kind of Jollity', for example, was considered 'a course kind of quality, that throweth a Woman into a lower Form, and degradeth her from the Rank of those who are more refined'.¹⁰⁶

Didactic writers emphasised women's need to pay particular attention to controlling the topics of their (and others') conversation; especially all indelicate topics were strictly forbidden from women, who 'should *hear* [...] nothing, that can call forth a blush', and who supposedly had 'a thousand ways to turn off the conversation'.¹⁰⁷ Grave subjects, such as politics and religion, were also prohibited from women, as well as frowned upon generally within the context of polite sociability.¹⁰⁸ Especially politics was, as a particularly heated subject, thought to be especially incompatible with feminine delicacy. 'Engaging in political Controversies is apt to produce an Eagerness and Sourness both of Temper and Expression, which are Opposites to that delicate and dispassionate way of Converse so requisite in your Sex'; therefore, the 'State of Publick Affairs, and the Characters of publick Persons, are Subjects very improper for a young Lady's Conversation', stated *The Lady's Preceptor*.¹⁰⁹ Religion was a similarly contested topic; on the one hand, to 'talk or act like a Missionary, or an Enthusiast' was zealous and impolite.¹¹⁰ Then again, religion was a central and revered aspect of the eighteenth-century gentlewomen's life, and as such,

part of their polite identity.¹¹¹ Therefore, moderate conversation on Christian morals, carefully avoiding all fanaticism, was encouraged. Other serious subjects, such as philosophy, were more ambiguous; on the one hand, such writers as Hannah More—a moralist and a bluestocking—encouraged women to raise the standards of conversation by engaging in the topics of art, literature, philosophy, religion, or even natural philosophy—as long as this was done without any show or pedantry. On the other hand, even More acknowledged that serious conversation could not be women's only resource, since too rational a woman would be branded an unnatural, unfeminine pedant by polite society.¹¹² Indeed, a learned and serious conversation was, in its essence, a masculine prerogative. John Gregory went as far as to advise women to carefully conceal any good sense they might have when conversing with men, since a woman displaying her rationality would be seen as assuming 'a superiority over the rest of the company'.¹¹³

The twist is, of course, that Hannah More and her fellow bluestockings were eminently known and widely celebrated precisely for their trespassing practically all the discursive borders of female speech. Elizabeth Montagu thought that an apprehension for 'uttering idle words' would be 'unnatural [in] a girl' and, accordingly, gleefully represented her propensity for abundant speech one of her distinguishing features.¹¹⁴ Having been struck 'dumb with a sore throat', she reported being 'quite low spirited' till her 'tongue could fidget' and her 'voice pronounce ten thousand words in five minutes'—in short, being 'at last restored to the substantial bliss of talking all day long'.¹¹⁵ The bluestocking salons hosted politicians, philosophers, poets, and bishops, with whom these women of letters had unfemininely learned conversations. Their company was sought because of their sharp reasoning, clever harangue, and 'overwhelming torrent' of wit.¹¹⁶ The bluestockings were especially well-known for their wit—didactically represented as the most dangerous talent a woman could possess. Conduct book writers agreed that even though wit was arguably 'perfectly consistent with softness and delicacy', they were 'seldom found united'.¹¹⁷ The general attitude towards female wits can be seen to undergo a subtle change during the eighteenth century; the emergence of bluestockings and literary salon culture and women's prominence as both writers and readers of novels created an atmosphere where a certain amount of quick sense was, if not straightforwardly lauded in an elite woman, at least acceptable.¹¹⁸ In literary and intellectual circles, female wit was admired, and it could bring women such as Elizabeth Montagu or Hester Lynch Thrale reverence and visibility. The crucial point is that wit, like female conversation in general, was acceptable within the semi-public space of the literary salon, where—as I argued in Chapter 4—social gender roles were blurred and more fluid than in domestic or public spaces. However, ever in the refuge of the salon, unregulated or malicious wit could easily turn women into sharp-tongued shrews who were hated 'not only by all the World', but even by their 'own Children and Family'.¹¹⁹ Therefore, wit needed to be 'guarded with great discretion and good-nature'.¹²⁰ Even though the judicious use of good wit was regarded as the crown of good conversation,

it posed risks for women, to whom ‘humility, if not the most brilliant, is the safest, the most amiable, and the most feminine’ qualification for polite conversation.¹²¹

The ambiguous reputation wit had, even amongst intellectual circles, made witty women assume cautious approaches towards their own flow of repartee. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, took turns to disavow and own her wittiness. On the one hand, she consciously emphasised her reputation as a wit in her letters; she claimed that ‘to make my friends laugh is all I wish; I do all I can for that purpose; I am inconsistent, whimsical, and all that mirth and ridicule can desire’, and dared them by all means to ‘believe that I could be extremely witty if I dared’ even when circumstances (such as general want of interesting events) made her seem dull.¹²² On the other hand, she could also settle into a more sober-minded role when needs be. After making her initial acquaintance with the scholarly Elizabeth Carter, she wrote her to assure her tongue was not as sharp as her reputation might suggest: ‘I can perfectly understand why you were afraid of me last year, [...] you had heard I set up for a wit, and people of real merit and sense hate to converse with wittlings; [...] I am happy you have found out I am not to be feared’.¹²³ Montagu could also moralise on other women’s displays of wit. When reading Laetitia Pilkington’s recently published scandalous *Memoirs* (1748), she noted, referring to the author, that—

wit in women is apt to have other bad consequences; like a sword without a scabbard it wounds the wearer, and provokes assailants. I am sorry to say the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity; perhaps it inspires too much confidence in the possessor, and raises an inclination in the men towards them, without inspiring an esteem; so that they are more attacked and less guarded than other women.¹²⁴

Women’s wit, as well as women’s speech in general, was interpreted and valued differently from men’s. Wit and satire were considered to be privileged arenas of masculine intellect in medieval and early modern times; therefore, words that were considered clever and witty out of a man’s mouth were often interpreted as abusive and defamatory when uttered by a woman.¹²⁵ Accordingly, women who demanded immoderate attention with their unruly wit stepped into a traditionally masculine sphere and thus disrupted the social order. Moreover, wit demanded attention in a most unfeminine manner.¹²⁶ Women’s role in conversation was to ‘please, sooth and enliven’, not to show off their piercing intellect or verbal superiority.¹²⁷ Therefore, according to many writers, ‘the attempt at *wit*, or saying *smart* things, is, by no means, to be encouraged’.¹²⁸ While bluestockings such as Elizabeth Montagu succeeded in asserting their intellectual dominance through their skilful manipulation of semi-public space, wit remained a controversial and dangerous gift, since it enabled women to step out of their appropriate role in conversation—and (polite) society in general—by becoming the centre of attention. Indeed, female wit showcased the subversive potential of women’s speech in general; it was feared and ridiculed,

since it threatened the naturalised gender roles that were crucial for sustaining the patriarchal social system.

Women's speech was thus policed in multiple ways in polite society. This policing was not only didactical, but an everyday practice that elite women themselves partook. Even bluestockings were acutely aware of the controversial positions their tongues could put them in, and often worried about treading too close to the line of acceptability. Fanny Burney, for one, had scruples about coming off unfemininely intimidating and learned while attending a salon:

The Conversation, however, grew so very Bookish, I was ashamed of being one in it, & not without reason, as every body, out of that party, told me afterwards *they had been afraid of approaching me, I was so well engaged*; [...] This is just the sort of stuff I wish to avoid, & as far as I *can*, I do avoid.¹²⁹

Hannah More had a practical as well as a moralist solution to this problem—that of full silence. She quoted Cicero's notion of silence being 'so important a part of conversation, that "there was not only an art but an eloquence in it"' in her *Strictures*, pointedly observing 'how peculiarly does the remark apply to the modesty of youthful females!'. Instead of 'inconsequent flippancy' and 'voluble rashness', More encouraged women to display 'the silence of sparkling intelligence'. This did not mean that women should not take part in conversation—only that they should do it through their speaking bodies, not tongues:

And an inviolable and marked attention may shew, that a woman is pleased with a subject, and an illuminated countenance may prove that she understands it, almost as unequivocally as language itself could do; and this, with a modest question, is in many cases as large a share of the conversation as is decorous for feminine delicacy to take.¹³⁰

Hannah More was by no means the only moralist writer to advocate women's all but total silence.¹³¹ A discipline of the tongue so comprehensive was justified as an indication of feminine modesty and, thereby, a natural feminine inclination and a proof of true femininity, especially in the case of young, unmarried women. Even a requirement of complete silence was not seen as contradictory to the ideals of polite sociability by these writers, for, as John Gregory wrote, '[o]ne may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable'.¹³² The rationale behind this surprising statement was the internalist and sentimentalist belief in women's essentially transparent bodies, which gave their countenance the force of words. Women were said to have particularly speaking miens, and, therefore, their 'silent Language of the Eyes' together with their 'Countenance, vermilioned over with an innocent Bashfulness' would supposedly be 'more eloquent than any Expressions'.¹³³ Moreover, *The Lady's Preceptor* encouraged women 'always to shew, by [their] Silence' when they were not pleased with the subject of conversation—especially since the conversation of 'the *Beau Monde*,

runs too often upon Calumny and Detraction'.¹³⁴ Therefore, since some topics were deemed too indelicate for women to converse on, they needed to rely on their expressive bodies to fulfil their civilising and moralising duties by expressing either their approval or condemnation of the tone, mode, or subject of the conversation. The concept of a speaking body enabled the simultaneous realisation of the moralist demand of female silence and the ideal of female participation in polite sociability. The civilising tasks of a woman's tongue were delegated to the other parts of her body, so that when the tongue was being disciplined, the body could resume the act of speaking. In this way, the problem of the unruly and subversive female tongue was neatly resolved. The silent language of the body also moved the focus of communication from listening to women to looking at women, which was, in many ways, the governing principle of the culture of politeness.

Catherine Talbot's Quest for Self-improvement

If this Summer more is given me with all its usual Delights & Advantages how shall I improve it so as to be the better for them when Winter Comes? And then (to look strangely for forward) How After a well spent Rational Winter how shall I continue to be in still a happier Disposition against another Summer? And thus to go on thro' Life how Charming! [...] I have got into a strange Careless Way of losing time. Strict Tasks & Regular Hours I believe must be the way of mending That.

Journal of Catherine Talbot (1751)¹³⁵

Catherine Talbot's journals and letters offer an illuminating view into an intellectual gentlewoman's mental and bodily self-discipline.¹³⁶ As in Fanny Burney's case, Talbot's social conditions provide an important context to her self-formation. Talbot lived her whole life with her mother under Bishop Thomas Secker's roof, which meant that the two were financially entirely dependent on Secker. Talbot's position in the bishop's household was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, she was not under the direct control of a male relative, but on the other hand, her situation was, in reality, subordinate. As she grew older, Talbot assumed the roles of Secker's housekeeper, personal secretary, and companion—tasks that were, in Rhoda Zuk's words, 'at once absorbing and dull'.¹³⁷ She wrote in her journal that being of 'some use' and giving 'some Cheerfulness' to Secker and her mother was her 'only real business'.¹³⁸ Talbot was thus in a position where she was nominally independent, but in reality had very limited control over her own doings and goings; instead, Secker's activities and movements dictated many of the everyday minutiae of Talbot's life. As Rhoda Zuk notes, in her journals and letters Talbot repeatedly voiced a 'sar-donic recognition of her narrow range of choices'.¹³⁹ For example, she complained to Elizabeth Carter that, even though she had spent several months of the winter season in London, she had not yet had the chance to 'suff[er] the ennui of a four hours oratorio' or see 'Garrick one single time'. Therefore, she

could not amuse her friend with anecdotes of London entertainments, and, as to her newly acquired love of dancing, 'I cannot imagine what business I had to grow fond of amusement that scarce happens in my way twice a year'.¹⁴⁰

Talbot's curious position in Secker's household was the main cause of her social and emotional anxiety. As the bishop's representative, she felt it her duty to, for example, appear daily in church and, moreover, to set an example to others by her behaviour. When dining privately at Marchioness Grey's house and attending a concert on Easter week, she felt her mind 'unsatisfied with such an unusual degree of Gayety' in a week that 'ought sure to be peculiarly Serious'—not because she herself thought she did wrong, but because she was afraid 'some good body or other would be offended' at her.¹⁴¹ Secker's influence



