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Aesthetic Intersections: Portraiture and British Women's Life Writing in the Long
Eighteenth Century

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Flavia Ruzi

September 2017

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Adriana Craciun, Chairperson
Dr. George Haggerty
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The Dissertation of Flavia Ruzi is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Aesthetic Intersections: Portraiture and British Women's Life Writing in the Long
Eighteenth Century

by

Flavia Ruzi

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, September 2017
Dr. Adriana Craciun, Chairperson

This dissertation examines the ways in which British women authors engaged with visual representations of femininity in their letters, memoirs, and autobiographical novels. I pair these materials with these writers' portraits and graphic prints and explore the resulting intersections between these closely entwined processes of self-production. My project traces the extent to which these authors questioned or reinforced representational strategies of femininity by participating in the aesthetic conversations of their time, bringing to light an underexamined feminist tradition of engagement with eighteenth-century aesthetic theories and practices.

My project proceeds from the assumption that portraiture in various media is a collaborative transaction between sitter, artist, patron, and projected audience – a transaction that both generates a self and enables the sitter to manipulate that self through the performance of the pose. Stressing the agency of the sitter questions dominant interpretations of the female sitter as the passive object of the male gaze. The travel writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, did not simply roll over for her

portraits in Turkish dress. When paired with her aesthetic commentary on the harem in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, her portraits become staged events orchestrated by Lady Mary herself, who unlike male artists, had access to the all-female space of the harem.

Art historians have often used these portraits to construct stylistic genealogies of male artists instead of understanding the aesthetic contributions of their literary female sitters. My project regroups these portraits alongside the writing of these women authors to recognize the collaboration that produced them. My findings will also demonstrate that an insular literary hermeneutics that fails to account for the material circulation of aesthetic objects, which were as crucial to the production of the eighteenth-century self as any text, is incomplete.

The aim of my project is to trace a subordinated female-centered narrative of engagement with aesthetic discourse alongside the grand narratives perpetuated by conventional male-centered studies of aesthetics in the eighteenth century. By tracing the contribution of women authors to the development of visual culture, I aim to destabilize the long-standing masculinist interpretation of eighteenth-century aesthetics as a product of cultural debates among men.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1-22
1. Woman in Turkish Dress: Imaging the <i>Turkish Embassy Letters</i> in the Portraits of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in <i>Turquerie</i>	23-79
2. Georgiana’s Public Bodies: Classed Femininity and the Nation in the Portraits and Prints of the Duchess of Devonshire	80-135
3. “brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk”: An Archival Reconsideration of Elizabeth Montagu as Connoisseur and Art Patron	136-193
4. The Mediated Gaze: Romantic Visuality and Gender in the Portraits and Works of Mary Darby Robinson	194-249
Conclusion	250-259

List of Illustrations

1. Frontispiece to volume 1 of Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*, 1745. Huntington Library, San Marino. 1
2. *Mary Wortley Montague*, attributed to Jonathan Richardson, 1725. The Earl of Harrowby, Sandon Hall. 31
3. *Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, attributed to Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, c. 1717. National Portrait Gallery. London. 34
4. *Le Bain Turc*. Dominique Ingres. 1862. Musée du Louvre. Paris. 38
5. *Henrietta of Lorraine*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck. 1634. Kenwood House. London. 47
6. *Marchesa Elena Grimaldi*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck. 1623. National Gallery of Art. D.C. 47
7. *Mary, Duchess of Ormonde*, John Smith after Sir Godfrey Kneller. 1702. National Portrait Gallery. London. 47
8. *Elizabeth Murray*, Lady Tollemache, Sir Peter Lely. c.1651. National Trust. Ham House. 47
9. Trade card of John Cotterell. c.1751. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection. 56
10. Mezzotint of Anne Bracegirdle in the role of *The Indian Queen* from Sir Robert Howard's eponymous play. c. 1685- 1695. Published by John Smith and printed by William Vincent. The British Museum. 56
11. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Sir Godfrey Kneller. 1719-1720. The Marquess of Bute. 58
12. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Charles Charles Jervas. 1718-1720. National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 60
13. *Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater* Charles Jervas. c.1710-1720. National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 60
14. *Lady Mary Churchill, Duchess of Montagu*, Charles Jervas. The Duke of Buccleuch. Boughton House. 60

15. <i>Lady Jemima Gray</i> . Charles Jervas. English Heritage. Wrest Park.	60
16. Frontispiece to William Hogarth's <i>The Analysis of Beauty</i> .	69
17. The line of beauty (#4). Detail from Plate 1 of <i>The Analysis of Beauty</i> .	69
18. <i>Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire</i> , Thomas Gainsborough, (1787). Chatsworth, Derbyshire.	82
19. <i>Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire</i> (ca. 1775-76), Joshua Reynolds, Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA.	94
20. <i>The Vis-à-vis Bisected or The Ladies [sic] Coop</i> , Published by Mathew Darly, 1776. The British Museum, London.	103
21. <i>The Devonshire Amusement</i> , Published by McPhail, 5 May 1784. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.	109
22. <i>The Tipling Dutchess Returning from Canvassing</i> , Published by A. Aitken, 29 April, 1784. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.	113
23. <i>Political Affection</i> , Published by John Hanyer, 22 April 1784, Printed by Thomas Rowlandson. The British Museum, London.	115
24. <i>The Fashionable Mamma</i> , Published by Hannah Humphrey, 15 February 1796, Printed by James Gillray. The British Museum, London.	116
25. <i>Supplies for the Year 1784</i> , Published by H. Macphail, 17 April 1784. The British Museum, London.	118
26. <i>Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and Her Daughter</i> , after Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1784, Printed by George Keating, 1787. British Museum, London.	120
27. <i>George, Prince of Wales</i> (1781), Thomas Gainsborough, The Waddesdon Collection, Buckinghamshire.	125
28. <i>George, Prince of Wales</i> (ca. 1783-84), Joshua Reynolds, Lord Lloyd-Webber.	128
29. <i>Falstaff & His Prince</i> , 16 May 1783. Printed by John Boyne. The British Museum, London.	128
30. <i>Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire</i> (ca. 1780), Joshua Reynolds, Chatsworth, Derbyshire.	130

31. <i>Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo (or The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain)</i> , 1778. Richard Samuel, National Portrait Gallery. London	136
32. <i>Elizabeth Carter (Elizabeth Carter as Minerva)</i> . John Fayram, c.1735-1741. National Portrait Gallery. London.	139
33. Elizabeth Montagu. c. 1775-1779. Modelled by Flaxman. Factory of Wedgwood and Bentley. British Museum. London.	140
34. <i>Elizabeth Montagu</i> . 1762, Allan Ramsay. Private Collection.	142
35. Odoardo Fialetti, Illustration from <i>Tutti le Parti del Corpo Humano Diviso in Piu Pezzi</i> , 1608, British Library, London.	144
36. Elizabeth Montagu (then, Robinson), Frontispiece to vol I of <i>Her Correspondence</i> by Emily Montagu, after her miniature portrait by Christian Friedrich Zincke, painted for a “Friendship Box” for the Duchess of Portland, c.1740.	154
37. <i>William Pulteney, 1st Earl of Bath</i> . Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1761. National Portrait Gallery. London	164
38. William Pulteney, after Allan Ramsay, 1762. Printed by David Martin, 1763, British Museum, London.	164
39. <i>Full-length portrait of the Marquis de Pompadour</i> . 1748-1755. Maurice Quentin de La Tour, The Louvre, Paris.	165
40. <i>Elizabeth Montagu</i> . 1776. John Raphael Smith after Sir Joshua Reynolds. National Portrait Gallery. London.	182
41. <i>Elizabeth Montagu</i> , Charles Townley after Fanny Reynolds, painted in 1778, frontispiece to vol II of <i>Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of the Blue-Stockings: Her Correspondence from 1720-1761</i> by Emily J. Climensson.	183
42. <i>Mrs. Robinson</i> , after Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1782. Engraved by W. Dickinson 1785. National Portrait Gallery, London.	200
43. <i>Hélène Fourment</i> , ca. 1630-32, Peter Paul Rubens. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon.	200
44. Studio Copy of <i>Portrait of a Lady</i> by Sir Joshua Reynolds. 1782. Private Collection.	204

45. Sir Peter Lely. *Elizabeth Hamilton: Comtesse de Grammont*. 1663. Royal Collection. 204
46. *Portrait of a Young Woman in 18th-Century Dress*, 1901. After Thomas Gainsborough, 1781. Printed by Gerald Philip Robinson. British Museum, London. 215
47. *Mrs. Robinson*, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1783. Printed by William Russell Birch, 1792. British Museum, London. 225
48. *The Wanderer above the Mists*, 1818, Caspar David Friedrich. Kuntshalle. 234
49. *Mary Wollstonecraft*. John Opie. c. 1792. Tate Britain. London. 250
50. *Mary Wollstonecraft*. John Opie. 1797. National Portrait Gallery. London. 255

Introduction



Figure 1. Frontispiece to Volume 1 of Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*, 1745.
Huntington Library, San Marino.

The frontispiece to the first volume of Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator* (1744) depicts four women in mid-conversation, one of them holding a quill, ready to document the vibrant exchange, and the other three holding fans that have clearly transcended their use as accessories and have morphed into thinking aids. In the

background, we see signifiers of the collective literary production taking place in the room. The rows of books directly behind the table, Madame Dacier's and Sappho's classical busts on the left, and the image of fame above them insist that we are witnessing more than the gossip of a lady's dressing room. Indeed, we are more than likely inside a library.¹ Anticipating the Bluestocking Circle in the second half of the century, this remarkable image establishes a female claim to a long-standing literary heritage by invoking the ancient Greek poet and reasserts this claim through the contemporary French translator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. That this capacious claim is made in visual rather than verbal terms speaks to the entwined cultural work of the printed text and the image of the author. Extending this interrelation beyond the materiality of the text, Haywood's introduction unveils an additional visual narrative that precedes the depicted literary assembly. The women in the frontispiece represent fictional spectators who have gathered to discuss their observations of other women's lived experiences, which are then transcribed into a cultural guide for a female reading public. Hence, the many-bodied female authorship posited by Haywood is a panoptic structure that relies on women as bearers of a mobile literary gaze. A direct response to Joseph Addison's *The Spectator*, Haywood's periodical questions Addison's strictly gendered *flâneurie* and insists on women writers' participation in the public sphere as not mere objects of the male gaze

¹ Malcolm Baker argues that "by the early eighteenth century might even have been seen as a necessary component of any well-appointed private library" (74). He cites George Lyttelton's placement of Pope's portrait by Richardson above the chimney piece of his library, near the busts of Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton, and Spencer, positioning Pope as their literary successor (72). Dr. Richard Meade's library is another example of this practice; he had busts of Newton and Pope displayed alongside busts of Milton, Shakespeare, and the ancient Greeks and Romans (74).

but as visual subjects – witnesses and actors in the rapidly expanding eighteenth-century terrain of visibility.²

That a text like *The Female Spectator* circulated in this period is a testament to the individual's and the public's shifting relationship to visibility. John Brewer has chronicled the multifaceted development of a visual public and its relationship to a thriving art market in his capacious study *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, titled of course after one of Addison's essays in *The Spectator* (2 July, 1712). David Solkin's less inclusive study, *Painting for Money*, zooms in on the booming pictorial practices, exhibition spaces, and art academies to investigate this same visually inclined public. In his more theoretically driven examination, Peter de Bolla takes the matter a step further, explaining that these new exhibition spaces and this culture of display and spectacle became a technology of eighteenth-century subjectivity. As he puts it, in his examination of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, this "experimental subjectivity" is positioned in "the exchanges that occur in the phantasmatic projection of what it might feel like to be constituted as a subject by looking on the onlookers of ourselves" (75-78). In Part I, Section I of his treatise, "Of Sympathy," Smith describes seeing and being seen as a dialectical discipline mechanism based on the internalization of the gaze of the other, a process that posits a subject deeply embedded in visibility (1-13). In other words, immersed in the period's ubiquitous visual landscape, the eighteenth-century subject is simultaneously spectator and spectacle.

² For a thorough examination of structures of looking and their relationship to power in Haywood's oeuvre, see Juliette Merritt's *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators*.

Despite recognizing that women were prominent members of this visually-savvy public, sitting for portraits, consuming paintings and prints, and regularly present in exhibition spaces ranging from Vauxhall gardens to the Royal Academy, these scholars and others tell a story of eighteenth-century visual culture as a product of formal conversations among men – the likes of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Jonathan Richardson, William Hogarth, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and William Hazlitt. That women left a legible trace in the archive of conversations that contributed to the formation of a culture of visibility in the eighteenth-century is evident from texts like Haywood’s *The Female Spectator*. Combining verbal and visual media to record women’s experiences as visual subjects and objects of self-authorized portraiture, *The Female Spectator* exemplifies the multiplicity of platforms across which women represented themselves. This dissertation aims precisely to investigate the extent to which women writers explored self-representational strategies by engaging in the vibrant visual landscape of the long eighteenth-century, and how during this process, they contributed to the shape of contemporary aesthetic conversations.

The multiplicity of practices that comprised visibility in the eighteenth-century is staggering and certainly beyond the scope of any single dissertation. My inquiry focuses on portraiture as a material strategy of self-representation for literary women whose public presence extended beyond the realm of letters. I read portraiture as a crucial manifestation of the eighteenth-century subject’s expert navigation of the visual sphere. As William Hazlitt remarks in his famous essay “On Sitting for One’s Picture,” “the fact is, that the having one’s picture painted is like the creation of another self; and that is an

idea, of the repetition or reduplication of which no man is ever tired, to the thousandth reflection” (653). Recognizing portraiture as a productive technology of the self, Hazlitt corroborates de Bolla’s assessment of the eighteenth-century’s culture of visibility as a fundamental mechanism of subject-formation. Focusing on the material circumstances of portraiture, Hazlitt proceeds to unpack the sitting process, revealing the frequently neglected agency of the sitter through the performance of the pose: “I appear on my trial in the court of physiognomy, and am as anxious to make good a certain idea I have of myself, as if I were playing a part on a stage” (655). For Hazlitt, portraiture is not only a technology of the subject, but a manipulable technique that enables the sitters – “parties to the plot” – to posit selves partially of their own making (654). Sitting for one’s picture then is a performative performance, and therefore, the resulting portrait is always already a self-portrait.

This understanding of portraiture as a collaborative visual transaction among multiple parties, including sitter, artist, audience, and patron is central to my dissertation. And here I must admit that I owe a considerable conceptual debt to Angela Rosenthal’s groundbreaking study of Angelica Kauffman, one of two female founders of the Royal Academy, the other being Mary Moser. Although the literary women that populate this dissertation were first and foremost sitters, but also patrons and spectators, rather than professional artists like Kauffman, Rosenthal’s examination of the portrait event as an intersubjective exchange that generates co-curated selves is essential to establishing the possibility for the agency of the sitter and the structure of the encounter that shapes the sitter’s agency in the artist’s studio, the exhibition gallery, and the front matter of a

printed text. This last space of public display brings me to the peculiar kind of contribution that literary women who were frequent subjects of portraiture can make to a study of visual culture in the long eighteenth-century. Like Eliza Haywood, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Georgiana Cavendish – Duchess of Devonshire, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Montagu, and many others engaged with visuality in their writing, in addition to the more blatantly visual spaces I listed above. They wrote about their portraits – the material conditions of their creation and display; they deliberated on the aesthetics of femininity – foreign and domestic; and they evaluated and critiqued the dominant schools of aesthetic thought in the eighteenth century.

The written materials I pair with my protagonists' portraiture include their correspondence, memoirs, autobiographical fiction, and even lyrical poetry. I have not only chosen these varied forms of life writing due to their extensive discussion of my protagonists' relationship with eighteenth-century visual practices, but also due to the autobiographical mode's function as a verbal analog to self-portraiture. Much like the co-authored portraits for which these literary women sat, their autobiographical materials function as both technologies and techniques of the self that emerge as the product of a negotiation among multiple parties: senders, receivers, patrons, and the greater reading public. Scholars have already explored the discursive production of the gendered subject that such texts bring about. Ruth Perry, for example, has described epistolary novels as "subjective experience synthesized for others" (xii). Cynthia Lowenthal has examined epistolary exchange as a "transaction generated not only through self-performance but also through an interdependence between the affective relationship the writer wishes to

maintain with the recipient” (24). More generally, Nancy Armstrong’s seminal work on domestic fiction has persuasively demonstrated the role of the novel as a disciplinary technology of the eighteenth-century subject. My contribution to this scholarly conversation consists in the dialogic pairing of these textual strategies of intersubjective performances with their visual counterparts. It is important to distinguish this interdisciplinary impetus from a study of autobiography as literary form, in which this dissertation is only tangentially interested. I examine life writing materials as they are relevant to the case studies in each chapter. While I might at times discuss the ways that the distinct genre of the autobiographical text communicates with the portraiture of the author in question, I am not invested in drawing conclusions about autobiography as a literary form.

Proceeding from the understanding that portraiture and life writing materials as collaborative negotiations between various interested parties, my study will trouble the conventional understanding of gendered aesthetics in the eighteenth century by exploring the ways in which several women authors appropriated aspects of aesthetic discourse in their lives and their work. I will examine how these authors dismantled, restructured, and redeployed established self-representational strategies often to their political, social, and economic advantage. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Robinson, Georgiana Cavendish, and Elizabeth Montagu were the subjects of innumerable portraits by leading artists of the century. Yet, many of their portraits remain underexamined, a neglect of some consequence, given these figures’ extensive engagement with gendered aesthetics in their writing. These women’s alternating roles as aesthetics subjects and objects need

to be re-examined in the context of the interdiscursivity that characterized their participation in the public sphere.

The interdisciplinary dialogue at the heart of my intervention finds a significant precedent in Richard Wendorf's *The Elements of Life*, a seminal examination of biography and portraiture in eighteenth-century England. Wendorf focuses on the shared impulses, methods, and effects of these two associated genres and produces a "history of related forms" (7). My project proceeds from some of the same genre-related assumptions that inform Wendorf's work, and in many ways it represents a supplementary study that will pursue what remains unspoken in Wendorf's text: how the analogous conversation between similar genres is inflected by gender.³ Alison Conway's more recent interdisciplinary study of portraiture in the English novel remedies to some extent this glaring absence in Wendorf's text, but she is more preoccupied with the textual manifestations of portraiture in the novel rather than portraiture as a material practice.⁴ Conway explores the gendered politics of the gaze in the English novel by using actual portraits as secondary resources that shore up her reading of textual portraiture in a range of canonical texts. My interdisciplinary approach synthesizes elements of Wendorf's and Conway's related studies. Like Wendorf, my inquiry examines portraiture as a material practice, and like Conway, I will discuss the cultural work these portraits perform in the gendered realm of visibility in image and written text.

³ Wendorf's "Mrs. Piozzi's Anecdotes: Biography as Conversation" includes a discussion of Hester Thrale Piozzi's *The Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, but it completely elides the question of gender and how it informs authorship and biography.

⁴ See *Private Interests: Women, Portraiture, and the Visual Culture of the English Novel, 1709-1791*.

The stakes of my project are as interdisciplinary as my approach. Art historians have either neglected the portraits I will address or examined them in the interest of constructing stylistic genealogies of male artists rather than understanding the aesthetic contributions of their female sitters. Despite the now well-established understanding of portraiture as a complex transaction among several parties, the artist remains the principal organizational principle of most art historical conversations about portraiture. With the notable exception of scholars like Marcia Pointon and Elizabeth Eger, who have grounded their inquiries in the female sitter, art historians have often listed portraits of literary women alongside other portraits by male artists, such as Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jonathan Richardson, Charles Jervas, and Allan Ramsay, as exemplars of or departures from stylistic genealogies.⁵ Regrouping these portraits alongside the writing of these women authors recontextualizes them by recognizing the collaboration that produced them. In terms of literary studies, my project will demonstrate the inadequacy of an insular textual hermeneutics that does not account for the material circulation of related aesthetic objects that were as crucial to the discursive production of the eighteenth-century subject as any text. My project will demonstrate the shortcomings of this approach by questioning existing interpretations of aesthetics in Lady Mary's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Mary Robinson's *Memoirs*, for instance – a reading that can only emerge through an examination of their portraits and their material histories. Literary critics who have already attempted to do some of this work include

⁵ Examples of more conventional studies include Pegum's *The Artistic and Literary Career of Charles Jervas*, Carol Gibson-Wood's *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment*, and Martin Postle's *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*.

Anne Mellor and Srinivas Aravamudan, but their discussion is incomplete, largely because they recruit portraits in the service of textual interpretation. A more productive approach to portraiture requires that the practice is recognized as not only a corroborating accessory, but an inter-related discourse of equal valence to the written text and in need of being examined on its own terms.

Relying on a historicist methodology, I will draw on eighteenth-century literature and art theory to contextualize the portrait event but to also examine the discussion of portraiture in the life writing of the authors I discuss. I will also examine the material lives of the portraits, their creation, display, and subsequent reproduction as engravings. Tracing the circulation of these images in print, and their display in the exhibition spaces that proliferated in mid-late eighteenth century – pleasure gardens, artists’ studios, and galleries – is essential to understanding their impact on the increasingly visual public sphere.

By tracing the contribution of women authors to the formation and evolution of the visual sphere, I aim to destabilize the long-standing interpretation of eighteenth-century aesthetics as a masculinist product of cultural debates among men. In this sense, my dissertation is a project of historical recovery. As Janet Todd observed a long time ago, “women are far more present in what is usually regarded as men’s history than is commonly accepted” (8). Her observation is worth repeating here, because the work of recovery remains relevant, though perhaps not in its original form. The protagonists of my dissertation are not unknown; their literary work and at times their exceptional lives have been the subject of considerable scholarly work. Nevertheless, their work has been

read in disciplinary isolation, and my project aims to recover their place in an interdisciplinary narrative that reconsiders their writing as integral to understanding the gendered intricacies of visual culture in the period.

Although Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the focus of my first chapter, is now undeniably as much a part of the eighteenth-century canon as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the letters remain divorced from her portraits in Turkish dress, obscuring the aesthetic conversation that is taking place in the letters. While Lady Mary was certainly not in the room, when William Hogarth attacked academic standards of aesthetics in favor of a modern, British visual sensibility – a project that culminated with his publication of *The Analysis of Beauty* – she took up the debate in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, questioning traditional principles of the aesthetic production and consumption of women. Although Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman – the only female members of the Royal Academy – were excluded from the Academy's life class due to concerns about (im)proper looking, Mary Robinson's widespread portraits and her *Memoirs* critiqued precisely such notions of a strictly gendered gaze. In collaboration with Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, her portraits revised the customary alignment of the gaze with masculinity, positing, instead, an articulation of the gaze as a fluid negotiation of power. These are only two of the many examples of the aesthetic interventions by literary women with vibrant visual lives. Capturing the extent to which these women and others participated in contemporary aesthetic debates in both image and text will generate a more sophisticated and dynamic interdiscursive terrain of eighteenth-century visual politics and gender.

The chapters in this dissertation are arranged chronologically, following the interconnectedness of the prevalent aesthetic debates in the eighteenth century, and as it will become clear in the following pages, their derivativeness. I start with Lady Mary, whose most famous portrait was painted by Jonathan Richardson, author of the foundational *Essay on Painting*, arguably the most important essay on aesthetics in the first part of the century, not least because it marked the beginning of the official narrative of British art. Alongside the Richardsonian school, there were of course, William Hogarth's more modern and democratic views in favor of a native naturalism over Richardson's reliance on Old Masters. My second chapter on the battle between originals and copies that was waged on the body of Georgiana Cavendish, continues this conversation by replacing Richardson with Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose teacher, Thomas Hudson, had been Richardson's pupil. Reynolds was the heir to Richardson's efforts to transform painting into a liberal art, efforts that he formalized in his *Discourses on Art*, initially a series of speeches to the students of the Royal Academy. My third chapter on Elizabeth Montagu, whose life thankfully sprawled across almost the entire century, discusses the sitter's engagement with both Richardson and Reynolds, and introduces Ramsay's aesthetic theories, which Montagu's social circumstances made her uniquely equipped to understand and evaluate. My last chapter shifts its attention to Mary Robinson, the most sophisticated instance of the subject of visibility in this dissertation. While still grounded in earlier eighteenth-century discourses of visibility and portraiture in particular, this chapter also addresses the distinct visual concerns of Romantic poetics, a transition that Robinson helped guide and shape. The chronological order of these case

studies follows not only the evolution of eighteenth-century ideas on visuality but aids in uncovering these literary women's varied contributions – whether materially or conceptually – during key moments of the process.

These writers' engagements with visuality range from attempts to co-author and manage a public persona in the visual sphere by (re)shaping aesthetic conventions to a sustained critique and evaluation of these same conventions. My first chapter on Lady Mary recontextualizes her *Turkish Embassy Letters* by investigating their place in early eighteenth-century conversations about feminine aesthetics. The chapter begins with an exploration of the self-generating and self-management functions of epistolary materials, a discussion that I invite the reader to keep in mind across the entire dissertation, and which I will revive, as the need arises. Lady Mary's own portraits in Turkish dress – a fashion she popularized upon her return from Constantinople – often only briefly touched upon in existing studies of the letters, take center stage here. While there has been no shortage of scholarship on Lady Mary's *Turkish Embassy Letters* – feminist and postcolonial – my chapter supplements a lack of engagement with her portraits by Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, Jonathan Richardson, and Charles Jervas, which were commissioned during and after her travels. Although Elizabeth Bohls briefly discusses the letters' relationship to the art theories of the Earl of Shaftesbury and Immanuel Kant, she does not extend her discussion to the more immediate aesthetic climate that Lady Mary references in her letters – the debates that informed her own portraits in Turkish dress and her evaluation of feminine aesthetics in the letters. Indeed, scholars tend to jump forward to the work of Orientalist painters like Dominique Ingres to explain the aesthetic

landscape of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, instead of situating it within the vibrant terrain of early-mid eighteenth-century aesthetic debates. This chapter will examine how each portrait of Lady Mary in *turquerie* insisted on tying her travels and her account of the East to her image by both exploiting existing aesthetic preconceptions about the Orient – in the Richardson portrait, for example – but also shattering them in the Vanmour portrait.

My second chapter on Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, examines a three-way dialogue among her autobiographical fiction, letters, and portraiture – in paint and in print. Scholarship on Georgiana has been overwhelmingly autobiographical – unsurprisingly so, in light of her eventful romantic life and celebrity-status. Georgiana’s marriage to one of the most powerful men in England launched her public career as a celebrity and a Whig political activist – activities that made her image fair game in the public sphere. As one of the most visually prominent women of the late eighteenth-century, Georgiana’s body became a register for the complex conversation between graphic satire and portraiture, a dialogue that she herself understood and contributed to, as her novel *The Sylph* and her letters make evident. Even as she was incessantly caricatured during the Westminster Election of 1784, where she campaigned in favor of Charles James Fox, she responded to the graphic satire through portraits that addressed the same physical tropes. Even as her maternity, or lack thereof, became a frequently cited failure in print, Georgiana’s portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds insisted on her exceptional practice of it. This chapter will examine how a collision between copies and originals, a crucial difference between the media of graphic print and portraiture, was

mapped onto the maternal (re)productivity of Georgiana Cavendish, converging narratives of classed femininity, female citizenship, and female sexuality. Moreover, Georgiana's encroachment on the purview of masculinity through her political activity brings into prominence eighteenth-century anxieties about masculinity, male citizenship, and its reliance on a gendered separation of the private and the public that Georgiana's case threatens and exposes as imaginary.

In my third chapter, I turn to the archive of Elizabeth Montagu's papers at the Huntington Library to examine her theoretical and material discussions of portraiture from her early life, before she became the celebrated Queen of the Blues, to key moments in her well-established role as leader of the Bluestocking Salon and the epicenter of the social and intellectual life of the cultured elite in London. The 2008 exhibition organized by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz at the National Portrait Gallery has successfully resurrected the visual lives of the Bluestockings.⁶ Their collective portraiture has received considerable attention since then, especially as it reflected the formation of a coherent narrative of a British literary tradition. This chapter zooms in on one of the most important figures in this tradition, whose letters are often examined as records of the greater network of Bluestocking women and their relationships of friendship and patronage. My third chapter maintains this interest but focuses on Montagu's writing to the extent that it speaks to her development as a connoisseur and patron. Despite the considerable attention that Montagu has received, her early artistic education by her father, a connoisseur and an amateur artist has been neglected. The Queen of the Blues

⁶ See *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings*.

approached her own portraits and those of others she commissioned, with a level of aesthetic wherewithal that was uncommon. Although she was not inclined toward painting, she became familiar with the Academic tradition of drawing, the intricacies of Academic debates, and their contemporary manifestations in her extended circle of artists, theorists, and thinkers. I look at a crucial moment in her letters surrounding the inception and creation of her remarkable portrait by Allan Ramsay and the social and material dynamic the process makes evident. I also use the Princeton collection of Montagu's correspondence to examine her relationship with Fanny Reynolds, the artist and theorist, who even posthumously continues to exist in her brother's shadow. Montagu's patronage of her as an artist and aesthetic theorist speaks to her continued involvement in the visual arts and her astute understanding of women's place in them.

My last chapter shifts to Mary Robinson, the most sophisticated instance of a literary woman's engagement in the visual field that combines elements from my discussion in each preceding chapter. Like Haywood, Robinson did not simply respond to existing discourses of visibility. She generated her own. Robinson took the agency of the sitter beyond the example of Georgiana Cavendish, and collaborated with the most important artists of the late eighteenth century to co-author sophisticated portraits that sought to not only revise the public image of her that circulated in lewd graphic satire and scurrilous print, but to put forth complex alternative narratives that communicated with her own public writing. Anne Mellor and Anca Munteanu have already succeeded in redirecting scholarly attention toward Mary Robinson's portraits. However, an interdisciplinary intervention in this work remains necessary, and I might add, the greater

necessity for such an intervention in eighteenth-century studies of women authors is nowhere clearer than in this chapter. Robinson's portraiture has been examined alongside other portraits of actresses by Reynolds and Gainsborough, resulting in stylistic comparisons among the two rivals and the celebrity coalitions they built to advance their professional careers. This one-sided approach neglects the canny, insightful, and frequently original discussions of sight, visibility, and their material dimensions in Robinson's *Memoirs*, her poetry, and her periodical *The Sylphid*. Like Lady Mary long before her, Robinson forged a close link between her life writing and her portraits, recognizing the intersecting public planes on which she had to operate to adroitly manage her celebrity status. This interdisciplinary dialogue between her writing and her images will reveal that Mary Robinson did not retreat from the visual sphere and into the realm of letters after the accident that left her paralyzed at the age of 26.⁷ Instead, visibility remained a crucial dimension of her public persona, her writing more than ever concerned with sight and the ways that it was materially mediated and fluidly gendered. This approach to Robinson is not only significant, if we want to understand her place in the visual public sphere, but is also essential to understanding her contribution to the articulation of a distinct Romantic visibility that drew on eighteenth-century aesthetic principles even as it departed from them.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Bluestockings' visual and literary roles as cultural agents began to fade – the result of a complex intersection of

⁷ According to Paula Byrne, it is likely that Robinson suffered a miscarriage in pursuit of Banastre Tarleton who was on his way to France to escape his debts. The likely streptococcal infection that followed the miscarriage she suffered alone in a post-chaise resulted in a rheumatic fever, paralysis and eventually heart failure in 1800 (212-215).

events including the French Revolution, competition in the literary marketplace, and the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Memoirs* by William Godwin.⁸ The case of Wollstonecraft is a pivotal moment in the narrative of visuality I trace throughout the dissertation, and as such, an appropriate one with which to conclude. Her portraits by John Opie, speak to the radical aesthetics of femininity she describes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – a book Wollstonecraft called a “faithful sketch” where she herself “appear[ed] hand and heart” – and a statement against the reactionary aesthetics of femininity put forth by the likes of Rousseau and Burke.⁹ My conclusion briefly explores these images in the immediate context of Wollstonecraftian feminine aesthetics, but also in conversation with the narrative that preceded and enabled the empowered physicality her portraits depict.

I hope that upon finishing this dissertation, the reader will see that by expanding the number of participants, venues, and media in which conversations about portraiture and self-representation took place, visuality in the eighteenth century becomes the product of a network of discourses that exceeded the boundaries of male-dominated formal institutions like the Royal Academy. The conversations that took place in the artist's studio, the salon, the pleasure garden, and the windows of a printer's shop were integral to the development of a contradictory, ever-quaking, and anything but coherent

⁸ For more on this see Anne Mellor's “Romantic Bluestockings: From Muses to Matrons” in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance, and Patronage 1730-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, and Lucy Peltz's “‘A Revolution in Female Manners’: Women, Politics, and Reputation in the Late Eighteenth Century” in *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz.

⁹ qtd. in Lucy Peltz's “‘A Revolution in Female Manners’: Women, Politics, and Reputation in the Late Eighteenth Century” (110).

dialogical landscape of British portraiture, whose structure was inflected by gendered visual politics. I hope to show the reader that literary women's roles as spectators and spectacles in this vibrant terrain of visibility is crucial to understanding the multiplicity of material practices and the gendered nuances of the conceptual and material debates that comprised eighteenth-century visual culture.

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Woman in Turkish Dress: Imaging the *Turkish Embassy Letters* in the Portraits of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in *Turquerie*.

To sit for one's Picture, is to have an Abstract of One's Life written, and published, and ourselves thus consigned over to Honour, or Infamy.

Jonathan Richardson (*An Essay on the Theory of Painting* 13-14)

I have sent you so many verses, this shall wait on you in the Form of plain prose. My picture went last, wrapped up in poetry without Fiction.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (*The Complete Letters* 110)

The extract from the letter Lady Mary Wortley Montagu sent to Francesco Algarotti in December of 1736, reproduced above, evinces an awareness of the interchangeability of text and image as vehicles for the conveyance of the intense attachment that Lady Mary felt for the young man she would eventually follow to Italy, abandoning her husband and her friends until her return only a few months before her death.¹⁰ The portrait here is not only a material addendum to her letters; neither is it an extraneous object that interrupts the verbal correspondence. Lady Mary's casual listing of the portrait alongside the various genres that she employed in her letters to Algarotti entangles the image with both poetry and prose in a familiar eighteenth century convention captured by the commonplace Horatian dictate *ut pictura poesis*.¹¹ Lady Mary's understanding of the relationship between the sister-arts posits the poem as more authentic than the painting. Her poem, suggests that the portrait Lady Mary sent to

¹⁰ See Chapter 20, "Algarotti: 'This Youth, Delightfull Vision of a Day!'" in Isobel Grundy's *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* for a detailed treatment of Lady Mary's relationship with Francesco Algarotti (356-378).

¹¹ See Richard Wendorf's "Introduction" in *The Elements of Life* for a longer discussion of the *ut pictura poesis* doctrine. According to Wendorf, the most likely translation is "As a painting, so also a poem" or "As sometimes in painting, so occasionally in poetry" (6).

Algarotti was a representation of her younger, beautiful self, what had been reduced to a mere fiction in the writing moment.¹² The first stanza asserts the documentary value of the portrait as an accurate depiction of Lady Mary in her youth:

This once was me, thus my complexion fair,
My cheek thus blooming, and thus curl'd my Hair,
The picture which with pride I us'd to show
The lost resemblance but upbraids me now. (*Essays and Poems* 381)

The ostensible function of the poetic caption is to claim the authenticity of the image only to subordinate that image to the aged Lady Mary's interiority in the last lines: "Look on my Heart, and you'll forget my Face" (381). The juxtaposition of her aesthetic exterior and her affective interior lends profundity to the latter, relegating the image to a superficial ephemeron. Of course, paradoxically, the portrait as a document of Lady Mary's former aesthetic appeal serves as evidence of the object's longevity and its material persistence beyond the body's physical deterioration, suggesting that Lady Mary might be attempting to put forth an idealized version of herself as a more enticing object for the much younger and universally admired Algarotti. The paradoxicality of the transaction extends to her imperative that Algarotti "*look* on [her] heart" instead of her face to fully appreciate her devotion to him and determine whether Lady Mary is truly "below [his] care" (line 23; my emphasis). As Helen Deutsch observes, the conclusion of the poem asks Algarotti to "escape the visual by an act of looking," a feat ostensibly requiring that he look at Lady Mary's portrait in all its resplendence precisely so that he can dismiss it and divert his gaze elsewhere for a more faithful index of his wooer's soul.

¹² Lady Mary was 47 in 1736, her face had been marred decades earlier by small pox and she had lost her fine lashes that made her eyes an exceptional feature. See Grundy.

So, where exactly is Algarotti to *look* in order to gain access to Lady Mary's soul? The only alternative their relationship affords is the letter, indeed, the principal locus where their relationship took place. Whether in verse or prose, the letter seeks to make present the absent object by collapsing the spatial distance between sender and recipient. But Lady Mary's letters to Algarotti are not merely symbolic proxies for her body; they offer the recipient knowledge of her private self, figured in scopic terms. As Bernhard Siegert, explains, the letter is a symbolic assemblage of the individual in the confessional mode, allowing for the emergence of the subject in the discourse of the letter: "Words [are] metaphors for ideas formed by the soul – every self thus becomes the subject of its own discourse, a priori" (*Relays* 44).

Siegert's understanding of the private letter as it relates to the production of self-knowledge is worth examining further here. For Siegert, "instead of being promulgated as a discourse between absentees alone the letter create[s] the presence of an absent person's doppelgänger for all those who [are] not present" (35). Letters become "reflections of glances" and the glance is always that of the Other; the epistolary transaction becomes narcissistic in its projection of an imaginary self, confirmed by the glance of the Other.¹³ The second self, conjured by the epistolary signifiers, emerges into being in the service of disclosure; its very existence is predicated on its – at least partial – coincidence with a

¹³ For Siegert, the Other in the transaction of the letter seems to be more often than not female. Siegert positions woman as the recipient of the letter whose function is that of an extra-discursive echo – a stand-in for Mother Nature – rather than a producer of discourse. The Romantic writers Siegert examines saw woman as the educating mother whose letters were interpreted and translated by the male letter-writer and producer of discourse, a dynamic that effected the institutionalization of gender. However, this highly selective analysis of Romantic poets is exclusionary and limited. Lady Mary would certainly be one prominent example that problematizes Siegert's application of his theory of the letter to gender.

prior private self, thus retroactively creating the illusion of an authentic, secret pre-discursivity. What interests me in the case of Lady Mary's letter to Algarotti is that this narcissistic transaction projects a self in both the visual and verbal fields. Although Lady Mary hierarchizes these fields based on their relation to truth value, privileging the symbolic over the iconic sign, sending her portrait in place of a letter recognizes the functional affinity between these two modes of self-production. Both the letters and the portrait are spatially and temporally removed from their referents, and seek to recreate absent subjects through an intersubjective exchange carried out across multiple sign systems.