Figure 6.1 Christian Friedrich Zincke, *Catherine Talbot* (n.d.). Bonhams

on Talbot's behaviour was also considerable; Zuk, for one, argues that Talbot's complicated and materially, intellectually, and emotionally dependent relationship with her mentor and protector was a central reason for her feelings of inadequacy and diffidence.¹⁴² Secker was apparently a short-tempered man, and Talbot could brood for days on mistakes which caused him to snap at her. When she was six minutes late for an appointment with him, she recorded being 'Chid as I indeed deserved because Eng:s time is this Month tied to a Minute, & ought *I* ever to make *Him* wait. Inconsiderate Animal! I was rather vexed with myself, but so foolish, so Childish, that I hate to be Chid, & altogether, being very far from well, was put out of Spirits for all day'.¹⁴³ On another occasion, Secker was angry at Talbot for leading him on too long a ride:

We took after Breakfast a Ride rather too long & too Sunny; for Eng: having left the conduct of it to me[.] Out of a Notion that he would wish to stay out longer than I shd else have chose, I led him two or three Miles farther than he liked. I have promised to lay aside this blundering Politeness for the future, & when it is proper to do so Consider my own health & convenience without guessing & imagining what will suit other people in which as he says & I have often experienced I shall generally guess wrong.¹⁴⁴

Talbot's continual feelings of inadequacy regarding social decorum are reflected in this passage. Indeed, Talbot's social responsibilities gave her endless trouble, and her perceived failures in polite interaction gave rise to ruthless self-flagellation. 'My heart is heavy to day', she wrote, for 'feeling my own want of every requisite except peacefulness towards making an Agreeable Companion'. However, the more she obsessed over her insufficiencies, the more unfit she felt herself to become 'to be tolerable in Society'. 'There is nothing I dread so much as being talkative', she complained:

Yet at my Years one must not sit like a Statue—On these occasions & on these only I sometimes wish my self back to the other side of Twenty, when my L^d & Mamma are not with me, & it seems as if I should say somewhat, yet am so painfully tho' justly diffident of my self that I had much rather hold my Tongue. I scarce ever in my Life left a Company that I valued without feeling great uneasiness from the fear of having shewn my self unworthy of bearing a part in it.¹⁴⁵

In other words, Talbot was not only failing her social responsibilities as a companion and representative of Bishop Secker, but also falling decidedly short of the norms of ideal polite femininity that her life as a gentlewoman revolved around, and, more specifically, failing in portraying the conversational and sociable virtues she should have embodied as a bluestocking.

In fact, Talbot's journals show that she subjected herself to continuous severe self-criticism. Her journals and letters 'communicate a morbid anxiety about her usefulness, and record an arduous, self-imposed regime that included the

duties of housekeeper and hostess, catechizer of servants, and supervisor of children, as well as the pursuit of scholarship', as Zuk notes.¹⁴⁶ Talbot observed herself with an unforgiving and critical eye, and every imperfection she detected gave rise to a new bout of self-loathing. Especially Talbot's journals, mainly addressed to either Marchioness Grey or Julia Berkeley, the daughter of Bishop Berkeley, draw a disconcerting picture of a woman engaged in agonising introspection and relentless self-discipline. In her journals, Talbot recorded meticulously, almost obsessively her daily routines, with the goal of not losing a minute to 'Indolence [and] Laziness', her 'most Formidable Enemies'.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, meticulous time management was one of her most important self-afflicted duties and also a key method for self-improvement.¹⁴⁸ She started her account of every day by noting the time she woke up—mostly between 5 and 7 o'clock—and continued to jot down her activities to a high level of precision:

8 to 9½ as usual. To 12 Read, writ, stated my Julias Account of her Hours, sorted Papers for Mama, drest, received a short Visit from a good Old Gentlewoman an old St James's Neighbour. Till 4 went to L^{dy} Ansons & returned, calling by the way at a Shop. Sat & worked with her while she dispatched an hundred affairs for her self & other people with such liveliness, such Prudence, such Ease & goodnature as made me love her more than ever. Found my Uncle come to dine with us & sat below till 5½. Till 6: chatted with M[ama]:¹⁴⁹

Or—

the good D^{ss} knocked at my Door, & after ¼ running up & down all the stair cases I could find by way of Exercise, I went & read with her in her Closet Sir Ch[arles Grandison]: till 1 ½. [...] Then went into the Drawing Room, & while I walked for near ¾ read the Psalms for the Day, mused on some of my own Faults.¹⁵⁰

Leaving out Talbot's social and domestic engagements and examining at her leisure time—that is, time she was free to dispose as she wished—it is possible to divide her documented daily activities into four groups: working (painting, needlework, handicrafts), studying (arithmetic, languages), reading (novels, plays, and religious material), and 'moral work' (philosophising, contemplating on 'her evils'). Looking at these, it becomes clear that Talbot's military regime of self-control was aimed at personal and moral self-improvement. In a very straightforward way, her everyday work included honing her education and practising various accomplishments. She was a decent scholar and worked hard to improve her skills in French and Italian; in fact, she wrote some of her journals in French as an exercise. She read sermons and books on morality, practiced painting flowers for hours on end, and applied herself to arithmetic.

To some extent, Talbot's practices of discipline were prompted by practical reasons, as it was necessary for her to have recourse to reading and studying

during the long lonely months she spent wherever Thomas Secker saw fit to stay. Rhoda Zuk ascribes her self-policing to the vague paternal governance and ambiguous social expectations she received from Secker.¹⁵¹ However, I think it is possible to interpret her regime of self-discipline in a more positive light. Underlying the immediate goal of improving literary and polite skills, perhaps prompted by social anxiety, there seems to be an aim of acquiring modest humility and mental strength in face of life's afflictions, as well as a desire to wean the body off luxury and idleness and bend it to the regulation of the will. Indeed, Talbot's detailed journals seem to have served primarily the rationalist goal of self-perfection—a feature that can be connected to the so-called 'Enlightenment subject'. This Enlightenment project of the self can be tied to the thought of, for example, John Locke, who forwarded an idea of the subject as a rational agent who believes that the self is fully within an individual's power to perfect through 'disengagement and rational control'.¹⁵² However, Locke and other propagators of rational selfhood generally excluded women from their philosophical considerations, since women were thought to be 'by definition irrational beings'.¹⁵³ Catherine Talbot's project of rational self-improvement and her rejection of the glorification of sentiment can thus be seen as a means of taking a part in this supposedly masculine sphere—striving towards autonomous, moral, and rational subjectivity. Her unfeminine disdain of public amusement, even if partly prompted by necessity, was a part of the same project; she believed that 'one lives to no one purpose of a rational being all those hours that are spent at the modern assemblies'.¹⁵⁴ In this sense, Talbot can be connected to the same eighteenth-century tradition of proto-feminist philosophical critique as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Astell, who aimed to establish women as equally capable of rationality and self-control as men.¹⁵⁵

To this effect, Talbot engaged in a strict regime of self-discipline. She aimed at transparent and truthful disclosure in her time-monitoring, feeling an obligation to honestly confess whenever she had been idle; 'Let me own then that much of my time has moved heavily & uselessly to day from a stupid lumpish heaviness & uncomfortableness', she wrote to Julia Berkeley.¹⁵⁶ Talbot did not only keep a conscientious track of her daily time, but often reflected in her journals on the use she had made of her time during the past month or months. When looking back to summer 1751, she worried that it had been wasted: 'I fear I as usual so broke my time with a thousand little errands & employments that I did not make the improvement of it I might & ought to have done'.¹⁵⁷ A few years later, she reproached herself for allowing the amusements of London to tear her away from her project of self-improvement, comparing her idle life with Julia Berkeley's rural existence:

Wednesday Oct^r ye last.

Fare thee well Thou long month. May the next be better improved! Part of it will I am sure. But Oh the wearisome hours of London! Indeed my Love yours is on the whole much the pleasanter life since you have it in your Power by daily agreeable Walks to keep up the Cheerfulness &

hardyness & Activity that ones Confinement here & hanging over a Fire side is so calculated to take away, & then with what spirit may you go on uninterrupted by any thing but this necessary care of Health in a continual course of improvements!¹⁵⁸

To George Berkeley, Julia's brother, she expressed not only her self-loathing for her waste of 'inestimable time!' but also her fears over 'the impossibility of ever improving it better'.¹⁵⁹ Yet, by her friends' estimations, she was more than diligent with her time; Elizabeth Carter even chided her for being 'so scrupulously cautious (may I not venture to say, in some instances, so superstitiously cautious) not to misemploy the least moment'.¹⁶⁰

Chastising the body in order to strengthen her character was one of Talbot's most important self-appointed tasks. The mere limits of her physique often prevented Talbot from employing her time to the utmost effectuality; when her family insisted on her getting seven hours of sleep in a night to keep up her health, she complained that 'by this Means I do nothing, have no time'.¹⁶¹ In fact, Talbot saw her frail human body mostly as a nuisance which demanded pampering and thus hindered the full developing of her mind: 'But how Slow Alas how perpetually interrupted is the Progress of embodied Mind! A Mind too of so slight a Make, in a Body so liable to weariness, & that makes such large demands of time for refreshment & amusement'.¹⁶² Thus, she endeavoured to harden her body by various methods. She regularly read standing or walking in order to better both her mind and body simultaneously, and could impose unpleasant tasks on herself to strengthen her mind over matter: 'Walked absolutely in the Dark & very Cold till 7. & by that time found it grow very agreeable. Tis the Case of most disagreeable things that are upon the whole right & good for one: A very little use makes them not unpleasant, a very little Reflexion Delightful'.¹⁶³

Not only her body, but Talbot's spirits also regularly failed her in her project of self-improvement. A particularly gloomy journal entry describes her occasional melancholy: 'Saturday ready to hang my self. Jaded to Death & almost ill'.¹⁶⁴ She often recorded herself too weary or low-spirited to work effectually, and was liable to bouts of melancholy and depression, which she however condemned as an ungrateful weakness that prevented the proper management of her social duties. She recorded herself feeling dejected in 1752; 'Wicked Fool! for does not this hurt & grieve Dearest M[ama]: & is it not unreasonable, groundless—O Fie Fie! These reflections have cost me bitter Tears. I hope useful ones'.¹⁶⁵ Talbot felt the full weight of the social requirement for women's constant cheerfulness, which followed from their role in polite society as the soother of men's troubles and the light-hearted amuser of the company: 'I do not believe any body was ever more thoroughly versed in the theory of cheerfulness, or more convinced of the duty'.¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, she did her best to fight to overcome her unfeminine gloominess.

Compared to her disciplinary journals, Talbot's letters to her friends paint a more moderate picture of her everyday life—thus showing her bowing to the

norms of polite sociability as light and pleasing. 'Yet what in the World do I do but eat drink sleep, ride walk visit my neighbours & divert myself?' she wrote to Marchioness Grey in a light-toned letter.¹⁶⁷ In her letters, she also presented her quest for improvement in a more detached and even humorous manner. 'It is a sad thin[g] to have set up for any particular Character because really it costs one some pains to keep it up', she observed; 'Being Famous for Dressing up Flower Pots, a pretty Dounesca sort of Fame that I do not at all decline, I have been forced to spend two whole hours this morning in that employment'.¹⁶⁸ Even if her morbid self-criticism was thus curbed by the rules of polite letter-writing, she however saw her weekly letters to her friends as a means of further improvement. 'I am much obliged to you', she wrote to Marchioness Grey, 'for requiring [an exact Journal of my Life & Conversation], since meerly out of fear you should chide me I shall certainly do more ingenious & spirited things than ever would enter my head without such an Inspector'.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, Talbot viewed her letters almost as writing exercises. She complained of her inability to write entertaining and witty letters and, being afraid that her correspondents would not enjoy her dull compositions, strove to improve her skills. 'I am so tired of my old way of writing that I was determined to begin in quite a new one—but it will not do, I cannot obtain [...] familiar ease & ingenious Politeness', she bemoaned.¹⁷⁰ Thus, as with so many other social duties, the art of letter-writing did not come naturally to Talbot, but instead caused her continual anxiety.