Despite Lady Mary's distinction between words and images, scholars have persuasively shown that her letters were not devoid of the same fictional projection of the self she associates with painting. Most notably, in her book-length examination of Lady Mary's letters, Cynthia Lowenthal concludes that collectively her letters comprise a series of elaborate performances of selves contingent on the dynamic of reciprocity that characterizes epistolary exchange (10-11). Like Siegert, Lowenthal concludes that the letter is a "means of writing a [theatrical] self into existence" (19) but she rejects the possibility of a "self-referential epistolary universe" (23), which Siegert implies by reading the recipient as an echo rather than a full participant in the epistolary transaction. So while Siegert is largely interested in the letter as a technology of the subject, Lowenthal reads it as a technique of the subject, available for the always already discursive subject's manipulation and deployment contingent on the context of the

exchange and the specificity of the participants that carry out this exchange.¹⁴ When discussing portraiture as analogous to letter-writing, Lowenthal rejects the association all together, based on the comparatively static, because spatial rather than temporal, nature of portraits (21). She reprises Lady Mary's privileging of words over images in her letter to Algarotti, when she examines the linguistic portraits Lady Mary sketches in the *Turkish Embassy Letters*. She deems the genre's atemporality responsible for the frozen aestheticization of Turkish women, a process that denies them the depth and fluidity afforded by the more temporal medium of letter-writing.¹⁵

While Lowenthal's conclusions about the effects of Lady Mary's aesthetic consumption of Turkish women in the letters are thought-provoking, her dismissal of the link between portraiture and letter-writing prevents her from considering a crucial dimension of Lady Mary's aesthetic commentary on her experience in Constantinople, the traveler's own portraits as registers of her complex identification with Turkish femininity. This neglect of portraiture by literary critics often rests on the foundational assumption that the painted object is evacuated of any agency in the very process of being captured, or arrested, to borrow Lowenthal's words, by the artist's interpretation.

¹⁴ Srinivas Aravamudan produces a similar reading of the letter in his examination of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the most famous of Lady Mary's collected letters and the subject of this paper. Aravamudan describes the unidentified recipient of some of Lady Mary's more risqué letters, including her famous description of the hammam, as a "fictive device of self-reflexivity" that collapses "author, reader, and mode" and reduces femininity to a masquerade (169). Bruce Redford also identifies masking and impersonation as instruments frequently employed by the writer of the eighteenth century familiar letter, which he reads as both a theatrical and linguistic performance in the case of Lady Mary (2).

¹⁵ Lowenthal's reiterates the structural distinction between these two modes made famous by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon: An essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, where he distinguishes between painting and poetry precisely on the basis of the spatiality of the one and the temporality of the other. W.J.T. Mitchell has, however, equally famously critiqued this distinction in "Space and Time: Lessing's Laocoon and the Politics of Genre" *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*.

This assumption favors the artist's vision at the expense of that of the sitter, who is understood as the object of the gaze, traditionally gendered as female, an association that is certainly corroborated by the historical and cultural context of the eighteenth century which witnessed the rise of the professional male portrait painter as well as the connoisseur – a classed and masculinized celebration of the voyeuristic gaze.¹⁶ Even Elizabeth Bohls's fuller examination of Lady Mary's use of aesthetics in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* is limited to her ekphrastic descriptions of the segregated female spaces of the harem and the hammam. Bohls suggests that although Lady Mary tries to occupy the position of the connoisseur – the subject of the gaze – she can only successfully do so by inserting the male gaze into these all-female spaces, a move evident in her comparisons of the women to works of art by male painters (192). Although she briefly extends her analysis to nineteenth-century paintings by Manet and Ingres inspired by Lady Mary's encounters with Turkish women, Bohls does not examine Lady Mary's own portraits in Turkish dress by leading portraitists of the day such as Jonathan Richardson or Charles Jervas. These pictorial manifestations of Lady Mary's encounter with the other are indispensable to our understanding of Lady Mary's aesthetic interpretation of Turkish femininity and the resulting transformations of her own subjectivity. Moreover, by ignoring Lady Mary's portraits, literary criticism of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* has left unattended the possibility that the object of the gaze in eighteenth-century portraiture

¹⁶ Of course, female artists did practice – often very successfully – in the eighteenth century. Angelica Kauffman, Mary Moses, and Anne Damer are a few examples of female artists who had brilliant careers. However, they were often subject to cultural anxieties surrounding gendered notions of (im)proper looking. For more on this, see Angela Rosenthal's "She's got the look! Eighteenth-Century Female Portrait Painters and the Psychology of a Potentially 'Dangerous Employment.'" in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*. Ed. Joanna Woodall. (147-166).

wielded considerable authority over the creation of her own image through the performance of the pose.

As the *Turkish Embassy Letters* insist upon repeatedly, lady Mary was an enthusiastic, but also calculating and self-aware consumer of all things Turkish. On April 1 1717, she wrote to her sister, Lady Mar, from Adrianople, promising her a portrait of herself in Turkish dress and temporarily delivering in its stead a verbal portrait, anticipating the forthcoming visual depiction (113). Lady Mary's detailed description of her decadently adorned Turkish habit alongside the splendid textiles and costumes she brought back from Turkey would become a popular source of inspiration for artists and tailors nationwide. Her imports were reproduced in pattern books which were frequently used as references for portraits and masquerade costumes.¹⁷ Lady Mary had herself painted in Turkish dress by several prominent eighteenth-century artists whose interpretations continue to serve as frontispieces and covers to her texts. Indeed, her authorial persona is so closely sutured to these images that at least six portraits of women in Turkish dress have been misidentified as portraits of Lady Mary, testifying to the interrelated cultural work of the images and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*.¹⁸ Despite the popularity of *turquerie* in the eighteenth century, Lady Mary is the woman in Turkish dress, and every woman in Turkish dress is Lady Mary, at least until proven otherwise. And yet, while her letters have been the subject of ample scholarship, Lady Mary's

¹⁷ For more on this, see Aileen Ribeiro, "Turquerie: Turkish Dress and English Fashion in the Eighteenth Century," in *Connoisseur* 201 (May 1979): 20.

¹⁸ John Kerslake mentions six "false portraits" in *Early Georgian Portraits*. vol. 1 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 190.

portraits have remained largely neglected.¹⁹ This chapter will remedy this oversight by examining several images that circulated alongside Lady Mary's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and the intersections between these two modes of self-production. Redirecting attention to the portraits will also resituate the *Turkish Embassy Letters* within eighteenth-century aesthetic debates about representations of femininity. As a result, in the following pages, I will also question existing scholarly interpretations of Lady Mary's consumption of Turkish femininity in the letters and illuminate her more sophisticated engagement with eighteenth-century aesthetic theories and practices.

The most readily recognizable portrait of Lady Mary in Turkish dress that regularly graces the covers of her work was painted by Jonathan Richardson (figure 2), whose professional interests also included art theory, poetry, and biography. In one of the earliest English art theoretical texts of the eighteenth century, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, a work that sought to elevate the art of painting, and by extension, the professional painter, Richardson recognizes the temporal limitations of painting as a form but distances this essential feature from its ability to capture depth of character. He asserts that "to sit for one's Picture, is to have an Abstract of One's Life written, and published, and ourselves thus consigned over to Honour, or Infamy," claiming for portraiture not only the right to a narrative complexity generally reserved for the written word, but also gesturing toward its greater significance as a mode of public self-

¹⁹ Marcia Pointon is one of the few scholars who examines several of Lady Mary's portraits in "Going Turkish in Eighteenth-Century London: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Her Portraits" in her foundational work *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993). Srinivas Aravamudan briefly discusses two of them in "Lady Mary in the Hammam" in *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1999). I will address their discussions of the portraits below, when I examine each one at length.



Figure 2. *Mary Wortley Montague*, attributed to Jonathan Richardson, 1725. The Earl of Harrowby, Sandon Hall.

(re)presentation mediated by professional artists. As scholars routinely note, the early eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of portraiture as a means of shaping and publishing one's status available to the rapidly growing commercial classes who wanted to partake of a practice until then reserved as a privilege of the aristocracy and the landed gentry.²⁰ What Richardson recognizes as the public function of portraiture is the result of intersecting economic and cultural forces manifested in the visual field. Having one's portrait painted was a deliberate attempt to publish one's wealth and status and to convey one's material consequence in the world. Richardson explicitly acknowledges the classed nature of portraiture when he asserts that "a Portrait-painter must understand Mankind, and enter into their Characters, and express their Minds as well as their Faces; And as his Business is chiefly with People of Condition, he must Think as a gentleman, and a Man of Sense, or 'twill be impossible to give Such their True, and Proper Resemblances" (22). Although Richardson's ostensible purpose here is to elevate the status of portraiture as a meaningful practice grounded in interpretive profundity, he also reveals that the depth of

²⁰ See John Brewer's *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* and David Solkin's *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*.

the image is highly contingent on the class status of the sitter and by extension, that of the artist. He undercuts his claim of the portrait's purpose in capturing the "True and Proper" likeness of the sitter by admitting that in order to have access to this truth, the artist must be a gentleman just like his sitter, a requirement that makes Richardson's true resemblance highly contextual and far from essential. The truth that the portrait seeks to represent is, for Richardson, an explicit class-based negotiation between the portrait and the sitter, both claiming a privileged position in the increasingly commercialized and democratized visual field. As a result, the sitter in the eighteenth century portrait was not merely aiming for aesthetic immortality, but was invested in the far more mortal pursuit of visually asserting her material membership in a particular class.

Harry Berger Jr.'s compelling and widely applicable investigation of the pose in his extraordinarily extensive study of Rembrandt sheds some light on the implications of Richardson's recognition of the sitter's interested participation in the collaborative transaction of the portrait. As Berger puts it, "a patron who commissions a portrait doesn't simply roll over and hold still while the painter portrays him; he *gets himself portrayed*; he participates in what for him, is an act of self-portrayal, or self-presentation, or self-representation" (4). For Berger, it is precisely this act of posing that the portrait ultimately signifies. The portrait, much like the letter, puts forth not a true self, but a version of the self in the process of being fashioned for the purposes of publication. Berger explains that the hidden self – or the mind and character of the sitter, as Richardson would put it – presumably revealed and made intelligible in the portrait is a product of the representational act. The very process of representation produces a

remainder, the unexpressed portion of the self, which is then retroactively inscribed onto the sitter as a pre-discursive truth, making the sitter a container for a pre-existing interiority that is, in fact, only the effect of representation (141). Like Siegert's and Lowenthal's theories of the letter, Berger's account posits the portrait as both a technique and a technology of the subject. While generating versions of the self, resulting from the sitter and artist's collaborative interpretation, the portrait also creates the illusion of the pre-discursive subject.

I have elaborated on the structural affinities between the portrait and the letter for two reasons: first, to justify my reading of the portraits as indispensable explanatory texts that speak to the cultural work of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* and that have remained neglected for far too long; and second, to show that the eighteenth-century subject was a product of intersecting discourses that she could manipulate by either reinforcing formal and theoretical conventions or modifying and reshaping these same conventions to critique existing cultural practices. As it will become clear from the analysis that follows, Lady Mary's portraits in Turkish dress accomplish both.

Taking Back the Look: The Vicarious Gaze in Vanmour's Harem

The portrait Lady Mary refers to in the letter to her sister was painted by Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, the King's Painter of the Levant, a title he received in 1725, formally recognizing his work for several French ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire (Gopin 61). Scholarly neglect of this portrait and a second one of Lady Mary by Vanmour could partially be due to a corresponding lack of interest in the artist, a painter about whom very little is known. Vanmour and his atelier were responsible for *Recueil Ferriol*, one of

the most important series of engravings of various Turkish subjects, ranging from weddings to funerals and dancing Dervishes, which enabled the widespread scopic consumption of the Ottoman Empire by the Western world.²¹ The most interesting of Vanmour's portrait of Lady Mary in Turkish dress (figure 3) doubles as a conversation piece that features a sophisticated engagement with Ottoman culture and with Lady Mary's self-presentation as its chronicler for the English reading and viewing public. The painting asserts the sitter's status as a privileged witness of frequently inaccessible spaces that occupied a prominent position in the English imaginary of the Orient. It accomplishes this by positing a sitter that is simultaneously spectacle and spectator, thus revising the gendered line that Western culture drew between subjects and objects of the gaze in the eighteenth century.



Figure 3. *Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, attributed to Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, c. 1717. National Portrait Gallery. London.

²¹ The full title of the collected engravings is *Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant tirées sur les Tableaux peints d'après Nature en 1707 et 1708 par les Ordres de M. de ferriol Ambassadeur de Roi a la Porte et gravées en 1712 et 1713 par les soins de Mr. Le Hay. Recueil Ferriol* was published in 1712 but Vanmour was not explicitly associated with it till 1715 (Gopin 135-138).

In his brief exploration of the visual dimension of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Srinivas Aravamudan remarks on the “controlled staging” of the portrait and points out the “cultural conundrum” it suggests; Lady Mary occupies a liminal space between the all-female Turkish space and the “tight circle of English aristocratic society” to which she is drawn by the letter presented to her by the steward (172). I believe the cultural ambivalence that Aravamudan points out in the Vanmour painting is less an indicator of Lady Mary’s conflicted state of mind and more a reminder of her exclusive access to Ottoman culture and the related assertion of her right to report on what she witnessed for her English public. Throughout the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Lady Mary insists on her account’s reliability relative to that of prominent male authors’ whose access to the gender-segregated Ottoman culture was necessarily limited. In letter 38, Lady Mary denounces Jean Dumont’s voyages to the Levant, which “never fail giving you an account of the women, which ‘tis certain they never saw, and talking very wisely of the genius of the men, into whose company they are never admitted, and very often describe mosques, which they dare not peer into” (148-149).²² In her most famous letter of the collection, detailing her experience in the all-female baths at Sophia, Lady Mary concludes her scandalously graphic description of the nude bodies of Turkish women with a statement that cements the uniqueness of her perspective: “’Tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places” (103). Although the Vanmour painting does not depict Lady Mary in the *hammam*, the presence of an unveiled Turkish woman

²² Lady Mary refers here to Jean Dumont’s *Nouveau Voyage du Levant* published in 1694 and translated into English in 1696.

reiterates the sitter's privileged visual position by reminding the viewer that the painting could not have taken place without the sitter's first-hand testimony of the gendered Turkish elements it depicts.²³ The mechanism that makes this reminder possible is the veil. By using it as an enabling instrument of visual agency, this image relies on the dialectic between sitter, artist, and projected audience to subvert gendered assumptions about looking, asserting the superiority of the female sitter's gaze and the contingency of the male artist's gaze.²⁴

Throughout the letters Lady Mary lauds the "perpetual masquerade" facilitated by the veil, which affords women the anonymity required to freely roam public spaces and engage in extramarital affairs, unencumbered by the limitations imposed by their identities (115).²⁵ As a woman, Lady Mary was not only able of experiencing some of these advantages first-hand by wearing the veil, but she was also able to enter veiled spaces such as the *harem* and the *hammam*. Indeed, her written account of such spaces is the verbal equivalent of lifting the veil that hides them from the English reader-spectators, who until Lady Mary's narrative had to rely on hear-say descriptions by male authors. The formal feature that enacts this sophisticated dynamic of managed spectatorship in Vanmour's painting is the curtain in the background, a Baroque

²³ Although Lady Mary's infant son would have been allowed in women's quarters, the male steward delivering the letter to Lady Mary would have been most certainly barred entry. The steward could of course be a eunuch, but this information cannot be determined from the image.

²⁴ I leave out the patron from this transaction because there is no archival information on the party responsible for commissioning the two Vanmour portraits. Lady Mary's eager description of her *turquerie* in the letters suggests that she herself would have been invested in having her portrait painted in Turkish dress. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that her husband might have been involved in the transaction.

²⁵ For a thorough analysis of Lady Mary's masquerade, see Joseph W. Lew's "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24.4 (Summer 1991): 432-450.

convention inherited from Van Dyke who made frequent use of it.²⁶ Vanmour's revision of this convention rests in the object's functionality; he transforms the drapery from a purely symbolic emblem indicative of the sitter's status to a gateway into Ottoman culture by rendering it as a veil that has been deliberately drawn back. The female lute-player on the dais is a reminder that Vanmour could not have drawn this curtain himself. The veil has been lifted for him, and he has been granted vicarious access by someone else.

To paint the harem is, pace the rules of grammar, to *unharem* it, to undo it on an ontological level, an unambiguous act of cultural violence, when perpetrated by the wrong party. Hence, the revelation of Turkish women in their segregated spaces, through an unsanctioned act of scopic intimacy is routinely read as an Orientalizing move perpetrated by the voyeuristic colonizer invested in a fantastical projection of the other.²⁷ However, such a reading is more applicable to Dominique Ingres's inventive interpretation of Lady Mary's description of the hammam in *Le Bain Turc* (figure 4) than Vanmour's treatment of a similar space.²⁸ Vanmour's drawn curtain is not analogous to

²⁶ Desmond Shawe-Taylor describes "the drape hanging down out of nowhere" as a Baroque convention, *The Georgians*, 83

²⁷ See Frantz Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled" for the colonizer's voyeurism as a political strategy of cultural oppression. *A Dying Colonialism*. trans. Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Grove, 1965), 35-67.

²⁸ For a thorough analysis of Ingres' *Le Bain Turc* through the lens of Orientalism, see Ruth Yeazell's "Public Baths and Private Harems: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Origins of Ingres's *Le Bain Turc*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7.1 (1994): 111-138. The distinction I draw here is significant, in that it is implicitly grounded in a long-standing scholarly conversation about the (in)applicability of Saidian Orientalism to early eighteenth-century literature and culture. Srinivas Aravamudan, for example, rejects the monolithic term Orientalism in favor of "levantinization," which he uses to examine the cross-cultural exchange taking place in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, a process of anthropological investigation as well as utopian feminist projection that brings about subjective alterations in the observer (*Tropicopolitans* 159-160). In *Women's Orients*, Billie Melman also argues that Lady Mary's Orient is "markedly different from that of orientalists," because it is based on an intersubjective relation between observer and observed, and in Lady Mary's case, it results in a critique of "middle-class gender ideology in the West" (61-62).



Figure 4. *Le Bain Turc*. Dominique Ingres. 1862. Musée du Louvre. Paris.

Ingres's keyhole, which constitutes a clearly voyeuristic gesture. Vanmour's curtain denotes deliberate exposure that should be read in the context of the portrait as an intersubjective exchange between artist and sitter – the unveiling of the scene, a collaborative act between them. As Olga Nefedova suggests, it is possible that Vanmour's source for his depictions of the harem was, in fact, Lady Mary herself (105). Much like the male authors who claimed intimate knowledge of the harem and whose claims Lady Mary ridiculed in her letters, Vanmour would have had no direct access to the details he depicts in his numerous renditions of the harem. His sources would most likely have been foreign women who visited the harems. Lady Mary's contribution to her own portrait is not limited to her pose then; if she did provide Vanmour with descriptions of unveiled Turkish women, she is the party responsible for drawing back the veil that affords the artist the opportunity to image the harem. In doing so, she does not simply

Aravamudan has reiterated his argument more recently in *Enlightenment Orientalism*, where he observes that a “transcultural, cosmopolitan, and Enlightenment-inflected Orientalism” existed as an alternative mode of apprehension of the Orient before the apparatus of Saidian Orientalism began to produce the Orient across multiple cultural and political registers through the “dualistic logic of self and other” (1-3). Although Orientalism is not central to my examination of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, I proceed under the assumption that Lady Mary's account of Constantinople can be read from a variety of alternative perspectives that posit a more open communicativeness between self and other than Orientalism.

reiterate the violence that the Western gaze often enacts on the other, because she is, first and foremost, correcting the assumption that the Western male gaze has ever even accessed such a space. It is the failure of this gaze that Lady Mary bears witness to as the privileged spectator in the Vanmour painting.

Lady Mary's revelation to the artist is analogous to her forthcoming revelation to a wider public of reader-spectators, the recipients of her letters and the circles in which they were read aloud. The letter in the steward's hand, aptly suspended on the edge of the unveiled dais, conveys its status as private communication made public. The frozen gesture of the steward is nonetheless clear; he has just entered the room to deliver a letter to Lady Mary. Even as this action positions her as a receiver, the viewer can anticipate that the experience that inspired the content of the painting will be transcribed and returned to the sender in another letter, reiterating the sitter's authority as eye-witness of the spaces she describes.

Vanmour's vicarious looking through Lady Mary's eyes questions scholarly readings of Lady Mary's aesthetic consumption of Turkish femininity through the eyes of male artists.²⁹ Although I do not deny that Lady Mary aestheticizes Turkish women throughout her letters, I believe that her insertion of the male gaze in her aesthetic experience is multivalent. In light of the insufficiency of the male gaze suggested by the Vanmour portrait, Lady Mary's comment that she "had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there – [in the harem] – invisible" so that the

²⁹ See my discussion of Elizabeth Bohls on page 5. See also Felicity Nussbaum's "Feminitopias: The Seraglio, the Homoerotic, and the Pleasures of 'Deformity'" in *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives*. Nussbaum argues that Lady Mary "restore[s] the absent male presence through the aesthetic" and "express[es] homoerotic desire by impersonating men" (139).

sight of “so many fine women naked” could have improved his art, constitutes a quite literal recognition of the inadequacy of the male gaze rather than a vicarious aestheticization (102). Vanmour’s portrait suggests that it is the male gaze that is being shored up by the female gaze here rather than the other way around. The effects of this scopic dynamic are reminiscent of Malek Alloula’s discussion of the colonial postcard depicting images of unveiled Algerian women captured by French photographers in the early twentieth century. Using Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine the veil, Alloula argues that the veil functions as a visual obstacle to the object of the photographer’s desire and his ability to practice his art (7). The photographer’s response is to stage elaborate fantastical scenarios of unveiled women and disseminate them under the guise of ethnographic evidence. The inadequacy of Vanmour’s gaze is similarly exposed in his painting of Lady Mary. His inability to enter certain spaces renders him incapable of practicing his art until his gaze is enabled by that of his sitter’s privileged visual access. Although not as transparently counterfeit as the postcards of Algerian women, the space reproduced in Vanmour’s portrait remains a secondhand account, and therefore, a visual testament of what the painter *never saw*. Unlike the French photographer though, and unlike Ingres, who positions himself as a Peeping Tom – an elision of his scopic frustration, Vanmour accepts the inadequacy of his look by foregrounding the artifice. The drapery invokes this artifice through its association with the theatre, and the dais confirms this association by functioning as an elevated stage where the performers put on a show for both the artist and the projected audience.

Vanmour's curtain is also a *trompe l'oeil* device similar to Ingres's keyhole and the French photographer's drapery, beyond which – we are expected to believe – lies the hidden object of the audience's desire. However, Vanmour's treatment of the device undercuts its function by eliminating the principle of unavailability, distance being a structural requirement for a successful voyeuristic transaction. As Jacques Lacan notes in his story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, the latter wins the realism contest by using the *trompe l'oeil* device of the veil, which serves to entice the look and inflame the desire for what's located behind it (103). Parrhasios's painted veil deceives the spectator's eye, and it is precisely in this deception that the gaze in the painting triumphs over the eye, exposing the visual subject as inadequate.³⁰ The *trompe l'oeil* device of the veil enables the illusion of presence by promising that something is located behind it, when in fact behind the veil, there is nothing. Instead of enlisting the veil in the service of the voyeuristic event, Vanmour includes it as a *trompe l'oeil* device only to demolish it by folding it back onto itself in a self-referential gesture, revealing that there is indeed nothing behind it but a received performance of Turkish interiors. It is no accident that the gaze in Vanmour's painting as the revelatory site of inadequacy coincides with woman as spectacle; Lacan also identifies the female exhibitionist as the site of the ubiquitous gaze (75). As Kaja Silverman explains, "exhibitionism unsettles because it threatens to expose the [scopic] duplicity inherent in every subject, and every object" (152). The carefully orchestrated spectacle of femininity in Vanmour's portrait foregrounds the phenomenological rather

³⁰ In Seminar XI Lacan differentiates between the look and the gaze by associating the former with the limited perspective of the subject and the latter with the *objet a* – the promise of the subject's fulfillment in the object of desire and simultaneously the symbol of the lack that constitutes the subject in need of fulfillment. Lacan locates the gaze in the painting (103).

than the binary structure of every scopic event precisely because it uses female spectacle as the object of the male spectator's gaze to expose that spectator's scopic shortcoming. Here, instead of being looked at, the object is doing the looking.

Both scholars who have discussed this Vanmour painting – Aravamudan and Poynton – refer to it as a portrait, perhaps because Lady Mary herself calls it “my picture” (113). However, while the other Vanmour painting is indeed a portrait, this one is actually a conversation piece, a genre that performs a distinct cultural function which might explain the inclusion of Lady Mary's son, while simultaneously adding another layer to the traveler's authority as eye-witness. The emphasis on maternity in the painting is evident in Edward's presence, and it is also possible that Lady Mary was pregnant when she sat for it. She gave birth to her daughter in Constantinople, on the 19th of January, 1718. She mentions her picture ten months earlier, on April 1st of 1717, but it is unclear which picture it is and whether the sitting had just started, ended, or was underway. If it is the latter circumstance, and assuming the painting took longer than a month to paint – which would be more likely than not, given Vanmour's lively practice in Constantinople – Lady Mary could have very probably been pregnant with the future Lady Bute when she sat for this painting.

In a letter to Mrs. Thistlewayte, Lady Mary confesses that despite her anxiety about the approaching birth of her second child, she is comforted by the “glory” that will be heaped on her; she observes that in the Ottoman Empire, “'tis more despicable to be married and not fruitful than 'tis with us to be fruitful before marriage” (151). A longer description of the Turkish celebration of maternity follows in this letter, with the author

listing several examples of women of her acquaintance boasting of the number of children they've had, ranging from twelve to thirty each (152). Lady Mary does not neglect to mention that unlike British mothers, Turkish ones "see company the day of their delivery, and at the fortnight's end return visits, set out in their jewels and new clothes" (152). Although she does not miss the opportunity to critique confining Western practices in her discussion of maternity in the letters, the eighteenth-century conversation piece relies on maternity to reinforce confining patriarchal practices. As Marcia Pointon observes, "a conversation piece is to be understood as a visualization of the last will and testament," inserting a "statement of familial power relations into the narrative of succession" (161). The conversation piece would often present an inventory of the patriarch's belongings, which did include his wife and children, who secured the transmission of his lineage and property. In this sense, this conversation piece fulfills a cultural function that relegates the mother to a mere vehicle for the symbolic value of her husband's firstborn son, and as Pointon puts it, this is a function to which "woman is essential but within which she is subsumed" (172).

However, it is possible that there was more to Lady Mary's maternity in the painting. In line with her interest in asserting the authenticity of her firsthand observations of Ottoman culture, Lady Mary's inclusion of Edward, whom she suggestively and somewhat awkwardly holds by his arm, could be a reminder of Lady Mary's own famous legacy. In another much mentioned letter, she describes the process of inoculation, which was carried out successfully by "a set of old women who make it their business to perform the operation" (125). Lady Mary had her son inoculated during

her stay in Turkey and she expresses her intent to do so to Sarah Chiswell on April 1st, 1717, declaring that she is so “well satisfied of the safety of the experiment” that she intends to try it on her son (126). Indeed, it is possible that Edward had already been inoculated before he and his mother sat for this painting, which one could speculate might explain the emphasis on his tiny arm, precisely the place where he would have been inoculated. Speculation aside, however, Lady Mary’s investment in engrafting as an effective and significant medical advance that the English ought to practice is clear from her efforts to persuade the English public against the prejudices of the physicians who deemed inoculation a dangerous and unreliable Eastern import, or whose modifications of the process were not nearly as safe or effective. Having survived small pox herself, she must have been thrilled to see “that the small pox so fatal and so general” in England was so rendered so “entirely harmless” by engrafting in Adrianople (125). In the *Flying Post* account of Turkish engrafting (1722), published anonymously long before the collected letters were published after her death, Lady Mary condemns “the miserable gashes that [the physicians of the College] give people in the arms,” risking their loss, and the large amounts of the “infectious matter” of “the worst kind of smallpox” that causes their patients’ deaths (256). She considered inoculation a matter of national interest and herself “patriot enough to take pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England,” despite the “courage” that it would take for her “to war” with physicians (126). Hence, it is not improbable that in her collaboration with Vanmour, she would take the opportunity to link the visual legacy of her travels to some of the most significant cultural observations she transcribed for her English reader-spectators.

Containing the Other: Slavery, Femininity, and Consumption

The most dazzling painting of Lady Mary, Richardson's spectacular full-length portrait (figure 1) is also one of the most recognizable images of her in Turkish dress. Unlike the Vanmour painting, Richardson's portrait elides authenticity and works instead to anglicize Lady Mary's experience in the Ottoman Empire. Scholars who have discussed the portrait have already pointed out this nationalist impulse. Marcia Pointon observes that Richardson Europeanizes the portrait by replacing the more accurate Circassian slave with a black slave and by modifying the Turkish dress to resemble English fashions rather than the more corpulent forms to be found in Vanmour's work for example (146).³¹ However, Pointon argues that the portraits of Lady Mary in Turkish dress, including that attributed to Richardson, re-empower her "by the actual restoration of her beauty in paint" (144). Pointon's claim may very well be true a literal sense, but in the following pages I will argue that this process also erases her individual specificity by abstracting her into a commodity. There are moments of productive ambiguity, however, in the tension between the apparent content of the portrait and its subtle links to a greater eighteenth-century conversation about slavery, women, and the consumption of luxury goods. The crux of these tensions is the neglected black page. Srinivas Aravamudan, for

³¹ The replacement of the Circassian slave with an African slave is an unusual aesthetic move in its specificity but indicative of a common inattention to complexion-based categories of race in the eighteenth century. As Roxann Wheeler explains, the predominant racial slippage in eighteenth century visual culture was between Indians and Africans, a phenomenon that resulted from the period's fluid and elastic understanding of complexion, the universal and haphazard application of the "noble savage" concept, and ultimately "the overdetermination of the category *slave*," which could be responsible for the racial confusion in the Richardson portrait (52-53). A white child in livery would not have been intelligible as a slave to the English public, and it certainly would have departed from the longstanding tradition of the black attendant that appeared in the works of Van Dyck, Lely, and Kneller.

instance, echoes Pointon's interpretation of the portrait by reading it as consonant with the last stage of levantinization in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* – Lady Mary's reaggregation back to Englishness (185). He suggests that although the skyline is that of Constantinople, the setting invokes the English country estate, resulting in a subordinated acknowledgment of Turkishness. For Aravamudan, the black page fits in this framework by being a "metonym for the tropicopolitan space that Montagu experienced but left behind" (185).³² Pointon acknowledges the black page's association with slavery but still insists on his status as a foil that serves to elevate Lady Mary through his aesthetic inferiority (146). Although I recognize the function of the black page as an ornament that situates the portrait within a pre-existing European tradition of aristocratic portraiture, I argue that he exceeds this purely emblematic function. The black page needs to be reinterpreted as a discursive node at the intersection of conflicting cultural narratives about slavery, femininity, and consumption.

At the same time, taking into account Lady Mary's collaboration in the production of this image, this section will explore how both artist and sitter worked to advance their respective public images by drawing on intersecting cultural narratives about femininity, slavery, and the consumption of luxury goods. Unlike the Vanmour painting and the Jervas portraits that follow this section, the Richardson portrait undermines the more communicative exchange between Lady Mary and the Turkish

³² Aravamudan defines "tropicopolitan" as a term for the "colonized subject who exists both as a fictive construct of colonial tropology *and* actual resident of tropical space, object of representation, *and* agent of resistance" who "challenges the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans" (4). Aravamudan's useful term could easily be applied to the black page in the Richardson portrait to produce a sophisticated reading of the image, but he seems more interested in establishing the portrait's normalizing function as it "reaggregates" Lady Mary back to Englishness.

other evident in the letters. However, by replacing Lady Mary's nuanced cross-cultural experience of the Orient with a more monolithic narrative of British imperial benevolence, the portrait ensures the image's legibility, and by extension, its enduring connection to the letters.



Figure 5. *Henrietta of Lorraine*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck. 1634. Kenwood House. London.

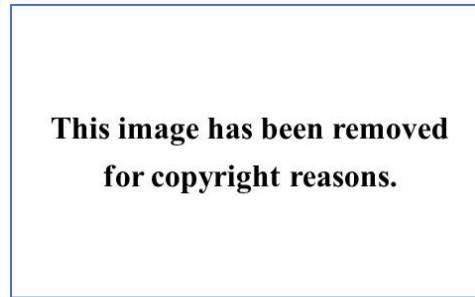


Figure 6. *Marchesa Elena Grimaldi*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck. 1623. National Gallery of Art. D.C.



Figure 7. *Mary, Duchess of Ormonde*, John Smith after Sir Godfrey Kneller. 1702. National Portrait Gallery. London.

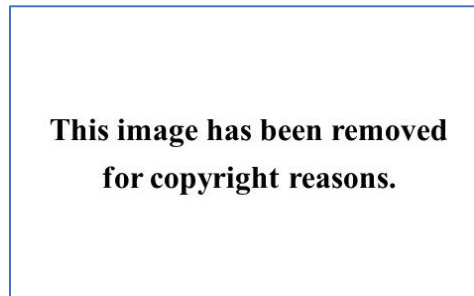


Figure 8. *Elizabeth Murray, Lady Tollemache*, Sir Peter Lely. c.1651. National Trust. Ham House.

As Pointon notes, the black page's darker clothes and his visual subordination into the background of the painting highlights Lady Mary's brilliance in an unusually idealized depiction that anticipates the stateliness of later eighteenth-century portraiture (146). Precedents and possible references include Van Dyck's *Henrietta of Lorraine* (figure 5) and his *Marchesa Grimaldi* (figure 6), Kneller's *Duchess of Ormond* (figure 7), Lely's *Elizabeth Murray* (figure 8). Similarly to the page in Kneller's *Duchess of Ormond*, Richardson's page peeks from behind Lady Mary's left arm on which hangs an ermine-lined coat; he is fawning, docile, and his eyes look upward and to the right, leading the viewer's gaze toward the central object of the portrait. Like many of the other pages, he is in livery and he holds an ineffectual parasol that appears to function purely as a prop. The metal collar around his neck could signify his status as a slave, despite the expensive livery he sports.³³ As David Dabydeen observes in his reading of the black boy in Hogarth's *The Beggar's Opera*, the conflicting symbolism suggests an ambivalent position: "blacks in England were legally slaves at the time [and] not paid servants" but the livery suggests that their status was more akin to that of a pampered household pet, "the equivalent of [a] lap-dog" (127).³⁴ The depiction of the black page in fine livery could be a deliberate emphasis on the civilizing narrative that informed and justified the cultural understanding of slavery as a benevolent enterprise (Molineux 497).

Richardson's portrait participates in this narrative by unabashedly stressing the

³³ The collar could also be ornamental if made of gold or silver, signaling the page's function as a status symbol. Such a collar would have the owner's name, title, and coat of arms stamped on it (Aravamudan "Petting Oroonoko" 38). It is unclear from the portrait whether the collar of the black page is made of silver or iron.

³⁴ See also Aravamudan's "Petting Oroonoko" in *Tropicopolitans*.

ineffectual servitude of the page – he offers Lady Mary no plate of fruit or bouquet of flowers, and he carries a parasol that holds no promise of fulfilling its ostensible function. The functional gratuitousness of the parasol is telling. As Joseph Roach point out in his study of the parasol and its use in the English theater, “to accessorize is to make a useful sign out of a practical superfluity; the word accessory suggests not only a surplus or an excess . . . but also an oblique but significant instrumentality . . . To accessorize a costume is thus to furnish it with the supplementary but nonetheless crucial items that serve to identify or locate the wearer (98). The page’s parasol becomes a marker of identity that implicates Lady Mary in a discourse of otherness by the parasol’s status as “a visual metonym for the concept of difference itself” (103). While this effect might appear superfluous, in light of Lady Mary’s more obvious masquerade in Turkish dress, it does not converge with the effect of the tightly fitting Anglicized rendition of her *turquerie*. Richardson’s depiction of Lady Mary’s dress betrays a lack of concern with authenticity. The *turquerie* becomes a costume like that of the shepherdess in the portraits of Kneller and Jervas or like a Van Dyck fancy dress, and unlike the identificatory marker of otherness that associates Lady Mary with Turkish femininity at the complex level of the Vanmour portrait. Therefore, the exact nature of the alterity that the parasol suggests, I argue, is located in the joint treatment of woman and slave as subject to a similar process of commodification.

Although abolitionism was in its infancy in the early eighteenth century and abolitionist rhetoric would not flourish in a systematic manner until later in the century, intersectional comparisons of the plight of women to that of slaves can be located in the

early works of Mary Astell, Lady Mary's good friend and the author of the preface to the first edition of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.³⁵ In *Reflections Upon Marriage* (1706), Mary Astell laments the legal condition of married Englishwomen— a multifaceted argument that was certainly an influence on Lady Mary and her comparative analysis of women's condition in Europe and the Ottoman Empire. What interests me here though is Astell's sustained metaphor of slavery to represent the gendered power dynamics that subtend the institution of marriage. Astell compares the "Matrimonial Yoke" to the oppression of "a Poor people, who groan under Tyranny" and who can only resort to "Patience and Submission" as a response to the absolute power they are not strong enough to subvert (101-102). She exposes the hypocrisy of men by declaring that "how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not *Milton* himself wou'd cry up Liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny" (102).³⁶ The affinity between a nation's female subjects and slaves anticipates the feminist and abolitionist rhetoric of Mary Wollstonecraft, and although Astell was more concerned with the freedom of women than that of slaves, her text posits women's condition as a form of slavery to underscore its unnaturalness.