There is also a perceivable change of tone in Talbot's journals from her youth to old age regarding self-improvement and self-discipline. Talbot saw her young self as a giddy creature who loitered her days away and allowed her mind to be 'full of Vain Anxiety & foolish unhappiness'.¹⁷¹ Only in her thirties did Talbot properly begin her project of relentless self-improvement, which she apparently again eased up on somewhat in her later years. She also often reflected on her progress, condemning her 'Stupid Worthless Vehement' younger self and expressing gratitude for having been 'led into Uniform Rational Happiness & a State of Improvement' on her more mature years.¹⁷² However, Talbot repeatedly regretted wasting the days of her youth in leisure, and was determined to help her young friend and protégée Julia Berkeley to avoid making the same mistake. In fact, Talbot took it upon herself to reform Julia according to her own programme of meticulous journalising and maximum utilisation of time. 'Je m'interesse pour elle, Je l'aime, il me semble que c'est un de mes Devoirs [illegible] tons ses petits défauts & de les redresser. Elle m'aimè tant, on a une telle Confiance en moi—Est-ce encore ma mêler de ce qui n'est pas mon affaire?'¹⁷³ Talbot pondered in 1753, and quickly decided that it was her duty to help Julia to achieve feminine perfection:

I found my Dear Girl so neatly dress'd, so composed, so reasonable, & so fond of following her little Plan of Employments, that it has given me infinite Satisfaction & Thankfulness. Surely I [...] owe every Care I can give to such a Sweet Child as this who seems Providentially thrown under

my influence [...] Ill should I repay the Esteem I was undeservedly honour'd with by her Father [...] if I did not endeavour all I could to form & sooth this Young Mind Capable of becoming every thing it ought.¹⁷⁴

Talbot expected Julia to send her daily accounts of her doings so that she could superintend whether her time was spent in the most useful way. Talbot soon had reason to be displeased with her pupil; 'the Journal was not however by any means what I wished it', she complained, for 'in Tuesday you will see there are three hours unaccounted for'.¹⁷⁵ Julia's failings grieved Talbot, for she saw the brief years of youth as the period when a woman's character and accomplishments should be formed. 'What will become of my Julia if she dreams away, & in dull unpleasant dreams too, this golden Opportunity of uninterrupted leisure with the benefit of M^{rs} B: & the Governor to assist, regulate, applaud & delight in her daily improvements', Talbot bemoaned.¹⁷⁶ She believed firmly that true happiness was to be found through improvement, not self-indulgence, and criticised the common empty-headed female way of life and 'those poor idle Girls who for want of knowing how to amuse themselves at home are forced to fancy themselves happy in the continual & wearisome repetition of the same insipid Diversions Day after day till they grow uneasily conscious themselves that every body else is tired of seeing them'. For Julia's complaints of ennui, listlessness, or want of spirits, common enough amongst elite females, she recommended 'constant Exercise' and going on 'diligently & regularly with your employments & your Journal'; in this way, these complaints would 'cease of [them] self'.¹⁷⁷ Talbot herself, however, managed to repel her gloom by cheerful employment only occasionally.

Discipline as Freedom

Talbot's self-imposed regime of discipline not only bettered her social and domestic skills and fashioned her as a rational subject, but it also seems to have brought her an acute sense of private satisfaction.¹⁷⁸ Not only did she believe that 'Our true Happiness lies not in Enjoyment but Improvement', but she seems to have experienced tremendous secret joy out of the thought of, for example, being able to 'steal an hour & be[ing] up before 5', and thus pushing herself towards the limits of her mental and physical capabilities.¹⁷⁹ In other words, she engaged in self-improvement not only to achieve particular goals, such as honing her arithmetical skills, but also to experience pleasure and a sense of achievement. In this sense, Talbot's project comes close to the enjoyment received from ascetic exercises, such as, for example, dieting. The feminist philosopher Cressida Heyes suggests in her Foucauldian analysis of modern dieting that the practices of dieting provide satisfaction for the dieter; they give the individual an 'active, creative sense of self-development, mastery, expertise, and skill'.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Talbot's self-improvement scheme also highlights the elision between mastering oneself and caring for oneself in a Foucauldian sense, suggesting, as Heyes puts it, that 'the controlled and relentlessly self-disciplined

persona is also the most ethically responsible'.¹⁸¹ Thus, Talbot was essentially engaged in a project of ethical self-care and self-(trans)formation; she felt that her regime of self-discipline made her a morally superior person compared to both her own younger days and to other, idle, flighty females.

Catherine Talbot's meticulous regime of self-discipline was perhaps extraordinarily diligently executed, but women's disciplinary time management was by no means unique.¹⁸² For example, Elizabeth Montagu described her life at Sandleford as 'monastic':

I inhabit a convent too, and live by rules, not given indeed by a St. Francis or St. Benedict, but by myself, merely that I may seem to have a reason for what I do. I allot seasons for exercise, for reading, writing, &c. &c. that I may not get into a habit of indolence. As all states have their temptations, solitude has its dæmon of indolence, the most harmless devil I will allow, but such as in time, makes great depredations upon the mind, and steps between us and our best purposes.¹⁸³

While in her country estate, Montagu adhered to a regular daily schedule—much like Catherine Talbot. 'I am walking in the garden before eight, breakfast before nine, find the day too short for my employments, and go to bed at eleven, because Dr. Monsey says it is wholesome, and because I could not rise before seven if I sat up later', she wrote to Monsey.¹⁸⁴ To be sure, Montagu's disciplinary existence was the result of a must rather than of choice; she was alone in the countryside out of the wish of her husband, who detested town life. Montagu made it her goal, however, to 'keep the same degree of spirits in every situation', for she wanted to be of 'amphibious' mind, able to 'subsist in different elements'. Nevertheless, she expressed an ardent wish to quit her solitary country life after 'five months' at most; 'I can drink no more of this sort of life at a draught, it is as much as I can promise to swallow without making wry faces'.¹⁸⁵ In other words, Montagu submitted to a life of solitude out of necessity, and consciously engaged in practices of self-discipline in order to create meaning into her everyday existence. She declared that one should 'rather pass one's life à faire des riens, qu'à rien faire. Do but do something, the application to it will make it appear important, and the being the doer of it laudable; so that one is sure to be pleased oneself'.¹⁸⁶ Like Talbot, Montagu thus received pleasure from her disciplinary practices, even though they were practically forced upon her.

Self-discipline was not only a source of pleasure for women; it was also a source of freedom in several ways. In fact, Catherine Talbot's project of self-improvement can be interpreted as an aspiration towards autonomy both in respect to the free and rational 'Enlightened subject' as well as in a Foucauldian sense. Indeed, if reason and rationality were needed in governing one's passions, surely the government of those passions was also the means to achieve rationality.¹⁸⁷ As we recall, Foucault describes in *The Use of Pleasure* the care of self as a practice of freedom, his point being that controlling one's pleasures makes

one free from those pleasures.¹⁸⁸ Thus, discipline is a prerequisite of freedom. Such is the case in, for example, the Earl of Shaftesbury's thinking; for Shaftesbury, expanding the control of the self would bring about a freedom from external stimuli and inner passions. According to Michael Schoenfeldt, early modern culture imagined a regime of self-discipline to be a 'necessary step towards any prospect of liberation'. Thus, for eighteenth-century subjects, self-control authorised individuality.¹⁸⁹ This, of course, was the underlying principle of Locke's formulation of selfhood as a rational endeavour towards self-perfection. For this reason, women's self-control was a deeply ambivalent virtue in eighteenth-century culture. On the one hand, self-control was represented as especially important for women, from whom resignation to circumstances, generally beyond their control, was required as a feminine duty; therefore, the ability to control their feelings and thus to take control of their own 'happiness' was imperative for women.¹⁹⁰ For example, Hannah More asserted that 'A PASSIONATE woman's happiness is never in her own keeping: it is the sport of accident, and the slave of events. It is in the power of her acquaintance, her servants, but chiefly of her enemies, and all her comforts lie at the mercy of others'.¹⁹¹ Thus, a woman in control of her passions becomes free of both external and internal stimuli. On the other hand, female self-control was also a potentially subversive refutation of feminine stereotypes of irrationality and unruliness through masculine pretensions to rationality. Indeed, Hannah More, with all her enthusiasm for women's self-control, nevertheless firmly believed that women should aspire only to 'those virtues' that were 'peculiar' to their sex.¹⁹² As a matter of fact, eighteenth-century proto-feminists seem to simultaneously argue for women's capacity of rational Enlightenment subjectivity while maintaining a more or less rigid separation between genders and subscribing to both 'biological' and social differences between men and women.

Questions of masculinity and femininity are, in many ways, central for practices of self-discipline. According to Foucault, freedom acquired through self-care is essentially power—power that individuals use over themselves, but also power that they use over others. This is why self-control was, in Foucault's analysis, a masculine virtue; it was expected from those who were in charge, and it was considered to be indispensable for good government.¹⁹³ The association between control, liberty, and power was common in eighteenth-century political thought; Edmund Burke, for example, wrote that '[m]en are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites'.¹⁹⁴ Thus, claims that too severe bodily control made women unfeminine had a political significance; presenting the female nature as naturally prone to vanity, excess, and luxury was a way of excluding women from political participation by establishing that they were incapable of self-control.¹⁹⁵ The political rights attached to self-discipline also meant that any display of self-control in a woman was deeply disconcerting and politically subversive, since it undermined the patriarchal system of power. Therefore, female self-discipline was labelled unfeminine, something that made a woman's gender suspicious. This is why Catherine Talbot's regime of self-control

unfolds as an extremely controversial set of acts that bear deep gendered and power-related meanings. Talbot's case shows that she not only believed that women were capable of self-control, but she was also engaged with active self-formation and self-discipline to become an ethical, autonomous subject.

When self-control was perceived as a masculine trait, the act of exercising discipline by a feminine self could be seen as an empowering act, a move away from normative passive femininity towards active masculinity. As Foucault writes, 'self-mastery was a way of being a man with respect to oneself,' whereas 'immoderation derives from a passivity that relates it to femininity'.¹⁹⁶ There is a long tradition of seeing women as symbols of the flesh—licentious, gluttonous, unrestrainable. Therefore, women also have a centuries-old tradition of disciplining that flesh in an effort to rise to the level of spirit and to 'become, metaphorically speaking, male'.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, eighteenth-century polite women's efforts to be self-disciplined resemble, for example, the extreme fasting of medieval woman saints Caroline Bynum has researched; they both can be seen as a part of a historical continuum of women's ascetic practices, aimed at controlling and bringing down the desires of the flesh in order to gain spirituality and/or rationality, either in one's own eyes or in the face of society.

In fact, self-discipline was used as a strategy to negotiate controversial desires and freedom from feminised conduct norms in other areas of life. Bynum suggests that medieval women's fasting was not merely substituting control of self for control of circumstance; it also gave women actual power over their lives and made it possible for them to reject traditional feminine duties and roles. Bynum writes:

[W]omen's food practices frequently enabled them to determine the shape of their lives—to reject unwanted marriages, to substitute religious activities for more menial duties within the family, to redirect the use of fathers' or husbands' resources, to change or convert family members, to criticize powerful secular or religious authorities, and to claim for themselves teaching, counseling, and reforming roles for which the religious tradition provided, at best, ambivalent support.¹⁹⁸

Similarly, eighteenth-century women's engagement with self-discipline can be seen as a strategy of escaping the traditional domestic model of femininity. Deborah Heller has argued that bluestockings and other female intellectuals adhered to a strict regime of 'self-regulation' that helped them 'secure liberation on other fronts', such as intellectual pursuits.¹⁹⁹ Thus, in order to be able to take on gender-bending roles as wits, poets, and scholars, female intellectuals disciplined themselves into normative femininity as moral maidens, dutiful mothers, or chaste wives. Unfemininity in one area of life could be compensated for by a strict adherence to the norm on another, and too many breaches of conduct on too many fronts could turn the scale of popular opinion and good reputation against a woman.

Thus, self-discipline was a powerful strategy for escaping gendered expectations of proper conduct. However, self-control played also an important role in forming specifically feminine eighteenth-century subjectivities. Achieving ideal politeness and mastering the different skills expected from well-bred women required diligent practice and constant vigilance. 'Becoming a subject for women meant subjecting oneself to roles and practices of domesticity and discipline', describes Deborah Heller with respect to the dominant understanding of women's identity formation.²⁰⁰ Indeed, this seems to be what Catherine Talbot was after, in the end; to her, her project of self-improvement was a quest towards responsible femininity. The ideals that Talbot strove for—such as domesticity and Christian morality—were ideals that were routinely labelled as feminine within polite society, and Talbot clearly observed her own performances through the authoritative spectacles of these dominant discourses. For example, she was very careful not to appear inappropriately talkative or erudite in her conversation, carefully concealing her learning in the best conduct book manner: 'We had in the Evening a conversible Coffee drinking, not that I had any share in the Conversation I assure You for it was a learned one, & tho' two or three things came into my Head I had the fear of Harriet & Mr Walden before my eyes'.²⁰¹ By mentioning the 'fear' that kept her unfeminine impulses in check, she referred back to a previous entry in her journal, in which she condemned Harriet Byron's conversation in *Sir Charles Grandison* on grounds of its unfemininity; 'The *Gentlemen*,' she wrote, 'have no patience with Harriets Vanity & Talkativeness. She *does* argue too much with Mr Walden. A long sentence never sounds well out of a Womans mouth'.²⁰²

Thus, while Catherine Talbot's self-discipline enabled her to build herself an ethical subjectivity, it was not a particularly subversive one in the sense that it reproduced many of the gendered norms of the discourse of politeness. However, disciplinary practices aimed at producing normative femininity could, paradoxically, still provide women with certain kinds of freedom. Even if Talbot was aiming for the kind of moral femininity described by conduct books, the process of self-care transformed her aspirations from external coercion into internal selfhood, thus providing her with a sense of autonomy. Moreover, the skilful mastering of all the polite feminine arts through rigorous self-discipline could bring women concrete power over their lives; a dexterous woman could manipulate her surroundings and people in it just as effectively as Caroline Bynum's female saints could take an active control of their circumstances by their food practices.

However, even if working on herself brought Catherine Talbot experiences of pleasure and freedom, her self-discipline was not enabling in the sense that it would have provided her with freedom from feminine roles or behaviour. This is the case, of course, with the sort of self-control bluestockings were committed to in exchange for intellectual liberation. In fact, many scholars have argued that the early bluestockings' efforts were targeted towards an 'ambiguous form of emancipation', a compromise that served to bind them all the

more thoroughly to the domesticised norms of female chastity and morality in their attempt to compensate for their intellectual digressions.²⁰³

The case of Hester Lynch Thrale's second marriage illustrates the extent to which bluestockings, including Montagu and Burney, emphasised the trade-off between self-control and intellectual pursuits—and the vigilance with which they were committed to policing each others' behaviour. When Hester Lynch Thrale's first husband, the wealthy brewer Henry Thrale, died in 1781 after eighteen years of loveless marriage, she fell passionately in love with her children's Italian singing tutor, Gabriele Piozzi (1740–1809). Despite the desperate pleas of her friends and family, Hester Thrale married Piozzi in 1784, causing a widespread scandal due to their differences of age, class, and nationality. Fanny Burney, along with other former bluestocking friends of Thrale's, immediately broke ties with her—a decision Thrale ascribed to Burney's famously zealous concern for her own reputation, musing that 'Dear Burney [...] loves me *kindly*, but the World *reverentially*'.²⁰⁴

For the bluestockings, Thrale's uncontrolled passion was unacceptable because it breached their code of self-restraint and was, therefore, an ill-advised deviation from normative femininity. In their view, Thrale had succumbed to a low passion against all rational considerations. In fact, Thrale's behaviour was condemned as altogether too masculine. Her literary female friends described her uncontrolled passion for Piozzi as profoundly unfeminine—surprisingly enough, since sensuousness was commonly seen as a specifically female flaw, and criticised as such by, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft.²⁰⁵ However, for these women, succumbing to sexual drives was to be expected from men, whereas women were characterised by virtuous self-restraint; as Hester Chapone insisted, 'such mighty overbearing Passions are not natural in a "Matron's bones"'.²⁰⁶ Similarly, Hannah More's famous poem *The Bas Bleu: or, Conversation* (1786) celebrated the bluestockings as 'Chaste Wits'.²⁰⁷ According to Felicity Nussbaum, Thrale's marriage shook Elizabeth Montagu especially hard, since it violated her views of 'contracted virtue' which went hand in hand with intellectual brilliance; indeed, Montagu complained to Elizabeth Vesey that 'female purity dignity and excellence' were greatly endangered by such 'base plebeian loves, which wait on some soft hearted Dames to the great debasement of their character and the honour of the Sex'.²⁰⁸ Montagu was thus afraid that Thrale's masculine enslavement by her emotions would contaminate the public image of the bluestockings. Montagu herself abided strictly to the bluestocking code of sexual self-regulation to gain intellectual freedom. Therefore, unlike Thrale, Montagu succeeded in combining her many masculine endeavours with public approval.

Women's entitlement to carnal desire was a controversial topic, since it reflected the ambivalence of the gendered meanings sexuality was given. For these reasons, and because of the constitutive role women's sexual control played in English society, gender-bending roles in the intellectual sphere were socially more acceptable than those shaking the norms of female sexuality. Succumbing to sexual passion was simultaneously a masculine prerogative and a threat to a man's autonomy, as well as a female flaw of character and a



Figure 6.2 George Dance, *Hester Lynch Piozzi* (1793).
© National Portrait Gallery, London

subversive female act of sexual equality. By marrying Piozzi, Hester Lynch Thrale ‘actively defied the self-regulation that other bluestocking women had insisted upon’ to gain social respect as women stretching gender boundaries, and chose ‘to follow instead her unrestrained passions’. Nussbaum argues that Thrale regarded a woman ‘openly following her passions as establishing a new kind of sexual equality’ and thus established a gender-bending code of conduct of her own.²⁰⁹ Indeed, as one of the most strictly regulated areas of women’s life, sexuality also held subversive potential. It is this potential we will examine in the following final section of this book.

Hypocritical Chastity and Sexual Power

Chastity [is] the first Female Virtue. [...]

There is no Charm in the Female Sex, that can supply the place of Virtue. Without Innocence, Beauty is unlovely, and Quality contemptible, Good-breeding degenerates into Wantonness, and Wit into Impudence.

The Spectator (1712)²¹⁰

[T]he reputation of chastity is not so necessary for a woman [...] for it is possible for a woman to be virtuous, though not strictly chaste.

Lord Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 8 January 1750²¹¹

Hester Lynch Thrale may have breached polite society's notions of *social* decorum by her controversial second marriage, but she was still operating strictly within the bounds of *sexual* decorum by entering into the wedlock in the first place.²¹² There were, however, plenty of women whose sexual affairs were not blessed by the Minister—and this sort of misconduct has in previous scholarship generally been seen as much more detrimental of the two for female reputations.²¹³ However, I would like to claim that chastity, or sexual self-regulation, was a virtue of ambiguous nature. Discursively, it was represented as the most important area of polite feminine self-discipline, while in practice there seemed to be an abundance of ways getting around it.²¹⁴ Even though eighteenth-century conduct writers and modern-day scholars alike have routinely tended to present as an essential prerequisite of normative femininity and women's social honour, I am suggesting that maintaining chaste reputation in polite society was a subtle matter and accordingly examine the multiple ways chastity could be negotiated. As Fanny Burney noted on Mrs Alicia 'Bad Mac' Macartney (1716–1804), her godmother Frances Greville's eldest sister who, according to Burney, as 'a Drunkard notoriously, an assistant to the vices of others, & an infamous Practicer of all species of them herself' was 'one of the worst women Breathing'—even this notorious woman 'contrived to get Company to her Mansion, & to be Countenanced by People of Character and Rank' by keeping 'a superb House' and giving 'most elegant Entertainments'.²¹⁵ Accordingly, despite general beliefs and didactic warnings, sullied sexual reputation did not lead to an automatic banishment from polite society, but lost chastity could, in real world, be compensated through a variety of means focused on maintaining respectable external appearance.

According to conduct writers, chastity was indeed 'the most necessary and indispensable' of all virtues, without which 'wit, beauty, sense, knowledge, and every other female accomplishment, are not only useless and insignificant, but frequently destructive and pernicious'.²¹⁶ In other words, abstinence before marriage and faithfulness thereafter was thought to be an essential characteristic of the ideal polite woman. As with other 'indispensable' signs of true femininity, there was a forceful attempt to represent chastity as an innate

female quality. This process of internalisation and naturalisation is most notably visible in the change in the rhetoric in which chastity was discussed during the long eighteenth century; as Ingrid Tague has observed, the emergence of the rhetoric of naturalness in the early 1700s targeted especially chastity, which thus became, in addition to the moral duty it had always been, a natural female trait.²¹⁷ The process of internalisation also changed chastity's meaning from simply physical continence to internal purity of the mind. As Ruth Yeazell has noted, modesty became increasingly synonymous with women's sexual virtue and chastity during the eighteenth century.²¹⁸ Chastity as the female kind of honour accrued multiple meanings and became entangled with more general feminine virtues, such as modesty, meekness, and piety.

Even though especially the proponents of inward politeness accordingly presented chastity as an internalised characteristic, they never thought it was sufficient for a woman merely to *be* chaste. Instead, chastity had to be clearly visible to others. Therefore, chastity can be seen not only as a state of sexual (in)action, but also as a performative identity, which was to be acted out in the language of modesty. Chastity's collation with modesty meant that sexual purity was thought to automatically have a visible influence on the body. Modesty was thought to steer 'every part of the outward frame' into a chaste appearance and to 'guid[e] and regulat[e] the whole behavior'.²¹⁹ A modest woman would have 'calm and meek looks'; she would 'refine [her] language' and 'modulat[e] the tone and accent' of her speech.²²⁰ Modesty was deemed such an inseparable aspect of female chastity that an immodest woman was portrayed, again, in bestial and monstrous terms:

And if we consider Modesty in this sense, we shall find it the most indispensable requisite of a woman; a thing so essential and natural to the sex, that every the least declination from it, is a proportionable receding from Woman-hood; but the total abandoning it ranks them among Brutes, [...] an Impudent Woman is lookt on as a kind of Monster, a thing diverted and distorted from its proper form.²²¹

In other words, internalist writers believed that a chaste mind would show itself in specific external signs, readable and interpretable by other members of polite society—and similarly, that an impure mind would reveal itself through the body: 'Every indecent curiosity, or impure fancy, is a deflowering of the mind, and every the least corruption of them, gives some degrees of defilement to the body too'.²²² Moreover, these external signs of modesty were thought to indicate a pure mind and body alike. 'She who values not the virtue of modesty in her words and dress, will not be thought to set much price upon it in her actions', argued Richard Steele.²²³ Thus, the idea of the transparent body played a crucial role in internalist readings of chastity.

The various signs of chastity were endlessly debated and meticulously defined in didactic literature. A poem circulating around the fashionable crowd in the

novel *Evelina*, where an anonymous admirer praises Evelina Anville's feminine modesty aptly condenses the external signs of chastity:

See last advance, with bashful grace,
Downcast eye, and blushing cheek,
Timid air, and beauteous face,
Anville,—whom the Graces seek.²²⁴

Bashfulness, timid air, and downcast eyes were all important signs of virtue, but blushing was perhaps considered to be the most requisite one. 'An unaffected blush is an indication of real modesty. [...] They, who have a proper sense of the dignity of the female character, will regard it as an exterior symbol of interior purity', wrote one conduct book writer, and another praised 'the graceful blush of modesty' as an 'emanatio[n] of a virtuous mind'.²²⁵ This, of course, meant that women supposedly needed to be extremely cautious in guarding their external looks. The mere appearance of guilt was thought to be enough to ruin their chaste reputation, as John Burton warned: '*To avoid the appearance of evil is as expedient as to avoid the evil itself.*'²²⁶ Burton continued:

As the most brilliant Jewel is soonest deprived of it's [*sic*] lustre, so is female reputation the most liable to tarnish. It is obscured even by the breath of slander. You ought, therefore, to avoid every appearance of evil. For though your thoughts and intentions may be perfectly pure and innocent, yet from a World, who judge only by externals, [...] the most injurious, though groundless inferences may be drawn.²²⁷

Burton's view was echoed by countless other contemporary writers throughout the long eighteenth century—as, for example, by the Marquis of Halifax (1688) who warned women against bringing 'a Cloud upon your Reputation, which may be deeply wounded, though your Conscience is unconcerned'.²²⁸

The importance of external manifestations of chastity also caused deep-seeded anxiety amongst eighteenth-century writers, as the ever-present danger of dissimulation made them fear that debauched women would simply imitate the signs of chastity to hide their loss of virtue.²²⁹ Indeed, like the bodily signs of sensibility, the outward marks of chastity were easily counterfeited. For example, blushing could be manifested simply by applying rouge or pinching the cheeks, and nothing was easier than knowingly putting on a modest dress—enough so as to make many conduct writers complain that these manifestations of purity were becoming suspicious signs of affectation rather than proofs of true innocence.²³⁰ In fact, the disconcerting fact was that the only way to distinguish female chastity was through the female body—which, as much as the internalists gushed about its honest transparency, was a potentially misleading and devious medium of communication. This, of course, made the performance of chastity weigh more on the scale than the actual state of sexual (in)activity.