Lady Mary would have been intimately familiar with Astell's famous text.

Indeed, in her contribution to Addison's *The Spectator* (1714) in the guise of an old

³⁵ According to the editors of the most recent edition of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn, Lady Mary loaned Mary Astell the manuscript in 1724 and Astell wrote the preface in 1725 which appeared in the 1763 edition of the letters (13). See Chapter 12, "Settling Down: 'one's own fancy upon one's own Ground'" in Grundy for a detailed account of their friendship (179-202).

³⁶ It is important to keep in mind that Astell was a royalist. Her criticism of the monarchy in *Reflections* was an attempt to expose the logical flaws of a liberal politics that applied the concept of freedom from tyranny rather selectively (Janet Todd 27).

widow, the president of a fictional club of nine widows that Addison had satirized earlier, she echoes Astell's critique of marriage. The widow she impersonates was married to her first husband at the age of fourteen by her guardian "by way of Sale, for the Third part of [her] Fortune" (69). She was a "poor, passive, blinded" wife until "it pleased Heaven to take away her Tyrant" (70). Lady Mary's self-representation as a commodity at the mercy of male sellers and buyers in the marriage market aligns her understanding of the female condition with slavery. Her lack of control over her fortune underscores her status as a vehicle for the transfer of property rather than a property owner herself, a significant detail in light of Lady Mary's own marital background. After a failed lengthy negotiation between her suitor Edward Wortley and her father, Lady Mary eloped and received no dowry at all, so she could not avoid marrying a second suitor she disapproved of.³⁷ Her use of anti-absolutist rhetoric to describe her husband as tyrannical is a nod to Mary Astell's critique of the hypocrisy inherent in touting the virtues of the freedom afforded by a parliamentary monarchy, while refusing to extend the same courtesy to half the population of England. Richardson would have certainly been an easy target of Astell's protofeminist critique. According to Carol Gibson-Wood, Richardson celebrated England's "post-1688 political system and its religious toleration" and the conditions it created for the flourishing of portraiture in England (1). Moreover, his familiarity with the work of John Locke contributed to his rejection of absolute authority as a source of knowledge and to his embrace of the exercise of reason as the path to truth in morality as well as art (42). And yet, despite his enlightened perspective on politics and aesthetics,

³⁷ See Grundy's Chapter 4, "Elopement: 'ran away with, without fortunes.'"

Richardson thought women inferior creatures, whose only role was to support their husband's intellectual pursuits in the domestic sphere (46). Such ideological incongruity was the crux of Mary Astell's attack on politically enlightened men who continued to promote the institutional oppression of women. Richardson's patriotism, evident in both his political beliefs and his support for a distinctly English tradition of painting, certainly informs his efforts to Anglicize Lady Mary's experience in Constantinople.

The ideological affinity between femininity and slavery that is obscured by the veneer of aristocratic grandeur in Richardson's portrait extends to Lady Mary's modified Turkish dress which, unlike the various instances of her enabling masquerade in the letters, is hollowed out and transformed into a signifier of English modishness. The dress's dangerously low décolletage and its inauthentically snug fit are designed to reveal and make available rather than conceal and enable through anonymity, the advantages of the "perpetual masquerade" that Lady Mary found so appealing and useful in the streets of Constantinople (115). The modification of the dress in the Richardson portrait does not only signal the artist's investment in a nationalist aesthetic or a pre-existing visual grammar commonly employed in the portrayal of female nobility. Lady Mary's complicity in this alteration can be traced in her own textually documented modifications of the aesthetic of otherness that she exported to England. Her description of the Turkish dress to Lady Mar paints a sexualized garment "exactly fitted to [her] shape" and through which "the shape and color of the bosom [is] very well to be distinguished" (113). On the other hand, the more authentic "*ferigée* which no woman of any sort appears without" disguises women so effectually that "there is no distinguishing the great lady from her

slave, and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street" (115). The anonymity afforded by the *ferigée* annihilates class differences and individual identity so completely that it almost acts as an invisibility cloak, enabling women to access public spaces alone and without fear of impropriety. The erasure of class differences blurs the boundaries between master and slave in stark contrast to the Richardson image, carefully orchestrated as it is, to showcase the grandeur of the master by the visual distinctness of the slave.

Lady Mary concludes her extended description of Turkish feminine aesthetics in her letter to Lady Mar with a memorable declaration: "Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire" (116). This freedom, however exaggerated for the purposes of advancing a critique of English gender norms, is undeniably connected to a sartorial grammar that has been almost entirely dispensed with in the Richardson portrait. Here, Lady Mary's corseted rendition of the Turkish dress becomes yet another iteration of the fancy dress wardrobe that symbolized status in portraiture, while simultaneously invoking popular but controversial amusements that were widely criticized throughout the eighteenth century. Masquerades were often associated with licentiousness, moral decay, and the subversion of fundamental gender and socioeconomic hierarchies. Its critics denounced their foreignness by interpreting their moral laxity as a French, Venetian, or Spanish import that threatened English national integrity (Castle 7). A corresponding conceptualization of the Orient as morally primitive could only amplify the public perception of masquerades. The Ottoman Empire

was frequently interpreted as analogous to the absolutism of the English past; indolence and excessive sensuality were often cited as the reasons for its impending collapse (Nussbaum 17). Such assumptions relied on the conceptualization of the harem as a space of carnal indulgence where entrepreneurship and the intellect were slowly neutralized by excessive attention to earthly pleasures. Richardson's portrait participates in this narrative by linking the only symbol of the harem in it – the Turkish dress – to the public masquerade. Lady Mary's hypersexualization fuses the sensual fantasy of the harem with the commodified erotics of the masquerade.

Much like Oriental wear, masquerades were part of a rapidly expanding commercial network of goods and activities in eighteenth-century England; John James Heidegger, the Swiss manager of the Haymarket, recognized their profitable potential invented the masquerade ticket, making the event itself a commodity (10-11). In this context, Lady Mary's masquerade dress is a signifier of a culture of consumerism evident in the acquisition and display of foreign goods. This culture of consumerism, as Laura Brown has observed, had a distinct link to femininity. Women were scapegoated for their insatiable consumerism; their acquisitiveness became an apology for imperialism as well as a target of attacks on the troubling effects of imperialism at home (14). Lady Mary's multivalent Turkish dress along with the black page interpret the narrative of her experience in Constantinople through the framework of femininity as a justification for the English colonial and mercantilist project. Richardson's brilliant display of the material goods resulting from this project simultaneously obscures the exploitation that facilitates mercantile capitalism and links woman with the commodities it makes

available for her consumption. This work of ideological mystification through the figure of woman results in the transformation of female adornment into “the main cultural emblem of commodity fetishism” (Brown 119). Under the weight of her Anglicized Turkish dress and her finely dressed human accessory, Lady Mary’s individual specificity is erased, reducing the portrait into an assemblage of commodities.

The portrait itself as both a reflection and a product of the increasing demands for luxury objects by a rapidly growing middle class – yet another effect of mercantile capitalism – participates in the fetishistic structure of meaning it depicts. The portrait exemplifies Richardson’s attempt to insert portraiture as a profit-generating commercial practice into a larger network of trade based on the buying and selling of material goods. Richardson positions himself as a supplier of commodities, a role he seeks to anxiously justify in his *Essay on the Theory of Painting*, even as he tries to elevate the status of portraiture within existing aesthetic hierarchies. Indeed, Richardson’s portrait functions almost as his trade card, advertising portraiture as a luxury object by associating it with a range of other recognizable wares. Reproducing images that echoed the aristocratic tradition of the noblewoman and her exotic attendants in their trade cards was a commonplace practice for shop owners in the eighteenth century (figure 9). Using a version of the widely circulating image of *The Indian Queen* (figure 10), John Cotterell’s card, for instance, advertises exotic commodities such as, “Glasses, Old as well as New China . . . fine Teas, Coffee, Chocolate”, and even “pictures.” Although slaves would not be listed on a shop owner’s trade card, the connection between portraiture and luxury goods extended to human commodities. Dabydeen reminds us that painting and slaves

were both sold in coffeehouses, for example, and in the colonies, slaves and paintings were even sold simultaneously. Dealers in Old Masters were often dealers in slaves, and expertise in the quality of slaves was akin to connoisseurial discourse (87).

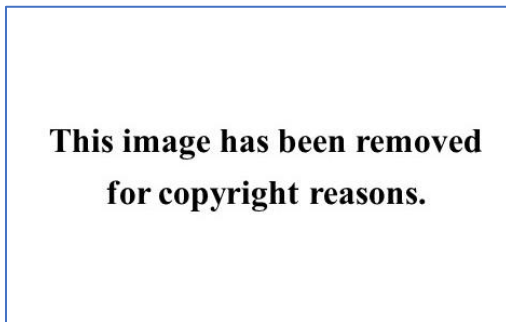


Figure 9. Trade card of John Cotterell. c.1751. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection.



Figure 10. Mezzotint of Anne Bracegirdle in the role of *The Indian Queen* from Sir Robert Howard's eponymous play. c. 1685- 1695. Published by John Smith and printed by William Vincent. The British Museum.

In the process of reifying Lady Mary's experience in Constantinople, the Richardson portrait obscures the reciprocity of her encounter with the other as evidenced by the letters and as captured by Vanmour eight years earlier.³⁸ We know from my earlier discussion of the role of inoculation in the Vanmour portrait suggests, that Lady Mary

³⁸ It is likely that Richardson was familiar with the content of the letters and would have easily had access to them through his good friend Alexander Pope whose relationship with Lady Mary was still one of mutual admiration in 1725 and would not begin to deteriorate until three years later. See Valerie Rumbold's *Pope and His Women*. See also Chapter 16, "Lady Mar, Pope: 'Scenes of Sorrow,'" and Chapter 19, "Pope, Round Two: 'Universal Rancour,'" in Grundy.

was not likely to espouse the benevolent civilizing narrative of imperialist consumerism that the Richardson portrait advances. Her anticipation of the resistance she would have to face from the medical community upon sharing with them the practice of inoculation speaks to this. Lady Mary confesses that “she should not fail to write to some of [the English] doctors very particularly about it if [she] knew any one of them that [she] thought had virtue enough to destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue for the good of mankind (126). Lady Mary’s awareness that she would need to wage war against the mercenary representatives of the medical field in England to introduce such a beneficial practice to her country suggests that she believed for-profit behavior to be at odds with civilizing efforts which could come to England from abroad instead of the other way around. The commercially inspired agenda of the Richardson portrait collides with the nuanced interrelation between the East and the West, evident in the letters and the Vanmour portrait. However, even if there were archival material suggesting that perhaps her husband commissioned this portrait, we must recognize that Lady Mary was still complicit in the creation of this image in posing for it. As the sitter, she at least confirmed her pictorial representation, and likely even provided the *turquerie* she is wearing. So what could have motivated the sitter to collaborate in the creation of an image whose ideological content was in such stark contrast with her own experiential observations?

The Richardson portrait of Lady Mary remains her most dazzling image, highly idealized and flattering, surpassing in aesthetic appeal the Vanmour portraits, certainly

any portrait by Jervas, and even the Kneller portrait commissioned by Pope (figure 11).

But the artist's emphasis on woman as a beautiful spectacle is dwarfing rather than



Figure 11. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Sir Godfrey Kneller. 1719-1720. The Marquess of Bute.

aggrandizing. Indeed, this treatment is reminiscent of Lady Mary's introduction to the Kit-Cat Club at the age of eight after her father proposed her as the object of a toast (Grundy 12) One of the few women to ever enter the privileged space of the most influential club in the early eighteenth century, Lady Mary reprises this early performance in the Richardson portrait as a spectacle evacuated of nuanced authenticity and functioning instead, as a signifier of various commercial and intellectual male enterprises. This partial decontextualization through aestheticization risks reducing her to a symbol of male accomplishments, undermining her account by reinterpreting it within the discursive confines of masculinist projects. But perhaps it was precisely this partial decontextualization that Lady Mary was after. Even as the portrait modifies the *turquerie* and replaces the Circassian slave with an African one, it retains a superficial connection to the sitter's account. In fact, counterintuitive as this might appear, these modifications amplify this connection by increasing legibility. By translating the image of Lady Mary

into a Western narrative of the Orient, the image becomes more recognizable, and hence more closely allied with the letters in the public sphere. Despite the unambiguous loss of authenticity, accuracy, and subtle sophistication, the Richardson portrait of Lady Mary sutures her authority to the letters even more effectively than the Vanmour portrait, by ensuring that the visual grammar it employs is readily available to reader-spectators.

The Taxidermic Gaze: Preserving the Love-Object in Death

Charles Jervas has largely been unattended to by scholars of the eighteenth century. At first sight, his work, at least, appears to warrant this neglect (figures 12, 13, 14, and 15); Jervas's "wretched daubings" exemplify the ineptitude of early-eighteenth century painters that Walpole laments in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*. Godfrey Kneller, in whose studio Jervas trained and worked for a year, famously said of him, when he heard that Jervas had purchased a new coach that "if his horses [did] not draw better than he[did], he would never get to his journey's end." George Vertue less venomously observes that because of Jervas's reliance on studies of Guido Reni in Rome and "for want of true drawing of Nature, his pictures wanted just likeness and natural Tincture of coloring" resulting in portraits "of beautiful colours but no blood in them or natural heat or warmness" (qtd. in Pegum 31-32). Vertue's comment on Jervas's inattention to resemblance and the lack of life that characterizes Jervas's portraits of women aptly captures the petrified and often uniform quality of his female sitters, many of whom are indistinguishable from one another. It is precisely this frozenness that Lady Mary laments in her hammam letter, when she wishes that Jervas could have access to the many beautiful living forms of Turkish women engaged in their daily activities.



Figure 12. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Charles Jervas. 1718-1720. National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin.



Figure 13. *Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater*. Charles Jervas. c. 1710-1720. National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin.

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for copyright reasons.**

Figure 14. *Lady Mary Churchill, Duchess of Montagu*, Charles Jervas. The Duke of Buccleuch. Boughton House.

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for copyright reasons.**

Figure 15. *Lady Jemima Gray*. Charles Jervas. English Heritage. Wrest Park.

Caroline Pegum suggests that in his portraits of women Jervas eschews the individuality usually found in his portraits of men, a technique that produces “a recognisable ideal” (33). In many ways, Jervas’s portraits of women in Turkish dress seem to reprise what Richardson’s more famous portrait of Lady Mary epitomizes: the

abstraction of woman into a commodified spectacle. But while Richardson's aesthetically superior rendition of Lady Mary enlists this abstraction in the service of a celebration of Englishness in all its imaginary grandeur as a benevolent commercial force, Jervas's work does not aspire to such sophisticated heights. But the relative simplicity of Jervas's portraits of women in Turkish dress and their nearly cartoonish quality does succeed – whether intentionally or not – in producing sophisticated meta-pictorial effects that trouble the very foundations of eighteenth-century portraiture. When considered in conversation with Lady Mary's aestheticization of Turkish women, these effects reveal that Lady Mary does not appropriate a connoisseurial rhetoric to position herself as an aesthetic subject. Instead, she does so to critique certain eighteenth-century aesthetic tenets that produce idealized images at the expense of women.

Vertue's observation of the affinity between Guido Reni's work and Jervas's causes him to attribute the stiff and flat quality of Jervas's work to its derivativeness. According to Vertue, Jervas's sitters lack dimension, depth, and uniqueness because Jervas was making copies of copies, when reproducing his studies of Reni in his portraits of women. The artist seems to have been guilty of what Richardson seeks to rise above in his *Essay on the Theory of Painting*: the purely mechanical aspect of portraiture that relegated the practice to the periphery of elevated aesthetic discourse which identified history painting as the acme of pictorial accomplishment. According to Richardson, the mechanics of painting, such as “Neatness, and high Finishing; a Light, Bold Pencil; Gay and Vivid Colours, Warm and Sombrous; Force, and Tenderness,” require and are indicators of very little ability – no more than is “frequently seen in Ordinary Workmen”

(v-vi). It is the face that constitutes the focus of the portrait for Richardson, its expression, its air, its status as the index of one's character and the site of the sitter's individuality; as such, the rendition of the face should incorporate both resemblance and idealization. Jervas's portraits of women in Turkish dress defy Richardson's theoretical principles so forcefully that they border on parody. The rendition of the face in figures 12-15 is almost identical, erasing all individual specificity by insisting on the same sharp nose, small pouty mouth, prominently large eyes, and plump chin. It is no surprise that these paintings were often called portraits of Lady Mary before the sitters were more accurately identified.³⁹ The faces of the sitters are so uncannily similar that the referential function of the portrait is entirely destabilized.

Jervas's dismissal of individual specificity extends to the Turkish dress, which evinces the same inattention to authenticity that we see in Richardson's portrait, but becomes almost caricature-like when viewed alongside the other portraits of ladies in Turkish dress, the rendition of which varies very little. The tight-fitting *antery* is of a darker color, covering the *caftan* underneath it, which is usually of a white color and sometimes over an orange smock under which peek out uniformly positioned feet clad in pointy golden slippers. The headdress consists of a turban and, more often than not, a red cap out of which extends a dark feather with a jeweled base. The regularity with which the dress is reproduced leaves no doubt regarding its status as a decontextualized generic costume rather than an identificatory feature referring to a particular experience or

³⁹ Figure 15 has been reidentified as Lady Elizabeth Bridgewater. In 1983, Alastair Laing pointed out the existence of an almost identical painting of Lady Bridgewater formerly attributed to Kneller and now accepted to be by Jervas. For a more detailed treatment of the subject see the catalogue entry by Brendan Rooney and Nicola Figgis in *Irish Painting in the National Gallery of Ireland* (302).

narrative. Unlike Richardson's portrait, Jervas's work does not actively seek to manage otherness through the deployment of various discourses of Englishness; that alterity is always already taken for granted as evacuated of its contextual specificity is implied by its repeatability and interchangeability as a pictorial trope. Even the parasol, which, as I discussed earlier, had become a metonymy of difference in the early eighteenth century scopical imaginary is divorced from the charged otherness it signifies in the Richardson portrait; In figure 14, Lady Mary Churchill's attendants are round, plump, and blonde English *putti* rather than commodified bodies standing in for the luxury goods made available by the English colonial project. Their function is not to signal alterity in themselves or the sitter but to underscore the commonplace masquerade that the sitter's fancy dress denotes. As Castle explains, mythological Greco-Roman figures belonged to one of the three main categories of costumes frequently worn at masquerades known as a "character dress," the other two being fancy dress, and the domino (58). Clad in the pastel blue of rococo, the cherubic attendants are props who perform their function as such impeccably, endowing the sitter with Venusian connotations.

The repetition of form, style, and content evident in Jervas's Turkish dress group is consistent with Vertue's description of his work as lacking the resemblance one expects of portraiture, whose ultimate function is to convey a sense of individuality, albeit an improved version of the self it depicts, as Richardson reminds us. If, as Caroline Pegum points out, the effect of this derivativeness is "a recognizable ideal," this ideal is so thoroughly stripped of interiority that it is reminiscent of iconic portraiture or relief

sculpture.⁴⁰ Harry Berger Jr. identifies this two-dimensional stiffness as the effect of the “sacrifice of likeness at the altar of exemplarity” (188). Berger calls this emphasis on exemplarity at the expense of the “stuff of life” the fiction of objectivity, which produces “thinglike, inanimate” effects (189). The sitter of such a portrait “aspires to exchange his merely natural and sullied flesh for a glorified body of paint, to pass through the looking glass into the pure ideality of an ikon [*sic*]” (189). Jervas’s subjects abandon their physicality all together and aspire to become paint. Indeed, the subject is entirely exiled from the portrait, leaving in lieu of an individual, “death buried, preserved, and represented in the portrait itself” (Berger Jr. 189). Jervas’s ideal women are not merely exemplars of the artist’s conception of beauty; they are so excessively aestheticized that they are almost transformed into hunks of marble, claiming a permanence beyond what traditional portraiture can offer them in its customary focus on recognizable specificity – contingent as such specificity is on the ephemeral body.

For Berger, however, such idealized sitters ultimately convey interiority in their resistance to objectivity or by failing to achieve objectivity, which follows Berger’s interpretation of the petrification of the sitters as a sign of deliberateness (111). But Jervas’s objectified subjects foreclose this possibility through the repetition of identical

⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, the work of Guido Reni, whose studies Jervas was reproducing according to Vertue, depicts a host of religious subjects, among them an abundance of icons ranging from Christ to the Madonna. For a more nuanced analysis of Reni’s varied representations of women see Richard Spear’s excellent study *The “Divine” Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni*. Spear points out that Reni’s vexed relationship with sexuality and the body – beginning with his own – informed his unusually evocative depictions of women in sado-masochistic scenarios, especially when considered alongside his male figures (76-82). According to Jacob Burckhardt, Guido Reni used antique statues for inspiration in his female heads, while in their bodies “he paid homage to a certain wanton sensuality” (qtd. in Spear 80). Jervas seems to have borrowed some of Reni’s methodology while failing to produce the same dynamism and vivacity that characterizes Reni’s work.

features in all the sitters. The early modern portraits Berger examines as exemplars of the fiction of objectivity display the idealized flatness of religious icons but they retain their physiognomic specificity. Conversely, Jervas's portraits insist on physiognomic sameness, resulting instead in what Richardson identifies as the disconcerting effects of a purely mechanical pictorial technique: the portrait transforms into a "Snuff-Box, a Fan, or any other Toy" (vi). Devoid of subjective profundity, Jervas's portraits expel the subject and become akin to still life; instead of capturing an individual, they capture the death of the individual, the individual's transformation into a thing, into the equivalent of a fruit bowl, as it were. As Norman Bryson explains in his study of Chardin's still life, it is not merely by evacuating the canvass of the human form that still life exiles the subject; it also banishes "the drama of greatness" and narrative. "Still life is unimpressed by the categories of soul, consciousness, achievement, grandeur or the unique. The human subject that it proposes and assumes is a bodily material entity on a par with anything else in the material field" (229). The body that Bryson discusses should not be confused with the physical organic body; the human body still life posits is neither exceptional, nor specific. It is not a vessel for metaphysical interiority; it is only a thing. Perhaps no comparison captures the difference between Richardson's objectification of Lady Mary and Jervas's depiction of women in Turkish dress better. Richardson's portrait posits bodies as commodities – indeed, fetishized commodities, living, breathing commodities, whereas Jervas extinguishes life from the bodies of his sitters, reducing them to material objects.

By incorporating and foregrounding what Bryson refers to as “the killing gaze” of still life in portraiture, Jervas’s rendition of women in Turkish dress becomes a meaningful commentary on the violence that aestheticization visits upon women. Jervas’s portraits are ultimately taxidermic; to preserve and immortalize their female subjects, they must first kill them. As Pegum notes, Jervas displays this mechanical technique only in his portraits of women; his portraits of male subjects celebrate singularity – his images of Pope being a prime example of this Richardsonian approach. Lady Mary’s criticism of Jervas in her hammam letter and her constant comparisons of Turkish women to works of art reveal her profound understanding of the death-bearing effects that the work of excessive aestheticization produces in idealized female sitters. Elizabeth Bohls has already observed that Lady Mary engages with a masculinist discourse of connoisseurship, positioning herself as an aesthetic subject whose aestheticization of Turkish women is designed to de-eroticize and de-exoticize them (191-192). Bohls suggests that Lady Mary succeeds only partially in her attempt because aestheticization allows her to be the subject of the look only at the expense of Turkish women who become the object of her look. But Lady Mary does not appropriate connoisseurial rhetoric uncritically; her comparative analysis of women to works of arts finds the latter an inadequate mode of representation that falls short of Nature, which she has the privilege of witnessing directly. She deploys aestheticization only to expose the very process of aestheticization as flawed. In light of the mortiferous objectification produced by Jervas’s work, her declaration that she “took more pleasure in looking on the beauteous Fatima than the finest piece of sculpture could have given [her]” is a telling

evaluation of the effects of aestheticization on women. Having been previously reduced to a “piece of sculpture” by Jervas herself (fig 12), Lady Mary refuses to do the same to the women she encounters, describing them instead in a dynamic manner, while dancing, playing music, drinking coffee or in conversation. When she has to leave the hammam, where many women “were as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian,” she laments her “haste to see the ruins of Justinian’s church” which “being little more than a heap of stones” were not nearly as agreeable as what she had left behind (102, 103).⁴¹

The comparison Lady Mary maintains throughout this crucial letter and beyond works to subordinate the artistic to the natural, anticipating an anti-connoisseurial rhetoric advanced by William Hogarth in *The Analysis of Beauty*. As he puts it, “who, but a bigot, even to the antique, will say that he has not seen faces and necks, hands and arms in living women, that even the Grecian Venus doth but coarsely imitate” (59). Hogarth’s critique is directed at the connoisseur or artist who returned from the Grand Tour obsessed with Italian art and who adhered to pre-existing hierarchies of taste that routinely dismissed English artists in favor of the Old Masters. Hogarth’s aim was to show that art’s representation of the quotidian, the observable, the modern – the stuff of life – could be both edifying and aesthetically pleasing.⁴² Lady Mary and Hogarth converge in their valorization of life over the preserved death that work like Jervas’s exemplifies in its preoccupation with reproduction of an Italian ideal such as Guido.

⁴¹ According to Richard Spear, Guido Reni was also known as Guido; Lady Mary is referring to the same here.

⁴² See Ron Paulson in “Introduction” to *The Analysis of Beauty*.

According to Ron Paulson, Hogarth's anti-connoisseurial principles became the dividing line between the artists of the Saint Martin's Lane Academy, who in October 1753 were "meeting and caballing" over their method of instruction – "whether by copying casts of the canonical sculptures or drawing from the live model" (*The Analysis of Beauty* xix). The serpentine line of beauty that Hogarth theorized in *The Analysis of Beauty* published a year after these debates embodies the aesthetic philosophy that explains his preference of living forms over statues; Hogarth's line of beauty (figures 16 and 17) evinces the movement that Hogarth thought vital to the depiction of a body whether in motion or at rest. The example Hogarth uses to illustrate the line of beauty and its attendant scopic pleasures is that of a country dancer whose windings he once found bewitching as a young man (34). Even more significantly, he locates the line of beauty in a figure's hair, especially the "flowing curl" which "ravishes the eye with the pleasure of the pursuit" as the "naturally intermingling locks" wave and turn (34). It is this articulation of movement calculated to elicit pursuit that emerges in Lady Mary's description of the dancers the fair Fatima entertains her with in Adrianople. Lady Mary confesses that "nothing could be more artful or proper to raise certain ideas, the tunes so soft, the motions so languishing, accompanied with pauses and dying eyes, half-falling back and then recovering themselves in so artful a manner that I am very positive the coldest and most rigid prude upon the earth could not have looked upon them without thinking of something not to be spoke of (134). Fatima's dancers, as Hogarth would put it, "lead the eye, [in] a kind of chace [sic]," and the nature of this chase for both Lady Mary and Hogarth is erotic.

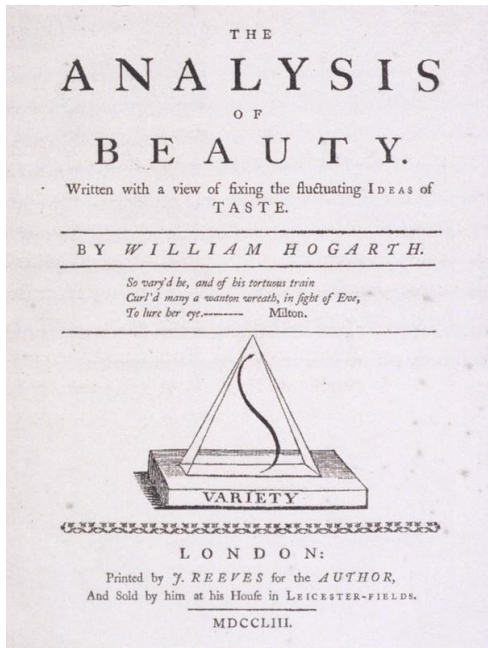


Figure 16. Frontispiece to William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty*.
The line of beauty is the S-shaped line inside the pyramid.

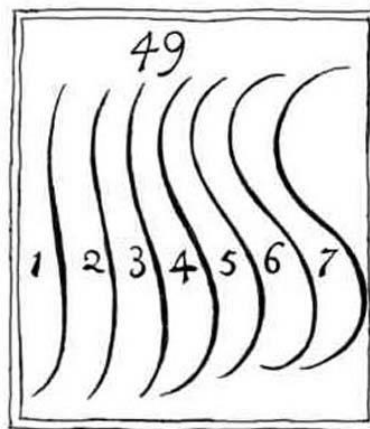


Fig 17. The line of beauty (#4). Detail from Plate 1 of *The Analysis of Beauty*.

Instead of positing a disinterested and de-eroticized pleasure by abstracting and idealizing the object of the look, they both acknowledge the physical basis of the pleasure they derive from the moving female form. However, this is not to say that idealization and

desire are antithetical for either one of them, rather, that a disinterested subject-position is impossible, and any rhetoric that seeks to separate the two is insincere.

In the hammam letter Lady Mary further complicates her appropriation of connoisseurial rhetoric by comparing Turkish women to what has been often read as *the* idealized female form in the British imaginary – Milton’s Eve. According to Lady Mary, the naked bathers “walked, and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our General Mother” (102). A closer analysis of Hogarthian aesthetics reveals that this comparison is less transparent than it appears. Adorned only “by their beautiful hair divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders” these Turkish Eves are anything but abstract forms to be admired impartially from a distance (35). Indeed, neither is Milton’s Eve, as Hogarth suggests, by observing that both the painter and the poet who has “described the wanton ringlets waving in the wind” understand the luring effects of the “flowing curl” (34-35). Hogarth’s clear reference to Milton’s description of Eve’s “unadorned golden tresses . . . /Dishevell’d, but in wanton ringlets wav’d” insists on the appeal of the chase as a crucial element of her visual characterization (*PL* 4.305-306). Milton himself declares that Eve’s curls imply “coy submission, modest pride,/ And sweet reluctant amorous delay” (*PL* 4.310-311). By invoking Milton’s Eve, Lady Mary does not seek to distance herself from the naked bathers by elevating them to the status of classical nudes; rather, her comparison underscores the futility of such an attempt by demonstrating that even the most ideal of all female forms cannot be divorced from its earthly associations. Lady Mary deploys the taxidermic gaze of the connoisseur only to

undercut it by exposing the disinterestedness that ostensibly informs it as indefensible posturing.

The taxidermic gaze, exemplified in Jervas's portraits of women in Turkish dress and repeatedly criticized in Lady Mary's letters, would become the *modus operandi* of institutionalized connoisseurship; The Society of Dilettanti, established in 1714, was ostensibly concerned with the aesthetic appreciation and evaluation of works of art, but they soon acquired a reputation for inclinations of a less disinterested and earthly nature. Paired with the sexual associations of the Grand Tour as a tradition that taught young men only vice and immorality, the connoisseur's investment in antiquities, many of which celebrated nude forms and the free sexuality of the Greeks and the Romans, resulted in a cultural understanding of the "collector's gaze as the look of private sexual desire" (Brewer 263). The mortiferous effects of this eroticizing and idealizing gaze are epitomized by Sir William Hamilton's obsession with Emma Hart as a living piece of collectable *virtu*. When visiting Sir William Hamilton in Naples, Goethe,

... was greatly intrigued by a chest which was standing upright. Its front had been taken off, the interior painted black and the whole set inside a splendid gilt frame. It was large enough to hold a standing human figure, and that, [he was] told, was exactly what it was meant for. Not content with seeing his image of beauty as a moving statue, this friend of art and girlhood wished also to enjoy her as an inimitable painting, and so, standing against this black background in dresses of various colors, she has sometimes imitated the dresses of Pompeii or even more recent masterpieces. (qtd. in Brewer 268)

Aside from the obvious objectification of woman as a work of art, Emma Hart's transformation into a three-dimensional painting by means of a coffin-like standing chest invokes the mummified bodies that were being excavated in Egypt as well as the petrified human fossils unearthed in Pompeii and Herculaneum. This morbid mingling of erotic

desire with the mummification of the loved object is what Jervas's work reproduces incessantly and what Lady Mary seeks to undo by appropriating the rhetoric of the connoisseur only to expose its untenability in positing "heaps of stone" as superior to the living bodies of actual women.

In Jervas's case, the taxidermic idealization of his sitters was especially untenable, in light of the circumstances surrounding his portrait of the Countess of Bridgewater (figure 13). In his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, Horace Walpole suggests that Jervas looked at the Countess of Bridgewater "with more than a painter's eyes." According to Walpole, "so entirely did the lovely form possess his imagination that many a homely dame was delighted to find her picture resemble lady Bridgewater" (qtd. in Pegum 33). Brendan Rooney and Nicola Figgis have persuasively suggested that the male figure carved on top of the clavicytherium could be a self-portrait of Charles Jervas gazing on the sitter (304-305). The artist's self-incorporation into the portrait in classical form – possibly an apt reference to Apollo, the god of music and poetry – literalizes the erotic dynamics of the visual encounter between artist and sitter, as the portrait enacts the drama of the artist's desire for her. But in entering the portrait, the artist himself must shed his humanity and become an *objet d'art*, a transformation that confirms the aesthetic experience of his sitters. Even as a spectator, Jervas could only participate in the material realm of the portrait by turning himself into a carved wooden sculpture.

As William Hazlitt would later observe in "On Sitting for One's Picture," the risk of the artist sliding into the lover is always a real possibility, as the artist is "employed to

transfer living charms to an inanimate surface.” However, Hazlitt also recognizes that this is the same means through which the artist’s desire is defused, the object of his desire being “converted into something intermediate between Nature and art, hovering between a living substance and a senseless shadow;” in the process of being displaced onto the canvass, the body is gradually erased, and the portrait takes its place (660). Hazlitt suggests that this is almost a precondition for the very existence of art; the impossibility of fulfillment is precisely what inspires the work of art. As he cleverly observes, “Had Petrarch gained his Laura for a wife,/Would he have written sonnets all his life?” (659). Jervas’s permanent distance from his own Laura enables him to repeatedly return to her in all his portraits of women in Turkish dress, idealizing and abstracting her, disembodied and re-embodied in fabric and paint.

Despite the artist’s obsessively recursive practice, his Laura remained in the shadows along with Jervas himself. The portrait of Lady Bridgewater was one of at least six portraits of women in Turkish dress that were misidentified as Lady Mary, testifying, as Marcia Pointon suggests, to the enduring mythology that emerged around her before and after *The Turkish Embassy Letters* were published (148). Although often exemplifying the gendered politics of visibility that Lady Mary’s letters aim to destabilize, by eliding particularity through idealization and abstraction, the portraits have contributed both to reducing but also elevating Lady Mary to something like an aesthetic type – the woman in Turkish dress. The cultural urge to *see* Lady Mary in so many eighteenth-century portraits, despite the popularity of *turquerie* in the period’s visual register does not necessarily attest to the triumph of the text over the image. I hope to

have shown that in light of the interwoven discourses of the letter and the portrait, this phenomenon is the more complex result of intersecting sign systems and their interaction on multiple cultural registers. The generalized type of the woman in Turkish dress is paradoxically inextricable from the individual specificity that emerges from the *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Lady Mary's portraits in Turkish dress adorn the covers of almost every edition of Lady Mary's works as well as those of scholarly work about her. Unlike countless other eighteenth-century texts by women or men, who were painted by more consequential eighteenth-century than artists Lady Mary, her writing remains sutured to her image, attesting to the union of her visual and epistolary personae, fraught with contradiction as that union might at times have been.

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Georgiana's Public Bodies: Classed Femininity and the Nation in the Portraits and Prints
of the Duchess of Devonshire

In her little known autobiographical novel *The Sylph* Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire includes a meticulous description of her aesthetic transformation into the larger than life figure that she became after her marriage to the Duke of Devonshire. The elaborate coiffure and related accoutrements that her female protagonist Lady Julia Stanley is forced to wear by a too readily indignant French stylist include “curls, flowers, ribbons, feathers, lace, jewels, fruit, and ten thousand other things” (32). The litany of unlikely ornaments that litter her person extends to “the finest bundle of radishes that had yet come over” which “the dresser of the actresses” had used on Lady Stanley at the risk of offending the Duchess of D--- (33). This subtle reference to the author reminds the reader that the fashionable attire showcased in these pages emulates the signature style of the author herself who pioneered and encouraged the aesthetic excess that adorned female aristocrats and arrivistes alike in the late eighteenth century. The lengthy scene that details Lady Stanley's visual metamorphosis into the properly fashionable wife of Lord Stanley, one of the leading men of the *ton* in London, is a crucial autobiographical moment that captures the Duchess's sophisticated relationship to her celebrated public persona.

On one level Lady Stanley's discomfort with the female trappings of the *ton* is explicitly attributed to her gaucheness. Her humble beginnings as the daughter of a gentleman who retired from the fashionable world and raised his daughters in the idyllic countryside could only generate disgust with the artifice literally heaped upon her in the

city. Her reaction echoes prevalent eighteenth-century narratives that critique the middling sort's appropriation of a class-coded aesthetic by ridiculing their fumbling mimicry. But as Diana Donald has persuasively shown in her seminal study of graphic satire during the reign of George III, the significance of Lady Stanley's distaste for luxury and excess was more complex than it might at first appear. According to Donald, the denigration of social climbers existed alongside the middling sort's critique of aristocratic excess and their increasing association with true politeness defined in opposition to that excess (75, 80). *The Sylph* certainly succeeds in conveying this ambivalence by placing the critique of "commoners" in the mouth of an effete French dresser, thus redefining Lady Stanley's refusal to partake of an imported hyperbolic aesthetic. Furthermore, by repeatedly establishing Lady Stanley's moral and ethical superiority in the rest of the narrative, the novel renders it difficult to for the reader to laugh at her inept manner.