Since 'it is only by appearances [the world] can judge', a woman's virtue was 'nearly the same, in effect', as her reputation, as James Fordyce concluded.²³¹

In fact, as Mary Delany complained, polite society seemed more concerned about women's indiscretions getting discovered than happening in the first place:

[T]he common conversation one daily meets with [turns upon] [...] the strange behaviour of Lady A., and some more of the *same character*. These are subjects that would afford very good morals, and be far from displeasing topics in conversation, if people would give themselves time to make reflections; but instead of that, the woman is pitied—'*poor thing!*' her '*stars*' are blamed; she was *unlucky*, indiscreet not to manage more cunningly, and by the generality of the world she is more condemned for not hiding her fault than for committing it. Does not this give one a very sad idea of the virtue of the times?²³²

Thus, external appearances could make up for actual lost virtue. The importance of the exterior shell made the performance of chastity weigh more on the scale than the actual state of sexual activity, meaning that women would, in theory, have been able to engage in extramarital sexual encounters without losing their chaste reputation, provided they were able to maintain the external appearance of modesty and chastity. Mary Wollstonecraft openly criticised this performative conceptualisation of female chastity. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft attacked the dominant conduct book ideal of female chastity 'as a "system of dissimulation" that obliges women to sacrifice the substance of morality for the show of it'.²³³ She specifically targeted feminine modesty by denouncing it as hypocrisy and, as such, a danger to the morality of the whole society. Wollstonecraft complained that 'it is reputation, and not chastity and all its fair train, that [women] are employed to keep free from spot, not as a virtue, but to preserve their station in the world', and called for a reformation of female manners towards true chastity instead of false modesty.²³⁴ Wollstonecraft's critique demonstrates that maintaining chastity in the eighteenth century was ultimately an external performance. Chastity was, of course, discursively defined as sexual continence, but as Wollstonecraft complained, in practice the spectacle of modesty had overtaken chastity's 'true' meaning. Even more importantly, Wollstonecraft's critique highlights the complex relationship between chastity, honour, and social status. Chastity-as-performance had a considerable impact on a woman's reputation—not as its sole component, but certainly an important one. Thus, chastity, understood as a performed identity, had a significant role as a social booster, which on the one hand made physical chastity relatively unimportant, and on the other hand made the loss of reputation of chastity potentially extremely hazardous. Indeed, didactic literature was full of threats over misguided women being cast off from their family, friends, and the entire polite society. Maria Rushworth's fate in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) represents typical didactic scaremongering. After the married lady elopes scandalously with another man, she becomes a lost cause as a matter of social routine. Her father

sends her to live alone with her aunt in a 'remote and private' part of England, never to be admitted to the presence of her family again, for fear of tainting the whole family with both her social stigma and corrupted morals.²³⁵

For these reasons, women were most certainly mindful about their appearances and public excursion. Mary Delany primly explained the precautions she saw fit to take upon her introduction to the London social scene:

[My Aunt, Lady Stanley] was infirm and unable to go to public places, but was *very careful who I went with*: my being young and new, and soon known to be married to a man much older than myself, exposed me to the impertinence of many idle young men. It was not my turn to be pleased with such votaries, and the apprehension of [Mr Pendarves's] jealousy kept me upon my guard, and by a dull cold behaviour I soon gave them to understand they were to expect no encouragement from me.²³⁶

Fanny Burney was also extremely conscientious about her public reputation regarding men, and accordingly avoided socialising with not only most of them but also with women whose reputation retained even a whiff of potential scandal. She recorded in her journal an earnest cautioning her elderly acquaintance Richard Owen Cambridge gave her regarding the importance of conversing 'as little as possible with *young men*!':

'There is more danger than you are aware of, in the acquaintance of young men. They are very apt to do mischief, even when they don't intend it. But there are so few that know *how* to speak of Women, without hurting them, that you cannot be too cautious. [...] In talking with young men, he continued, there is always some risk, —& it is better to avoid it. They may often want to know You for no reason but to talk of you. You have a very large acquaintance, —& your House is very well *manned*—but young men coming into it —'

'Dear Sir, interrupted I, nobody has a *less* acquaintance of young men! Scarce any ever visit us!'

'So much the better! a great deal the better!'

Burney was shocked that her cautious and prudish behaviour had given cause for such warnings in the first place; all this addressed 'to *me*, commonly reckoned so reserved & shy, quite amazed me', she complained to her sister.²³⁷

However, in reality, the management of sexual reputation was not this straightforward. First of all, not all conduct writers saw immediate social ruin as the inevitable result of the loss of chaste reputation. For example, Richard Steele complained that even though shunning fallen women 'would have a good effect on the guilty, who would be ashamed to be thus singled out and discriminated', this in reality was not done; instead, adulteresses 'are suffered to mix with the best societies, like hunted deer in a herd', where 'they flatter themselves they are indiscernible'.²³⁸ The Earl of Chesterfield even questioned

the necessity of a chaste reputation in the first place; he claimed, in his letters to his son, that ‘the reputation of chastity is not so necessary for a woman’, since a ‘slip or two may possibly be forgiven her, and her character may be clarified by subsequent and continued good conduct’.²³⁹ Thus, even though Chesterfield certainly saw chastity as an important contributor to a woman’s honourable reputation, it was by no means the only or an irrecoverable part of it. In fact, rather than a straightforward system that was pivoted around a chaste reputation, once lost then lost forever, women’s social respectability was constructed from a set of overlapping pieces, all centred on external appearances. If a woman succumbed to a sexual indiscretion, it was possible for her to compensate for her slip by carefully managing her external appearances, through hiding her indiscretion, or through ‘subsequent and continued good conduct’. Furthermore, as Amanda Vickery has argued, the vulnerability of a woman’s social reputation depended greatly on her place in the social hierarchy. Thus, whereas the uppermost aristocracy had a wider selection of means through which to compensate for a loss of virtue through their high rank, influential family networks, and abundant wealth, women below that status would have been those ‘who were not placed so high as to have their actions above the Reach of Scandal’, but ‘who have Reputations to lose, and who are not altogether so independent, as not to have it their Interest to be thought well of by the world’.²⁴⁰

The women in the lower spheres of polite society would, then, have found the rules of honour more binding, and compensating for a loss of chaste reputation more difficult—but, perhaps, not as undoable as it would at first glance appear. Even women with little wealth or connections could, to some extent, preserve their reputation through a skillful management of appearances—for the dominance of external appearances over internal virtue facilitated negotiating honour in cases where public reputation was lost. For, as David Hume wrote in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, appearances tended to trump even factual knowledge:

There are many particulars in the point of honour both of men and women, whose violations, when open and avow’d, the world never excuses, but which it is more apt to overlook, when the appearances are sav’d, and the transgression is secret and conceal’d. Even those, who know with equal certainty, that the fault is committed, pardon it more easily, when the proofs seem in some measure oblique and equivocal, than when they are direct and undeniable.²⁴¹

As *The Lady’s Preceptor* advised, ‘One who is guilty of all those Transgressions, which we’ll rather imagine than mention, if she will but put on the Mask of Bashfulness and Modesty, will please at least in this respect, and under that Veil conceal the Irregularities of her Heart, especially from those who have not had flagrant Proofs of them’.²⁴² Thus, maintaining honourable appearances could save a woman’s reputation even in the face of damning evidence. Such was the case of Mary Cholmondeley (1729–1811), a society hostess and

daughter of an Irish bricklayer. In spring 1780, Fanny Burney wrote in her journal that Mary Cholmondeley, an intimate member of Burney's circle of friends, was guilty of a sexual 'indiscretion', which gave the cautious Burney cause to avoid '*publicly associating*' with her.²⁴³ However, Cholmondeley's indiscretion was carefully hushed up, and her close friend Horace Walpole took the trouble of supporting her station, never indicating in any way that there was anything suspicious concerning her reputation.²⁴⁴ Consequently, Cholmondeley's reputation suffered no permanent damage. She remained a favourite in literary circles—and two years later, Fanny Burney recorded having accepted a dinner invitation at Sir Joshua Reynolds's expressly to meet Cholmondeley, and the two continued their friendship as if nothing had happened.²⁴⁵ Indeed, much depended on the willingness of friends and family to participate in maintaining the appearance of respectability, but with a careful performance, the appearance of chastity could be used as a dissimulative mask to fulfil the normative ideal of a polite woman while gaining freedom from the strict regulation of female sexuality.²⁴⁶

Not only was it possible for women to put on a hypocritical external performance of chastity, but also a public loss of character could be patched up by a clever fashioning of external circumstances. Contrary to didactic warnings, even universal knowledge of lost virtue did not necessarily end a woman's social career.²⁴⁷ Fanny Burney's description of her dealings with Alicia Macartney in Bath shed light on the complex manoeuvring negotiating reputation and respectability within polite society required—and enabled. The Thrale party saw 'Bad Mac' at the lower rooms, where, as Burney sniffed, her mere appearance confirmed her depraved state of morals:

[Her] Face carries an affirmation of all this account,—it is bold, hardened, snuft, leering & impudent! just such a face as I should Draw for Mrs. Sinclear—Her Dress, too, was of the same cast, a thin muslin short sacque & Coat lined throughout with Pink,—a *modesty bit* [two words blotted out]—& something of a *very* short cloak half concealed about half of her old wrinkled Neck—the rest was visible to disgust the Beholders,—red Bows & Ribbons in abundance, a Gauze Bonnet tipt on to the top of her Head, & a pair of Mittens!²⁴⁸

Despite all this, Macartney was dubbed the 'Queen of Bath' on account of her 'expensive Entertainments' frequented by 'People of Character and Rank'. Even the Thrale company was curious enough to creep up very close to get a good look at her—upon which, the lady in question 'addressed herself to Mrs. Thrale' to the great horror and vexation of Burney. Apparently Macartney's blatantly debauched external looks were nevertheless respectable enough to deceive Hester Lynch Thrale, who—apparently mistaking the lady for her respectable sister—immediately began 'a very intimate conversation with this gay lady'. During this conversation, the Thrale group procured an invitation to one of Macartney's famous soirées. After

Burney then explained to Thrale the details of Alicia Macartney's reputation, they 'agreed that it was totally improper to make such an acquaintance, & that some method must be devised to put an end to it *without* making the visit'. This, however, proved uncommonly tricky, as 'it was indispensably requisite that she should be *civilly* shirked, as her enmity was horrible'. In the end, Hester Lynch Thrale decided to call on Macartney during one morning to let her know 'she had forgotten when at the Rooms a previous engagement' for the night of the *soirée*, while the rest of the company staid safely at home in fears of getting associated with such a dubious character.²⁴⁹ Burney rejoiced in their success at avoiding getting added to Macartney's '*Coterie*', writing she should be 'perfectly *enragée* to have avoided *publicly* associating with poor Mrs. Cholmondeley, & then to go to Balls and assemblies at Mrs. Macartneys!—when Mrs. Cholmondeley is only suspected of one indiscretion, & Mrs. Macartney has been notoriously guilty of vices innumerable'.²⁵⁰

The intricacies of the Burney—Thrale—Macartney ménage illustrate the ways in which clever use of polite display could enable women of questionable reputation to nevertheless retain a standing in polite society, as well as the ways in which polite decorum worked in their advantage, preventing their open slighting. Despite Alicia Macartney's soiled reputation, she nevertheless had enough social leverage to publicly shame those she perceived had insulted her. Burney was especially worried that Macartney might lampoon them in the local paper if slighted—as she was in the habit of doing and had, indeed, recently done with Sophy Streatfeild for not visiting her.²⁵¹ Accordingly, even though Burney was queasy at the thought that 'one of Mrs. Thrale's Fame & celebrity & purity of mind & conduct should countenance a Wretch notorious for all manner of evil', they needed to remain polite enough terms to prevent 'Bad Mac's' retaliation.²⁵² As Ingrid Tague argues, 'social power and the demands of politeness vied with the ostensibly unalterable effects of a woman's lost chastity, and the outcome was far from predetermined'.²⁵³ In fact, the obligations of politeness often prevented precisely the social ruin prescribed to adulterous women by the discourse of politeness—as when Henrietta Knight, Lady Luxborough (1699–1756) forced her acquaintance on Mary Delany's sister Anne Dewes. When the Dewes family rented a house close to Lady Luxborough's famous coterie in Warwickshire—where the adulterous lady had been banished by her husband—she 'obliged' Anne Dewes to enter her cottage, 'was most profoundly civil, and comes to see me this week', Dewes complained to her brother.²⁵⁴ While Dewes was 'not vastly fond' of the acquaintance of a known adulterer, Mary Delany saw 'no reason why her acquaintance is to be declined' and was, in fact, 'vastly entertained at your being acquainted with her in spite of your prudence':

If she leads a discreet life, and does generous and charitable things, she ought to be taken notice of, as an encouragement to go on in a right path, and your conversation and example may be of infinite service to her. She

has lively parts, is *very well bred*, and knows the polite world, and you may, I think, divert yourself with her as much as you can.