While the emphasis on Lady Stanley's ignorance of the way of the *ton* might set us up for her spectacular failure at her court debut, the opposite takes place. Lady Stanley passes seamlessly for a fashionable woman by managing to dazzle even the royals. The ostensible critique of cross-class appropriation is further diffused by this successful emulation. Indeed, when paired with her effective passing, the reception of *The Sylph* by the Duchess's contemporary audience suggests that it is likely aristocratic anxieties over potentially effective metamorphoses of class that emerge in the text. According to Amanda Foreman, the Duchess's most recent biographer, readers were shocked at *The Sylph*'s candid treatment of the *ton* and the attendant moral laxity that characterized its

Frenchified aristocratic champions. Hester Thrale even called it an “obscene Novel” (qtd. in Foreman 60). But beyond the unreserved discussion of improper subjects, the exposé of the aristocracy uncovered what was truly disconcerting about the *ton*: it was an elaborate aesthetic performance that could be put on and taken off at will by anyone, with the aid of conspicuous consumption. It is no accident that the French hairstylist is a “dresser of actresses”; his role as such marks the effects of his work as theatrical acts that enable a performance of class.⁴³ The Duchess’s critical approach to her way of life unfolds visually; Lady Stanley’s class mimicry manifests as a recognizable aesthetic appropriation that inevitably conjures the many images of the Duchess herself, one of the most popular subjects of visual media in the late eighteenth century. Perhaps the most enduring of her images, Gainsborough’s famous hat portrait (figure 18) best conveys the signature visual aesthetic showcased by Lady Stanley.⁴⁴

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Figure 18. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, Thomas Gainsborough, (1787). Chatsworth, Derbyshire.

⁴³ See Hallet’s “Satire and the Street: *The Beaux Disaster*” in *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth* on fashionable excess and the blurring and inversion of the signs of class (174).

⁴⁴ The stunning portrait remains famous not only because of its sitter but also for its propensity to vanish and reappear. Stolen from Chatsworth, resurfacing later at Christie’s, and then stolen again from William Agnew’s gallery in London by Adam Worth – the most notorious professional criminal of the nineteenth century – the painting did not make its way back to Chatsworth until 1994. For a brief history of the portrait’s unusual adventures, see Ben Macintyre’s “The Disappearing Duchess” in *The New York Times* (31 July 1994).

The voluminous hair, the oversized hat, and the billowing dress capture the Duchess at the height of her popularity and her role as the empress of the *ton*. Unlike Lady Stanley, however, the Duchess does not disappear under the weight of her garment and accessories. The right tilt of the gigantic hat is balanced by the bustle to the left and the Duchess stands erect and self-assured, her knowing look further underscoring her command over the image she presents to the audience. There is nothing comical about the stylistic excess evinced in this image. Unlike the satirical commentary that accompanies Lady Stanley's transformation, Gainsborough's rendition of excess does not obscure the woman under the wardrobe; rather, it celebrates that excess by subordinating the wardrobe to her command. Gainsborough's Duchess manages to effectively control the trappings of the *ton* like an inveterate actress.

The satirical distance that emerges in Lady Stanley's narrative aligns the aesthetic excess she condemns with another popular set of images that circulated alongside Georgiana's portraiture: graphic prints that lambaste her stylistic choices and those who avidly replicated them hoping to elevate their social status. While commissioned portraiture by eighteenth-century heavyweights such as Gainsborough or Reynolds represented the Duchess and her signature style in an aggrandizing and laudatory fashion, the graphic satire of the same period denigrated her conspicuous excess by representing it as an oppressively comical masquerade. The tenor of such prints emerges in *The Sylph* in textual form when Lady Stanley compares the "six enormous feathers" in her hair to the "plumes which nodded on the immense casque in the castle of Otranto" (33). The analogy draws on the excess of the general campiness that characterizes Walpole's text,

while gesturing also toward the tragic futility of aesthetic excess – a theme that emerged consistently throughout graphic prints about fashion.⁴⁵ The reference to the casque in *The Castle of Otranto* serves here as a particularly apt *memento mori* that reminds the reader of the insignificance of beauty's accoutrements given the common end that awaits all. Indeed, the enormous plumed casque in *The Castle of Otranto* heralded the beginning of the end for the protagonist of the novel, whose sickly son Conrad was crushed under it along with Manfred's hopes for a lineage (17-18). *The Sylph* returns even more explicitly to the theme of *memento mori* with a nearly lethal incident later in the novel that involves Lady Stanley's coiffure catching on fire and almost resulting in her spectacular death (75). At one of the many social gatherings Lady Stanley attends in the novel, lost in her own thoughts and paying little attention to the vacuous folly surrounding her, the heroine does not notice that some of the ornaments of her coiffure are set ablaze by coming too close to a candle. Saved by her future romantic interest and the titular character, she ridicules the absurd female fashions that "render [women] liable to such incidents" (75).

The complex multiplicity of images and their attendant cultural implications conjured in *The Sylph* reflects the elaborate visual life led by the Duchess of Devonshire. The visual ambiguity apparent in the author's careful negotiation of the cultural currency of the *ton* but also its public ridicule suggests that she was acutely aware of the multimedia consumption of her public persona. The Duchess herself wavers between sincerely celebrating her classed signature aesthetic and ridiculing it as a fruitless

⁴⁵ According to Donald many such prints "took the form of divided figures of a man and a woman, half in court dress and half a skeleton" (78).

masquerade. This instability of the iconic signs through which her public life unfolded speaks to a larger cultural dialogue between representational forms. Most scholarship on the duchess has been fueled by an interest in the place of these images within art-historical narratives that prioritize either form of visual media over the individual featured in both.⁴⁶ Kate Retford stands alone in her investigation of Georgiana's attempts to counterattack the profusion of visual satire on her political activity by enlisting the services of portraiture (196-203). This article builds on Retford's examination of Georgiana's varied visual archive by placing images of her – in painting and in print – in conversation with each other. Unlike Retford, however, I am not only interested in uncovering the specific details of a case study.⁴⁷ This archival rearrangement exposes the iconic ambiguity that subtends the duchess's public persona as a negotiation of oppositional forms of visual media that were aligned with the incipient aesthetic categories of high and low art. In the following pages, I will explore how the multitude of images that recorded and produced the public life of the duchess constitutes an interrelated network of references that captures the aesthetic dialectic between these

⁴⁶ See Diana Donald's *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Age of George III* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1996), and Amelia Rauser's *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 2008). Donald and Rauser have both written on satirical prints featuring the duchess, situating these prints into the complex history of eighteenth-century graphic satire. See also Mark Hallett's *Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014) on the duchess's portraits in the context of his artist-centered investigation of eighteenth-century portraiture. The work of Ann Stott and Linda Colley, while focusing on the duchess herself as a public figure especially during the Westminster Election of 1784, still limits its scope to graphic prints. See Stotts's "Female Patriotism: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Westminster Election of 1784" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 17.3 (November 1993): 60-84, and Colley's "Womanpower" in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 237-250.

⁴⁷ Retford does examine other similar cases, but her analysis is limited to showing that this intermedial dialogue existed, rather than investigating the structural mechanism that defined the terms of the conversation.

emergent categories, as they were instrumentalized in the service of national politics. The Duchess's ever-morphing bodies – be they contained by polite discourses of classed femininity on the walls of the Royal Academy or exploded by satirical attacks plastered on print shop windows – are central to understanding eighteenth-century cultural anxieties about the national import of public femininity.

Originals and Copies: Liberal Art or Mechanical Trade?

Throughout his *Discourses on Art*, President of the Royal Academy Sir Joshua Reynolds attempts to sustain a rigid artistic hierarchy that prized historical painting of Greek, Roman, and religious subjects over portraiture, landscape painting, and modern subjects. This hierarchy rests on an aesthetic logic of universally recognizable and applicable forms, traces of which can be found in all artistic subjects given their abstract intelligibility. This Platonic structure subtends Reynolds's famous great style or manner which deals with lofty generalizable subjects and labors to avoid singularity. Reynolds subordinates the individual to the type and recommends to the Royal Academy students a course of professional training that reflects this preoccupation with the abstract rather than the particular. Indeed, for Reynolds, this distinction constitutes the difference between painting as a liberal art rather than a mechanical trade (57).⁴⁸ His teachings undermine mechanical dexterity in reproducing exact likenesses – no matter how accomplished these likenesses may be –and prioritize Invention, which he defines as the

⁴⁸ In an effort to elevate painting above a mere trade and the artist above a mere mechanic, Jonathan Richardson articulates the same distinction in *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*. Reynolds imbibed these principles through his teacher Thomas Hudson, who was Richardson's student. For more on this, see Mark Hallett's *Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (35-36), and Carol Gibson-Wood's *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment* (7).

artist's ability to capture the spectator's overall mental image of an event (58). While the capacity to reproduce an exact copy of an original subject and eventually the works of the great masters such as Raphael and Michelangelo are the fundamental steps of artistic training, they remain only elementary stepping stones leading to Invention, which can only be acquired through extensive reading (25-26). For Reynolds, replicating as subject or an artwork remains a secondary mechanical skill that reduces the painter to a mere laborer and his art to the merely ornamental (71). Mastery of Invention, on the other hand, leads to the expression of an idea rather than its representation. While the idea itself may be unoriginal, the work of art that expresses it is an original product, not a replica. Thus, by intellectualizing and narrativizing its artistic subject the grand style leads to a temporally transcendent expression of metaphysical forms that endures beyond the details of the historical context that produced it. As Reynolds puts it, "present time and future may be considered as rivals, and he who solicits the one must expect to be discountenanced by the other" (73). Art that deals with the immediacy of present events, characters, and concerns can only at best result in accomplished imitation; art that aspires toward futurity must abandon the dexterous mimicry of contextual details and seek to express eternal truths.

While it may at first appear that there is little room in Reynolds's exclusive and idealized grand style for portraiture, he allows that borrowing upward could improve the present-focused categories such as portraiture by elevating them into the transcendent. Thus, portraiture can partake of the grand style and strive for longevity by "approaching [its subject] to a general idea" (72). Reynolds admits though that by "ennobling the

character of a countenance” the portrait painter risks sacrificing likeness, the principal concern of the portrait. Despite the ostensible inflexibility he evinces here, Reynolds’s portraits – the overwhelming majority of his work – drew on the grand style to produce allegorical likenesses that omitted “all the minute breaks and peculiarities in the face, and change[d] the dress from a temporary fashion to one more permanent” (72). The most famous representative example of this practice is his portrait of *Sarah Siddons as The Tragic Muse*. As Mark Hallett explains, the Siddons portrait raises her to “an elevated allegorical realm” by associating her with a litany of classical references ranging from “Michelangelo’s images of majestic male prophets on the ceiling of the Vatican” to sculptural groups such as the Laocoon and the Niobe, “prized as most perfectly embodying the tragic mode in classical art” (404). While one might be tempted to point out the paradoxicality of Reynolds’s method here, it is important to note the distinction between referentiality – what Reynolds does in his allegorical portraits – and replication – what lesser genres accomplish when they are merely preoccupied with capturing likeness. Reynolds extended the allegorical treatment of the grand manner that we see in Siddons’s portrait to female sitters who were not professional actresses. As I will demonstrate below, his portraits of Georgiana are always negotiating between the individual and the type, testifying to the always already hybridization of the artistic categories that Reynolds was at pains to render distinct. What my forthcoming discussion will show is that the porousness of such emergent categories extended to graphic prints that actively plundered from both portraiture and historical painting, constantly rearticulating the border between them.

While lesser genres of painting may have straddled the line between the grand style and the ornamental, graphic prints would surely seem to lack the qualities that Reynolds attributes to the grand style. Graphic prints are by definition replicas, especially for Reynolds, whose savvy relationship with print reproductions of his work has been extensively documented. As Richard T. Godfrey puts it, “the essence of prints is in their multiplicity” (9). This multiplicity allowed Reynolds to disseminate images of his work beyond the walls of the Royal Academy, aristocratic homes and those of the rising middle class. “Over 400 prints authorised by Reynolds were published during his lifetime. Unauthorised piracies and copies take the total much higher” (Clayton 50). If historical painting was a liberal art, printmaking would certainly be a mechanical trade, if we are to apply Reynolds’s terminology in *Discourses on Art*. Even when discussing arguably the most consequential engraver of the eighteenth century, William Hogarth, Reynolds refrains from evaluating his prints and only gives qualified praise to his paintings of “low and vulgar characters” (51). But for engravers and printmakers the matter was more complicated. Hogarth himself, early in his career as an engraver, had defied the status of engraving as “a pictorial relay, something that successfully passed on an extant image, [rather] than as a self-sufficient work of art” (Hallett 15). After setting up his own shop as an engraver, he proceeded to introduce into his work the signs of “artistic invention” (16). Despite Hogarth’s revision of the fundamental relationship between paintings and prints through his artistic praxis, the fact remained that the utility

of prints resided in their inexpensive reproducibility.⁴⁹ Whether they were replicas of paintings or original scenes, prints could be quickly copied – legally and otherwise – and disseminated widely. While the painting’s aura, to use Walter Benjamin’s term, remained intact, unencumbered by such special-temporal limitations, graphic prints collapsed the distance between the masses and the artwork, bringing the two into close proximity (23).⁵⁰ For Benjamin, the aura – the uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art – “is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition” which finds expression into a cult (24). Echoing Reynolds’s interest in the grand style as a continuation of the idealized aesthetics of the Greco-Roman period and the high Renaissance, Benjamin suggests that the aura is a universally intelligible – albeit historically changeable – modality of interaction with a work of art. Reynolds’s portraits of eighteenth-century characters steeped as they are in a long aesthetic tradition maintain their air of uniqueness and authenticity while confined to spaces such as the Royal Academy, his studio, and the private homes of his patrons. Although this accessibility to artwork was truly unprecedented, such spaces still did not equal the reach of graphic prints.⁵¹ Depending on

⁴⁹ Of course, some engraving methods were more time-consuming and expensive than others. For more on this, see Tim Clayton’s “‘Figures of Fame’: Reynolds and the Printed Image” in *Reynolds: The Making of Celebrity* (49-59).

⁵⁰ Although Benjamin’s text focuses on photography and film as modes of mechanical reproduction that “freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction,” he recognizes woodcutting and engraving as early forms of mechanical reproduction. He identifies lithography as marking “a fundamentally new stage in the technology of reproduction” because it enabled “daily changing variations” and was able “to keep pace with movable-type printing” (20).

⁵¹ Indeed, the Royal Academy, at least ostensibly, claimed a deliberate design of exclusive access by declaring that “they have not been able to suggest any other Means, than that of receiving money for admittance, to prevent the Rooms being filled by improper Persons, to the entire Exclusion of those for whom the Exhibition is apparently intended” (qtd. in Brewer 246). For an examination of the increasing number and types of public exhibition spaces in the eighteenth century, see John Brewer’s “The Market and the Academy” in *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (56-122).

their quality, prints were available for consumption at a range of low prices and sometimes even for free in such public spaces as coffeehouses.⁵²

The wider accessibility of reproducible images is partially why Benjamin both mourns and celebrates the decay of the aura in the age of mechanical reproducibility. The increased proximity of the artwork to the masses signaled the democratization of art and by extension, its political potential.⁵³ The recruitment of graphic prints in the service of radical politics throughout the eighteenth century is a testament to their rhetorical effectiveness.⁵⁴ Indeed, the reproducibility of graphic prints made them an indispensable instrument in both attacking and defending a range of political positions in the eighteenth century. According to Vic Gatrell, “few prints had fixed political meanings, and their willfully parodic distortions would always inhibit simple binary interpretations as either ‘for’ or ‘against’ the established order.” Gatrell suggest that this was the case, despite the content of the print, and even “the artist’s conscious intentions” (141). Ian Haywood identifies this “insidious fecundity and promiscuity” as “the problem with the caricature gaze . . . its seemingly limitless capacity to generate a phantomal alternative reality of

⁵² A complete catalogue of Reynolds’s prints lists prices from one pound fifty shillings for *George III* to two shillings six pence for *Dionysius the Aeropagite*, with the bulk of the prints priced between five and seven shillings (*The Gentleman’s Magazine* 183-188). Copies of such authorized prints proliferated. Clayton reports that Reynolds’s portrait of *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* by Edward Fisher was copied at least thirteen times. Depending on their sizes, the prints ranged in price from ten shillings and six pence to one shilling. (52-52).

⁵³ Painting was also subject to this democratization. Members of the rising middle class were frequent commissioners of portraiture, a practice that was once reserved for the aristocracy. For a thorough treatment of the subject, see David Solkin’s *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* and John Brewer’s *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*.

⁵⁴ Graphic prints were also effective in the hands of reactionaries. Gillray’s case exemplifies this political promiscuity. Although he was paid generously by the government, the rhetoric of Gillray’s caricatures was inconsistent. See Donald for a summary of Gillray’s shifting political allegiances (36-43) and Gatrell (258-292).

‘spectropolitical’ encounters” (14). Haywood’s gendered language here is telling; it suggests the feminization of caricature as creative visual mode the essence of which resided in its proliferative potential.⁵⁵ The case of the Duchess of Devonshire is significant because it constitutes a negotiation between these fecund propensities of caricature and the actual fecundity (or its absence) of the female body. These same concerns over reproductivity extend to Georgiana’s portraits, further expanding the “intervisual” conversation surrounding her public image.⁵⁶ The images I will examine at length below are part of a reciprocal and interrelated exchange among these two visual genres that communicate by ceaselessly rewriting the female body and attendant anxieties about its (re)productive failures and successes. My analysis will show that these anxieties are closely related to analogical processes of replication in eighteenth-century painting and graphic satire.

Georgiana, the Duchess: Containing Aesthetic Excess through Doubling

On June 7, 1774, Georgiana Cavendish married the fifth Duke of Devonshire in a small ceremony at Wimbledon Park (Foreman 20). This significant alliance launched her career as one of the most fashionable socialites in England, a career that would only grow more dazzling and controversial as she learned to navigate the intricate social and political circles of the aristocracy and their hangers-on. Her mother’s worst fears seemed

⁵⁵ Even more specifically, in his analysis of James Gillray’s *Sin, Death and the Devil* in “Milton’s Monsters” Haywood argues that like Milton’s *Sin*, “caricature can be regarded as the monstrously productive offspring of corrupt power, continuously releasing its fearsome litter into the cultural bloodstream (14).

⁵⁶ I borrow this term from Haywood who defines it as the “aspect of the satirical visual imagination [that] covers both its simultaneous parodying of and borrowing from mainstream classical and Romantic art and its constant recycling and modification of its own tropes and traditions” (8).

to gradually materialize as Georgiana became caught up in the world of the *ton*, indeed, as she became one of its leaders.⁵⁷ As such, she was the constant subject of periodicals and graphic prints that were daily consumed by the London public. As discussed above, Gainsborough's famously elusive "hat portrait" presents Georgiana as the empress of the *ton* in the most positive light, insisting on her exuberant and confident persona. Painted at least eleven years after her marriage, this portrait elides the fraught private and public drama that followed Georgiana throughout her early life as the Duchess of Devonshire, foregrounding instead, her unquestionable social triumph in the form of her signature style. Unlike Gainsborough's portrait, Sir Joshua Reynolds's earlier rendition of the young Duchess (figure 19) painted in 1775-1776 – shortly after her marriage, presents a more modest version of the empress of the *ton*. Likely commissioned by Georgiana's mother, Lady Spencer, the portrait retains the sitter's personal aesthetic but mitigates its overall effect by subordinating the individual character of the woman to her role as a duchess. Reynolds's depiction attempts to contain the aesthetic excess associated with Georgiana by rewriting it in the service of classed femininity. At the same time, by insisting on strategically twinning Georgiana's image in the portrait and in the material conditions of its exhibition, the portrait acknowledges the artifice of this rewriting process.

⁵⁷ Lady Spencer's discusses her anxieties regarding Georgiana's age and her early marriage in a letter to an unidentified correspondent. (Lord Bessborough 11)



Figure 19. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (ca. 1775-76), Joshua Reynolds, Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA.

Reynolds's attention to Georgiana's elaborate and luxurious dress underscores the affluence of his subject, and her role as a queen of fashion is only gestured at subtly through the ostrich plumes that adorn her moderately towering coiffure, especially when compared to Gainsborough's treatment of the same. Reynolds's strategic deployment of a beam of light illuminating Georgiana's face, chest, and exquisitely delicate hands

emphasizes the milky whiteness of Georgiana's skin – a signifier of the elite refinement that was a universally intelligible marker of the aristocracy. The splash of light onto Georgiana's dress highlights the folds of fabric around her disappearing figure, the contours of her lower body barely detectable under the weight of the billowing fabric. The Grecian dress reflects Reynolds's discussion of the strategic hybridization of contemporary portraiture by borrowing from a classical aesthetic, the white fabric folds mimicking the marble drapery of ancient statuary. Reynolds retains a suggestion of Georgiana's youthful and desirable physicality in his treatment of her décolletage, which plunges into dangerous depths, even as the uniformly stark whiteness of her chest prevents the desiring gaze from identifying any corporeal details. This marble-like whiteness is consistent with the contemporary valuation of feminine modesty and its expression in the skin's tendency to blush. The whiteness of Georgiana's chest and arms combined with the slight redness of her cheeks reiterates the common eighteenth-century belief that "the blush is the body-language of beauty" (Shawe-Taylor 125).

Georgiana's positioning on the staircase reinforces her alignment with the aristocracy while also introducing a measure of ambiguity into the abounding signifiers of class. The liminality of the staircase as a two-way conduit that leads from the domestic space of the ducal home to the open space of the garden and vice-versa captures the transitional period in the first few years of Georgiana's marriage, as she negotiated between her former country-girl self and her new fashionable self at the center of the

aristocratic *ton*.⁵⁸ A friend of Lady Spencer, Georgiana's mother, and later a frequent visitor at Chatsworth, Reynolds would have personally witnessed and appreciated the lively youth's transformation into a Duchess. The child that he had always treated like some kind of "fairy queen" (Leveson Gower 14) had grown into an important sophisticated society woman before his very eyes.⁵⁹ This dual treatment of the sitter as a subject in process emerges even more explicitly in the nude statue in the garden. Positioned much like Georgiana herself, with her right hand lifted slightly below her waist, her head drooping in a melancholy fashion, the statue questions the coherent and laboriously contained body in the foreground. Unlike Georgiana's assuredly erect head, even as it labors to support the ponderous coiffure, the statue's head sinks tellingly. This significant distinction suggests that in addition to reinforcing the sitter's connection to classical antiquity, the statue could also function as a displaced register for the sitter's interior state, capturing the affective tenor of the portrait.⁶⁰ When read alongside the statue, the whiteness of Georgiana's skin in the foreground becomes pallor of a melancholy cast. While such pallor was an indicator of a desirable feminine sensibility

⁵⁸ It is possible that the blocky, monumental balustrade belongs to the grand staircase at the Palladian villa at Chiswick, which was Georgiana's "favorite" residence (Leveson Gower 23). However, Chiswick's balustrade would have been topped by an urn, which is missing here. It is unlikely that the location is Chatsworth, given the metal balustrade adorning its more minimalist frontal staircase. See pictures of Chatsworth in *Georgiana: Extracts from the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, Ed. by The Earl of Bessborough (30). It is also possible that the setting refers to Althorp, the Spencers' ancestral home, given that the portrait might have been designed to hang next to a portrait of Georgiana's brother, George John Spencer, Viscount Althorp (Hallett 264). I do not yet know what happened to the portrait after it was exhibited at the Royal Academy. It is possible that it was hung in one of the ducal homes – perhaps the reason that critics assumed it was commissioned by the Duke and not Lady Spencer.

⁵⁹Hallett's reading reinforces this dual significance by pairing the portrait with another group portrait of Georgiana, her sister Harriet, and their brother George by Angelica Kauffman. He points out that Georgiana is wearing a similar dress in both portrait and she seems to have "stood up and walked into her own image, leaving her siblings behind "both literally and metaphorically" (265).

⁶⁰ For more on the role of sculpture in painting, see Donald Posner's "The True Path of Fragonard's Progress of Love" (530).

proper to the idealized pastoral landscape that Georgiana occupies, it also hints at the obscured narrative that informs this portrait. The sitter's petrified replica literalizes both her immobility and helplessness under the weight of her meticulously manufactured spectacle of classicized aristocratic femininity.⁶¹ She is reduced to an inert art object eliciting the contemplating gaze of the scrutinizing male appraiser fond of Grecian marbles.

The patch of blue over the natural space of the garden does promise a potential escape from Georgiana's discursive imprisonment in the skylless enclosure in the foreground. The garden coincides with her more carefree past, while the space closer to the picture plane represents her more immediate present in all its grandeur. It is tempting to suggest that the fantastical gardens of Althorp might still be accessible to her, as she tilts slightly forward, preparing to descend from the heights of the Duchy into the natural grounds of pleasure and leisure. However, the extensive land disappearing into the horizon reminds us that vast landscapes of pleasure and leisure are inseparable from the country estate and therefore, an integral feature of the visual articulation of the aristocratic elite. In Ann Bermingham words, nature is here reduced to "a sign of its owners' status and privilege," while simultaneously signifying the justification or "the primary source of value that legitimizes this status and privilege" (15). Thus, even the liberatory potential of the garden can be diffused by the dominant trope of classed femininity as the open space becomes an "aristocratic arcadia" (Hallett 267). Reynolds's

⁶¹ Georgiana's letters to her mother and Lady Stanley's letters to her sister in *The Sylph* corroborate the melancholy content of the portrait. Georgiana was disappointed with the nondemonstrative, "naturally lethargic" and phlegmatic Duke even as she expertly and effortlessly submitted to the social requirements of public display as his wife. See Leveson Gower (19) and Foreman (29-31).

spectacular portrait confines the vivacious and scintillating young Duchess to the social position she occupies, although it acknowledges the multivalent significance of this confinement through her duplicate in the garden. The private self here yields to the orchestrated public image that celebrates the landed aristocracy and justifies its supremacy through the discourse of civic humanism.⁶² Georgiana is instrumentalized in the service of this visual rhetoric even as the portrait acknowledges its overt dimming of alternative visual narratives.

The additional layer of latent meaning that exists simultaneously with the readily available content of this portrait adds narrative depth and complexity to an otherwise standard example of the grand style aesthetic that Reynolds champions in *Discourses on Art*. Georgiana's muted double does not attempt to claim precedence over the central image, but it does question its authenticity. However, this unmasking function of the double would only be accessible to a well-informed reader intimate with the personal details of the sitter as a private individual rather than an aesthetic type. Unsurprisingly, this portrait was commissioned by Georgiana's mother, who was the principal recipient of Georgiana's anxious reports of her new life as the Duchess of Devonshire. The general public would have limited accessibility to this veiled narrative until at least two years later when *The Sylph* was published.⁶³ Georgiana's candid description of Lady Julia Stanley's initiation into the ways of the elite aristocracy is painful, to say the least. She is required to not only partake of a ludicrously artificial (and even potentially lethal) visual

⁶² For more on the relationship between civic humanism and painting, see John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public."*

⁶³ *The Sylph* was published anonymously but the public guessed its author not too long after its publication, and Georgiana reportedly admitted her authorship in private (Foreman 59).

aesthetic, but she must substantially revise the contours of her moral and ethical self in order to be one of its members. *The Sylph* paints a portrait of the aristocracy that destabilizes its claim to moral superiority; Georgiana unveils its inner social mechanisms as mercenary, debauched, and devoid of real feeling. Lady Stanley's nondemonstrative husband continues his sexual escapades after his marriage and ends up committing suicide after prostituting his wife to pay his debts (167-174).⁶⁴ Lord Stanley's aristocratic circle spend their time drinking, gambling and pursuing each-other's spouses. Georgiana's own Lord Stanley, the Duke of Devonshire, had fathered a child with another woman the year of their marriage; Georgiana would eventually adopt this illegitimate child and raise her alongside her own children.⁶⁵ Like the novel, the portrait exhibits a similar binary structure that destabilizes the authenticity of its official narratives about marriage and the aristocracy by positing an outside/inside or a before/after split when it comes to Georgiana's transformation. Even as it spectacularizes classed femininity, this dual treatment questions its desirability by exposing it as a manufactured façade.

Georgiana's portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776, and according to Hallett, it was one of four full-length portraits of fashionable society women by Reynolds that year (*Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* 261). The portrait hung next to that of Mrs. Lloyd in the Pall Mall exhibition room and according to Hallett, the images

⁶⁴ Jonathan Gross explains that these events were inspired by the real-life misfortunes of Anne Seymour Damer, the sculptor whose parasitical husband committed suicide in similar circumstances (*The Sylph* xii).

⁶⁵ Foreman 70-72. This was only the beginning of their increasingly flexible marriage. See Foreman for a detailed treatment of the relationship between Georgiana, the Duke, and Lady Elizabeth Foster, a complicated and still not fully understood dynamic.

functioned as a “temporary dyptich” that provided a twinned representation of elite female beauty” (264). This additional doubling of the portrait in its exhibition is suggestive. The other two portraits that Reynolds could have chosen to hang next to Georgiana’s were portraits of aristocratic women: Charlotte, Countess of Dysart and Jane, Countess of Harrington. As Hallett explains, the newly married Mrs. Lloyd carving her husband’s initials on a tree was a proper companion piece for Georgiana given her recent marriage to the Duke.⁶⁶ It is not only the common narrative of a recently altered marital status and their formal properties that link these two portraits, however.⁶⁷ Like Joanna Lloyd herself, Mrs. Lloyd’s husband, although immensely wealthy is a commoner.⁶⁸ This crucial difference between the two otherwise aesthetically similar depictions of female sitters in the grand style adds another layer to the doubling to Georgiana’s pictorial narrative. While Mrs. Lloyd is more overtly allegorized than Georgiana, she is still part of a series populated by elite aristocratic women in bucolic settings. Her dress is similar to Georgiana’s, her coiffure almost as elaborate, and she is marked by the same attractive pallor. Unlike Georgiana, however, the undisputed empress of fashion and member of two of the most socially and politically consequential families in England, Mrs. Lloyd has no claims to distinction beyond her wealth. Her pairing with Georgiana, although ostensibly motivated by aesthetic choices, threatens to

⁶⁶ Hallett suggests Mrs. Lloyd’s representation could be a reference to Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, or Prior’s *Henry and Emma: A Poem on the Model of the Nut-Brown Maid* (266).

⁶⁷ See Hallett for a thorough analysis of the sitters’ position and the treatment of light and darkness in these two portraits (266-267).

⁶⁸ Joanna Lloyd was co-heiress to the fortune of her father, the wealthy merchant Joh Leigh, of Northcourt House, isle of Wight. Her husband, Richard Bennett Lloyd, acquired his fortune from his family’s tobacco plantation (Plock).

further destabilize the image of aristocratic femininity in its companion portrait. As the passage I discussed in the introduction suggests, Georgiana's signature style was open to emulation and reproduction by commoners with the financial resources to engage in conspicuous consumption. Lady Stanley's hairstylist's response to her ingratitude is couched precisely in terms of the impropriety surrounding the appropriation of classed style by commoners such as Lady Stanley. Mrs. Lloyd's pairing with Georgiana's portrait further undercuts the celebration of status the latter puts forth by hinting at its reproducibility beyond the aristocratic realm. If Georgiana's sculpted double mitigates the coherence of classed femininity by underscoring its constructedness, Mrs. Lloyd's presence exacerbates this effect by extending the privilege of the performance to the wealthy middling sort.

The confined and confining grammar of elite aristocratic femininity in Reynolds's portrait is paradoxically in a constant state of precarious rewriting. Its ostensible exclusivity is undermined by its formal and material replication. Georgiana's aesthetic excess is constantly threatening to spill over, therefore always in danger of being read as a performance available for emulation by the eager public to which it was becoming increasingly accessible visually and textually. This increased availability extends beyond the Royal Academy and the artist's studio to any household that could afford to purchase print copies of her images. In 1780 the engraver Valentine Green included Georgiana's portrait in a mezzotint series titled "Beauties of the Present Age" literalizing Reynolds's multiplication of her image in the painting and in its exhibition (Hallett 282-283). Given Reynolds's savvy self-promotion throughout his career, it is likely that he was involved

in this project, a business venture catering to the desire of the masses for consuming public figures, an effect far from Reynolds's ideals as promulgated in his *Discourses on Art*. Georgiana's multiplication in print reiterates her reproduction in the painting and the exhibition room, and constitutes an invitation for further replication in its consumption by an urban public eager to emulate her aesthetic excess. It is this wider public consumption of Georgiana's image that I want to examine next in another genre of prints that circulated widely alongside her portraits and their engravings: an innumerable array of satirical prints commenting on her private and public life.

Georgiana, the Politician: The Satirized Body in the Westminster Election of 1784

Whatever subtleness Reynolds employed in the replication of Georgiana's image is summarily dismissed in her treatment by graphic satirists. The reproduction of Georgiana's image in late-eighteenth caricature is both explicit and heavy-handed. Not only do such prints refuse to contain her aesthetic excess but they deliberately explode her physicality and employ the resulting fluidity of her image to comment on the danger and the appeal of unbridled classed femininity. Although the rest of this section will largely focus on satirical prints circulating during the Westminster Election of 1784, I would like to begin with a print that circulated much earlier. Mathew Darly's *The Vis-à-vis Bisected or The Ladies [sic] Coop* (figure 20) was published in 1776 and was available to the public alongside the Reynolds portrait analyzed above. These two disparate images posit distinct articulations of the aesthetic excess associated with elite femininity, but they both rely on duplication as a formal method of accomplishing their respective ends. While the Reynolds portrait employs doubling in order to add narrative

complexity to its subject, the Darly print uses doubling to foreground the absence of authenticity.



Figure 20. *The Vis-à-vis Bisected or The Ladies [sic] Coop*, Published by Mathew Darly, 1776. The British Museum, London.

Amelia Rauser has usefully defined caricature as “an ironic mode of portraiture” that “paradoxically makes the most like likeness via deformation” (100). While Reynolds’s portrait puts forth an attenuated, even modest version of Georgiana, the empress of the *ton*, the Darly print exaggerates her signature style much as Georgiana herself does in her description of Lady Stanley’s metamorphosis in *The Sylph*. The subtitle of the print is a clear pun on the profusion of feathers that adorn the riders’ respective coiffures. The women’s luxurious garments further identify them as members of the elite femininity, and even though the print does not explicitly identify Georgiana as

its subject, the towering plumage and the radishes hanging from the woman on the right are unambiguous allusions to her public persona and the specific fashions she popularized. The blue and buff ribbons strewn all over the woman on the left further insist on the role of the Devonshire family as prominent Whig supporters. Georgiana, here, is split into two symmetrical figures that collectively embody her signature style. The women's unnatural bow is here construed as the result of their equally unnatural sartorial embellishments and conspires along with the title of the print and the complacent smile on the woman on the left to create a distinctly Frenchified atmosphere. The continental influence that permeates the print speaks to a popular narrative of excessive feminine fashion as a dangerous weapon that could be used to seduce and control sturdy, traditional British manhood. The threat grew even more insidious as this sartorial excess spilled over onto men themselves, who returned from their Grand Tour sporting a similarly profuse personal aesthetic that often marked them as feminized specimens of the Macaroni variety.⁶⁹ The employment of the woman on the right reinforces this multivalent threat as the image pairs her French smile with a letter – likely a love letter gesturing at the morally dissolute ways of elite femininity and masculinity alike. The version of Georgiana that this print puts forth neatly summarizes cultural anxieties about excessive feminine aesthetics, but its formal significance proceeds beyond this perfunctory commentary that it shared with an abundance of contemporary prints.

⁶⁹ See Donald on the association between French politics and feminine dominance which posited a threat to British manhood and the attendant concepts of patriotism and liberty (81).

The title of the print refers to the type of carriage that forces its passengers to face one another, its nomenclature literally meaning face to face. Of course, due to the passengers' sartorial excess the title is merely ironic, as the possibility of face to face interaction is foreclosed. Failing in its intended design, the symmetrical structure of the carriage creates a dysfunctional mirror image that relies on doubling as a repetitive visual trope. While in the interior of the Reynolds portrait doubling served to convey a sense of authentic subjectivity, in the Darly print, doubling suggests a performative *mise-en-abyme* that unveils the utter absence of any original authenticity. The formal thrust of the print relies on a logic of revelation through unveiling; the bisection of the carriage promises to uncover what would otherwise be inaccessible to the eye. This split produces a binary structure reminiscent of the inside/outside division that informs the Reynolds portrait. Unlike the Reynolds portrait, however, instead of adding complexity to the sitter's subjectivity, the split only reveals another layer of stylized doubling. The imperfect symmetry of the doubles literalizes the performative dynamic of mirroring. As Jacques Lacan observes in his famous examination of the mirror, "in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject [facing the mirror] feels are animating him," the mirror image offers a more perfect and whole image of himself (2). The more sturdy and rigorous mirror reflection is then internalized as an authentic version of the self, making the core vision of selfhood the result of fictive effects. The travelers in the vis-à-vis, deformed as they are by their exaggerated stylizing, exemplify the distorting effects of the ideal mirror image. They simultaneously embody a manufactured aesthetic wholeness and the fragmentation that the internalization of this seeming integrity produces.

Although the print's act of unveiling through splitting promises an internal truth, it only succeeds in delivering imperfect copies where the viewer expects to find an original.