Even Delany's husband, Patrick Delany, a Church of Ireland minister, thought the acquaintance proper and even 'meritorious'.²⁵⁵

Thus, not only was sexual honour's link to social status equivocal; in addition, the role of opaque image-control and hypocritical fashioning of external appearances played a crucial role in providing elite women with freedom from didactic politeness norms. Since external signs were polite society's only means of measuring chastity—or, indeed, any form of idealised polite femininity—there was always a gap between an individual's behaviour and her actual state of chastity. Within that gap, women like Mary Cholmondeley, Alicia Macartney, and Henrietta Knight could find some freedom of sexual action, otherwise denied to them. The possibility of performative play on chaste identity also further blurs the external/internal division; by suggesting that the external self is malleable and hypocritical, it questions the internalist notion of an authentic identity that is reflected on the external surface of the body, and, instead, suggests that identities are performative. At the same time, the performances of chastity as citations of the norm, honest and hypocritical alike, of course also served to maintain and reconstitute the feminine ideal of chastity and its importance to female honour.

The intensity of public concern over women's chastity indicates that controlling women's sexuality was seen as a matter of vital importance for the entire polite society. Feminine chastity was widely thought to have a crucial influence on the morals of the nation. The English patrilineal transmission of property and the wish to ensure rightful inheritance by female chastity further enhanced chastity's social importance.²⁵⁶ Besides, women's chastity was intimately tied to their husband's reputation; the image of a cuckolded man was a general laughing stock, because it represented a pitiable inability to control one's wife as a proper head of household should, and thereby violated patriarchal society's gender roles.²⁵⁷ Most importantly, sexuality was perceived to be one of women's most effective means of getting power, which is why regulating women's sexuality was of crucial importance. A discursively disorganised female sexuality was a disruptive force. The seductive female body could lead men to abandon all control and rationality, thus endangering the ordered workings of society. Shawn Lisa Maurer argues that the 'traditional belief in women's power to arouse, confuse, and distract men makes imperative men's ability to control women's use of their sexual desirability', simultaneously maintaining that men are dependent upon 'women's construction as pleasing objects in order to make themselves feel and act like men'.²⁵⁸ Thus, the careful discursive regulation of women was motivated by the urge to keep the anarchic potential of the female body under control, thereby ensuring the continued self-control of men. Any female assertion of (sexual) power would not only be considered as a deviation from polite feminine normativity, but also a threat to constructions of masculine identity, sexuality, and hegemony.

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Notes

- 1 Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 157–73.
- 2 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 184–5.
- 3 On satisfaction received from self-discipline, see Chapter 4. For a Foucauldian interpretation on pleasure, self-discipline, and dieting, see Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, Ch. 3.
- 4 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 158.
- 5 See e.g. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Carter, *Men and the Emergence*; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*; Hunt, *Middling Sort*. Parts of this section have been previously published as an article in *Cultural History* (Ylivuori, Soile, 'A Polite Foucault? Eighteenth-Century Politeness as a Disciplinary System and Practice of the Self' in *Cultural History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014), 170–189) and are reprinted here with permission of Edinburgh University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Polite Foucault?')
- 6 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 8.
- 7 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 71–2.
- 8 Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, I, 48–9.
- 9 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 82.
- 10 Self-discipline was also seen as a national and Protestant virtue, which linked it all the more strongly to English urban politeness (Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 170).
- 11 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 72. See also Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 6–10.
- 12 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 46.
- 13 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 46.
- 14 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 46. On men's self-discipline and politeness, see e.g. Carter, *Men and the Emergence*; Maurer, *Proposing Men*; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*; Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French'; Shoemaker, 'Reforming Male Manners'.
- 15 Gender played a part in articulations of men's need for self-discipline, as well; however, in men's case, also other authorities, such as honour or social status, were invoked. (See e.g. Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 8; Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 40–1, passim.)
- 16 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 158.
- 17 *Ladies Calling*, 47–8.

- 18 Rousseau, *Emilius and Sophia*, IV, 30, 32. On *Èmile*'s English reception, see e.g. Duffy, *Rousseau in England*, 16–22.
- 19 See e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 55–6, Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 29–31. On the complex relationship between politeness and religion, see e.g. Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 41–4; Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere', 107, passim.; Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 10, passim. On women's manners and religion, see e.g. Major, who argues that polite feminised Anglicanism was one of the main ingredients of the construction of Britishness (Major, *Madam Britannia*, 7, 136, 142–3, 200).
- 20 Burney, *Camilla*, 688.
- 21 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 37–8.
- 22 More, *Essays*, 165. See also e.g. D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 68.
- 23 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 134.
- 24 More, *Essays*, 145.
- 25 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 5.
- 26 Chapone, *Letters*, 69.
- 27 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 184–5, 123. On Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau, see Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 73–92, passim.
- 28 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 166–7; Vane, *Memoirs*, II, 276.
- 29 E.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 87. See also Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 61, 74, 112–13.
- 30 Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 207–27. The power of the uterus over the female body was also used as the rationale behind denying women full civil rights, since the very unpredictability of their behaviour precluded the rational and independent mental capacities required from full citizens (Kaplan, 'Wild Nights', 161–2).
- 31 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 66.
- 32 Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 145.
- 33 *Rambler*, No. 151, 27 August 1751, V, 42.
- 34 See e.g. Bennett, *Letters*, I, 158–61; II, 70–1; Chapone, *Letters*, 177–8. On early modern understandings of imagination, see Winkler, 'Perception and Ideas', 237–59; Schmitter, '17th- and 18th-Century Theories of Emotions'. On passions and affections, see e.g. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, 62–4.
- 35 EM to Frances Boscawen, 24 December 1752, LEM, III, 203–4.
- 36 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 71; Chapone, *Letters*, 115–16.
- 37 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 163–4. See also e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, II, 99; *Ladies Calling*, 46.
- 38 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 44.
- 39 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 26–7; *Polite Academy*, xx–xxi. Interestingly enough, the advice *The Polite Academy* gives on controlling anger is taken from *The Spectator*, where Joseph Addison's original remarks were addressed against women's political participation and 'party-zeal' (*Spectator*, No. 57, 5 May 1711, I, 319–23).
- 40 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 162, II, 42. See also D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 43.
- 41 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 41.
- 42 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 12.
- 43 King, 'Gender and Modernity', 37; *Spectator*, No. 128, 27 July 1711, II, 243–8. See also D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 45–6.
- 44 Bennett, *Letters*, I, 164.
- 45 *Spectator*, No. 246, 12 December 1711, III, 429–34. According to the humoral system, the breast milk, like the blood of a passionate person, would contain her passions.
- 46 See e.g. Arditì, *Genealogy of Manners*, 1–17, 221–8; Maurer, *Proposing Men*, especially Ch. 7.
- 47 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 38–9.
- 48 Burney, *Camilla*, 358–9.

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- 49 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 84–5.
 50 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 86–7.
 51 See e.g. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 78–82; 81.
 52 Moss, *Spilling the Beans*, 10.
 53 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 260, 262.
 54 See e.g. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 274–6; Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*.
 55 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 24.
 56 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 95–6, 26–7.
 57 Chapone, *Letters*, 142.
 58 Shirley, *Rich Closet of Rarities*, 42–3, 177–8.
 59 Shirley, *Rich Closet of Rarities*, 177; Burney, *Evelina*, 288.
 60 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 109.
 61 For women's abstinence tradition, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 215–17.
 62 Mikkeli, *Hygiene*, 83–4.
 63 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 17. See also Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 129.
 64 FB to Susanna Burney, 12 October [1779], *JFB*, III, 372–3.
 65 FB to Susanna Burney, 12 October [1779], *JFB*, III, 372–3; Hester Lynch Thrale, 22 November 1780, Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana*, I, 463.
 66 *CMD*, I, 292; *CMD*, I, 8.
 67 MD to Anne Granville, 30 March 1732, *CMD*, I, 345–6.
 68 MD to Anne Granville, 24 January [1732–3], *CMD*, I, 397.
 69 E.g. MD to Anne Dewes, [n.d., 1744?], *CMD*, II, 331–2; MD to Mary Dewes, 6 October 1764, *CMD*, IV, 27.
 70 MD to Anne Granville, 5 April 1733, *CMD*, I, 405–6.
 71 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 121. See also e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, II, 16–17.
 72 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 122.
 73 Haywood, *Anti-Pamela*, 189.
 74 Burton, *Lectures*, II, 17.
 75 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 262. See also Bennett, *Letters*, II, 86.
 76 *Spectator*, No. 365, 29 April 1712, V, 277–81.
 77 See e.g. Tague, *Women of Quality*, 63; Porter, *Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*, 108–9; Ellis, Coulton, and Mauger, *Empire of Tea*, 85–91.
 78 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 21–2. For these kinds of portrayals of women, see e.g. Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 71–4; *Spectator*, No. 606, 13 October 1714, VIII, 274–9; Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 27.
 79 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 22.
 80 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 259–60. There was a long early modern tradition of contrasting urban life unfavourably with healthy country life, as well as treating city-induced health problems with dieting and exercising; see e.g. Mikkeli, *Hygiene*, 138–46.
 81 *Polite Lady*, 177–8.
 82 *Lady's Delight*, 10.
 83 Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 4.
 84 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 1–4.
 85 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 14. On conversation in the eighteenth century, see e.g. Halsey and Slinn (eds), *Concept and Practice of Conversation*; Gleadle, 'Conversation, Politics, and Gender'.
 86 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 11.
 87 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 18.
 88 EM to Elizabeth Carter, [1759], *LEM*, IV, 186–7.
 89 On the rudeness of dominating conversation, see e.g. Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 16 October 1747, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, I, 282–3.
 90 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 115.

- 91 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 20.
- 92 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 63–6.
- 93 *Ladies Calling*, 7; D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 12. On women's counterfeiting a lisp, see e.g. Burton, *Lectures*, II, 158; Bennett, *Letters*, II, 37; More, *Essays*, 112.
- 94 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 92.
- 95 Korhonen, *Kiusan henki*, 46, 50–3.
- 96 Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 63.
- 97 Eskin, 'Rei(g)ning of Women's Tongues', 102, 108–9.
- 98 Glover, *Elite Women*, 104.
- 99 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 56; *Spectator*, No. 606, 13 October 1714, VIII, 274–9; Bennett, *Letters*, I, 163–4; *Ladies Calling*, 11–13.
- 100 Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 93.
- 101 More, *Strictures*, II, 42–3.
- 102 Korhonen, *Kiusan henki*, 55.
- 103 Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 21.
- 104 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 108. See also e.g. Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 115–17; *Ladies Calling*, 9.
- 105 *Ladies Calling*, 48–50.
- 106 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 108.
- 107 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 268; Bennett, *Letters*, II, 43.
- 108 Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, 63.
- 109 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor* (3rd ed.), 56. Interestingly, this paragraph dealing with women and politicks can only be found from the third edition onwards; it is missing from the original first English edition. See also e.g. More, *Essays*, 171–2; *Spectator*, No. 57, 5 May 1711, I, 319–23; No. 57, 5 May 1711, I, 319–23. Scholars have shown that, despite attempts to regulate women's talk of politics, they could be quite active in taking a political stand. Elite women played a role in politics in multiple ways, such as patronage networks and direct influence on their male relatives. Moreover, women could display their political views in non-verbal ways when their access to speech was limited—like publicly expressing their party preferences in the colours of their hoods, the styles of their head-dress, or the placing of their patches. (*Spectator*, No. 265, 3 January 1712, IV, 77–81; No. 81, 2 June 1711, II, 1–6. On women's political participation, see e.g. Glover, *Elite Women*, 137–8; Tague, *Women of Quality*, 194–7; Chalus, 'My Minerva at my Elbow'; Chalus, 'Women, Electoral Privilege and Practice'; Chalus, 'Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World'.)
- 110 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 8 January 1750, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, II, 312.
- 111 See e.g. Major, *Madam Britannia*, 1–4.
- 112 More, *Strictures*, II, 48–61.
- 113 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 19.
- 114 EM to Mary Robinson, 15 August 1771, BL Add. 40663, f. 27.
- 115 EM to Anne Donnellan, 2 December [1741?] *LEM*, II, 31–2.
- 116 FB to Susanna Burney, 29 April [1789], *JFB*, IV, 85. On bluestocking conversation, see Eger, *Bluestockings*, 59–60, 101–14.
- 117 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 18.
- 118 See e.g. Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 10–11; Spencer, *Rise of the Woman Novelist*, 53, 75–6; Pearson, *Women's Reading*, 22.
- 119 Manley, *Adventures of Rivella*, 34–5.
- 120 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 18.
- 121 More, *Essays*, 61.
- 122 *LEM*, I, 293–4; I, 90. See also EM to Anne Donnellan, 5 February 1741, BL Add. MS 70493, ff. 66–9.
- 123 EM to Elizabeth Carter, 6 June 1758, *LEM*, IV, 75–6.

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- 124 EM to Anne Donnellan, 26 [September?] 1749, *LEM*, III, 96–7.
- 125 Korhonen, *Kiusan henki*, 60. See also Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 92–3.
- 126 More, *Strictures*, II, 70.
- 127 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 23.
- 128 Bennett, *Letters*, II, 23.
- 129 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, 3–4 November 1782, *JFB*, V, 138.
- 130 More, *Strictures*, II, 65.
- 131 E.g. Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 26; Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 17; *Ladies Calling*, 160.
- 132 Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, 17.
- 133 Shirley, *Rich Closet of Rarities*, 188; D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 10. See also e.g. Chapone, *Letters*, 164–5. Women's speaking silence had also long roots in Renaissance and early modern English culture (Eskin, 'Rei(g)ning of Women's Tongues', 101–2).
- 134 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 15.
- 135 *JCT*, 11 May 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, ff. 4–5.
- 136 A version of this section has been published as an article in the *Journal of Early Modern Studies* (Ylivuori, Soile, 'Time Management and Autonomous Subjectivity: Catherine Talbot, Politeness, and Self-discipline as a Practice of Freedom' in *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 6 (2017), 113–32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/JEMS-2279-7149-20391>.) and is reprinted here with permission of Firenze University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Time Management'.)
- 137 Zuk, 'Introduction', 5.
- 138 *JCT*, 30 October 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, ff. 27–9.
- 139 Zuk, 'Introduction', 8.
- 140 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 28 February 1743, *LCT*, I, 27. On Talbot's sequestered life, see also e.g. CT to Elizabeth Carter, 5 October 1743, *LCT*, I, 38.
- 141 *JCT*, 25 March 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 63.
- 142 Zuk, 'Introduction', 4. On Talbot's relationship with Secker, see Myers, *Blue-stocking Circle*, 62–6.
- 143 *JCT*, 1 February 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 51. Talbot referred to Secker by the codename 'Eng[land]:' in her journals.
- 144 *JCT*, 15 August 1753, BL Add. MS 46690, ff. 96–7.
- 145 *JCT*, 30 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 28–30; 12 November 1753, ff. 20–3.
- 146 Zuk, 'Talbot, Catherine'.
- 147 *JCT*, 31 December 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 45.
- 148 Ylivuori, 'Time Management'.
- 149 *JCT*, 30 October 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 17–19.
- 150 *JCT*, 20 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 28–30. See also CT to Elizabeth Carter, 11 November 1743, *LCT*, I, 41–2.
- 151 Zuk, 'Introduction', 5.
- 152 Hall, *Subjectivity*, 24. See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 160–3.
- 153 Hall, *Subjectivity*, 28.
- 154 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 2 March 1745, *LCT*, I, 89.
- 155 On women's capability of rationality and English proto-feminism in the Enlightenment period, see e.g. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, 11–20, passim.; Simonton, 'Women and Education', 36–7.
- 156 *JCT*, 2 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 17–19.
- 157 *JCT*, 30 October 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, ff. 27–9.
- 158 *JCT*, 31 October 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 17–19.
- 159 CT to George Berkeley, [n.d., 176-?], BL Add. MS 39312, ff. 304–5.
- 160 Elizabeth Carter to CT, *LCT*, I, 284.
- 161 *JCT*, 1 February 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 51.
- 162 *JCT*, 26 June 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 22.

- 163 *JCT*, 1 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 17–19.
- 164 *JCT*, [n.d., 1745–53?], BL Add. MS 46688, f. 14.
- 165 *JCT*, 3 March 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 59. See also e.g. CT to Elizabeth Carter, 12 April 1744, *LCT*, I, 50; 7 September 1744, *LCT*, I, 69–70.
- 166 CT to Elizabeth Carter, 10 May 1744, *LCT*, I, 52–3.
- 167 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 30 August 1750, BLRA, Wrest MS 2886.
- 168 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 14 August 1747, BLRA, Wrest MS 3125.
- 169 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 7 May 1748, BLRA, Wrest MS 3151.
- 170 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 18 July 1763, BLRA, Wrest MS 783/701.
- 171 *JCT*, 1 February 1752, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 51.
- 172 *JCT*, 12 November 1751, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 33.
- 173 *JCT*, 30 July 1753, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 90. 'I take an interest in her, I love her, it seems to me that it is one of my duties to [illegible] her little imperfections and correct them. She loves me dearly and has confidence in me—Then again, is it my business to mix myself with something that does not concern me?'
- 174 *JCT*, 6 August 1753, BL Add. MS 46690, f. 93.
- 175 CT to Julia Berkeley, 30 October 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 15–16.
- 176 *JCT*, 14 October 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 24–5.
- 177 *JCT*, 9 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 20–3.
- 178 A version of this section has been published as an article in the *Journal of Early Modern Studies* and is reprinted here with permission of Firenze University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Time Management'.)
- 179 CT to Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, 25 July 1761, BLRA, Wrest MS 750/635; *JCT*, 3 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, f. 19.
- 180 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 78.
- 181 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 85.
- 182 On practices of self-imposed industry, see Jordan, *Anxieties of Idleness*, 17–18; Ylivuori, 'Time Management'.
- 183 EM to Gilbert West, 26 September 1755, *LEM*, III, 331.
- 184 EM to Messenger Monsey, 5 July [1757?], *LEM*, IV, 132.
- 185 EM to Gilbert West, 26 September 1755, *LEM*, III, 331–2.
- 186 EM to Anne Donnellan, 30 December 1750, *LEM*, III, 138–9.
- 187 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 210.
- 188 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 78–80.
- 189 Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 11.
- 190 E.g. Chapone, *Letters*, 69, 88–9; More, *Essays*, 145–6.
- 191 More, *Essays*, 119.
- 192 More, *Essays*, [title page].
- 193 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 80–4.
- 194 Burke, *Letter to a Member*, quoted in Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 8.
- 195 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 59–69; Kaplan, 'Wild Nights', 161–2; Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 207–27.
- 196 Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 82, 84.
- 197 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 217.
- 198 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 220.
- 199 Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound', 234. See also Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 2, 17.
- 200 Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound', 218.
- 201 *JCT*, 19 December 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 31–2.
- 202 *JCT*, 12 November 1753, BL Add. MS 46688, ff. 20–3
- 203 D'Ezio, *Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi*, 35–6. See also Kelly, 'Introduction', xlviii; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 2, passim.; Ylivuori, 'Time Management', 128.
- 204 D'Ezio, *Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi*, 5–6, 25; Hester Lynch Thrale, 23 May 1784, Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana*, I, 593.
- 205 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 9–10.

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- 206 Hester Chapone to William Weller Pepys, 24 August 1784, Gaussen (ed.), *Later Pepys*, I, 408, quoted in Nussbaum, 'What Trace of the Wit?', 197.
- 207 More, *Bas Bleu: or, Conversation*, 298.
- 208 Nussbaum, 'What Trace of the Wit?', 195–6; EM to Elizabeth Vesey, [25] July 1784, HL MO 3583, quoted in Bloom and Bloom (eds), *Piozzi Letters*, I, 100. Nussbaum argues that indulging passions was also a cosmopolitan mode of conduct and opposed to the English ideals of self-control (Nussbaum, 'What Trace of the Wit?', 198, 202).
- 209 Nussbaum, 'What Trace of the Wit?', 198. On passion and sexual equality, see Kaplan, 'Wild Nights', 160–84.
- 210 *Spectator*, No. 540, 19 November 1712, VII, 370–5; No. 395, 3 June 1712, VI, 1–5.
- 211 Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, II, 317.
- 212 This section is a significantly reworked version of a previous article, published in *The Historical Journal* (Ylivuori, Soile, 'Rethinking Female Chastity and Gentlewomen's Honour in Eighteenth-Century England' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2016), 71–97) and reprinted here with permission of Cambridge University Press. (See Ylivuori, 'Rethinking Female Chastity'.)
- 213 See e.g. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 104, 377, Ch. 6; Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 13–15; Clark, 'Whores and Gossips'; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 6, passim.; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 127, 288–9; Tague, *Women of Quality*, 30–5; Dabhoiwala, 'Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status'; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 253, passim.; Amussen, *Ordered Society*, 119–20.
- 214 For a more detailed analysis on chastity, performance, and honour, see Ylivuori, 'Rethinking Female Chastity'.
- 215 FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 44–5. Alicia Macartney, or 'Mrs MacDevil' as she was known, was even a noted friend of the Royal Family. According to Rizzo, Macartney 'contrived by providing various unsavory services to be countenanced by the great' (*JFB*, IV, 44–5, footnote 55).
- 216 *Polite Lady*, 193. See also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 3; *Spectator*, No. 99, 23 June 1711, II, 95–100.
- 217 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 30–1. On parallel development of conceptualisations of virtue in France, see Linton, 'Virtue Rewarded?'. The internalisation and naturalisation of virtue started already at the end of seventeenth century; for example, already *The Ladies Calling* (1673) refers to female chastity as 'an instinct of nature' (*Ladies Calling*, 16. See also e.g. Dabhoiwala, *Origins of Sex*, 187).
- 218 Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty*, 8.
- 219 *Ladies Calling*, 5–6.
- 220 *Ladies Calling*, 5–7, 17. See also Essex, *Young Ladies Conduct*, 32–8; Centlivre, *Busie Body*, 2nd act, 35.
- 221 *Ladies Calling*, 16.
- 222 *Ladies Calling*, 161.
- 223 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 134.
- 224 Burney, *Evelina*, 333. See also Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty*, 133–5.
- 225 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 212–13; *Polite Lady*, 165.
- 226 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 81.
- 227 Burton, *Lectures*, I, 215.
- 228 Halifax, *Lady's New Year's Gift*, 100. See also e.g. *Ladies Calling*, 30–1, Chapone, *Letters*, 84; More, *Strictures*, II, 39; Burney, *Evelina*, 164.
- 229 For example, Syrena, the heroine of Eliza Haywood's satire *Anti-Pamela* uses the feigned signs of innocence to lure men 'with a modest Blush, downcast Eyes, and all the Tokens of an Innocent Surprize (which she before had practised in her Glass)' (Haywood, *Anti-Pamela*, 110).