Beyond the cultural critique of conspicuous consumption and imported aesthetics, this print is significant because its formal play emulates the conditions of its own existence. The print's frame-within-a-frame structure enacts the potential for multiplicity at the heart of printmaking. It is no accident that this structure relies on classed femininity and the proliferative potential of its excessive aesthetics. Not only were satirical prints as unstoppable in their dissemination as Georgiana's image was conducive to attempts at social emulation, but the prints in their multiplicity facilitated such emulation even in their critique of her image. As Diana Donald has observed, although caricatures of this period were overwhelmingly critical of the oppressive fashions featured here, they also served as models for the same contemporary fashions. Considering another print by Darly titled "The Extravaganza," Donald observes that caricature "has slipped the lead of its ostensibly corrective function to offer an even more beguiling display of the limitless possibilities of fashion" (88) Donald's review of contemporary sources reveals that fashion caricatures failed to reform taste or the "endless changes in dress"; Indeed, they might have even encouraged such changes by serving as more elaborate and richer sources of contemporary style than fashion plates, which were limited in size and therefore could include only a small amount of visual detail (89). This paradoxical cultural work speaks to the print's unpredictable reception and appropriation. While pamphlets and newspaper reports could articulate their politics unambiguously, graphic prints were rhetorically fluid. Their ubiquity enabled a kind of rhetorical promiscuity that

foreclosed the possibility of a single reading.⁷⁰ Similarly to the seductive narrative imposed upon elite femininity, caricatures were a semiotic fountain of meaning that could not be managed as adroitly as a painting. Unlike paintings, such prints were too widely accessible and mobile to be controlled through their physical placement or the rigidity of their visual tropes.

While significant as an early example of a low brow version of Georgiana's public image that existed alongside the Royal Academy visual articulation of the same, the visual impact of this image pales in comparison to the deluge of politicized prints that exploded when Georgiana's public presence was amplified during the Westminster Election of 1784. Georgiana and her sister Harriet campaigned for the Whig candidate Charles James Fox and against Sir Cecil Wray and Lord Admiral Hood in the spring of 1784.⁷¹ The political valence of the election unleashed a flurry of textual and visual propaganda both attacking and extolling the work of female canvassers. The most notable images from the period feature the recurring trope of the kissing Duchess, depicting Georgiana and her female entourage exchanging sexual favors for votes.⁷² Due to Georgiana's existing popularity, she became a prime target of government attacks. In a letter to her mother, she expresses her vexation "at the abuse in the newspapers," observing that it was "very hard that they should single [her] out when all the women on [her] side do as much" (Bessborough 79). In the same letter Georgiana denies that she

⁷⁰ The most notable example of this phenomenon was Hogarth's caricature of John Wilkes published in 1763, just as the later was incarcerated. Although a clear attack on Wilkes and his politics, the print was appropriated by Wilkes supporters and paired with broadsides that lauded his integrity. See Rauser (50-55).

⁷¹ For a thorough account of the election and the contending political platforms see *History of the Westminster Election* by J. Hartley.

⁷² See Anne A Stott's "Female Patriotism" for more on the image of the kissing Duchess.

was ever kissed, despite the widespread reports of the event. She confesses that “Sr and Ly [name illegible] were both kissed, so it’s very hard [she] who was not shd have the reputation of it” (79).

Whether such reports were accurate or not, the newspapers and print shops continued to churn out a profusion of explicit accusations surrounding Georgiana’s canvassing behavior. Amelia Rauser has persuasively argued that the group of prints featuring Georgiana and her entourage in sexually suggestive encounters with Westminster butchers works out cultural anxieties similar to those I discussed in the print above. She interprets the butcher as an incarnation of John Bull, the “preeminent figure of national identity after 1780,” and his seduction by Georgiana as the result of the excessive power wielded by decadent and phallic aristocratic femininity (123-124). While this group of prints has received considerable scholarly attention, others remain neglected perhaps because they are not as easily categorized into thematic clusters. In the next few pages, I will look at several examples of other less famous caricatures that circulated during the Westminster Election and whose content may have prompted a high art response that sought to publicly extoll Georgiana’s increasingly precarious virtue.

The *Devonshire Amusement* (figure 21) was published on May 5, 1784, and it is significant in its attempt to proceed beyond generalized accusations of indecent behavior and advance a deeply personal attack against the Duchess and her politics. While most Westminster Election prints question Georgiana’s virtue by assaulting her sexuality and her related empowerment, this caricature attempts to impugn her maternity, a deeply fraught subject that had caused Georgiana ample grief for most of her married life.



Figure 21. *The Devonshire Amusement*, Published by McPhail, 5 May 1784. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Georgiana had several miscarriages before she was able to carry a pregnancy to term, giving birth to her daughter, Little G, on July 12th, 1783 after nine years of marriage to the Duke (*Letters* 61). The significance of this protracted moment is apparent in Georgiana’s effusive letter to Lady Spencer shortly after her daughter’s birth:

How thankful ev’ry hour makes me more and more for the goodness of God in granting me my child, for tho’ my love for her is beyond any interested motive, and that I declare to Heaven, I should be happy with her on a dunghill. Yet how sh’d I have encounter’d all all the storms of this year without her. She has shelter’d me from them, and the idea of my having a son prevents many schemes that may be thought of against me. With my own faults and giddiness, if the Duke had not been the most just as well as the most generous of men, I must have been undone. And then to crown my happiness I have my little angel, whose presence would make me support almost any misfortune.

(*Letters* 67)

The anxiety that permeates Georgiana's celebration of her daughter's birth is a result of her decision to finally disclose her copious gambling debts to her husband, who proceeded to pay them. The arrival of Georgiana's child was thus a blessing to her in more than one way. Relieved of her financial onus as well as the ever-present threat of infertility, Georgiana was free – at least temporarily – from the judgment of her impatient relatives. *The Devonshire Amusement* offers an inside view into this aspect of Georgiana's private life and maps political concerns of a national scale onto her anxious maternal body. On the left half of the print, we see Georgiana in unusually casual dress. The shawl draped over her shoulders is of a drab, coarse material, and the droopy plumage in her disheveled hair is more suggestive of fox's tails than feathers. Her face is marked by a noticeable amount of blush, a result of either her physical exertion during canvassing or an association with stage actresses – both options implying improper sexual behavior. She holds in her right hand a staff with Charles Fox's head on it and fox's tails on each side of a sign with the word "liberty" affixed on the staff. This recognizable configuration is an allusion to the cap of liberty, an emblem Fox's supporters sought to equate with Fox and his politics. The bottom end of the staff, however, falls right between Georgiana's feet, drawing attention to their suggestive apartness. The blue ribbon emerging from underneath her dress and the bit of paper promulgates her "secret influence," in case the phallic imagery of the staff went unnoticed. Further suggestion of her sexual indecency unfolds on her left, where we see her holding an image of the Prince of Wales, the speech bubble above it stating "A Prince should not be limited." Georgiana's friendship with the Prince of Wales, a prominent ally

of the Whigs, had been a topic of conversation long before the Westminster Election. The dissolute behavior of the Prince of Wales, his debts, his affair with the actress Mary Robinson had been the subject of periodicals and prints prior to the Election, and Georgiana's connection to him did not reflect well upon her.⁷³

Reinforcing the theme of sexual availability, at Georgiana's feet we see a caricature of the most famous series of prints during the Westminster Election, an image of Georgiana kissing a butcher. Above her a speech bubble declares her opposition to Sir Cecil Wray's plan to tax maids, which the print perverts into "maidenheads," questioning Georgiana's virtue by linking her politics to her body's availability. This connection links distinctly female labor with female sexuality. The easy transition from "maid" to "maidenhead" is not only a linguistic slippage; it also signals the limitations on the kind of labor that a woman is expected to perform. Georgiana's proper labor is also of a domestic nature, according to this print. Her outdoor political excursions subvert the customary division of labor that assigns woman to the home and her husband to the public sphere. In the right frame of the print, we see the Duke of Devonshire changing diapers, as it were. The speech bubble informs us that "this work does not suit [the Duke's] fancy," and he considers himself "cursed" for taking a "Politic Mad Wife." The Duke is wearing neither his hat, which hangs on the wall, nor his ducal coronet which sits on the chair behind him – both signs of his public function. As the portrait above him suggests, he is wearing cuckold's horns instead, presumably because of his wife's alleged

⁷³ See Stotts for more on the relationship between Georgiana, the Prince, and Fox. In her letters Georgiana mentions her relationship with the Prince as a source of conflict between her and her husband. Her steward Heaton hinted at the impropriety of her connection which exacerbated Georgiana's then fraught relationship with her husband, a result of her financial mismanagement (Bessborough 70).

sexual relationships with Charles James Fox, or even the Prince of Wales. Of course what the print glosses over is that the Duke of Devonshire was not a particularly skilled politician. Indeed, he only gave his maiden speech in the House of Lords on March 17, 1780, on which occasion Edmund Burke congratulated Georgiana and expressed his desire that the event would inaugurate only the first of many others (Foreman 75). Burke hoped that the habit of speaking would make it “more disagreeable to him to continue silent on an interesting occasion than hitherto it ha[d] been to him, to speak upon it” (qtd. in Foreman 75). Burke’s hopes failed to materialize, as the Duke produced no other speech in the House of Lords and his political silence became permanent. The Duke’s public ineffectualness was not interesting to caricaturists though; if anything it only served to enhance his wife’s “vitality,” as Stotts puts it, and I would add her “indecenty” in more than amply compensating for her husband’s taciturnity.

The Devonshire Amusement insists on impugning Georgiana’s feminine failures with even more specificity by mapping them onto her maternal body. While the right side of the print accuses her of neglect, the deliberately maternal aesthetic of her breasts on the left frame asserts her guilt even more forcefully. Georgiana’s breasts in this print depart from the more traditionally erotic depiction of breasts in contemporary caricature. Elsewhere (figure 22), her breasts are imaged as those of a young, desirable woman, albeit for the ultimate purposes of denigrating her character and exposing her as a “woman of the people” – the equivalent of a prostitute. Despite being fully covered by her dress, Georgiana’s breasts in *The Devonshire Amusement* are available to the onlooker through their meticulously contoured shape. Their noticeably pendulous form

droops over the “Fox” sign imprinted on Georgiana’s chest, and is more than suggestive of her neglected lactating duties, conjuring her vexed relationship with childbearing and childcare.



Figure 22. *The Tipling Dutchess Returning from Canvassing*, Published by A. Aitken, 29 April, 1784. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Georgiana insisted on breastfeeding Little G to whom she was tenaciously attached, despite the belief that breastfeeding would delay her ability to become pregnant again, hopefully with a son. Exasperated, Georgiana confessed to her mother that the Duke’s relatives abhorred suckling due to “their impatience for [her] having a boy, and the fancying [she] shan’t soon if [she] suckled” (qtd. in Foreman 120). Breastfeeding was a multivalent cultural practice that had been a subject of much debate in the eighteenth century. *The Morning Herald* lauded Georgiana’s decision to breastfeed, declaring that it was a pity “that females in high life should generally be such strangers to the duty of a mother, as to render one instance to the contrary so singular” (qtd. in Foreman). Such

praise echoes Rousseau's call in *Emile* for more natural maternal behavior that began with mothers suckling their own children, instead of deferring to wet nurses for the job, and thus "having gotten rid of their babies, devot[ing] themselves gaily to the pleasures of the town" (44). The failure to nurse, for Rousseau, has consequences on a national scale. This neglect of the primal maternal duty leads to the dissolution of the family unit, which in turn leads to a moral, affective, and cultural wasteland. As Rousseau puts it, "this practice, along with other causes of depopulation, forbodes the coming fate of Europe. Her arts and sciences, her philosophy and morals, will shortly reduce her to a desert. She will be the home of wild beasts, and her inhabitants will hardly have changed for the worst" (45). "But when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state" (46). While *The Devonshire Amusement* does not elide Georgiana's decision to nurse her daughter, it uses it, instead, to amplify her sins against the nation. Shirking her natural private duties to arrogate public ones reserved for true citizens, Rousseau's "husbands and fathers," Georgiana subverts the foundational structures of a successful state (46). As a woman, Georgiana is a vehicle for the reproduction and fostering of citizens, and her husband is the rightful practitioner of such citizenship. The Duke's poor exercise of his own citizenship does not translate into his wife's right to compensate for it; the print makes it clear that such compensation takes place at the expense of her own responsibilities to the nation.

The Devonshire Amusement is not the first print to address concerns over the public dimensions of Georgiana's maternity. Two weeks earlier, John Hanyer had

published a print by Rowlandson depicting Georgiana nursing a human-sized fox, an obvious allusion to her political support of Charles Fox (figure 23). *Political Affection* literalizes Rousseau’s apocalyptic prediction of Western society’s decline into the “home of wild beasts,” all due to maternal neglect. Here, Georgiana shirks her responsibility to her crying infant to cater instead to Fox’s needs, a beastly perversion of the domestic order. Unlike in the later print though, here her breasts are significantly depicted as erotic rather than maternal objects.⁷⁴ The miniature encounter in the lower left corner of the print dramatizes the unspoken sexual subtext that informs Georgiana’s nursing of Fox. Her feline counterpart has also abandoned her kitten to tend to the vulgarly exposed canine love interest that unabashedly confronts the spectator.



Figure 23. *Political Affection*, Published by John Hanyer, 22 April 1784, Printed by Thomas Rowlandson. The British Museum, London.

⁷⁴ When deployed by her supporters in competing prints, the idealized depiction of her breasts was designed to suggest an image of classicized femininity. The bare-breasted Georgiana was often a figure of female patriotism in the tradition of Lady Liberty. See Rauser (125-128).

This visual parallel suggests that the central narrative of the print is both about unnaturally misdirected breastfeeding and about the breast as a contested discursive site, simultaneously representing woman as erotic object and sacred mother of the nation. Indeed, in addition to facilitating consecutive pregnancies, choosing not to nurse was also motivated by aesthetic concerns; women opted for wet nurses to preserve the beauty of their own breasts for themselves and their husbands (Mediratta 191). Georgiana's idealized breasts gesture toward this concern, while also conjuring competing narratives of breastfeeding as fashionable practice. Gillray's print *The Fashionable Mamma* (figure 24) exemplifies the detached exercise of maternity as a practice of the *ton* rather than natural feeling. The breasts of his "fashionable" mother peek through a strategically slit dress to perfunctorily nurse her child before the lady of the *ton* exits the frame to meet the beau who waits outside and for whom, one could speculate, her overtly sexualized breasts are really meant.⁷⁵



Figure 24. *The Fashionable Mamma*, Published by Hannah Humphrey, 15 February 1796, Printed by James Gillray. The British Museum, London.

⁷⁵ For more on the cultural multivalence of the eighteenth-century breast see Marilyn Yalom's "The Political Breast: Bosoms for the Nation" in *A History of the Breast* (105-145).

While condemning fashionable nursing, *Political Affection* simultaneously suggests that the misapplication of the breast was a kind of bestial monstrosity. Medical texts of the period suggested that even instances of breast cancer might be directly related to women's avoidance of their maternal duties, as the diseased breast became a symbol of unnatural or monstrous maternity (Mediratta 192).⁷⁶ Such writing linked the health of the mother to that of the child, and always already to that of the nation. The grotesque sexual encounter between Georgiana and Fox reiterates this rhetoric through the literalization of the politician's name. Her maternal practice is further perverted by the financial implications of the act, given the Devonshire's monetary contributions to the Fox campaign. Hence, Georgiana's breasts are also a fountain of pecuniary nourishment. This less explicit suggestion is made even more apparent when we consider other prints, such as *Supplys for the Year 1784* (figure 25). Georgiana and a fellow canvasser, her sister Harriet likely, are transformed into an actual fountain of coins, which pour out of their purses – a common metaphor for female genitalia – and less metaphorically, from between their legs.⁷⁷

The paradoxical multivalence of Georgiana's breasts as exemplified in these prints is facilitated by the rhetorical capaciousness of caricatures as a visual genre. Unfettered by the limitations of portraiture, caricatures could stretch the body to

⁷⁶ See also *Their Fathers' Daughters* by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace on Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) for more on the disfigured female breast as a symbol of derelict maternity. According to Kowaleski-Wallace, Lady Delacour exemplifies the problematic of the breast as sexual and maternal signifier. Incidentally, Lady Delacour acquires her breast wound in a duel following a conflict over her canvassing activities. It is possible that Edgeworth's dissolute but spirited Lady Delacour was inspired by Georgiana's real-life example.

⁷⁷ The Westminster Election cost the Devonshires a total of £30,000 (Foreman 155).

simultaneously accommodate a litany of cultural significations. Georgiana's body becomes a vehicle for endless permutations of femininity, a fluid carrier of national anxieties that are superimposed onto her very public personal narrative. The body that portraiture seeks to make coherent and intelligible, is deliberately exploded into an available palimpsest that can be rewritten and reread incessantly. The caricatured body is indiscriminately open, marked by an interpretive excess that refuses rigid aesthetic or political categories. Georgiana's body is semiotically porous and always threatening to spill over into additional categories of meaning. Much like Georgiana's self-fabricated excessive aesthetics, her caricatured image is malleable, endlessly multipliable, capturing the very essence of print as a mechanical art.

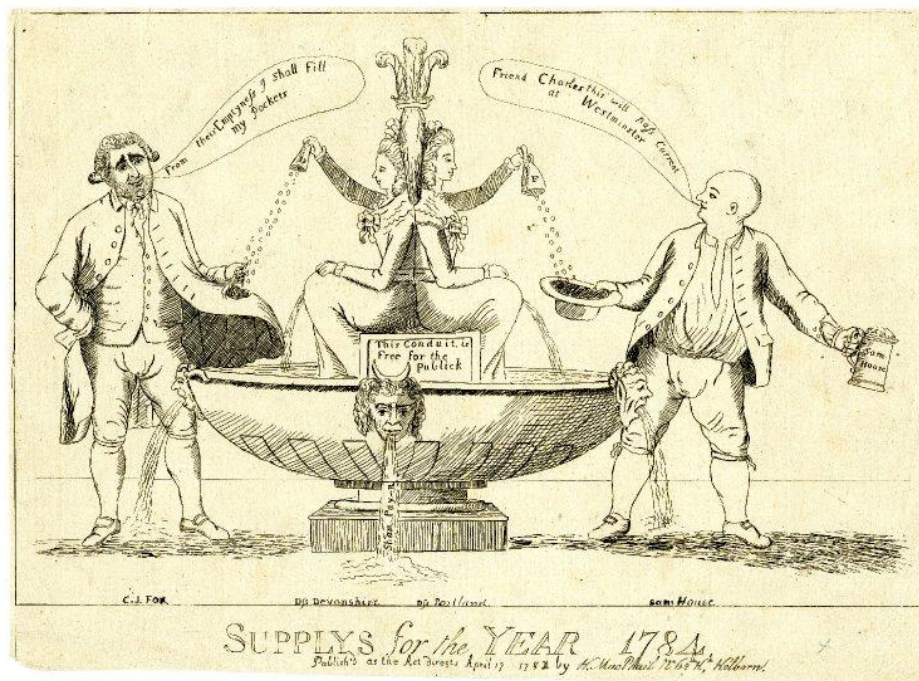


Figure 25. *Supplies for the Year 1784*, Published by H. Macphail, 17 April 1784. The British Museum, London.

Fighting Back: Reynolds's Response to the Westminster Election

In early July, 1784, Joshua Reynolds recorded a total of eight appointments for sittings with the duchess of Devonshire and her daughter (Mannings 124). The appointments took place a bit over a month after the notorious Westminster Election and they signal the beginning of a new artistic project for Reynolds. Indeed, it appears that he might have abandoned an existing portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire to undertake the double portrait of her and her infant daughter (figure 26).⁷⁸ Kate Retford has already linked this portrait to the prints I examined above, pointing out that the pose has been adopted “almost wholesale” from *Political Affection* (200). Retford asserts that “the portrait was almost undoubtedly an attempt to reassert the duchess’s moral status, to present her as an exemplary mother in the modern, sentimental mould” (200).⁷⁹ As I will discuss in this section, Reynolds’s painting attempts to neutralize the proliferation of meaning that the prints examined above perpetrate, by offering a static and idealized version of Georgiana’s maternity. The double portrait of Georgiana and her daughter does indeed reunite the protagonists who had been deliberately separated by *The Devonshire Amusement* and *Political Affection*. As Retford has observed, the painting seeks to restore Georgiana’s reputation as maternally loving and dedicated. I will examine how it tries to accomplish this by inserting her into a conventional visual narrative about lineage and inheritance, but also how such a narrative collapses as it fails to contain Georgiana’s un(re)productive excess.

⁷⁸ See Mannings for the detailed timeline (124)

⁷⁹ Vic Gattrell also suggests that the portrait is a direct response to the prints in *City of Laughter* (233).



Figure 26. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and Her Daughter*, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1784. Printed by George Keating, 1787, British Museum, London.

Unlike the first Reynolds portrait I examined, this double portrait represents Georgiana ostensibly indoors. She sits on a lavish chaise, a baroque curtain covering most of the background behind her but leaving enough exposed to suggest that the mother-daughter pair is sitting by a window.⁸⁰ The luxurious dress of the earlier portrait has been supplanted by a more somber satin dress with a high décolletage and spare accessories; a plain round brooch secures the scarf around her neck and a matching set adorns her waist.⁸¹ Georgiana's austere ensemble is completed by the absence of her

⁸⁰ See also other portraits by Reynolds that reproduce this common spatial arrangement: Charlotte, Countess Fitzwilliam; Lady Honywood and child; Mary Isabella, Duchess of Rutland.

⁸¹ Mannings reminds us that Lord Spencer, Georgiana's father, had passed away eight months earlier, so the severity of her dress is likely due to her being in mourning (124). Lord Spencer died in Bath on October 31, 1783 (Bessborough 68).

customarily extravagant headdress and a somewhat disheveled coiffure. While her hair retains the voluminousness that became her signature look, her errant curls seem caught in mid-air as Georgiana's head responds to the movements of her child. Her profile, perhaps not the most flattering angle for Georgina's "deplorable" pointy nose (Gower 73) suggests that the priority of this portrait is not advantageous personal aesthetics but the expression of a "general idea" (Reynolds 72).⁸² The concentration of light on the subjects' faces emphasizes their respective expressions of affection rather than their individual features.

This arrested moment of playful domestic harmony is complicated by the portrait's dual status as a conversation piece, the eighteenth-century visual equivalent to the "last will and testament" (Pointon 161). The portrait's celebration of maternity is all the more significant because it foregrounds Georgiana's capacity to reproduce, which until then had been considered doubtful. This public announcement of her fertility contributes to the "construction of [a] genealogical narrative" confirming her capacity to reproduce and extend the ducal lineage (159). The swelling decorative urn in the background, a common symbol of fertility, presents to the onlooker the "vessel – or womb" from which descendants emerge (Shawe-Taylor 152-153). The father's absence does not trouble the coherence of the image; as Pointon observes, in accordance with the function of the conversation piece as "last will and testament," the protagonist is often absent. Indeed, there are two absent fathers in this portrait, the Duke of Devonshire and Georgiana's own father, who had recently passed away. In this sense, by reminding the

⁸² Retford also points out that this angle would have made Georgiana less recognizable (202).

public of Lord Spencer's death and simultaneously asking them to witness the installation of a new father in the Duke of Devonshire, the image advances the narrative of familial continuity.

This genealogical trajectory of the painting is not without its problems. The birth of a baby girl, named after her mother, did not actually secure the reproduction of the ducal lineage; it merely succeeded in reproducing Georgiana herself. Reynolds's portrait captures this mirroring effect between the two Georgianas through their movements and clothing. The playful extension of the Duchess's right arm reflects the flailing limbs of the eager infant and the color-coordinated outfits extend the harmony to the rest of the subjects' bodies. The Duchess's black satin dress finds its counterpart in the ribbon tied around her daughter's waist; the infant's gauzy dress mirrors the trim of her mother's sleeves and décolletage. This deliberate combination of color and movement gestures toward the interchangeability of the two Georgianas, positing the daughter as a copy of her maternal original. Such direct reproduction cannot secure the continuity of the ducal lineage, however. Little G is too much a facsimile of her mother to do the job, and yet another indicator of Georgiana's unproductive excess; her unmanaged femininity spills over onto her child, echoing the identical multiplicity at the heart of the graphic satire circulating alongside the Reynolds portrait. Although the image tries to domesticate Georgiana's dangerously prolific femininity by rewriting it within the confines of the conversation piece, by generating too faithful a copy, Georgiana's mechanical reproduction fails to adhere to the formal structures of patrilineal inheritance which require repetition with a crucial difference.

The tension that emerges around Georgiana's contested maternity in this portrait would have been legible to spectators at the 1786 Royal Academy exhibition, where Reynolds exhibited the portrait, and in the print shops where George Keating's mezzotint of the portrait would have been sold alongside the Westminster Election prints (Retford 200). It had been only two years since the turmoil of the Westminster Election and Georgiana continued to be a popular subject of periodicals and prints, more closely involved in Whig politics than ever. To further reinforce the central conflict of the portrait, Georgiana had given birth to a second baby girl, Harriet, in September, 1785 (Bessborough 100). The Devonshire's hopes had been thwarted once more and Georgiana's failure was as public as ever. After announcing that the Duchess had given birth to a son on September 1st, the papers had to print a correction the next day, announcing that the baby was actually female (Foreman 164). It was not until May 21, 1790 that Georgiana produced the desired heir, the Marquess of Hartington in Passy, just outside Paris, on the eve of the French Revolution (Foreman 237-238). A well-informed London public would have taken the celebratory tone of the Reynolds portrait with a grain of salt, keeping in mind the deluge of competing images and reports that posited alternative narratives of the Duchess's maternity. While in isolation the portrait could have advanced the idyllic maternity it labors to construct, in conversation with the delinquent maternity disseminated by satirical prints it both achieves and fails its ostensible purpose. Although not explicitly condemning Georgiana's inadequate motherhood by visually assaulting her faulty exercise of it, the portrait's idealized visual rhetoric is inevitably inflected by the condemnation permeating the prints.

Acknowledging the gender of the child is tantamount to promulgating Georgiana's fruitless productivity, whether the announcement is couched in the language of classicized femininity or the louche diction of Drury Lane. The reception of Reynolds's portrait would have surely been conditioned by a constellation of images that preceded it and persisted beyond its days in the Great Room at the Royal Academy.

I want to now return to the Westminster Election prints examined above to address a more explicit assertion of the interrelated cultural work of graphic satire and portraiture. In *The Devonshire Amusement* Georgiana holds in her left hand a print after Gainsborough's portrait of the Prince of Wales, and at her feet we recognize a ubiquitous caricature of the "kissing duchess" in action. In the domestic space depicted on the right side of the print we see an unidentified but conventional portrait of the Duke of Devonshire modified to incorporate the implications of his wife's behavior. In *Political Affection* the central nursing scene is flanked by another portrait of the Prince of Wales and what appears to be a portrait of Charles James Fox's recognizably rotund figure. Such images are both accurate reproductions and fabricated versions of existing paintings. Although rotated by 180 degrees, the Gainsborough portrait of the Prince, for example, can be clearly identified by the star of the Order of the Garter which adorns the Prince's chest, the relaxed pose which has been meticulously reproduced, and even the peculiar arrangement of his hair (figure 27). The portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782 and it was perhaps one of the most famous images of the Prince of Wales until Reynolds's more dynamic and martial portrait of the Prince exhibited days after the Westminster Election ended (Mannings 362-363). The kind of masculinity

posited by the Gainsborough portrait is “refined and reflective” suggesting the man of feeling in a pastoral setting (362). Gainsborough’s manhood is that of a country gentleman; it expressed the authentic, uncontrived exercise of British liberty, a notion defined contrary to the artificiality of feminized and feminizing continental imports.⁸³ Whether the Prince of Wales could be categorized as such, especially in light of his publicly foppish ways is irrelevant; the inclusion of the Gainsborough portrait serves largely to set up a contrast between the idealized British manhood it posits and the perversion of it in the Duke of Devonshire as pictured in the print. The Duke’s casually rustic aesthetic with his brown coat and relaxed wigless coiffure enmeshes him in the category of the landed man of feeling but his domestic activity completely undermines this widely politicized type of masculinity. His cuckolded portrait above his chair further intensifies the fall of the same by putting the finishing touches on his humiliation. Hence, Georgiana’s sins against the nation extend beyond her delinquent maternity and result in the corruption of the ideal model of British manhood.



Figure 27. *George, Prince of Wales* (1781), Thomas Gainsborough, The Waddesdon Collection, Buckinghamshire.

⁸³ See “The Man of Feeling” by Desmond Shawe-Taylor for an in-depth examination of this masculine aesthetic in mid-late eighteenth century (61-80).

The dialogue between the portrait of the Prince and the caricatured versions of it in the Duke exposes the artificiality of the ideological coherence of Royal Academy portraiture. As it destabilizes the Royal Academy version of classed femininity and masculinity, *The Devonshire Amusement* claims for caricature the right to assert and disseminate not necessarily the truth but certainly competing ideological trajectories of equal valence. The alteration of the Duke's portrait to include the cuckold's horn exemplifies the revisionary work of caricature as it materially modifies an otherwise dignified formal portrait. The modification the print brings about is accomplished not by mere implication; it is the print of the Duchess engaging in sexual intimacy with a butcher that explicitly articulates charges of cuckoldry. These charges are then mapped onto the portrait of the Duke, troubling its ideological coherence. Thus, both portraits and prints exist in both spaces simultaneously despite the print's ostensible segregation of the public space and the domestic space. The portrait as print can acquire the mobility of graphic satire and enable a Gainsborough to circulate alongside lewd political caricature. At the same time, the portrait in the confines of the domestic aristocratic household is not safe from the long reach of caricature, which invades its content and alters its reception. The very form of the print, in this case, is a revisionary nod to the formal pendant portrait tradition (Retford 197).

The earlier print, *Political Affection*, proceeds even further in its visual dethronement of the Duke of Devonshire as head of the Cavendish household. Not only is he absent from the print; he has also been replaced by the Prince of Wales and Charles James Fox. The Duke's expulsion from his home follows Georgiana's shifting sexual

interests, both the Prince and Fox being her alleged love-objects. Priorities such as lineage and inheritance are supplanted by monstrous female desire, and portraits are the iconic vehicle for confirming this change; the truth is in the portrait, as it were. The print's use of portraiture to reflect Georgiana's labile allegiances can only occur successfully because of the cultural intelligibility of portraiture as a public political instrument. It is no accident that both prints feature the same Gainsborough portrait of the Prince of Wales, for example. Reynolds had been working on a new portrait of the Prince of Wales for several years (figure 28). He was unable to finish the portrait in time for the 1783 exhibition, so its public display was postponed to the next Royal Academy exhibit (Mannings 352). Despite its highly anticipated display and the ample discussion that followed, both *The Devonshire Amusement* and *Political Affection* elided the Reynolds portrait in favor of the 1782 portrait by Gainsborough, a decision all the more significant given the controversy surrounding the placement of Gainsborough's portrait of Princess Augusta and Elizabeth that year. Quoting Reynolds himself on the detrimental effect of rules on genius, *The Morning Herald* accuses the Royal Academy council of being envious of Gainsborough's favor with the king and therefore having defied Gainsborough's wishes regarding the proper placement of his portrait out of spite.⁸⁴ The writer goes as far as to suggest "whether the conduct of the council of the Royal

⁸⁴ *Morning Herald and Public Advertiser* (April 23, 1784) Four days later the *Morning Herald* published a review of Reynolds's pieces, mentioning that he was able to include as many as sixteen portraits due to Gainsborough's withdrawal of his paintings. The reviewer found the portrait of the Prince to lack animation: "Nature is surely neglected in this portrait! the face appears swelled and the eyes nearly closed. The figure is by no means graceful and the left leg in particular is awkwardly disposed of . . . The promise Sir Joshua made in his portrait of Col. Tarleton, is badly kept by his performance in the Prince!" (April 27, 1784).

**This image has been removed
for copyright reasons.**

Figure 28. *George, Prince of Wales* (ca. 1783-84), Joshua Reynolds, Lord Lloyd-Webber.

Academy towards Mr. Gainsborough, be not a greater affront towards MAJESTY than the artist!" This thinly veiled attack against the President of the Royal Academy is reprised in the graphic prints that choose the Gainsborough portrait over that by Reynolds. Indeed, the deliberate prioritization of Reynolds's main rival was more than likely the result of Reynolds's well-known Whig sympathies and his close relationship with Devonshire House, the headquarters of the opposition to the king.



Figure 29. *Falstaff & His Prince*, 16 May 1783. Printed by John Boyne. The British Museum, London.

The other portrait in *Political Affection* appears to have no precedent in portraiture but it does further insist on the intervisuality of the print by conjuring other caricatured versions of Fox as Falstaff to the Prince of Wales's Prince Hal (figure 29). *Falstaff and His Prince*, for example depicts the same lackadaisical, hands-in-his-pockets version of Fox and identifies him specifically as Falstaff. The text below the image sets up the Prince as a debauchee looking to gain access to an unnamed woman, while Fox asks him for money in exchange for procuring him the desired enjoyment. Fox's depiction as a carnivalesque procurer of sexual revelry, works in concert with the widespread accusations of the sexual bribery that fueled his campaign, in effect, rendering him a pimp and Georgiana his prostitute. This image of Fox serves to further expand the interreferentiality of the caricature, as it relies on past and present images – in portraiture and prints – to render itself intelligible to a visually literate audience.

Conclusion: Becoming Georgiana or the Image in Process

Earlier, I mentioned that Reynolds had abandoned work on an existing portrait of Georgiana to begin the double portrait of her and her daughter, Little G.⁸⁵ I now return to that unfinished portrait (figure 30) whose very incompleteness encompasses the dialectical interaction between the two visual modes that generated Georgiana's public image: portraiture and graphic satire. What makes this portrait in process interesting is precisely its unfinished condition. The painting is a close up of Georgiana's face in three quarter profile. Her features have been fully rendered so as to be recognizable but her hair

⁸⁵ Mannings reports several appointments starting in 1781 and as late as 1789 that were likely sittings for this portrait (124). They were interrupted by sittings for the double portrait and were resumed after its completion.

remains tentatively sketched out. We can also see the rough outline of a moderately sized hat but little else. Her dress remains speculative. What is so remarkable in this portrait is Georgina's facial expression; she sports an unstudied candor that defies the highly wrought poses we see in the majority of her portraits. Stripped of culturally intelligible signifiers, she offers the onlooker only her face. Indeed, perhaps even the term "stripped" is an inadequate descriptor; a nude would have been less revealing than this absence of readable signs. It is, of course, possible that Reynolds did not complete the Duchess's wardrobe because he intended to outsource it, a common practice of eighteenth-century artists.⁸⁶ Whatever his intentions, however, the portrait is all the more intriguing because of its incompleteness. Unlike the Reynolds portraits I examined above, this painting does not insist on discursive confinement. Indeed, it even defies the representational strategies of graphic satire, which despite its discursive multiplicity still only presents the onlooker with more versions of Georgiana. What distinguishes this portrait from these two imaging modes is the absence of a visual telos.

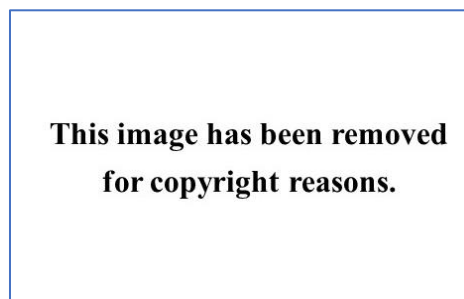


Figure 30. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (ca. 1780), Joshua Reynolds, Chatsworth, Derbyshire.

⁸⁶ Like other portrait painters, Reynolds made use of the services offered painters who specialized in drapery and background. Joseph Vanaken was the most famous practitioner of the craft till his death in the mid eighteenth-century. The only notable painters who did not use such services were William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough, and Jonathan Richardson. For more on this practice see "At the Portrait Painter's" by David Mannings (279-287).

In a letter to her friend Lady Elizabeth Foster, Georgiana includes the following revelatory poem about her elusive likeness:

I've oft puzzled to find, why hard 'tis to trace
The Features and looks of my comical face,
Since a moderate drawing might surely comprise
A snub nose, a wide mouth and a pair of grey eyes

And thus 'tis my Vanity tries to explain
Why all Painters have try'd at my likeness in vain,
I fancy their Genius their Pencil forsook
When a heart that's uncommon, distributes each look.
(Leveson Gower 43-44)

In this lovely and somewhat self-deprecating snippet of writing, Georgiana attributes the artist's apparent difficulty in capturing her likeness to her exceptional heart. I want to suggest, however, that the more likely culprit of her visual fugitiveness, is precisely the profusion of images, authorized and unauthorized by her and across multiple media forms. This unfinished Reynolds portrait might actually be the most accurate representation of her, because it manages to capture her very essence in her constant becoming. In its failure to produce Georgiana as a mother, wife, lover, adulteress, or political activist, this portrait insists on her capacity for transformation. Reynolds has produced the most accurate depiction of Georgiana, precisely because he has not produced a singular image of her, creating, instead an "image-in-process." The deluge of both coherent and contradictory visual narratives that surrounded Georgiana's image in the public sphere is here neatly condensed into the essence of this remarkable image: potentiality. The indeterminacy of the discursive thrust of the portrait leaves open all possibilities as the image is permanently on the verge of morphing into something more definite. The becoming that emerges as a result of the portrait's incompleteness

encompasses the fluidity and malleability of Georgiana's public image. It presents her in a permanent state of incipency, her image readily available to be appropriated, rewritten, disseminated and reproduced, a favored palimpsest in the eighteenth-century visual sphere.

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“brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk”: An Archival Reconsideration
of Elizabeth Montagu as Connoisseur and Art Patron



Figure 31. *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo (or The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain)*, 1778. Richard Samuel, National Portrait Gallery. London.

The most famous depiction of the Bluestockings, Richard Samuel’s *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (figure 31), presents a classicized version of the accomplished group of women, celebrating their literary, historical, artistic, and musical achievements, even as it makes a statement of national import about these contributions to the formation of an intellectual British tradition. As Elizabeth Eger argues in her analysis of the portrait, the women featured in it represent “an Enlightenment ‘republic of

letters' in which women's intellect was cultivated as a moral duty" (*Bluestockings* 20).

The portrait captures "an important moment in the history of both a national literature and women's writing, forming a public statement of women's contribution to Britain's cultural identity (23). The portrait seems to have been an attempt by Samuel to ride the wave of Bluestocking popularity, so to speak. This image was not commissioned by any of the Bluestockings, though we do know that the Queen of the Bluestockings, Elizabeth Montagu, did enjoy seeing herself in the print version.⁸⁷ In a letter to her good friend, Elizabeth Carter, Montagu observes that she was thrilled to live in an age in which she had the pleasure of seeing herself "universally celebrated," thinking it "extraordinary felicity even to enjoy a brief celebrity, & contracted fame" (qtd. in Peltz 63). Not all Bluestockings felt similarly about the prospect of their widespread popularity, however. Unlike Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, the acclaimed translator of Epictetus, and an intellectual whose social and economic status was vastly different from that of her friend, cautiously and mindfully of her public reputation, had retreated from metropolitan life in 1739. Lucy Peltz reminds us that unlike Montagu, "having elected not to marry, to preserve her freedom to study and write, [Carter] had to adopt a more modest lifestyle," leaving London for Kent, which further contributed to her "public reputation as a virtuous, pious, even domesticated woman writer" (73).

⁸⁷ According to Lucy Peltz, Samuel likely painted the portrait in an attempt to advance his career as a history painter. The image is heavy-handed in its debt to antiquity, and it was displayed at the Royal Academy in 1779, where it wasn't particularly noted. The print, however, created two years earlier and commissioned by the publisher Joseph Johnson, was included in *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book*, eventually becoming its focal attraction (61-63).

Carter's preoccupation with virtue is not accidental. Ongoing attempts to construct a coherent British literary tradition in which the Bluestockings held a prominent role intersected with cultural anxieties over women's public display through their participation in the intellectual public sphere. As should be clear from the case of the Duchess of Devonshire in the previous chapter, controlling one's public image was a challenging affair. In the case of the Bluestockings, the stakes were even higher, as their circle continued to grow and eventually become one of the central intellectual hubs of late eighteenth-century London. At least part of the approach to this challenge seems to have come in the form of a consistent classicization of Bluestocking intellectuals. In addition to the Samuel painting, individual Bluestockings were depicted in the classical tradition, John Fayram's portrait of *Elizabeth Carter as Minerva*, a notable example of this (figure 32). The writer sports full classical armor, complete with plumed helmet and shield, though resting her left hand on a book by Plato rather than Minerva's sword. By associating her with the wise but powerful Roman goddess, the portrait clearly masculinizes Carter, gesturing toward the traditionally masculine pursuit of translating classical authors, which Carter had appropriated in her masterful translation of Epictetus.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ For an extended examination of this striking portrait, see Emma Clery's "'To Dazzle let the Vain design': Alexander Pope's Portrait Gallery; or, the Impossibility of Brilliant Women" in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance, and Patronage, 1730-1830*. Clery focuses on the prominence of Carter's nose in Fayram's portrait and elsewhere in conversation with Pope's frontispiece portraits in profile that accentuated the same feature and insisted on its association with a distinctly masculine intellect. This association also emerges in Montagu's letters, which I will discuss at length below.



Figure 32. *Elizabeth Carter (Elizabeth Carter as Minerva)*. John Fayram, c.1735-1741. National Portrait Gallery. London.

Elizabeth Montagu's Wedgwood medallion (figure 33) is another example of this classicizing narrative. Montagu was particularly important in the effort to nationalize Bluestocking intellectual contributions due to the crucial service she had rendered in her publication of *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets, with Some Remarks upon the Misrepresentation of Mons. De Voltaire* as well as her continued patronage of other women writers. The portrait was created simultaneously with one of Anna Letitia Barbauld, as examples of "Illustrious Moderns" included in his sales catalogue alongside "Illustrious Romans," and "Grecian Statesmen, Philosophers, Poets, & c." Lucy Peltz notes that, unlike most other reproductions, the portraits of Montagu and Barbauld are "shown in severe profile, as if

imitating ancient coins and cameos” (66). While Barbauld sports a laurel wreath, Montagu wears a veil, underscoring her association with Roman matrons, paragons of public virtue in the eighteenth-century visual repertoire. However, much like the Samuel portrait, these ones did not require the input of the sitters either, and therefore there are limitations to what such images can tell us about the Bluestocking women’s engagement with visual culture.



Figure 33. Elizabeth Montagu. c. 1775-1779. Modelled by Flaxman. Factory of Wedgwood and Bentley. British Museum. London.

Someone like Elizabeth Montagu, whose spectacularly and meticulously decorated Portman Square home became the epicenter of social and intellectual life in London in the second half of the century and whose social circle included the most celebrated artists of the century, might have had something interesting to contribute to her own image. Her well-known investment in fashion and finery has been documented by many famous visitors, like Hannah More, for example, who even as she compared her judgment and experience to that of a Nestor, called Montagu “the finest genius” and “the

finest lady” living in “the highest style of magnificence.” Echoing More, Hester Thrale described Montagu as “brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk” (qtd. in Eger “The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage, and Learning” 26, 28). No Samuel portrait, Wedgwood medallion, or any of the popular prints that preceded or followed them conveyed this fashionable magnificence as authentically as Allan Ramsay’s portrait of Elizabeth Montagu (figure 34).⁸⁹ Commissioned by Montagu herself and the product of several sittings the details of which were documented in her correspondence, such a portrait can help us to uncover Montagu’s contribution to and understanding of the visual dimension of her public persona. Moreover, Montagu’s early education included drawing lessons by her father, Matthew Robinson, an amateur artist and a connoisseur. Her correspondence reveals that these early years created the foundation for an exceptional aesthetic acumen that enabled her to develop the sensibility of a connoisseur.

Although these materials have received some scholarly attention, such scholarship has been more invested in uncovering a shared public narrative of Bluestocking portraiture than individual women’s sophisticated engagement with their own portraiture. Beyond her glee and gratitude at fame, did Montagu identify with one image over another? Was she more invested in her portrayal as the virtuous Roman matron or as the English Madame de Pompadour? Eger’s effort to resurrect the visual lives of the Bluestockings has certainly uncovered a good chunk of Montagu’s investment in the visual arts. This chapter will build on and extend this work by returning to the extensive

⁸⁹ The Wedgwood medallion was circulated widely after being engraved by Thomas Holloway for the *Westminster Magazine* in 1776 and Richard Samuel’s print of the nine muses, engraved two years before the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1779 was immensely popular in the *Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum Book* for 1778 (Peltz 67, 62-63).

Montagu archive at the Huntington Library and reconsidering Montagu’s writing on the visual arts in her correspondence. I will first examine Montagu’s lively early correspondence where she discussed in detail her lessons in design, and then I will explore the circumstances surrounding the creation of the spectacular Ramsay portrait – an exemplar of the sociability at the heart of the portrait event for Montagu and her circle. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Montagu’s last two portraits, painted by the Reynolds siblings, the famous Joshua and the relatively unknown, Fanny, to whom Montagu extended her patronage.

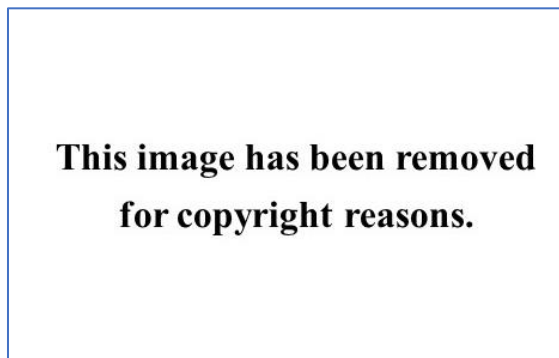


Figure 34. *Elizabeth Montagu*. 1762, Allan Ramsay. Private Collection.

Elizabeth Montagu’s Early Aesthetic Education

In a letter to her father from Bulstrode, Montagu tells him that her friend Mrs. Delany is “copying a portrait of Sacharissa from Vandyck” which she hopes will please Mr. Robinson, whom “she has great ambition to please” because he is an “artist and a

connoisseur” (*Her Correspondence* I; 236).⁹⁰ Such a characterization of Mr. Robinson, the first in Montagu’s correspondence that explicitly draws attention to his talent, explains Montagu’s early artistic education. In a playful letter to Margaret Cavendish, newly transformed into the Duchess of Portland through her marriage to the Duke of Portland in 1734, Montagu laments that her father has decided against going to Bath, and is remedying the lack of social variety in the country by teaching his daughter to draw. This is Montagu’s first mention of her practice in the visual arts. With typical vivacity of wit, she complains about her father’s cruel treatment of the new faces that are to alleviate her boredom by replacing the real ones she was to see at Bath, bringing her “sometimes a nose, sometimes an eye at a time” (I; 14). That the lively Fidget, as the Duchess lovingly referred to her, resisted his efforts to turn her into the accomplished amateur artist that he was, is clear from subsequent letters to the Duchess. Having failed in another effort to persuade her father to travel to London, citing Farinelli’s music as a better remedy for his ailments than hunting, she reveals more about her father’s teaching methods, when she complains about his insistence on her drawing “old men’s heads”: “Had [her] Pappa given [her] the blooming faces of Adonis and Narcissus,[she] might have been a more apt scholar; and when [she] told him [she] found those great beards difficult to draw, he gave [her] St John’s head in a charger,” at which point Elizabeth throws away her pencil all together (I; 16-17).

⁹⁰ To avoid confusion among several similarly titled primary and secondary texts, I will use the abbreviation *Her Correspondence* for Emily Montagu’s edited collection of Elizabeth Montagu’s letters. The full title is *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Bluestocking: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761* in 2 volumes.

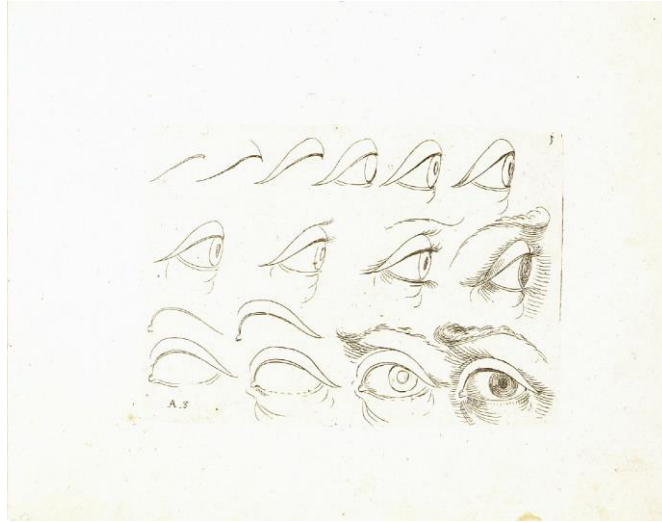


Figure 35. Odoardo Fialetti, Illustration from *Tutti le Parti del Corpo Humano Diviso in Piu Pezzi*, 1608, British Library, London.

It is unclear from Elizabeth's letters whether her father was asking her to copy drawings of the heads of Socrates and Seneca or draw their portrait busts. The last offer of St John's head in a charger suggests the former. It is clear, however, that her father was following a specific course of study that included a gradual and fractured approach to drawing, which was rooted in much earlier Italian practical manuals from the seventeenth century that sought to reproduce academic practices, especially in cities where there were no academies (Bermingham 42-43). The Venetian Odoardo Fialetti's *Tutti le Parti del Corpo Humano Diviso in Piu Pezzi* (1608) presents just such a step-by-step approach to drawing that begins with the human eye and extends to the whole human figure (figure 35).⁹¹ It is possible that Elizabeth's father had such books in his possession or that he was

⁹¹ The full title of the work is *Tutti le Parti del Corpo Humano Diviso in Piu Pezzi. Inuentato, delineato, et intaliato, da Odoardo Fialetti Bolognese, meaning, All the Parts of the Human Body in Many Pieces, Invented, Designed, and Engraved by Odoardo Fialetti Bolognese (my translation)*. See Bermingham for a thorough discussion of this and other Italian drawing manuals ("Complete Gentlemen" 33-73).

using English drawing manuals pirated from Italian drawing books, such as Henry Peacham's *The Gentleman's Exercise* (1634), for example. Peacham's text marked a crucial development in the history of drawing in England, popularizing and connecting the practice of drawing to politeness (48). His even more popular and widely reprinted courtesy book, *The Compleat Gentleman*, includes a chapter on drawing and oil painting and argues for a model of masculinity that is well-versed in both, in addition to literature, the natural sciences, and even physical exercise (50).

More contemporaneous with Mr. Robinson's approach to teaching drawing, however, are Jonathan Richardson's early prescriptions in his *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1725) about the foundational importance of drawing as preliminary and indeed, even superior to painting, the latter being "little other than Copies of" drawings, which "are undoubtedly altogether [the artist's] Own, and true, and proper Originals" (151). Richardson's extensive collection of old master drawings was the basis for this esteem of drawing but also for his study and theoretical formulation of artistic principles. Carol Gibson-Wood reminds us that beyond the Raphael cartoons displayed in Hampton court, on nearly every page of his *Essay on the Theory of Painting*, Richardson cites examples from his own collection of drawings (152). The "dismal" old men's heads that Elizabeth Montagu so despises and versions of which Richardson likely owned would have been the primary source of mechanical skill in a painter's education, and as basic a part of the process as "the expressing of our thoughts upon paper" (*Essay* 143). As Richardson puts it, there are no "two men, nor two faces, no, not two eyes, foreheads, nor any other

features” that are “perfectly alike,” and therefore, in drawing one must describe “that very form, as distinguished from every other form in the universe” (61).

Richardson deems drawing an exact reproduction of the forms of nature with the kind of distinctness and precision that discriminates between two eyes on the same face. The Lockean subtext of Richardson’s view of drawing evident in the direct correspondence between the object and its pictorial representation is deliberate. Richardson’s infusion of Lockean ideas in his theory has been well-documented by Carol Gibson-Wood in his entire oeuvre – painterly and literary. His writing follows the Lockean essay stylistically by pursuing an inductive process of inquiry through reason rather than following the tenets of established authority, and his valuation of painting over language as representational systems extends Locke’s assertion that some ideas are better imprinted on the mind by sight rather than words (Gibson-Wood 147). For Richardson, as for Locke, “Language is very Imperfect: There are innumerable Colours, and Figures for which we have no name. . . Whereas the Painter can convey his Ideas of these Things Clearly, and without Ambiguity” (3). Hence, for Richardson, design or drawing is fundamental to the art of painting because it constitutes the most accurate legible transcription of one’s thoughts.

Elizabeth’s description of her artistic education continues with a detailed enumeration of her failings – perhaps more revelatory of her father’s theory and praxis and her own comprehension of his ideas than examples of her success would have been. She declares that “if [she] drew a group of little figures [she] made their countenances so sad and their limbs so distorted that from a parcel of laughing cupids they looked like

tormented infants in Herod's cruelty and smiling Venus like Rachel weeping for her children" (MO 272). Fusing myth and religion for comical effect, Elizabeth inadvertently reveals that she was being schooled in history painting, even as the genre had yet to gain the formal and well-known currency it would have later in the century with the Academic hierarchy placing it at the very top of artistic subjects.⁹² Her attentiveness to the emotional tenor that animates her drawing, even as she berates her own incompetence at it, suggests that her father had schooled her well in the Richardsonian importance of Expression, or the "general character of the Story . . . whether it be Joyous, Melancholy, Grave, [or] Terrible" (*Essay* 87). For Richardson, expression manifested in a range of techniques and strategies ranging from the proper choice of clothing to the inclusion of recognizable symbolism and more relevantly to Elizabeth's description, the facial expressions of the sitter or the protagonists of the painting. Richardson recommends *The Book of Vandyck's Heads*, Giorgio Vasari's *The Heads of the Artists*, and Raphael's Hampton Court cartoons as useful sources of the "Variety of Attitudes suited to the several Characters" (102). By closely studying the faces and expressions of the figures in these collections, the artist would learn to express sophisticated sentiments suited for every story and occasion. That Richardson himself practiced what he preached is evident from his innumerable drawings of himself and his son. As Gibson-Wood points out, Richardson's chalk drawings of his son and his own self-portraits reveal a preoccupation with the subtleties of facial expression that his investment in the portrait as a picture of

⁹² See my discussion of Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* in my second chapter for an extensive examination of Reynolds's thoughts on historical painting and his application of its features to portraiture.

the mind certainly justifies (135). While he advocates for the young artist's mastery of expressions as varied as agony and zeal, himself, as chiefly a face-painter, he studies the nuanced distinctions between "restrained haughtiness" and "ironic contemplativeness" (130).

Elizabeth's self-aware practice of these prescriptions is evident in her amusing description of her artistic failings, as she confesses to the Duchess of Portland that her "happy genius led [her] to the drawing of tragi comedy countenances, for [she] drew down the eyes till they look'd as if they were weeping, & turned up the ends of the mouths which gave an amiable simper to the lower part of the face" (MO 272). She continues her self-evaluation with an astute comment that reveals the aim of these exercises, even as it highlights her subpar performance by declaring that "nobody drew a compound passion such as grief and joy, pain and pleasure, better than [her]self" (MO 272). Not quite at the point where she could negotiate distinctions as subtle as those between "restrained haughtiness" and "ironic contemplativeness," Elizabeth nonetheless evinces a knowledge of the passions that Richardson locates and explores at length in the cartoons of Raphael and the heads of Van Dyck.

Although Elizabeth seems to have given up her drawing lessons soon after – her references to them taper off after this extensive letter – she retained the visual acuity she acquired and generously applied it to incessant comical effect in descriptions of her social circle. The vivacious spirit that inspires her to characterize herself as neither a "Landscape Painter," nor a "battle Painter," but due to her propensity to draw figures that were either "lame" or "blind," as a "Hospital Painter" instead, re-appears in her caricature of Lady

Thanet (MO 272). As she describes one of her country entertainments to the Duchess, Elizabeth refers to the head of the assembly, Lady Thanet, as having a “gloominess of countenance” that was better suited for “a chief Mourner than the manager of a scheme of gayety and cheerfulness,” capable of wounding with a smile and killing with a frown (MO 962). When Lady Thanet “endeavors at a smile, she puts [Elizabeth] in mind of Milton, where he says Death grinned horrible a ghastly smile” (MO 962). Anticipating the masterful visual satires of Gillray and Rowlandson, Elizabeth reworks Richardsonian attentiveness to facial expression and even his attempt to invoke literary depth in his portraiture to produce vivid – albeit unforgivably malicious – written portraits of the faces around her. An even more detailed visual satire appears in her description of Miss Palmer, who distorted by affectation has managed to lengthen “her nose and chin to the total eclipse of the intervening feature her mouth, and when she would show her scorn she turns her eyes upwards and her nose downwards . . . touching her chin with her nose & her cap with her eyebrows” (MO 276). At a most recent display of such self-induced deformity, Elizabeth expresses her gratitude at Miss Palmer’s forthcoming absence from the Canterbury Assembly and Races because as she puts it, “if such as her show her faces, [women] shall soon lose the title of the fair Sex” (MO 276). Elizabeth’s aesthetic warning against affectation is reminiscent of her own dismal figures that by the arching of their eyebrows and the opening their mouths . . . look’d so frighten’d, you would have thought they had seen their own faces in the glass” (MO 272). Fusing an artistic tradition of grotesque heads, dating back to Leonardo da Vinci, with contemporary fashions, her visual representation of what amounts to fashionable self-mutilation anticipates the

deluge of graphic satire that would thrive in the second half of the century by critiquing the frenchified aesthetic trends that at times made women irre recognizable.⁹³

Lest a portrait of the young Elizabeth as a woman-hater begins to emerge, it's worth mentioning that she exercised her satirical muscles across the gender spectrum with equal magnanimity. Her letters to the duchess also feature descriptions of old men in love who disfigure themselves beyond what is appropriate to their age or their status in life, often for much younger women.⁹⁴ Elizabeth's particular focus on a woman's face, however, does suggest that she did understand the value of such a commodifiable asset in a nuanced and thoughtful way. In a later letter to the duchess, she discusses the dangers of small pox, a constant threat of early eighteenth-century life, which caused her to move from her home repeatedly due to fear of infection.⁹⁵ Elizabeth calls smallpox the "greatest alterative in the World both to the Mind and Person . . . teach[ing] a Woman in a moment all that Solomon wisdom and experience learned him in many years, viz that all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (MO 282). By eliminating the source of a woman's worldly ills – her face – smallpox teaches her humility through mortification, and submission by "taking away the Power of Commanding"; small pox is "a sovereign remedy against every vice of the mind but envy" (MO 282). Elizabeth's theory on the moral function of smallpox might appear cruel, but as she proceeds to apply it to herself, her reasoning becomes clearer. She confesses that she'd rather wear her face "smooth"

⁹³ See my second chapter for a more thorough discussion of this kind of visual satire.

⁹⁴ See MO 269 for a lengthy description of Miss Palmer's old beau, Lord Winchelsea.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth had to leave her home more than once due to fear of smallpox. Once, both her and her sister Sarah were sent to the carpenter's cottage, when their maid contracted the illness in October 1739 (*Her Correspondence* 37). In April 1741, she was sent away because her sister became sick (*Her Correspondence* 66-67).

but “if the small Pox in its ireful mood may disfigure [her] face . . . [it] shall not deform [her] mind” (MO 282). Recognizing the potential incongruity that smallpox would bring about between one’s exterior and one’s interior, she declares that her “heart shall wear a smile, tho [*sic*] a frown be predominant in [her] countenance” (MO 282). This eventful moment in her letters tears apart one’s interiority from one’s looks, aspects of an individual that eighteenth-century portraiture had sought to closely suture together in an effort to elevate portraiture to a liberal art. Inaugurated by Richardson and later pursued even more thoroughly by Reynolds and Hazlitt, this close relationship between one’s character and one’s face falls apart in Montagu’s letter.⁹⁶ As Richardson puts it, “a Portrait-Painter must understand Mankind, and enter into their Characters, and express their Minds as well as their Faces” (22). In the case of women, smallpox works similarly to affectation, severing the link between inside and outside, and in the process exposing and critiquing the gendered assumptions that inform early art theory. Due to the overvaluation of a woman’s face over her intellect, the relationship that Richardson posits in his *Essay on Painting* cannot be readily transferred onto women. By retaining the right to her heart and mind, even if smallpox ravages her face, the young Elizabeth rejects one of the central tenets of Richardsonian theory, as inapplicable to herself and other women subject to the aesthetic restrictions of patriarchy.

Elizabeth’s resistance to the disfigurement following smallpox has its limits. She admits that the potential smallpox damage to her face, given that it was unremarkable,

⁹⁶ See my Introduction and my first chapter on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu for a more thorough treatment of this relationship.

would be “but small,” but she does express some anxiety over the possible damage to her nose. As “the most prevailing feature in her face, [she] would fain preserve it from its assaults, for [she] should be loth to have her Tower of Defence . . . battered” (MO 282). She continues with an amusing and aesthetically fluent analysis of her face ranking her nose as the central most prominent feature, behind which the rest of her features “do very well for a distant prospect” and “take very well with people who are fond of perspective, but the *Basso Rilievo* is a thing of consequence and appears more conspicuous” (MO 282). Elizabeth’s nuanced aesthetic literacy is evident in her familiarity with sculptural terminology that hints at the breadth of her reading. She could have acquired such a term from John Evelyn’s *Diary* (1644), where it appears untranslated in English (II;.259), or simply through her father’s aesthetic teaching.⁹⁷ More importantly, couched in formal aesthetic terminology or not, this fear of losing her nose would be a mere comedic moment of self-deprecation – if one is to judge objectively from her later portraits, Elizabeth Montagu did have a prominent aquiline nose – but the eighteenth-century cultural valuation of this facial feature suggests that there is more to her worry.

According to Emma Clery, the nose, especially in profile, had a special status in in Western visual culture, due to the profile convention of the portrait medallion (51). Montagu’s depiction in profile by Wedgwood attests to the popularity of the profile view, and it perpetuates an antique convention popularized by Alexander Pope, whose innumerable profile portraits in this mode have been well-documented by W. K.

⁹⁷ John Evelyn’s book on engraving, *Sculptura*, could have also been a possible source.

Wimsatt.⁹⁸ Pope's concern with and focus on his nose could have very well been a response to the vicious caricatures that circulated after the publication of *The Dunciad*. Clery argues that Pope's preoccupation with his portraits in profile is likely an attempt to manage his public image, which lent itself to much ridicule, in light of Pope's spinal deformity (50). More importantly, due to the eighteenth-century association of the Augustan nose with the male genitals, and by extension, genius and virility – this last equation facilitated by Italian Renaissance thought – the profile portrait was a marker of one's intellectual prowess (Clery 52). The prominence of the nose in Bluestocking portraiture affirms the possibility that such an equation was transferrable, especially in the case of the masculinized portrait of Carter as Minerva by Fayram.⁹⁹ In this context, Elizabeth's pride over her prominent nose and her wish that it remain intact in the case of smallpox is no mere exercise in self-ridicule. As she herself explains, "while I can put a good nose upon the matter, I shall do well enough" (MO 282) Referring to her nose as an instrument of inquiry, she reiterates that the focal point of her facial composition is more than a physical feature; indeed her physical features merge into the background of her face as only relatively useful, their purpose secondary to the overvalued "Tower of Defence."

Elizabeth's earliest known portrait is a miniature by Christian Frederick Zincke (figure 36) whom she sat for at least twice in 1740 (*Her Correspondence* I; 46-47). The miniature had been commissioned by the Duchess of Portland, as one of four miniature

⁹⁸ See Wimsatt's *The Portraits of Alexander Pope*

⁹⁹ See Clery's analysis of the portrait and the intellectual contest between Carter and Pope. Carter had shaken Pope's status as translator with her work on Epictetus and had reportedly stolen his laurels when visiting his gardens in Twickenham (52).

portraits that adorn a beautiful gold “friendship box.” The other miniature portraits are of the Duchess herself, Mary Delany, and likely Mary Howard, Lady Andover. (Eger, “The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage, and Learning” 37). Elizabeth describes the portrait in a letter to her mother, declaring that she is “in Anne Boleyn’s dress” and she believes the portrait “will be very like.” (*Her Correspondence* I; 47).



Figure 36. Elizabeth Montagu (then, Robinson), Frontispiece to vol I of *Her Correspondence* by Emily Montagu, after her miniature portrait by Christian Friedrich Zincke, painted for a “Friendship Box” for the Duchess of Portland, c.1740.

Despite Elizabeth’s nasal panegyric, her “very like” miniature portrait seems to elide this crucial facial feature. The portrait is quite beautiful, depicting Montagu in the Boleyn dress and pearls, her nose by no means remarkable, except perhaps in its lack of prominence relative to the portraits of Delany and Lady Andover. Unless we are to believe that Elizabeth’s nose morphed into a considerably more distinguished feature later in life, this miniature portrait is not “very like” at all. In fact, it is more likely to have idealized the sitter, minimizing her prominent nose, which though prized by Elizabeth

herself, was not yet a legible public asset – her status as an intellectual, a patron, and a master conversationalist still only in its infancy at this time. The Duchess’s box, along with the miniature portraits that adorn it, is also a semi-private object, not meant for public display or circulation beyond her immediate social circle. As Marcia Pointon observes in her study of miniatures, these objects were not entirely private in the modern sense of the word; they were part of one’s domestic interior, commonly displayed in a woman’s dressing room, for example (50). They could also serve as a public mark of loyalty to a lover, husband, or father when worn on one’s clothing or as jewelry, a practice that has been well-documented in eighteenth-century portraiture.¹⁰⁰ A “friendship” box, however, like that of the Duchess of Portland could not be worn. Instead, it had additional tactile qualities that reinforced its intimate associations. To view all the portraits, one had to open the box, close it, and turn it every which way, the tactile manipulation “staging through analogue the close ties of friendship, its intimacies, secrecies, revelations, and proximities, physical and emotional” (63). Such a sophisticated object then would more likely serve as a proxy for the individuals depicted in the decorative miniatures and the reciprocal interdependence between them rather than an accurate reflection of one’s complex individuality, a purpose more suitable for a portrait being exhibited at the Royal Academy or the public dressing room of Montagu’s future home in Portman Square. A pretty picture in fancy dress would have sufficed to fulfill this very specific function for the Duchess’s “friendship box” – hence, the elision

¹⁰⁰ Famous examples of this are Hogarth’s playful portrait of David Garrick and his wife Eva and Mary Robinson’s portrait by Thomas Gainsborough, which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.

of Elizabeth's most prominent and intellectually charged feature, if we are to believe herself and other portraits of her, following the one by Zincke.

In a long letter she wrote to the Duchess of Portland on Oct 2nd, 1736, Elizabeth declares that “after many fruitless endeavors and the disjoynting [sic] figures distorting countenances rubbing out with crumbs of bread and then remisplacing [her] figures with black lead and perpetuating ‘em with ink” she determined to throw them “into the fire,” concluding with the resolution to ‘never draw anymore to the disgrace of God’s Creatures” (MO 261). Although she might have given up drawing, preferring as she confesses “moving pictures better than still life” – another testament to her fluency in painterly terminology – Elizabeth retained the aesthetic theories informing the practice (MO 249). Even as she complained about her father’s lessons as understandably unappealing to a lively young woman prone to conversation and the hustle and bustle of metropolitan London or fashionable Bath, Elizabeth was imbibing the fundamental principles of an aesthetic education under her father’s tutelage. In a letter to her cousin, Grace Freind, Elizabeth rejoices at the news that her addressee has survived smallpox and reiterates her esteem of the mind over a woman’s face, by confessing that she was at first “anxious for [her] beauty, but upon consideration of [her] good qualities I found my care was needless” because the only “truly beautiful” thing is a “beautiful mind” (MO 961). To illustrate her point, Elizabeth refers to Addison’s *Cato*, where Juba praises Marcia’s fairness only as a secondary quality. She then draws a telling analogy by claiming that those who do not understand drawing often commend the colouring while they over look the Master Strokes & spirit that give it the value with the Connoisseurs, and so it is with

some Gentlemen” (MO 961). This clever analogy attests to her sophisticated understanding of academic precepts. The design v. color debate had its root in the Italian Renaissance, but more contemporaneously with Montagu and her father, it had been famously discussed by the French art theorist Roger de Piles in his *Principles of Painting*. The influential text was not translated in English until 1743, but Montagu’s father would have likely had such a foundational text in the earlier French edition (1708), long before the English one was published. Like Richardson, Roger de Piles recognizes the fundamental function of design as “the *key* of the fine arts, as it gives admittance to the other parts of painting, and is the *organ* of the thoughts, the *instrument* of our demonstrations, and the *light* of our understanding (79). However, for de Piles, this does not mean that design is superior to color; indeed, he argues that design is fundamental to the arts, as the Roman school led by Raphael maintained, but coloring is what distinguishes painting from every other art such as poetry or sculpture, each prioritizing invention and bodily proportions, respectively (190). De Piles goes as far as to draw a metaphysical analogy of the comparison by positing that design is to coloring as the body is to the soul, concluding that just because the body is “prior to the soul . . . no one will affirm that the body is the more noble and more considerable part of the man” (194).

Although certainly echoing De Piles’s understanding of design as fundamental, Richardson does not wax as philosophical about coloring.¹⁰¹ His aim to elevate painting from craft into a liberal art could explain his investment in the superiority of design. Ann

¹⁰¹ Richardson was familiar with de Piles and would have read several of his works before he wrote his *Essay*. See Gibson-Wood discussion of intersections between their work, especially in “The Englishing of Continental Art Theory” (143-178).

Bermingham explains that “the word *disegno* was applied to both the initial mental conception and to its linear execution in sketches and cartoons” (5). This persistent effort to intellectualize drawing appears in Alberti’s *Della Pittura*, in the sixteenth-century work of Benedetto Varchi, “who called *disegno* the mother of the arts,” and Giorgio Vasari’s *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, and Architects*, where he “named *disegno* the father of architecture, painting, and sculpture” – the sex change in this last example, an attempt to connect drawing to the male intellect (5).

Elizabeth’s alignment with the design camp could be a direct consequence of her academic course of study and her eventual abandonment of the practice, before she was taught colouring, a later stage in the instruction of painting. It is also possible that, if she fully understood the implications of de Piles and others’ esteem of coloring for women, she would be more likely to favor design in the long-standing academic debate. As Kathleen Nicholson reminds us, de Piles believed that the main difference in the sexes “resided in the contrast between women’s attention to surface and men’s inner substance, a recurring theme in subsequent treatises on both art and human character” (54). For him, coloring was how one conveyed the sitter’s character, “getting just the right flesh tones that differ from person to person” (54). Nicholson points out that in France – and I’d add, in England as well, albeit not as routinely – women’s use of artificial colors in the form of makeup would have certainly made the process of drawing out one’s character through the natural color variations of the flesh difficult. Hence, this approach to painting would have been at its core a disadvantage to women. In the case of Elizabeth’s cousin, small pox – a much more severe form of facial distortion than makeup – would have threatened

to wreak a kind of havoc on a woman's face that would have effectively erased its capacity to convey one's personality and character all together.¹⁰² In refusing to go along with the overvaluation of a woman's face, Elizabeth, in effect, turns de Piles's metaphysical body-soul analogy on its head. To her, the fundamental function of the heart and the mind – equivalent to the soul in de Piles – is what gives structure and coherence to an individual, not the purely ornamental addition of superficial aesthetics, accomplished in painting through color. This relationship is transparent to the connoisseur, according to Elizabeth, but not always to the gentleman. The former knows that a woman's face is a mere superfluity that speaks to no real skill in the artist or authentic value in the sitter. By separating the gentlemen from the connoisseurs, at a time when the two were being forced closer together, artistic literacy becoming an indispensable feature of the true English gentleman, her own father being the consummate example of this, Elizabeth claims for herself the latter role and implicitly derides the former, for their shortsightedness and lack of expertise. This clever move allows Elizabeth to retain her connoisseurial freedom to evaluate a picture, without compromising her gender.

An aesthetic education for a woman of the upper class was not only common in the eighteenth century, but a matter of course. In her exploration of the accomplished woman, Ann Bermingham argues that in the late eighteenth-century, the concept became a way to deny women's status as commodities, even as it served to transform them into

¹⁰² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's poem "Saturday: The Small Pox" from her *Eclogues* speaks to the consequences of losing one's face and all that entails to the disease. At one point, the heroine threatens to tear the canvas on the wall which insists on reminding her of her former glory (201-204).

display objects. As she puts it, “accomplishments were intended to arouse masculine desire, yet desire could now be masked and displaced as aesthetic judgment” (184). Learning to draw was a staple of an accomplished woman’s educational diet, famously listed among needlework, music, singing and reading by Miss Bingley in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (27). That this expectation operated much earlier is evident from Elizabeth Montagu’s correspondence with her female friends. Talk of books, embroidery, and feather-work were routine. As she struggles with her own drawings, for example, Elizabeth requests a well-drawn “limb” from the Duchess of Portland and even offers to give her one, if she weren’t afraid of frightening the pregnant Duchess so much that her first son is born a Cyclops (MO 261).

Although the accomplished woman had not quite overshadowed the self-display of women in the marriage marketplaces of Bath, Tunbridge Wells, and London – Elizabeth records innumerable trips to these places even as she complains about being trapped with her father at Mount Morris – the skills that defined the concept in the late eighteenth-century were already commonplace for women of a certain status. What is unusual in Elizabeth’s case – incidentally something she shares with Austen’s Elizabeth – is her refusal to practice in order to nurture her drawing skills, all the while, choosing to retain the theoretical backbone of her father’s pedagogy, which gave her license to judiciously evaluate aesthetic works. Elizabeth rejects the always already limited realm of a skilled female painter – limited, because as a woman she could only aspire to amateurship not art – and claims for herself the decidedly more manly business of the connoisseur.

A telling comment in one of her most self-revelatory letters to the Duchess suggestively juxtaposes these varied aesthetic roles precisely in the context of the marriage market. Following a careful and calculating description of the man for whom she would change her “easy tranquility of mind,” Elizabeth declares that she is “already like Pygmalion in love with a picture of [her] own drawing, but [she] never saw an original like it in [her] life” (MO 275). The picture of the man she is referring to includes “a great deal of sense & prudence to direct and instruct [her], much wit to divert [her], beauty to please [her], good humour to indulge [her] in the right & reprove [her] gently when [she is] in the wrong, money enough to afford [her] more than [she] can want & as much as [she] can wish” (MO 275). Following the exacting picture she has drawn for her friend, it is no wonder that Elizabeth identifies with Pygmalion. Beyond the amused chuckle that is sure to follow this idealized picture (one that only exists in the pages of Richardson’s novels, perhaps in the form of Sir Charles Grandison, if he had the requisite wit, or Lovelace, if he had the requisite morals), this cross-gender identification with a male artist turns the eighteenth-century visual grammar of the marriage market on its head. First, and most obviously, she claims the male prerogative of thoroughly evaluating her spouse, unlike poor Miss Bingley whose list of requirements clearly applies to her own self. And while Elizabeth’s list includes such appropriate qualities as “a great deal of sense & prudence to direct and instruct” her, it also includes features like a capacity to divert with wit and please with beauty – this last one certainly an unusual request for a woman who routinely devalued her own beauty. Instead of identifying with Pygmalion’s work of art, she identifies with the artist, giving herself the freedom to choose rather than

be chosen. But Pygmalion is no ordinary artist. He was also a man who famously found all women inadequate as romantic objects, so he created his own, a perfect dead object, brought to life only through divine intervention (Ovid 232-234). Pygmalion's exacting judgment makes him also a consummate connoisseur, a role that Elizabeth claimed for in her letter to her cousin and reclaims here as a subject rather than an object on the marriage market.

Much like Miss Bingley's version of the accomplished woman, Elizabeth's future husband is also a fictional assemblage of qualities that would be improbable in actuality. In choosing painted portraiture as the vehicle for her comparison – a revision of the Ovidian myth in which Pygmalion is a sculptor – she both exposes the ludicrousness of the expectations placed upon women and reveals her comprehension of portraiture as an inauthentic process that aims to do more than simply represent its subject. As Richardson explains, a portrait should aim for more than “Exact Likeness”; in fact, he maintains that a portrait cannot but fall short of this, because it has to make up for accidental deficiencies that would affect “Exact Likeness” (80). While not openly advocating for pictorial distortion, Richardson recognizes that at times the painter absolutely must raise someone's character through flattery. He notes, however, that such flattery must not be apparent (79-83). While it would take another four decades for Reynolds to clearly articulate and encourage this idealizing function of portraiture, Richardson's thinly veiled prescription is implicit in Elizabeth's critique of unreasonable expectations.