- 230 See e.g. the morally deprived heroine of Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (Fielding, *Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, 40). In fact, the Pamela controversy of the 1740s is perhaps the best demonstration of the tremendous anxiety caused by the possibility of faked modesty. (See e.g. Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, Ch. 4.) On the other hand, fears of counterfeited signs of modesty could also lead to accusations of applied rouge when the blush was, in fact, genuine, as happens to Evelina in Burney's novel (Major, *Madam Britannia*, 193).
- 231 *Polite Lady*, 229; Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, 55.
- 232 MD to Anne Granville, 5 December 1729, *CMD*, I, 226.
- 233 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 220–1, 308. On Wollstonecraft's critique of modesty, see Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 77.
- 234 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 299–300, 317–18.
- 235 See also e.g. *Polite Lady*, 195–8. As Laura Gowing argues, a woman's honour was closely tied to the honour of her family, and a loss of chaste reputation compromised the respectability of her relatives as well (Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 94).
- 236 MD, 'Autobiography', Letter X, *CMD*, I, 83.
- 237 FB to Susanna Burney Phillips, [8–22 December 1783], *JFB*, V, 441–2, 444.
- 238 Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 133–4.
- 239 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 8 January 1750, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, II, 317; 14 January 1751, Stanhope (ed.), *Letters*, III, 101.
- 240 *Female Spectator*, I, 246; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 36. On conceptions of aristocratic (lack of) morals, see e.g. Klein, 'Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation', 659–60; Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy*, 5–8, 56–84; Arditì, *Genealogy of Manners*, 1–17, 221–8.
- 241 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 152.
- 242 D'Ancourt, *Lady's Preceptor*, 46. See also Steele, *Ladies Library*, I, 128; *Ladies Mercury*, 27 February 1693.
- 243 FB to Charles Burney, 18 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 67.
- 244 Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, XVI, 225–7.
- 245 FB to Charles Burney, [17 July 1782], *JFB*, V, 77.
- 246 Ylivuori, 'Rethinking Female Chastity', 94–6.
- 247 See e.g. Tague, *Women of Quality*, 178–82; Ylivuori, 'Rethinking Female Chastity', 94–7.
- 248 FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 45–6. 'Snuff' means dirtied with snuff, and with Mrs Sinclair Burney refers to the notorious brothel keeper Mrs Sinclair in Richardson's *Clarissa* (Richardson, *Clarissa*, III, 284–90, passim.).
- 249 FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 44–6, 52.
- 250 FB to Charles Burney, 18 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 67.
- 251 Mrs Macartney had placed a 'mortifying paragraph' on Streatfeild into the *Morning Post* (23 December 1779), entitled 'Learned Lass, or the Poor Scholar's Garland! A Song' (FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 47; *JFB*, IV, 47, footnote 61).
- 252 FB to Susanna Burney, 9–20 April [1780], *JFB*, IV, 45–6.
- 253 Tague, *Women of Quality*, 180.
- 254 Anne Dewes to Bernard Granville, 12 August 1750, *CMD*, II, 578.
- 255 MD to Anne Dewes, 24 August 1750, *CMD*, II, 586.
- 256 Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty*, 21; McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 157. From this basis, McKeon claims that money was the reason for demanding chastity more systematically from elite women than from women of lower social status, since the inheritances of the lower ranks would have been considerably smaller.
- 257 See e.g. Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 26–7; Korhonen, 'Disability Humour in English Jestbooks', 34–5; Foyster, 'A Laughing Matter?', 7–9; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 75; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 193–5, 232–3.
- 258 Maurer, *Proposing Men*, 109. See also Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 123.

Epilogue

At the age of 23, Fanny Burney found herself in a peculiar and not altogether pleasant situation. A Mr Thomas Barlow, an ‘unexceptionable young man with good prospects’ whom Burney had met only once in a small evening gathering, unexpectedly proposed to her in 1775. As Burney knew nothing of the man, marriage, in her view, was out of the question. This caused a small-scale uproar in her family, who were of a quite different opinion. To secure her future financial standing, Burney’s closest and most trusted relatives and friends pressured her to accept the proposal of a complete stranger for the fear of never receiving another. Burney, however, held her ground, maintaining that matrimony out of solely financial reasons was against her character. Accordingly, after a couple of weeks of Barlow’s persistent courtship, partly prompted by Burney’s family’s encouragement, she finally managed to extricate herself from the insistent gentleman.

Burney’s selection of means to cool Barlow’s feelings was limited by politeness and feminine decorum. She was forced to receive his visits, but found means to indicate his company was not welcomed by, for example, not asking him to sit down (and thus forcing the poor man to stand through his entire visit) and determinately ignoring all his attempts for conversation.¹ Interestingly, Burney noted down a conversation where she endeavoured to put an end to Barlow’s interest in her:

[Barlow:] ‘This is the severest decision!—I am persuaded, Madam, you cannot be so cruel?—Surely you must allow that the *social state* is what we were all meant for?—that we were created for one another?—that to form such a resolution is contrary to the design of our Being?—’

‘All this may be true,—’ said I; —‘I have nothing to say in contradiction to it—but you know there are many odd Characters in the World—& I am one of them.’ [...]

‘But surely—is not this—*singular*? —’

‘I give you leave, Sir,’ cried I, laughing, ‘to think me singular—odd—Queer—nay, even whimsical, if you please.’²

The choice of words by both Barlow and Burney is thought-provoking. Burney’s unorthodox decision to refuse a perfectly sensible marriage appears

‘singular’ to Barlow, and she readily admits to being an ‘odd’, ‘queer’, or even ‘whimsical’ character.

Burney’s actions highlight both the repressive force of the culture of politeness and the potential for freedom embedded in it. Polite society’s norms advocated marriage for women, and, indeed, not to accept an offer from a well-behaved, wealthy, and respectable suitor was considered to be ‘contrary to the design of our Being’, and especially against female nature as it was conventionally understood. Polite decorum forced Burney to receive the visits of an unwelcome suitor and behave with some (though limited) civility towards him. Moreover, her friends and family leant heavily on her, and women were generally expected to bow before such authority. This is not to say that refusing an impeccable suitor was an incident unheard of, but Burney was certainly swimming against a particularly strong tide.

Nevertheless, Burney managed to avoid ‘immolat[ing] herself for her father’s pleasure’ and thus being a ‘slave of decorum’, as Betty Rizzo puts it.³ Moreover, and much more significantly, by skilfully using the means that the culture of politeness provided—such as showing her displeasure through not conversing with her suitor, which, as she recorded, caused him a ‘good deal’ of agitation, but ‘what can a Woman do when a man will not take an answer?’—she created a form of subjectivity that effectively resisted the norms of politeness.⁴ Thus, her refusal of Barlow can be seen as an act of challenging the constitutive conditions of polite feminine subjectivity and replacing them with a subversive one—something which she herself then termed ‘queer’ and ‘whimsical’, fully aware of its exceptional character. Indeed, an act of resistance would, of course, appear odd and non-rational from the viewpoint of the hegemonic regime of power/knowledge. Marianna D’Ezio has similarly argued that Hester Lynch Thrale’s deliberate embracing of the role of an eccentric enabled her to establish herself as an individual, an intellectual, and a public writer. Fanny Burney’s defying her dearly beloved family’s will can be seen as a similar ‘step towards emancipation and expressive autonomy’.⁵

This book has examined the complicated interplay between politeness as a normalising power and politeness as an enabling practice. Burney’s refusal of Barlow can be read as a microcosm of polite interaction, where individuals’ actions are both bound and enabled by the norms of politeness. Individuals were not passive victims of the regime of politeness, nor was their identity inescapably dictated by gendered polite norms. Instead, they could engage in specific strategies to deploy the potential for freedom that is embedded in all regimes of power/knowledge.

While this book has attempted to add to the work done on politeness by drawing upon theoretical perspectives about performance, performativity, and identity construction, its goal has been to make also broader arguments concerning the position of the subject as both constructed through discourse and the shaper of that discourse. Indeed, my research is a part of a wider project of examining how individual and collective identities are formed through the interplay of social and cultural structures and individuals themselves. This

theoretically informed approach is, in part, an attempt to answer to the challenge Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues concerns all historians—that is, the departure from modernity. As Ermarth claims, our postmodern ‘discursive condition’ requires us to radically rethink the very tools of thought which we employ when writing history in order to ‘keep up with ourselves in any vital or creative way’.⁶ In this way, I want to open up new views for historical research and to problematise established research traditions of the history of politeness in a fruitful way. Moreover, my findings are applicable to other historical and cultural contexts beyond the immediate scope of eighteenth-century England, politeness, or women, for that matter. Foucauldian scholars have been committed to mapping the creation of subjectivity in its different historical stages as a practice of disciplinary, pastoral, or bio-power. Nikolas Rose, Cressida Heyes, and Susan Bordo, among others, have emphasised the central role of the body as an inscriptive surface in this process. For example, Nikolas Rose has influentially argued that we currently live in the age of the ‘somatic individual’, in which the self is ‘discovered’ through working on the body. This argument resonates powerfully with my analysis on politeness. ‘Selfhood has become intrinsically somatic—ethical practices increasingly take the body as a key site for work on the self’, Rose argues, and continues that ‘the corporeal existence and vitality of the self have become the privileged site of experiments with subjectivity’.⁷ Moreover, he tracks the history of the embodiment of subjectivity to the studies, bedrooms, courtrooms, markets, and schoolrooms of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe—a list where the polite salon or ballroom can be justifiably added.⁸

Thus, the project of constructing subjectivity through moulding and disciplining the body is a pressing contemporary phenomenon with historical roots—and those roots partly draw from women’s practices of politeness in eighteenth-century Europe. As Cressida Heyes claims, ‘somatic subjectivity’ has had an especially fraught relationship with gender; as Western feminism has ‘urged women to look inside to find the authentic and diverse selves patriarchy has denied and suppressed, this very gesture of self-discovery has been deeply implicated in emergent discourses that paradoxically take the disciplined and conformist body as a site of truth reflecting the self within’. Heyes argues that despite feminist and anti-racist effort to argue that gendered or racialised bodies do not indicate inferior intellectual or moral character, our present-day society nevertheless acts as if—even if it does not fully believe that—‘one’s outer form reflects one’s virtues’, and that the ever increasing visual objectification of (especially female) bodies—exemplified by the growing markets of beauty, dieting, fitness, and cosmetic surgery industries—indicates that the fashioning of the body is all the time becoming increasingly important to how we understand ourselves.⁹ Therefore, analysing women’s politeness as a bodily regime of subjectification offers us insight into not only a historically specific situation but to the workings of present-day society. By deconstructing the relationship between the polite performance as volitional theatrical act and performativity as unvolitional iterative practice through concrete eighteenth-century case-studies, I

have wished to make an original theoretical contribution that has applicability to a wide range of disciplines while maintaining an empirical and intelligible historical focus.

I have also wanted to contextualise politeness both historically and geographically within larger frames beyond eighteenth-century England. This book has explored the pivotal nature of the eighteenth century through examining politeness as a culture that simultaneously carries many early modern beliefs about the body and identity while actively advocating modern ones. The promotion of mixed sociability is a good example of this, being ill-advised if gender is conceptualised as fluid but civilising when it becomes anchored to sex. Similar ambiguity can be seen in conceptualisations of identity and selfhood, which vary between immense flexibility of superficial roles, commonly connected to early modern thought, and the sort of profound immutable internality that has been canonised as ‘the Enlightenment subject’. In geographical terms, the modes of self-mastery, self-care, and self-knowledge politeness required from women was neither limited nor particularly specific to England. However, even though the strategies to disciplining the body into normativity, as well as that normativity in itself, were marked by strong similarities throughout the European and Atlantic world, the rhetorical framing of those norms and strategies was deliberately nationalist.

Moreover, my analysis on the strategies of resistance has contemporary political significance. In his research on the genealogy of subjectification, Nikolas Rose has identified three ways of relating to the self: epistemologically (knowing yourself), despotically (mastering yourself), and attentively (caring for yourself).¹⁰ These are the means through which normalising power is appropriated by the subject as an ethical practice of the self in everyday life, and can be seen at work in women’s practices of politeness, as well. The tradition of journalising emphasised self-knowledge, and honing the body in polite accomplishments and appearances required both self-mastery and self-care. However, Rose emphasises that human beings are ‘not the unified subjects of some coherent regime of domination that produces persons in the form in which it dreams’; instead, ‘[t]echniques of relating to oneself as a subject of unique capacities worthy of respect run up against practices [of] relating to oneself as the target of discipline, duty and docility’.¹¹ In other words, resistance is an integral consequence of normalising practices. My aim in this book has been to discover and analyse some specific strategies through which this individual resistance operates—which is something that Rose does not go into—and thus contribute to the research recently undertaken by Heyes, Bordo, and Johanna Oksala, for example. The four strategies that women engaged in to acquire freedom and to resist normalising power—namely, the practices of hypocrisy, play between exterior and interior, multiplicity of identity, and self-discipline—can thus have wider applicability to other historical and cultural cases where individuals seek to resist normative power, including the present day.

Notes

- 1 *JFB*, [9] June 1775, II, 151–2.
- 2 *JFB*, 6 June 1775, II, 143.
- 3 Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 88.
- 4 *JFB*, [9] June 1775, II, 151–2.
- 5 D'Ezio, *Hester Lynch Thrall Piozzi*, 6–7, 25, 20.
- 6 Ermarth, *History in the Discursive Condition*, xi–xii.
- 7 Rose, 'The Politics of Life Itself', 18. See also Rose, *Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity*, 26–7; Bordo, 'Body and the Reproduction of Femininity'.
- 8 Rose, 'Identity, Genealogy, History', 140, 143.
- 9 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 5–6.
- 10 Rose, 'Identity, Genealogy, History', 135; see also Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 79.
- 11 Rose, 'Identity, Genealogy, History', 140–1.

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