“Is the little Picture finished?”: Elizabeth Montagu and Allan Ramsay

Elizabeth Montagu had known Allan Ramsay at least since October 1750. She records a visit from him, which was followed with a visit from her and Mr. Montagu to Ramsay’s house, where they “had the pleasure to see some admirable pictures” (*Her Correspondence* I; 279). Elizabeth likely met him through Frances Boscawen and her husband, with whom Ramsay had spent some time in Edinburgh (Smart 89). This relationship would eventually lead to the remarkable portrait of Elizabeth Montagu which she sat for in 1762, and which is significant both as an accomplishment in portraiture for Ramsay but also as a distinct image of Montagu, differing considerably from her other portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds, his talented – albeit consistently overlooked sister – Frances Reynolds, and especially her Wedgwood medallion. Montagu recorded several sittings for her Ramsay portrait and discussed it frequently with her good friend William Pultney, the Earl of Bath, who incidentally was also sitting for a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds at the time (figure 37), and for Ramsay as well (figure 38). This dazzling portrait of Montagu is painted at the height of Ramsay’s development of his “second style,” after his second visit to Italy, and after he published his *Dialogue on Taste*, his most popular and influential written work (Smart 91).¹⁰³ The portrait is characterized by an intimate naturalism that became typical of Ramsay’s work during this period, the combined result of his shift away from the formalism of Van Dyck, William Hogarth’s increasing influence – whose work he both critiqued but also emulated – and his

¹⁰³ According to Smart, Ramsay developed this second style “during a long absence from London between 1753 and 1757, first in Edinburgh and thereafter Italy” (91).

increasing identification with the contemporaneous French portraiture of Maurice Quentin de La Tour and Jacques-Marc Nattier.



Figure 37. *William Pulteney, 1st Earl of Bath*. Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1761. National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 38. *William Pulteney*, after Allan Ramsay, 1762. Printed by David Martin, 1763. British Museum, London.

Elizabeth Eger’s groundbreaking study of Bluestocking portraiture singles out the Ramsay portrait as “the perfect embodiment of ease, elegance, and learning” (*The Bluestocking Circle* 52). She notes the portrait’s reference to La Tour’s 1755 portrait of Madame de Pompadour in a similar pose (figure 39) – Montagu’s French counterpart in the salon – and the third volume of Hume’s *History of England* under her elbow (52). Eger argues that this portrayal connects Montagu to both “the Scottish Enlightenment and the French tradition of salon culture, in which women played a central role in the nation’s philosophical and cultural life” (52). Eger’s inclusion of the portrait alongside other

portraits of the Bluestockings in the context of a greater public narrative surrounding their contribution to a national literary tradition is fruitful but limited. In the next few pages I will focus on this particular object as a revelatory intersection of multiple visual narratives – private and public – while taking into account the material conditions of its creation and display as indicative of an intellectual collaboration between sitter and artist.

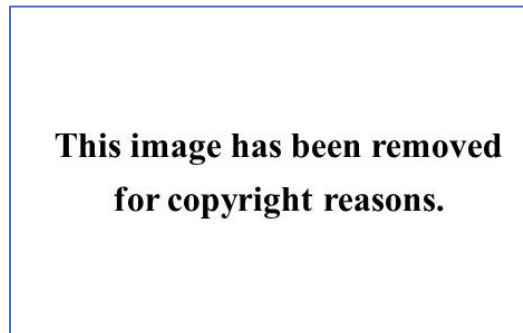


Figure 39. *Full-length portrait of the Marquis de Pompadour*. 1748-1755. Maurice Quentin de La Tour, The Louvre, Paris.

While Hume’s *History of England* connects the sitter to the Scottish Enlightenment – and I would add makes space for Montagu as an intellectual facilitator in the yet to be written cultural history of the nation – it is also a tribute to Allan Ramsay’s good friend and compatriot, whose philosophical precepts on aesthetics and taste informed Ramsey’s own engagement with portraiture.¹⁰⁴ The painter’s most influential work, his *Dialogue on Taste*, a work that resonated in the aesthetic community well-beyond London and the artist’s native Scotland by provoking passionate responses

¹⁰⁴ Montagu had met Hume through Ramsay – at Ramsay’s house, in fact – and “he had received very favorable impressions of her” according to a letter she wrote to Lord Lyttelton in October, 1760 (*Her Correspondence* 211-212).

that were not always of the celebratory kind, was foundationally influenced by Hume's philosophy.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Hume's own *Of the Standard of Taste* was published only two years later, and like Ramsay's text, it also features an extended conversation between two friends, suggesting that both works are the result of actual conversations between Ramsay and Hume during Ramsay's stay in Edinburgh in 1754 (Smart 139). Ramsay's aesthetic treatise delivered in the form of a witty conversation between Colonel Freeman and Lord Modish reveals the principles that animate such dazzling female portraiture of which the Montagu portrait is only one example, the famous portrait of his second wife being his most popular exemplar of his philosophy. Shockingly departing from Richardson's theory – which though not quite formally established doctrine in the way that Reynolds's presentation of the same principles would be in his *Discourses* remained one the most influential aesthetic documents in England – Ramsay joins William Hogarth's one-man crusade against the Old Master tradition. Though far from exhibiting Hogarth's pugnacious hostility to classicist doctrine and formally articulating a naturalist alternative like Hogarth did in *The Analysis of Beauty*, Ramsay joins him in rejecting the idealized aesthetic of ancient Greek statuary and posits that they excel at representing “mediocrity” rather than the extraordinary (24).¹⁰⁶ This assessment of universally deemed “ideal” figures, which formed the foundation of artistic pedagogy in both Kneller's Academy and St. Martin's Lane – famously contested by Hogarth who advocated drawing from life – is

¹⁰⁵ In *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani* (1761), Piranesi takes on Ramsey's denigration of imitative Roman architecture and offers alternatives to his claim that the Romans had made no original architectural contributions but only borrowed from the Greeks (Smart 146-148).

¹⁰⁶ See my first chapter on Lady Mary for an in-depth consideration of Hogarth's alternative to the classical tradition in his *Analysis of Beauty*.

unorthodox, if not irreverent. Ramsay argued that “in representing a Venus or a Helen, ancient sculptors and painters “must have found all their endeavours to please rendered ineffectual by the variety of sentiments which different men . . . have of beauty” (23). Hence, their only alternative was to “form a face that should affect a medium in all its features and proportions” (24). And that is why, according to Ramsay, first-time viewers of such ancient works are not struck by their beauty but grow to appreciate them through habit instead (25).

Ramsay’s central argument, announced early on in the text by Colonel Freeman is that objects of judgment are different from objects of taste, the latter being a matter of relative preference rather than absolute value (*Dialogue on Taste* 9). In a direct challenge to the still incipient “grand manner” that Reynolds would extoll a few years later, Ramsey’s approach leads him to reject painterly aspirations toward the general and emphasize the particular, instead. While not quite championing the “warts and all” sentiment animating Hogarth’s *Captain Coram*, Ramsay’s portraits, especially those of women, evinced a naturalist attentiveness to individuality and realism that might have very well caused Sir Horace Walpole to declare that while Reynolds did not have much success at painting the ladies, Ramsay was “formed to paint them (qt. in Smart 150). The Montagu portrait exhibits precisely this naturalism associated with Ramsay’s second style. While the exquisite grace and elegance of the portrait certainly captures the fashionable finery that distinguished Elizabeth Montagu, Ramsay seems to have portrayed her much like Elizabeth Carter described her: “Her form (for she has no body)

is delicate even to fragility; her countenance the most animated in the world” (qtd. in Eger *Bluestockings Displayed* 28).

The repeated comparison of this portrait with those of Madame de Pompadour is certainly warranted, but there is an intimacy in the Montagu portrait that is absent from the portraits of Madame de Pompadour that the Montagu is often related to. The La Tour portrait, for example, is a full-length image, which places the viewer at a distance from the sitter comfortably occupying the center of the composition in an elaborately decorated room stuffed wall to wall with books, artwork, musical sheets, globes, and other such objects signaling the intellectual status of the famed *salonnière* and patroness of the arts.¹⁰⁷ The more subtle portrait of Montagu zooms in and collapses the distance between sitter and onlooker by depicting Montagu somewhere between medium and three-quarter length. The chair she occupies is barely visible, its simply upholstered corner peeking behind her right side almost blending with the dark background. The table on which rests Hume’s *History of England*, and on it her elbow, is virtually invisible. Relative to La Tour’s depiction of Madame de Pompadour, the accoutrements of the learned woman are minimal here. The sitter’s pensive gaze disappearing outside the frame suggests she is possibly contemplating the text she has been reading. By depicting her in this fashion, Ramsay’s naturalism seems to suggest that the sitter has been interrupted in her private intellectual activity, evidence of the naturalism that Ramsay’s “second style” is after.

¹⁰⁷ There are at least two other portraits of her by Boucher that follow this same compositional scheme. It is worth noting that, though often compared to Madame de Pompadour’s salon, Montagu’s circle was distinct from its French counterpart in the hostess’ focus on a virtuous sociability (Eger *Bluestockings* 60).

The painter's famous portrait of his second wife features a similar effect, though it depicts an even more private event, the intrusive presence of the painter foregrounded by the sitter's turning of her head to acknowledge his entrance in the room. Conversely, the intrusion into Montagu's private meditation goes unnoticed by the sitter, her pose undisturbed by his presence, her faint smile a sign of her continued internal musings, which in one of her letters to Lord Bath, she attributes to her gratitude at having received a letter from him before she left for her evening appointment with Ramsay. As she puts it, "I believe you will find a smile of satisfaction in the portrait, which it will owe more to your Lordship's pen than his pencil" (MO 4523). Whether the smile was due to Lord Bath's "charming" letter or not, Montagu's comment reveals bits of the Painter's naturalist approach to his craft. More invested in a candid likeness than both his predecessors and successors, Ramsay's method prioritized the moment of the sitting.

The portrait is not all candor and sincerity, however. Montagu's splendid dress with its exquisitely painted fine lace trim and vivid color are indubitably testaments to Ramsay's virtuosity, but also an unmistakable index of Montagu's social status. The magnificent finery noted by Elizabeth Carter is exhibited here in full force. The portrait is tasteful, of course – Montagu's pearls only peeking through her neatly arranged hair, for example, instead of adorning her neck in rows. The flowers on her hair and her décolletage – the single rococo rose another link to Madame de Pompadour – further insist on the sitter's simple elegance, such delicate treatment of women typical of

Ramsay's portraiture.¹⁰⁸ Montagu's elegance, however, is also imposing in its spectacular display, her splendid dress – simply adorned or not, a reminder of her wealth and position.

As Montagu was sitting for Ramsay, her friend Lord Bath, upon her recommendation began to sit for him also. Earlier, Montagu had commissioned a portrait of Lord Bath from Sir Joshua Reynolds, but she had not approved of the result (Kerslake I; 14). She sent the portrait back to Reynolds for alterations, and her correspondent asks after it in a letter bordering on a *billet doux*: “Does the Picture answer? I would it could! Then I would tell you what I dare not say; The Eyes which you found fault with, would when you look intensely on them, express more than I dare venture” (MO 4238). The Earl's flirtatious play through the dual meaning of the word “answer” succeeds in conveying more than his sincere admiration for Montagu, whose remarkable character and intellect is a constant subject of his letters. It also gestures at Montagu's discerning taste, her aesthetic acumen, and her extensive investment in the images she commissioned – be they her own or others'. She even arranged for “Mr. Tristram Shandy (as [she] call[s] him) or Mr. Sterne (as [Lord Bath] must call him)” to meet with him in Reynolds's studio (MO 4243), so that Sterne's clever witticisms could positively contribute to the sitter's mood and work to mend the “sickly looks” that Montagu did not like in the portrait. In a suggestively worded comment Lord Bath declares that Reynolds “has made an old man look as if he was in pain, which an old man generally is, and so far

¹⁰⁸ See Melissa Hyde's “The ‘MakeUp’ of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette” on the iconology of Madame de Pompadour's portraiture.

he is right” (MO 4247). Whether this was a veiled insult at Reynolds – which wouldn’t be above Lord Bath, judging from his clever letters to Montagu – or a moment of candid frailty – Lord Bath was in fact old and in poor health – Montagu suggested that he sit for Ramsay after the Reynolds portrait for what Alastair Smart calls “one of his masterpieces of characterization” (179).

The correspondence between Lord Bath and Montagu during this period is fascinating in that it reveals the complex sociability subtending the portrait event. Already well-versed in the art of facilitating relationships in her drawing room, the consummate hostess tries her skills in the artist’s studio, arranging meetings among painters, statesmen, and literary celebrities. A later letter to Lord Bath reveals that upon returning from Ramsay’s studio, she conveys a message from the artist to Lord Bath, asking if he can sit for some retouching sometime after one o’clock, because Ramsay plans to work on Montagu’s picture before that time. She requests that Lord Bath let Ramsey know instead of herself because there is a chance she might not see the painter in the morning (MO 4518). As Alastair Smart has noted, telling *Lord Bath* to report to the studio at the convenience of a “a mere painter” is not a little bit unusual (179). The informality marking these sittings is largely due to Montagu’s masterful management of the social exchange that lies at the heart of portraiture but also the intellectual nature of the connection among the parties.

Montagu had met Ramsay in 1750, so she had known him for over a decade. Visits between the Ramsays and the Montagus are mentioned throughout her letters, and Ramsay’s interests in poetry, aesthetic theory, and painting would have made him

precisely the kind of individual Montagu would have appreciated both in her Bluestocking circle but also as a friend. In a letter to Lord Bath, Montagu mentions that she has enclosed verses by Ramsay given to herself which his “Lordship will, be so good as to return when [she] ha[s] the honour of seeing” him (MO 4528). This extension of the intellectual activity of the salon through the vehicle of the letter was routine. Montagu’s correspondence is rife with manuscript exchanges and the ensuing discussion concerning the merits of such materials. Montagu had given Lord Bath the exceptionally brilliant letters from Elizabeth Carter and even the less intellectually dazzling correspondence of her sister, Sarah Scott. Lord Bath praised both effusively, and upon returning one of Mrs. Carter’s letters declaring that “for the good of the world, and the benefit of mankind, [he] own[s] [he] wish[es] them very often separated, and apart from each other, that mankind hereafter may be benefited by such a Correspondence, and [he is] sure [they] can neither of [them] be two days without writing the prettyest [sic], & the easyest [sic] letters, in the world to one another” (MO 4238). In addition to unwittingly anticipating the wishes and work of contemporary eighteenth-century scholars worldwide, Lord Bath notes the value of Montagu’s correspondence as documentary evidence of the intellectual exchange taking place among her extensive networks of carefully selected friends. Allan Ramsay was one of them, and one suspects that the only reason that he does not have a prominent place as a correspondent in her letters is precisely the opposite of the reason that made possible the abundance of letters between Montagu and Carter; Montagu saw Ramsay in person more frequently than she saw Carter. The ever-present question recurring throughout the letters between her and Lord Bath during the period of the sitting – “Will

you be at Ramsay's tomorrow?" – speaks to the centrality of the painter's studio to Montagu's social life (MO 4251). Over a dozen letters begin or end with references to Ramsay, whose poor health at the time became a concern but also a nuisance– one imagines not only because it delayed the portrait, but also because it stalled what would have otherwise been lively social activity.¹⁰⁹ Her visits to Ramsay's studio continued beyond the sittings for her portrait. She expresses regret at missing a group expedition to Penhurst with Ramsay, Lord Bath, and Dr. Monsey – another frequent correspondent and visitor during this period. Her commentary on the occasion is worth reproducing at length:

I should have liked much to have been of the party to Penhurst . . . I should have heard the decision of a connoisseur upon the pictures while Mr. Ramsay pronounced upon their merits; the sentiments of a man of delicacy and gallantry while my friend Mr. Domville had talked of Sacharissa and many Witty observations perfectly new and genuine from the original Monsey. From the Universal mind of another person in the company, I should have equally informed myself of the true character of the Statesmen, Heroes, and beauties of the Sidney Race, [and] the imitative art that has given us their figures. (MO 4534)

Montagu's reliance on Ramsay as a connoisseur who would evaluate the "imitative art" and Lord Bath as the "Universal mind" who would assess their true characters effects a separation between the representational mimicry of portraiture and the biographical history of the sitters. Departing from the Richardsonian tenets that sought to unite these two functions of painting in the service of a reconceptualization of the painter as a liberal artist rather than a manual laborer, Montagu exhibits a nonchalant commitment to

¹⁰⁹ Montagu writes to Lord Bath that she has been trying to call on Ramsay but without success (MO 4524). Lord Bath's response to this letter suggests that he might have been in "low spirits" due to a nondescript illness (MO4256). Montagu was also struggling with her eyesight during this time, which made some of her outings challenging. She mentions having a headache during a sitting for the Ramsay portrait (MO 4521).

disciplinary segregation. Separating the characters of the Sidneys from their physical figures reiterates her youthful resistance to a coincidence between an individual's interiority and her exteriority, but it also echoes Ramsay's understanding of portraiture as the representation of the particular, not the general. As Colonel Freeman, Ramsay's mouthpiece in *A Dialogue on Taste*, explains, the Aristotelean standard of judgment for painting as *the art of imitation* has not changed, despite being "often obscured and confounded by modern connoisseurs" (57). Ramsay would have extended this assessment to Sir Philip Sidney's poetry as well. In his discussion of literature, Ramsay critiques poetry that "instead of representations of truth, and the real existence of things . . . consist[s] only of relations in ryme [*sic*] of giants, winged horses, griffins, castles moated round with fire and brimstone" (61). Leaving no room for doubt, Ramsay's Colonel Freeman lists Sidney's "jingling and strained conceits" alongside Spencer's "tedious allegories" (63).

Though Montagu does not mention Ramsay's *Dialogue* explicitly in her letters, given their intimate relationship and the text's immense popularity, we can safely assume that she had read it, and that it could have easily been a subject of conversation in the Bluestocking gatherings. Despite her apparent agreement with Ramsay's investment in verisimilitude, however, Montagu diverges from him in her esteem of the connoisseur, calling Ramsay himself one, in fact. Ramsay's Colonel Freeman would not have agreed with her, claiming that any one of the rustic daughters of Lord Modish's tenant would be struck by the Earl's La Tour and Lambert paintings and deem them "*vastly natural*," thus showing that she knew "the proper standard by which she was to be directed as much as

she would have done, if she had got Aristotle by heart and all his commentators” (57). Conversely, in the same Penhurst letter quoted above, Montagu singles out “certain genius’s [sic] that seem to be sent into the World as interpreters, they explain, express, unfold, what is absolutely unintelligible in itself to ordinary understandings” (MO 4234). The term “interpreters” here seems to include all the elevated minds – regardless of their area of expertise – with whom Montagu had carefully surrounded herself. It is particularly significant that she uses the term “interpreter,” in light of her immense respect and affection for her beloved friend, Elizabeth Carter. She might have been missing from this party – such outings unavailable to someone who simply did not have the means or social status to regularly associate with the likes of Lord Bath – but it is certainly *she* who informs her word choice.

Following her talk of genius and interpreters, and perhaps *because* of all her talk of genius and interpreters, she reminds Lord Bath that she “trusts in the Doctor’s [Monsey] honour, that he will not talk to Mr. Garrick or any person whatever, upon what he saw in my letter to your Lordship concerning Shakespear” (MO 4534). The work Montagu treats with such secrecy is her famous *Essay on Shakespear*, which would not be published until 1769. At this point she had shared the manuscript with Lord Bath, Lord Lyttelton, and Elizabeth Carter, but had decided against publishing it, and as it appears from this letter, against even circulating it in manuscript beyond a very select circle. Lord Bath reminds her that “Verbal Criticisms, as [she] say[s] are poor and low, fit only for small Genius’s but Observations and Comparisons of modern authors with ancients, Shakespear and Sophocles, is a work worthy of [her] Pen” (MO 4264). He

attempts to convince her to share “such nice and excellent observations ... such just comparisons between the similar Passages of the different authors, with such incomparable touches and reflections of Taste upon the whole” in manuscript at least, if not in print. (MO 4264). Her friend’s gushing review did not bring about its desired effect until much later, but these passages reveal Montagu’s vexed relationship with her potential role as critic. As her earlier letters suggest, Elizabeth, the young woman, wholeheartedly embraced the role of connoisseur, but Elizabeth Montagu – the hostess, wife, and business woman – was reluctant to publicly embrace the role of “interpreter” – to use her all-inclusive category for such intellectual activity in any discipline.¹¹⁰

In her correspondence during this period, however, Montagu continued to critique artwork, literary and historical works, and even landscapes. Her knowledge and facile application of Burkean aesthetic concepts appears in several letters where she describes her visit to the ruins of Kenilworth Castle, for example. She calls the ruins “august and venerable” but lacking in that “sublime horror” that would be lent them by “the brow of a barren mountain or the shore of some Rapid River” (MO 1413). Instead of “the dark shade of horror and melancholy” – she even refers Elizabeth Vesey to the exact page number in Burke here – the ruins are surrounded by a pastoral landscape calculated to remind one of the fruitfulness of the region, not least because of the power that Simon de Monfort had given to the House of Commons (MO 6363). Finding her company ignorant

¹¹⁰ She would eventually come to embrace her role as a critic and call herself “a Critick, a coal owner, a Land Steward, a sociable creature” in a letter to her sister Sarah Scott on 26 December 1767 (MO 5871).

of this fact causes her to critique English historians for ensuring that the English knew the history of the Gracchi but not that of their own countrymen (MO 1413).

Portraiture remains a constant, if not prominent, subject in her letters. Not quite reversing but certainly complicating her earlier position on portraiture as primarily an imitative art, she tells Lord Bath, who is temporarily executing the duties of his office at Shrewsbury, that she has been at the Grove in Ealing and has seen several “fine Vandyke pictures” there, “valuable not only from the Art of the painter but the character of the person painted” (MO 4524). Despite the stiff formality of Van Dyck, which Ramsay’s naturalism had moved away from in her own portrait, and despite her earlier dissatisfaction with Lord Bath’s portrait by Reynolds, she declares that “a certain picture painted by Mr. Reynolds will be of more value with posterity than any Vandyck, Lely, or Cornelius Janssen have drawn, think then how it is esteemed by one who knows ten thousand graces in the Original too delicate for the pen of the historian!” (MO 4524). Departing from Ramsay’s valuation of individual realism, Montagu praises the historical valence of Lord Bath’s portrait. In this, she anticipates what Reynolds would formally pursue as the aim of individual portraiture, i.e. longevity. And such permanence was not to be achieved through Ramsay’s second style but through Reynolds’s grand manner, a mere likeness, no matter how expertly rendered having little to recommend the portrait to posterity. As Reynolds memorably asserts, “the works, whether of poets, painters, moralists, or historians, which are built upon general nature, live for ever; while those which depend on their existence on particular customs and habits, a partial view of nature . . . can only be coeval with that which first raised them from obscurity” (73). In

recognizing that Lord Bath's individual qualities – known only to his intimate companions – would elude the historian, and that his place in her life would be “recorded no longer than her life and memory last,” Montagu admits that Ramsay's dazzling naturalism was ephemeral, coeval only “with that which first raised [his subjects] from obscurity,” alive in the hearts and minds of only those who cared for them. Attributing the fineness of the Van Dyck paintings she saw at the Grove to the character of the sitters over the skill of the artist, Montagu joins the Richardsonian camp of aesthetic theory, prizing Reynolds's forthcoming emphasis on the general over Ramsay's masterful celebration of the particular.

The reason for such praise could of course be situational, especially since Montagu herself would not sit for her first and only portrait by Reynolds for another 13 years. Lord Bath's unusually long letters to Montagu during this time describe in detail his official military duties, which he was less than thrilled to discharge. Montagu's compliment to the historical valence of such duties as inseparable from his person – a concept that the grand style celebrates – could be a contextually attentive compliment more than a tenet of her aesthetic philosophy. Her newfound esteem of the grand style over Ramsay's naturalism could also be partially due to her “infinite vexations about the picture,” having “call'd continually” but failing to “get it done” (MO 4524). The difficulties over the portrait extended beyond its inception and creation, unfortunately. Lady Mary seems to have had considerable trouble with its display. She complains several times about a Mr. Meyers, who has caused her to be disappointed about the picture more than once, likely in failing to procure the proper frame, or doing so

quickly.¹¹¹ Indeed, her ire inspires her to confess that if she “were a Man [she] should break Mr. Meyers head ; as a Woman and a scold, [she] could only cry” (MO 4527). Due to the “idle animal” – Mr. Meyers – the place where the picture ought to have been fix’d looks quite melancholy for want of it” (MO 4526). The next sentence reveals that she expects Mr Meyers to send the picture to her in the next few days “by a person who is to come hither” (MO 4526). By “hither” Montagu means her Sandleford estate in Berkshire, where she had just arrived from London. That she chose to have her portrait by Ramsay displayed in her Sandleford country home instead of her home on Hill Street in London is telling. Montagu likely considered this portrait much too intimate a view of herself to display in her London home, where visits were constantly exchanged and semi-public social gatherings took place regularly. She did not however, deem this place inappropriate for Lord Bath’s portrait. We know that in a letter to her, following an expression of regret that her own portrait by Ramsay is being delayed, Lord Bath asks if the picture is finished and “hung in the place it is designed for,” likely referring to his own portrait by Reynolds.¹¹² His suggestion that “like Pygmalion’s Image, it may possibly be brought to life, & then who knows what may happen” seems in line with his constant flirtation with Montagu, and confirms that it is likely his own portrait he is referring to, now a fixture in Montagu’s London home (MO 4526).

¹¹¹ Montagu does not specifically mention which portrait this was, but it had been much too long after Lord Bath’s portrait was finished, for it to be the one she is discussing in this letter.

¹¹² The Ramsay portrait of Lord Bath had been painted for Lord Lyttelton, and it still hangs at Hagley alongside portrait of the Earl of Hadwicke and the 1st Viscount Cobham, other friends of Lord Lyttelton (*Allan Ramsay: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* 79).

The matter of display was clearly of some consequence to Montagu, whose home, as I mentioned earlier, was a liminal space, not quite as public as a coffeehouse, and not quite as private as other women's conventional dressing rooms, but also not yet the epicenter of social and intellectual activity that her magnificent home in Portman Square would become in the 1780s.¹¹³ The portraits under discussion were painted when the Bluestocking Circle as such was still incipient, though Montagu records several densely populated evenings here as early as a decade before.¹¹⁴ On December 3rd 1752, for example, she tells Mrs. Boscawen that her "Chinese room was filled by a succession of people from eleven in the morning till eleven at night (*Her Correspondence* II; 20). On May 3rd 1753, she writes to her husband that she had "rather more than a hundred visitants last night, but the apartment held them with ease, and the highest compliments were paid to the house and elegance of the apartments" (II; 30). As such gatherings became more regular, the elegance of these apartments became a priority; over a decade later Montagu would hire Robert Adam, the architect, to redecorate her Chinese room, the central meeting place for the Bluestocking circle, with wallpaper, ceiling, carpet, porcelain, and furniture, all in the Chinese style (*Eger Bluestockings* 68-69). Situated in the same house was the very differently decorated classical room with the famous Cupid-

¹¹³ In "Bluestocking Feminism" Harriet Guest describes Montagu's Portman Square house as "a cross between a public building and private house" (*Reconsidering the Bluestockings* 64). This is where Montagu would also hang her famous feather collages created with feathers collected from all her acquaintance, assembled by Betty Tull, her forewoman at Sandleford. The spectacular screens earned wide acclaim and even inspired a poem by William Cowper (*Eger Bluestockings* 72).

¹¹⁴ The term "Bluestocking" itself was used as early as 1756, to describe Benjamin Stillingfleet, who wore blue worsted stockings instead of the more proper white silk stockings to Montagu's social gatherings (Myers 6). In the 1760s, however, Montagu and Vesey still used the term to refer to the male intellectuals with whom they socialized, and it wasn't until 1774 that Montagu used the term "blue stocking circle" in a letter to the same to refer to both men and women (9).

covered “Zephyr” ceiling (68). Hence, Montagu’s preoccupation with the just the right frame and location for her commissioned portraits was no small matter. As her guests walked through her home, they were likely to stop before Lord Bath’s portrait, an object designed to make an impression but also to generate conversation at least as effectively as the Chinese porcelain and the rococo Cupids.

The Other Reynolds: Elizabeth Montagu and the Woman Artist

As a hostess, Montagu was both formally and informally responsible for facilitating relationships among literary women and men. Hence, her patronage was worth coveting. Most famously, she and Hannah More worked together to launch the poetic career of Ann Yearsley, the milkmaid poet – this instance of patronage all the more notable, because the relationship between patronesses and artist eventually collapsed.¹¹⁵ In conclusion to this chapter, I will turn my attention to Montagu’s relationship with another woman artist, the quietly ambitious Fanny Reynolds, who lived most of her life in the shadow of her more illustrious brother, who had no qualms about deriding her artistic ambitions. Northcote records that her brother declared “her pictures . . . made other people laugh and him cry” (II; 160). And according to Richard Wendorf, Fanny had to sneak away to paint into another room of her brother’s house in Leicester Fields, where she served as his housekeeper, while her brother was otherwise occupied in the sitting room (184). Despite such unremitting discouragement, Fanny seems to have pursued painting quite seriously. She was an accomplished miniature painter, which her

¹¹⁵ A letter from Hannah More to Montagu details her ongoing efforts to sever their connections with “that wretched woman,” as More puts it. Ann Yearsley’s alleged ingratitude at More and Montagu’s management of her budding poetic career had been the catalyst for the deterioration of their relationship (MO 3993).

brother approved of, as a more appropriate medium for her than canvas and oil; in 1774 and 1775, she also exhibited three paintings at the Royal Academy to great acclaim (Wendorf 187).



Figure 40. *Elizabeth Montagu*. 1776. John Raphael Smith after Sir Joshua Reynolds. National Portrait Gallery. London.

Montagu's friendship with Fanny Reynolds, if one is to judge from their Princeton correspondence (1775-1791), was warm, intimate, and authentic. While Sir Joshua Reynolds is often mentioned, especially when Montagu extends invitations to her home, it is clear the two women shared a relationship that, though perhaps initiated through the common connection of Sir Joshua, was cultivated and thrived on the intellectual and temperamental compatibility of their characters. Montagu sat for a portrait by Sir Joshua in 1775 (figure 40) (Blunt I; 293). Among concerns for her friend's

health and a discussion of her traveling plans to France, Montagu asks Fanny to convey to her brother that on Wednesday before noon, she proposes to “bring him a face which another Winter will not improve, so [she] will leave it with him now,” i.e. before departing for her trip to France (MO 2.37.16). Advanced in her age and in poor health, Montagu would have yet another portrait of herself painted (figure 41), following the one by Sir Joshua. This time, it was her friend, Fanny, who was “inclined to once again make [her] pleased with [her] face” (MO 2.37.18). Responding to her friend’s wishes, Montagu confesses that she has not liked her face “for these twenty or 30 years,” but she is willing to bring Fanny her countenance “to be renewed” so that she may “be as fond of it as in the very meridian of female vanity” (MO 2.37.18).



Figure 41. *Elizabeth Montagu*, Charles Townley after Fanny Reynolds, painted in 1778, frontispiece to vol II of *Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of the Blue-Stockings: Her Correspondence from 1720-1761* by Emily J. Climenson.

Portraits of older women were not common in the eighteenth century, but as Devoney Looser has suggested, this is another much overlooked cultural impact of Bluestocking women, who lived well into their 80s, and who “found themselves on the front lines of representational battles about elderly women” (*Bluestockings Displayed* 101). That Montagu expected Fanny’s portrait to improve her to some degree is evident, and one can’t help but think that the “meridian” she refers to was something close to the image captured so splendidly by Ramsay in her 1762 portrait. Both Reynolds portraits depict a considerably altered woman, but in distinct ways. Sir Joshua’s portrait of Montagu is animated by the elegance and refinement now integral characteristics of the “Queen of the Blues.” Though advanced in age, Montagu appears fashionably dressed, her garment an elaborate piece – ribbons and lace abounding – her earrings and hat subtly complementary, the whole ensemble showcasing her status and wealth. Despite the attention to contemporary fashion, the perfunctory column and drapery in the background act as signatures of Reynolds’s grand style. What is so accomplished about this portrait, however, is that although the accoutrements of a literary lady are absent, Reynolds has managed to capture Montagu’s spirit, her lively sparkling eyes perhaps the most prominent element of the whole portrait, and her inquisitive nose almost as prominent as it would have been in a medallion-style profile pose. Fanny’s portrait three years later is less flattering than her brother’s work, but perhaps even more appropriate as Montagu advanced even further in years. Gone are the earrings and the fashionable hat; gone are the frills and flurry of the elegant dress – the only bona fide ribbon the one pinned to her chest, and the bodice of her dress buried under her simple shawl. The diaphanous head

covering tied with a bow under her chin is simpler and less fashionable than a hat, hence, a more demure choice; Montagu's coiffure, although simultaneously undoing some of this conservatism through its magnitude, is still neatly arranged and partially tucked into the head cover. Her voluminous hair is an index of the times; in the second half of the century, women's coiffure had reached new heights, quite literally.¹¹⁶ At the same time, however, devoid of ornament and partially covered, her coiffure is a refusal of the *ton*, even as it nods at it.

Fanny Reynolds's portrait of Montagu does include all the requisite elements that portraits of older women displayed in the eighteenth century. The head cover, the well-wrapped chest and shoulders, and the absence of superfluous ornamentation are all summoned to create an image of piety and virtue, much more effectively than Sir Joshua's portrait.¹¹⁷ Even the book on which she rests her fingers is part of the visual inventory of the revered older woman, according to Looser, who suggests that this kind of activity in old age might imply that "aged wisdom is receptive to the contemplation of ideas, rather than on working to create new ones" (104). Fanny Reynolds's depiction of Montagu as a reverent dignified older woman echoes Montagu's transformation into Wedgwood's Minerva medallion (1775), where her head cover is much less ambiguously the veil of the virtuous Roman matron. That Fanny Reynolds did see Montagu as precisely such a figure is apparent from her dedication of her theoretical work *Enquiry*

¹¹⁶ See my second chapter on the graphic prints of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, for a discussion of the towering coiffures that were popular in the second half of the century.

¹¹⁷ See Looser's "The Blues Gone Grey: Bluestockings in Old Age" for an examination of these conventional items in portraits of older women, including Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer, and Elizabeth Carter.

Concerning the Principles of Taste to her illustrious friend. Indeed, Fanny justifies her dedication to Montagu by declaring that she exemplifies the “moral excellence” that is the “subject, of which, [her essay] particularly treats” (iii). Although the bulk of Fanny’s essay is unremarkable (and at times hazy), in that it mostly echoes the hierarchized aesthetics of her brother’s discourses and the Burkean sublime, the essay does insist on marrying aesthetics to morality by equating taste with “what is truly good, beautiful, right, just” (36).¹¹⁸ Like Richardson, Fanny believes that the face is “that which expresses the internal character of the heart” (47). However, unlike Richardson, whose motivations were more practical than metaphysical, Fanny is wary of the wide-spread commercialization of the arts, which leads to the “destruction of moral virtue” by fostering “the love of fame and the love of riches” (48). Fanny’s own piety is consistent with her views on aesthetics. Wendorf calls her “punctiliously religious,” an attitude that often manifested in rebuking her brother for painting on Sundays (184). In fact, her warning against painting as a commercial activity might have been the direct result of her proximity to the most commercially successful painter of the century.

Fanny’s characterization of Montagu as virtue incarnate in the essay’s dedication is a matter that goes beyond the perfunctory flattery of one’s literary or artistic patron. Samuel Johnson had been considerably more involved in Fanny’s creative process than Montagu, for example, and dedicating the essay to him instead, might have been more warranted. In fact, Fanny had turned to Montagu for advice on the essay in 1785, after

¹¹⁸ A thorough analysis of this essay is beyond the scope of this chapter, being mostly concerned with Montagu’s relationship to Fanny Reynolds, rather than the artist’s contributions to aesthetic theory. For a more extensive consideration of the essay’s merits, see James Clifford’s introduction to the Augustan Reprint Society’s edition of the essay.

Johnson had suggested in 1781 that the essay “could not be printed in its present state,” because “many of [her] notions seem[ed] not very clear in [her] own mind,” and “many [were] not sufficiently developed and expanded for the common reader” (*Letters* III; 355-356). In Johnson’s defense, his judgment had not been flippantly delivered; he had praised parts of the essay, especially Fanny’s ideas of beauty, and her investigation of the sublime. However, he again, insisted in 1782, that it was unlikely booksellers would give anything for it (*Letters* II; 249-250). Not entirely dismissing Johnson’s opinion, but certainly sidestepping it, the resilient Fanny wrote to Montagu, explaining that Johnson’s involvement in the affair had ended after he had declined to have the essay printed for her, having been informed that other people knew about the matter (MO 4650). In the same letter, Fanny tells Montagu that her decision to publish the work depended entirely on her friend’s judgment, and that part of the reason she had asked Johnson to return her manuscript was the suspicion that “some other motives besides the want of merit in the work had influenced [Johnson’s] change of behavior,” i.e., her perception of Dr. Johnsons being strongly prejudiced against women’s literary productions” (MO 4650). She immediately retracts her accusation even as she makes it, declaring that she had deceived herself in this; as it turned out “his opinion exactly corresponded” with that of Montagu (MO 4650).

What Montagu’s opinion was exactly, we can glean from her next letter to Fanny, where she confesses that she “was sensible there were many ingenious things in [Fanny’s] work” but she doubted “how far they might gain the applause & attention of the present set of Readers” (MO 2.27.23). This opinion does seem to coincide with

Johnson's pronouncement in 1781 that Fanny's notions were "not sufficiently developed and expanded for the common reader." However, Montagu's explanatory addendum on the nature of contemporary readers as seeking "such books as ease them of the trouble of thinking" instead of ones that "investigate & study things" clarifies that, unlike Johnson, she does not think the work not good enough for the readers, but thinks the readers not good enough for the work (MO 2.27.23). This divergence is subtle, but meaningful.

Fanny's halfhearted accusations of Johnson's sexism must have rung true to Montagu to some degree, and perhaps were even calculated to appeal to her, given Montagu's history with Johnson. Although he had considerable respect and affection for Fanny, even sitting for a portrait by her in the early 1780s, he did harbor conservative opinions about women artists, having previously declared that it was inappropriate for women to stare in men's faces, or to engage in the public practice of any art (Wendorf 187). Montagu, of course had experienced Johnson's harsh criticism herself over a decade earlier when she published her *Essay on Shakespear*, though in her case, it seems to have also been a matter of literary competition to some extent, since Johnson's edition of Shakespeare had appeared four years earlier in 1765.¹¹⁹ He had similarly criticized the three dialogues she had contributed to Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogue of the Dead* (Wiltshire 404). The reader will also recall from the previous section that, despite Lord Bath's encouragement, Montagu had been reluctant to publish her *Essay on Shakespear* for at least seven years. She must

¹¹⁹ See Eger's "Out rushed a female to protect the Bard: The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare" for a closer look at the literary competitiveness between Montagu and Johnson (*Reconsidering the Bluestockings* 132-134).

have understood quite well Fanny's difficult circumstances, as she faced not only her own timidity but also Johnson's authority.

Despite her reluctance to offer unwavering encouragement to her friend's literary ambitions, Montagu clearly esteemed her as an artist. She complemented her on the portrait of Dr. Hoole, the translator, for "its perfect resemblance" and requested that Charles Townley, the engraver, save two prints of her portrait by Fanny for herself (MO 2.37.30). And despite her hesitation to produce a clear intellectual evaluation of the document, noting her long-time abandonment of metaphysical studies and her judgment-clouding affection for her friend as insurmountable obstacles, she was happy to be attached to it in the dedication (MO 2.27.23). Upon giving Fanny permission she noted that, "the only reason [she] could have for declining [Fanny's] addressing [her] ingenious work to [her] must be a consciousness of not deserving such an honour [*sic*]" (MO 2.27.27).

Montagu's relationship with Fanny Reynolds is evidence that her investment in portraiture remained prominent through her later years. The artist's studio that the young Elizabeth was so keen to evade in favor of the spaces populated by real rather than painted faces became an extension of the intellectual sociability that animated the Bluestocking Salon. Her own sittings and those of others she arranged through commissions and recommendations were occasions for the intellectual exchange and polite entertainment that resulted in an organic network of patronage that facilitated and advanced the intellectual pursuits of Bluestocking women. Portraiture was not only an activity that was imposed upon these women by the commercially motivated needs of the

likes of Richard Samuel and Wedgwood, who recognized the cultural currency of the Bluestockings and deployed it to their financial advantage. Montagu, a vital node in the Bluestocking network, who understood the possibilities of portraiture, went as far as to imagine a series of Bluestocking women portraits by Katherine Read, who painted Elizabeth Carter's portrait in 1765 (Barlow 62). That such an inspired plan for a painted tribute to these female worthies did never come to fruition is regrettable, to say the least.

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The Mediated Gaze: Romantic Visuality and Gender in the Portraits and Works of Mary

Darby Robinson

*O Thou! all wonderful, all glorious Pow'r!
That through the Soul diffuses light sublime,
And bidst it see th'omnipotence of God!
O SIGHT! To MAN the vivifying lamp,
That darting through the intellectual maze,
Giv'st to each rising thought the living ray!
As the PROMETHEAN touch awoke THAT source
Whose glory warms the Planetary world;
So the SUPREME illum'd the VISUAL ORB,
To mark his work, and wonder at his pow'r!*

(Selected Poems 1-10)

Mary Robinson's enthusiastic poetic tribute to "Sight" was published in 1793 after she was confined to her Windsor Cottage with her daughter, paralyzed from the waist down likely after a miscarriage.¹²⁰ According to her *Memoirs*, she spent much of her time there at her window observing a world where she could no longer actively participate, a melancholy "poet-spectator" who cultivated relationships with her poetic peers through correspondence and in print.¹²¹ Her gratitude for her sense of sight must have surely increased in these last few years of her life, but it was not a newfound appreciation for a woman who had spent most of her life in the public eye, strategically managing both her own vision and that of others. What is so remarkable about this effusive dedication to sight is its insistence of an earlier configuration of vision and

¹²⁰ According to Paula Byrne, it is likely that Robinson suffered a miscarriage in pursuit of Banastre Tarleton who was on his way to France to escape his debts. Robinson was rushing to provide him with the sum required to temporarily assuage his creditors. The likely streptococcal infection that followed the miscarriage she suffered alone in a post-chaise resulted in a rheumatic fever that eventually led to heart failure in 1800 (Byrne 212-215).

¹²¹ I borrow the term "poet-spectator" from Judith Pascoe's "The Spectacular *Flâneuse*: Women Writers and the City" in *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship*.

visuality in the literary sphere. Robinson's valuation of sight echoes Locke's equivalence of sight and understanding and is at odds with the less amicable Romantic association between the visible and poetic vision.¹²² As William Galperin has so eloquently put it, the Romantics no sooner saw the visible than they imaginatively appropriated it, rejecting the earlier eighteenth-century dynamic of *ut pictura poesis* between the sister arts (3). Instead, what was for Wordsworth "the most despotic of our senses," for Robinson reigns rightfully supreme as "that sense divine" (23).¹²³ Doubling her sins against a Romantic suspicion of the visible, she declares the productions of Fancy incapable of rivaling what the eye could witness: "Can Fancy paint,/with all the vivid magic of her pow'r, / The spangling legions of the sphery plains; the gaudy-vested Summer's saffron glow" (57-60).¹²⁴ Indeed, for Robinson a moment of clear sight can be an antidote to Fancy's "self-created anxious fears, / That, thronging round the midnight traveller, / give to his straining eye, fantastic forms" (100-102). Robinson's understanding of the visible as materially grounded does not foreclose any poetic possibilities. As I will explain in my examination of her *Memoirs*, for Robinson visuality is always already enmeshed with her deliberately fashioned poetic persona and not as the return of the repressed, as Galperin has famously observed in Wordsworth and Coleridge.

As scholars have already well-documented, Robinson's relationship to visuality was always of a material cast. As a beautiful actress and later the lover of the Prince of

¹²² In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke consistently compares understanding to the eye and sight. See, for example, "Epistle to the Reader" (9) and the "Introduction" (20) for early examples of this.

¹²³ See Book XI of *The Prelude* (174).

¹²⁴ Robinson uses "fancy" and "imagination" interchangeably here.

Wales, Robinson was the subject of numerous satirical prints and spectacular Royal Academy portraits. Anne Mellor has examined how the visual media inspired by Robinson advanced many of her personal narratives, ranging from the abandoned woman to the whore, with portraiture espousing the more generous narrative and graphic prints disseminating the more lewd one.¹²⁵ Laura Engel has also discussed Robinson's portraits in conversation with the gothic aesthetic of her *Memoirs*, and more recently, Anca Munteanu has looked at how Robinson might have co-authorized her image through a tacit professional arrangement that promoted her fame as well as that of her peers in the visual arts, artists as dependent on popular appeal as she was, such as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough.¹²⁶ Drawing on this existing work, this chapter will also explore the materiality of Robinson's relationship with visuality, and more specifically the mechanisms that underpin her adroit management of the gaze.

Recognizing that visuality played a crucial role in Robinson's ever-protean persona is important, but the scholarly focus on Robinson's private and public masks has obscured her contribution to the literary attitude toward visuality at the end of the century. Robinson's investment in visuality has implications beyond her celebrity status. As a Romantic poet, one that helped shape some of the earliest Romantic articulations of aesthetics and poetic inspiration, Robinson's relationship with the visible needs to be evaluated relative to established tenets of Romantic visuality.¹²⁷ Judith Pascoe has

¹²⁵ See Mellor's "Mary Robinson and the Scripts of Female Sexuality."

¹²⁶ See Laura Engel's "Mary Robinson's Gothic Celebrity" in *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* and Anca Munteanu's "Confessional Texts versus Visual Representation: The Portraits of Mary Darby Robinson."

¹²⁷ See Ashley Cross's "From 'Lyrical Ballads' to 'Lyrical Tales': Mary Robinson's Reputation and the Problem of Literary Debt," Linda Peterson's "Becoming and Author: Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* and the

already begun this significant work by exploring Robinson's impact on unveiling the theatricality at the heart of Romanticism's ostensible investment in authenticity.¹²⁸ While Pascoe's central concern is not visibility per se, she does discuss Robinson's celebratory relationship to the city in terms of the visible, an especially crucial moment in Robinson's oeuvre, in light of Wordsworth's antithetical attitude to the same in *The Prelude*.¹²⁹ My chapter will build on Pascoe's study by examining Robinson's visual strategies in both her work and the portraits she co-authored by agreeing to sit for them. Such images are not merely indicators of the various public roles Robinson cultivated; they are crucial visual transactions whose underlying scopical dynamic speaks to the material mediation of Robinson's gaze. Moreover, some of her portraits are inextricable from her poetics as they serve to advance her philosophy of the visual as it facilitates her poetic process. As I will explain in this chapter, the prevalent scholarly consent that Robinson's visual public presence waned after the accident that immobilized her, is only partially correct. While her *Memoirs* certainly corroborate the argument that she attempted to reinvent herself as a woman of letters rather than a woman of the stage – theatrical as well as social and political – Robinson's engagement of portraiture and her continued self-visualization in verbal form were indispensable to her poetics.

Origins of the Woman Artist's Autobiography," and Jerome McGann's "Mary Robinson and the Myth of Sappho" on the multifaceted impact of Robinson's work on Romanticism. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley are the exemplars of the Romantic suspicion of the visible, according to William Galperin in his foundational study *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism*. For an interesting exception to this rule, see W. J. T. Mitchell's "Visible Language: Blake's Art of Writing" in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*.

¹²⁸ See her *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship*.

¹²⁹ See especially "The Spectacular *Flâneuse*: Women Writers and the City."

In the pages that follow, I will first examine Robinson's relationship to visuality in her early portraiture, when her presence in the visual public sphere was mostly contingent on her sexuality. My interest in the earlier part of her life centers on the structure of looking rather than the different narratives such visual activity was designed to enable. This chronological approach is not in the service of any implicit telos of visual regression. Indeed, when I next discuss how the same scopic structures subtend Robinson's poetics, I will show that visuality is neither absent from, nor inimical to her poetry, but a constant component of her Romantic poetic identity. The interdisciplinarity of my approach, though certainly not new in Robinson scholarship, is newly deployed to shatter insular conceptualizations of the visual that are at the heart of the before/after split characterizing her literary narrative.

Mistress of the Gaze: The Subject of Sight in Robinson's Portraits

In addition to praising the intellectual and scientific properties of sight, Robinson's poetic tribute to the "sublimest gift of God" proceeds beyond the equivalence of vision with Reason, an equation that, as I mentioned above, echoes Lockean analogies and his prioritization of sight as "the most comprehensive of all our senses" (109). Robinson's interest in sight is as comprehensive as the sense itself, so to speak. Not only does sight serve an empirical function in ordering the "Chaos that were the mind of Man" otherwise, but it also facilitates a fuller affective life (12). In her characteristic attention to sensuality, Robinson does not neglect to examine the role of sight as a vehicle of desire that both triggers and cultivates romantic attachment. The hypothetical blind man that occupies the middle of the poem can still enjoy the sound of

That Lov'd Voice, whose thrill
rushing impetuous through each throbbing vein,
dilates the wondr'ing mind, and frees its pow'rs
From the cold chain of icy apathy,
To all the vast extremes of bliss and pain!" (135-139).

However, despite recognizing that the ear is an adequate conduit of affect, Robinson still deems it inferior to the eye. The "ill fat'd wretch" is unable to feed on "the magic of a smile," or drink "the poison of the murd'rous eye" (143-145). He cannot "trace each charm ... More lovely from the wonder it commands!" or "the undescrivable and speaking glance/That promises unutterable bliss!" (148, 151, 153-154). Neither can he see "the ruby lip,/Or the rich lustre of the silky waves, / That half conceal the azure-tinctur'd eye" (155-157). Robinson's description of sight here endows the eye with powers of persuasion that cannot be matched by those of any other sense. Indeed, the eye even takes over for the ear, as "the speaking glance" defies language to recreate its import through speech by being "undescrivable." The poet does not naively celebrate the eye's synesthetic capability, however. She identifies it, instead, as dangerous and manipulative, and one is tempted to declare that as an actress and a courtesan, well-aware of her own visual appeal, the author certainly ought to know. The most overt gesture toward the calculated duplicity of the visible lies in the half concealed "azure-tinctur'd eye," suggesting that its effectiveness rests in its deliberate withdrawal. The intermittent availability of the visible is precisely what renders it desirable. Gillian Perry has called this dynamic in the eighteenth-century theatre flirtation, which relies on "distance, deferral, and ambiguity" to mediate the erotics of spectatorship (10-14). Perry extends the mechanics of this transaction to portraits of eighteenth-century actresses, which were

often designed to transform the public moral assessment of actresses, who were almost always at risk of being branded “whores” (10-14). This erotics of (un)availability is overtly at play in Robinson’s portraits. The two paintings I will examine at length below are exemplars of the poet’s expertise at deploying the gaze to effect precisely what she describes in her poem.

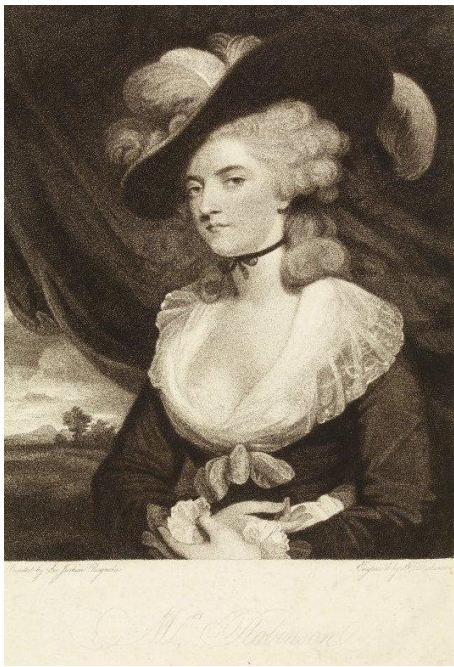


Figure 42. *Mrs. Robinson*, after Sir Joshua Reynolds. 1782, Engraved by W Dickinson, 1785. British Museum, London.



Figure 43. *Hélène Fourment*, ca. 1630-32, Peter Paul Rubens. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon.

The first portrait (figure 42) was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and it was the product of fourteen sittings between January and August, 1782. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy that same year under the title *Portrait of a Lady*. Mannings suggests that the composition was inspired by Rubens’s *Hélène Fourment* (figure 43), which Reynolds

would have had access to since it was located at Houghton Hall until 1779 (393).¹³⁰ According to Mellor, the image endorses the narrative of Mary Robinson as a “whore,” joining the often viciously graphic satirical prints that depicted Robinson in overtly sexualized ways alongside her husband and her many lovers (238-239). Mellor reads her Rubenesque costume as an “attempt to establish a respectable lineage for a woman now fallen on hard times” while simultaneously as a “subtle reminder – along with her half-closed, calculating eyes and slightly pursed lips – of Mary Robinson’s infidelity” (239). Eleanor Ty echoes Mellor’s assessment by suggesting that her direct gaze at the viewer would have associated her with “sexual transgressors such as Kitty Fisher,” although she maintains that her portraits are still “far more refined and romantic” than the lurid caricatures that circulated in less refined public circles (411). Like Ty, Laura Engel recognizes the portrait’s “idealized fantasy of feminine beauty, grace, and confidence” but adds that this “stylish fantasy” is inseparable from “the threatening possibility of her sexual agency” (69). More recently, Anca Munteanu has challenged these readings, suggesting that the portrait depicts Robinson as “grave and static” which she associates with Reynolds’s Grand Style (131). Munteanu relates this portrait to the sculptural style of Reynolds’s historical portraits, hence the “solidity that does not allow the figure to merge with her surroundings but rather closes upon itself in a gesture of completeness and self-sufficiency” (133).

¹³⁰ Hallett also notes that Reynolds had been to the Low Countries in the autumn of 1781 and had shown particular attention to the work of Rubens, especially his use of brilliant colors (396).

I propose that a return to the Rubens painting (figure 43) and a look at the studio copy (figure 44) of the Waddesdon original might be more revelatory of the portrait's complex layers, especially if the emphasis is placed on the gaze that Ty and Mellor find so suggestive.¹³¹ Both the presumed inspiration for the portrait, *Hélène Fourment* and the studio copy differ from the Waddesdon portrait in a detail that makes me inclined to agree with Mellor in her assessment of the portrait's sexual allure.¹³² Unlike the Reynolds portrait, the portrait of *Hélène Fourment*, always already less intimate because of its full length, images a devoted and proper wife whose gaze is modestly averted, her slightly drooping head evincing a timidity that is starkly absent in the Reynolds's portrait. Fourment's eyes are large, prominently rounded, and evince the alert naiveté of a shy child, as opposed to the challenging self-assuredness of a direct address. The embarrassment in her elusive gaze is compounded by the overhead angle of the viewer as he meets her gaze— she looks up at the viewer from under her hat – making her appear even more obliging and submissive. This portrait conveys modesty and polite virtue, features that Mary Robinson was clinging to unsuccessfully in 1782, especially after the

¹³¹ Mannings does not rule out Reynolds's participation in the studio copy, "considering the lively handling and a paint surface which is quite characteristic" for him (394).

¹³² However, I do find her conflation of this reading with Reynolds's critique of Robinson's lifestyle or behavior unconvincing. Reynolds's relationship with actresses and courtesans has been extensively examined by Mark Hallett in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*. Hallett persuasively shows that Reynolds was aware of the sensationalist discourse circulated by contemporary periodicals surrounding many of his sitter's dubious reputations, and he did not hesitate to exploit such rumors to draw attention to his work through its strategic display (44-47). It is, therefore, unlikely that Reynolds would be engaging in a critique of his sitter's morality or lack thereof, especially in light of the well-documented mutual admiration that characterized Reynolds's relationship with Mary Robinson (Byrne 169-172).

highly publicized negotiations for a financial settlement that followed her separation from the Prince of Wales.¹³³

In the studio copy, Robinson displays the same direct gaze of the Waddesdon original but her alert and widely open infantile eyes are more reminiscent of the Rubens portrait than the original, which features the sleepy eyes of a coy seductress not the alert and direct gaze of a self-sufficient intellectual, as Munteanu claims. Indeed, Robinson's gaze here is analogous to that of Elizabeth Hamilton, Comtesse de Grammont by Sir Peter Lely (figure 4), an unapologetically voluptuous representation of a "Court Beauty" – part of an entire series by Lely. The half-opened eyes of the Comtesse imply a dangerous sleepiness that, according to Desmond Shawe-Taylor, is a "sign of imperfect vigilance" and "a yielding disposition," attitudes associated with a fashionable lady's levee against which there was a general hostile sentiment – "a reaction against the moral and sexual laxity of the Restoration Court" (102). The similarities between the Lely and the Reynolds portraits extend to the pronounced pout and the position of the head – slightly tilted back and to the right. Instead of being looked down on, these women are looking down on the viewer; their barely detectible backward tilt is not a gesture of vulnerability but a declaration of ownership of the act of looking, the right to gaze immodestly, unflinchingly, and directly at the viewer engaged in the erotic transaction

¹³³ The Prince had initially promised her £20,000 but after lengthy and unpleasant negotiations that involved Robinson's return of the Prince's letters, the parties settled for £5,000 – a sum that did not even suffice to cover Robinson's abundant debts – and an annuity of £500 for the rest of Robinson's life (Byrne 150).

with them.¹³⁴ In Peter de Bolla’s words, this is the gaze of a woman “seeing herself made the object of the look” (37).



Figure 44. Studio Copy of *Portrait of a Lady* by Sir Joshua Reynolds. 1782. Private Collection.



Figure 45. Sir Peter Lely. *Elizabeth Hamilton: Comtesse de Grammont*. 1663. Royal Collection.

Robinson’s agency in the co-production of her representation has already been explored by Munteanu, Ty, and Engel, who recognize that she was not the passive and inert sitter captured and interpreted by the artist, but was likely to have substantially contributed to her own depiction. Robinson’s poetic dedication to Reynolds speaks to this possibility as she generously praises him:

‘Tis thine to tinge the lip with vermilion dye,
To paint the softness of the melting eye;
With auburn hair luxuriantly display’d,
The iv’ry shoulder’s polish’d fall to shade,
To deck the well turn’d arm with matchless grace,
To mark the dimpled smile on beauty’s face –
With cunning hand, the task is thine to throw
The veil transparent o’er the breast of snow. (*Selected Poems* 9-16; my emphasis)

Among the universal parts listed in the poem, there are readily identifiable features that belonged to Mary Robinson herself. As Paula Byrne has noted, “the tinted

¹³⁴ Laura Mulvey would define this self-aware pose in women as “to-be-looked-at-ness” in her famous essay on the cinematic gaze, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

lip, melting eye, auburn curls, dimpled smile, and ‘veil transparent on the breast of snow’ are Robinson’s own” (170). Robinson’s “melting eye” is particularly significant here as it seems to coincide with Reynolds’s depiction of her seductive gaze in the Waddesdon portrait and the appeal of Robinson’s half-concealed eye in “Sight.” Her acknowledgment of this in her poetic tribute to Reynolds evinces her awareness of the persona she co-authorized. In the eighteenth century, the word “melting” was often a euphemism for “available,” signaling the sexual susceptibility of the sitter (Shawe-Taylor 102). Indeed, in light of a certain spectator who witnessed Mary Robinson’s sitting, she might have been particularly motivated to pose with a “melting eye” for the Waddesdon portrait – the obvious reason being her desire to advertise herself in Reynolds’s studio.¹³⁵ It was during her sittings for her first Reynolds portrait that Robinson met Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton; her affair with Tarleton would become almost as highly publicized in the eighteenth-century visual sphere as her association with the Prince of Wales (Byrne 171). Tarleton’s presence in the studio during Robinson’s sittings was not an anomaly; it was not unusual for artists to have to entertain multiple sitters while working on a portrait. It is possible that Robinson’s pose for the Reynolds portrait was informed by Tarleton’s presence, potentially resulting in a literalization of the erotics that underpin the transaction of portraiture. Robinson’s “melting eye” might have been directed not only at

¹³⁵ The Waddesdon portrait remained in Reynolds’s studio until he died. Byrne suggests that this portrait may have been commissioned by Lord Malden, but it is even more likely that it was part of Reynolds’s continued self-promotion through association with contemporary celebrities. Reynolds might have painted Robinson’s portrait without a commission, in order to use it as an advertisement of his services, by having it copied and disseminated in print. This practice would not have been confined to Reynolds, since many other portraits of Mary Robinsons were studio portraits that were available for public consumption only in the artist’s studio until his death. Other famous examples include her portraits by Romney and Hoppner (Byrne 173).

the anticipated audience of the Royal Academy – an audience well-informed of her public character, but also, more specifically, at her new lover. And lest we forget the artist, Reynolds’s gaze was always already implicated in the desire that was inextricable from the process of painting a female subject. William Hazlitt’s meditation on the process of sitting for one’s portrait explores this possibility by recounting anecdotes of Reynolds’s more than professional relationships with his female sitters. Questioning the notion that Reynolds was a “confirmed old bachelor,” Hazlitt recounts the story of his attachment to a young sitter and her running out of the studio to her companion to declare that Reynolds had “made her an offer” (659). Hazlitt concludes that “the painter may chance to slide into the lover” when “the eye indeed grows critical [and] the hand is busy; but are the senses unmoved?” (660).

So, while the public might have been unaware of Tarleton’s presence in the studio, they were certainly aware of the erotic implications of the sitter-artist exchange, compounded as they were by Robinson’s suggestive look. One review of the portrait shown under the title *Portrait of a Lady* at the Royal Academy Exhibition attests to this awareness, as it declares the image “a faint representation of the Lovely Perdita (half length) the *sleepy eye*, so killing in the original, seemed to have engaged the principal attention of the artist; the bosom is faintly touched: here the artist seemed to have thrown by his pencil in despair – “*What! Paint Heaven!*” (*Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 2 May 1782; my emphasis). In addition to singling out Robinson’s seductive eye and echoing the murderous tenor of her own description of the inviting gaze in “Sight,” the reviewer also equates the artist’s paintbrush with his hand as it declares the bosom only

“faintly *touched*.” The artist’s reluctance to reproduce Robinson’s bosom in detail and the imagined exclamation of despair speak to the effectiveness of the erotics of (un)availability in portraiture. The proximity – nay, intimacy – to the beautiful sitter whose face and figure the painter scrutinizes for hours feeds his desire, as he must resign to caressing its object vicariously through his instruments. As Hazlitt would put it, “the fixing an inquisitive gaze on beauty, the heightening a momentary grace, the dwelling on the heaven of an eye, the losing oneself in the dimple of a chin is a dangerous employment” (659-660). The portrait’s location in the exhibit further insisted on making its erotic overtones available to the spectators, ensuring that they could connect Robinson to her budding romance with Tarleton, even if they hadn’t been in Reynolds’s studio to witness it unfold in person. Hallett notes that Reynolds had Robinson’s portrait displayed next to his portrait of Tarleton, enabling the spectator to enjoy the new direction of Robinson’s “smouldering look,” especially as Gainsborough’s equestrian portrait of the Prince of Wales, her former lover was also hanging in the same room (*Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* 397).

If we are to believe Robinson’s *Memoirs*, she had ample practice in the field of visuality beyond the artist’s studio and the walls of the Great Room at Somerset House. According to her own account, her first public outing to Ranelagh inaugurated her increasingly visual presence in the metropolis:

As soon as I entered the Pantheon Rotunda, I never shall forget the impression which my mind received: the splendor of the scene, the dome illuminated with variegated lamps, the music, and the beauty of the women, seemed to present a circle of enchantment. I recollect that the most lovely of fair forms met my eyes in that of Lady Almeria Carpenter. The first Countess of Tyrconnel also appeared with considerable éclat. But the buzz of the room, the unceasing murmur of

admiration, attended the Marchioness Townsend; I took my seat on a sofa nearly opposite to that on which she was sitting, and I observed two persons, evidently men of fashion, speaking to her; till one of them, looking towards me, with an audible voice inquired of the other: "Who is she?" (96-97)

This passage is one of Robinson's most detailed descriptions of her entry into the visual public sphere, an event that precedes even her stage debut as Juliet, years later (102-103). The excerpt captures the nuances of her expert navigation of the visual sphere, anticipating the dynamic that marks the visual transaction of portraiture. Robinson's outing to one of the most popular public spaces in London, Ranelagh Gardens, positions her first and foremost as a spectator, like anyone else who could afford the entrance fee and expect to partake of the sensory feast an eighteenth-century pleasure garden had to offer. Among the objects available for scopic consumption, the ostensibly wide-eyed Mary Robinson lists other female onlookers, and by extension herself, positioning women as both spectators and spectacle in the visual field. This precocious awareness of herself as the object of the gaze informs her decision to take a seat near the most visually compelling object, the Marchioness Townsend, an act that belies the sense of naiveté permeating her description of her first notable encounter with the metropolis.

As Judith Pascoe has notably observed, Robinson's relationship to the city was remarkably different from the Romantic attitude of shock and disgust that marked Wordsworth's description of London in *The Prelude*. The materiality of the metropolis is cause for anxiety for Wordsworth whose "urban alienation" has often taken center-stage

in Romantic articulations of the poet's relationship with the city (Pascoe 131).¹³⁶ In Book VII, Wordsworth recalls his anticipation of the same spectacle that dazzled Robinson:

Vauxhall and Ranelagh! I then had heard
Of your green groves, and wilderness of lamps
Your gorgeous Ladies, fairy cataracts,
And pageant fireworks; . . . (VII. 123-126)

However, when Wordsworth is finally immersed in the metropolis, the "moving pageant" that Robinson finds visually stimulating and socially promising, he finds chaotic, impersonal, and alienating (VII. 609). As he confesses in a revelatory moment:

Thus have I look'd, nor ceas'd to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams; (VII, 598-602)

For Wordsworth, urban spectatorship results in loss of self; the indeterminacy of the crowd prompts him to declare that "the face of every one / That passes by [him] is a mystery" (VII. 596-597). The only way for the poet to preserve himself is to retreat from the material details of the metropolis. Indeed, his unanswered questions about the anonymous humanity assaulting his vision cause this humanity to evaporate into the amorphous feature of a dreamscape. Confirming Galperin's argument, Wordsworth undermines his sight in favor of his "second-sight," which enables him to erase the immediately visible in favor of the imaginative and to exchange "least things" for a

¹³⁶ Pascoe also mentions De Quincey's vision of London alongside that of Wordsworth, and of course, we'd have to add Blake's "London" to depictions of the city's overwhelming materiality in similarly bleak terms. Other scholars who have discussed Wordsworth's relationship with the visible in an urban space include Sophie Thomas in *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* and Jacqueline Labbe in *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender, and Romanticism*. The first one focuses on Wordsworth's relationship to various forms of artificial spectacle, such as the panorama. Labbe's study will be important to my discussion of the poet's relationship to the landscape below.

“feeling of the whole” (VII. 710, 712). Ironically, it is the plight of a single individual, “a blind beggar” that confirms his loss of self and prompts his recovery through imaginative appropriation (VII. 611). The beggar’s attempt to elicit compassion by displaying his private history written on his chest serves only to confirm the blank otherness of the nebulous crowd. Incapable of participating in the urban space as a spectator, the beggar becomes mere spectacle. Gazing into his “sightless eyes,” becomes revelatory for Wordsworth, precisely because the beggar cannot look back (VII. 621). He embodies the erasure of individuality even as he pursues it through the sign on his chest.

Unlike Wordsworth, Robinsons revels in the materiality of the crowd. While Wordsworth copes with the visible by turning his gaze inward, Robinson allows her gaze to roam free in the urban space. And instead of losing herself in the shapeless mass, in Wordsworth’s “Parliament of Monsters” she attempts to define its visible contours and actively asserts her place in it (VII. 691). She singles people out, and uses the visual field to single herself out, to make herself prominently visible. Nowhere is this more evident than in her first exposure to Ranelagh, when by placing herself in the proximity of the most dazzling visual object she can locate, the Marchioness Townshend, she prompts her onlookers to identify her. After the gentlemen whose attention she has captivated through her strategic self-positioning notice her, Robinson declares:

Their fixed stare disconcerted me. I rose, and leaning on my husband’s arm, again mingled in the brilliant circle. The inquirers followed us; stopping several friends, as we walked around the circle, and repeatedly demanding of them, “Who is that young lady in the pink dress trimmed with sable?” My manner and confusion plainly evinced that I was not accustomed to the gaze of impertinent high breeding. I felt uneasy and proposed returning home, when I perceived that our two followers were joined by a third, who on looking at me, said, “I think I know her.” It was the Earl of Northington. (96-97)

Unsurprisingly, Robinson's target audience, the male admirers of the Marchioness, pursue her avidly around the Rotunda, seeking to establish her identity. Next, Robinson reminds us of her husband, who has presumably been next to her all along, downplaying her agency in soliciting the voyeurism of her male spectators by declaring that their gaze was "disconcerting." Her confusion results in her desire to retreat in the safety of the *private* domestic space, away from the gaze she so expertly chased, anticipating the erotics of (un)availability that dominate her Reynolds portrait. By attempting to retreat after she has ensured her status as a desirable spectacle, Robinson creates distance between herself and her spectators to encourage proximity. Her visual schema succeeds, and soon after her departure, her male onlookers determine her identity, inserting her into the visual field, arguably the desired result of Robinson's elaborate orchestration of the event. Robinson's performance at Ranelagh, marked by her shifting roles as the subject and the object of the gaze speaks to her intricate comprehension of eighteenth-century visuality. Peter de Bolla would deem her narrative a typical manifestation of the subject's insertion into the visual field. In his analysis of a similar public space, Vauxhall Gardens, de Bolla suggests that "entry into the architecture of visuality" made of the viewer "an object of sight, an experimental subject adopting certain positions within the culture of visuality in order to render more visible the ground of seeing and being seen" (75). This insertion into visuality is a technique of the subject; subjectivity is positioned precisely in "the exchanges that occur in the phantasmatic projection of what it might feel like to be constituted as a subject by looking on the onlookers of ourselves" (78). In other words, de Bolla posits a subject that is both

spectacularized and spectatoralized. Perhaps Jacques Lacan's terse but meaningful description of the subject of and in the gaze, "I see myself seeing myself," captures this complex phenomenological dialectic that articulates the subject as spectator of herself in the visual domain (80). Robinson's vigilant awareness of the visuality of the eighteenth-century pleasure garden enables her to identify with other objects of the gaze and anticipate that she will be seen, a prediction that enacts her visibility. This sophisticated understanding of her place in the visual field enables her to spectacularize herself on her own terms, manipulating, guiding the direction of the active gaze by positioning herself as its inert exhibitionist object. It is no wonder that Robinson had tremendous success as a theatre actress, given her profound comprehension of eighteenth-century visuality.

The social dimension of the event explains the ultimate motivation for Robinson's use of her status as spectacle to announce her presence in the visual sphere. The three women that preoccupy Robinson's attention upon entering the Rotunda belong to the loftier social circle of eighteenth-century London. Sitting next to the Marchioness signals Robinson's ambitions; the admirers attending to the Marchioness would be of an equally elevated cast. We are assured of this by the climax of the episode, when their friend, the Earl of Northington and the son of Robinson's godfather, declares that he knows her. Robinson's management of the public gaze is not motivated merely by a vain desire to see and be seen, but by an understanding of visuality as essential to the class relations underpinning public social interaction. Robinson's active participation in the classed scenario unfolding nearby foregrounds the democratizing potential of the gaze and represents only the first of many such events that advance her social standing by

association. The same indistinctiveness of the anonymous crowd that erased individuality for Wordsworth, is an opportunity to become distinct for Robinson. As she notes in the “Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England,” “the public promenades . . . are thronged with pedestrians of all classes, and the different ranks of people are scarcely distinguishable either by their dress or their manners” (111). This demotic mingling of the classes makes it difficult to separate the duchess from the *femme de chambre*, enabling the latter to aspire to the height of the former.¹³⁷ Robinson’s attention to her dress is persistent throughout her *Memoirs*.¹³⁸ Even here, her audience singles her out by referring to her “pink dress trimmed with sable.” Indeed, her style transformed her into a trend-setter, even causing a several fashionable items of clothing to be named after her, a phenomenon that was generally associated with the aristocracy.¹³⁹ Such self-awareness about her visual presentation was inextricable from her social ambitions, which were a subject of discussion in contemporary periodicals, especially after she began her affair with the Prince of Wales. Her insistence to keep a carriage with an insignia that was designed to appear like a royal coronet, for example, did not go unnoticed (Byrne 121). Perhaps even more scandalously, her decision to reserve a side box at the Opera House started rumors of her ambitions for a title (122-

¹³⁷ For more on the metropolis as a space of opportunity, especially for women, see Adriana Craciun’s “Mary Robinson, the Monthly Magazine, and the Free Press.” Craciun underscores the professional possibilities available to women in the metropolis, possibilities that Robinson took advantage of and successful instances of which she celebrated in her female peers.

¹³⁸ See Ty for an extended discussion of this in the *Memoirs* and how it might actually undermine Robinson’s attempts at self-fashioning by miring her in patriarchal expectations of femininity.

¹³⁹ See Byrne’s “The Priestess of Taste” for a thorough treatment of Robinson’s notable contributions to eighteenth-century fashion, which famously included the Marie Antoinette shepherdess dress she brought back from her trip to France.

123).¹⁴⁰ Moreover, rumors circulated that she was the natural daughter of the Earl of Northington, her godfather. Unsurprisingly, Robinsons did not bother to quell such rumors, as they only served to associate her with the elite circles of society (15-16).

Robinson's expert navigation of visibility, materially grounded in the visible, immersed in details that promote rather than erase individuality, offers an alternative to the Wordsworthian disillusionment and his subsequent retreat in the Romantic imagination. Through her gaze, more often than not, a carrier of desire, Robinson celebrates the material opportunities afforded by the visual field. Her love-affair with the Prince of Wales represents the height of such material ambitions, and in the next section, I will examine another portrait that showcases her relationship with the visible during this particularly public period of her life. By 1781, however, Robinson's affair with the Prince had irreparably deteriorated due to his infatuation with another woman and the animus that marked the negotiations concerning the financial settlement Robinson was promised. Among his promises of undying love, the Prince had promised her £20,000 in writing, in exchange for her retreat from the stage, but when he became infatuated with Mrs. Armistead, he neglected both promises. Robinson threatened to publish his letters to her, if he did not keep his word, and the King was able to secure £5000 for her in exchange for the letters in addition to an annuity¹⁴¹. The disappointing outcome of the negotiations was commemorated in Gainsborough's spectacular portrait of Robinson (figure 46), commissioned by the Prince of Wales himself. While many other portraits of Robinson

¹⁴⁰ The source for Robinson's interest in becoming a duchess was her patron and friend, the Duchess of Devonshire (qtd. in Byrne 122).

¹⁴¹ See Byrne's "Blackmail" in Robinson's biography for the lengthy details of the negotiation.

were painted during this tumultuous time, the Gainsborough painting is the only one that overtly broaches the affair. Hallett suggests that this was perhaps part of the reason that Gainsborough decided against submitting the painting to the 1782 Royal Academy exhibition, alongside his equestrian portrait of the Prince of Wales and Reynolds's portraits of Robinson and Banastre Tarleton (396-397).¹⁴²



Figure 46. *Portrait of a Young Woman in 18th-Century Dress*, 1901. After Thomas Gainsborough, 1781. Printed by Gerald Philip Robinson. British Museum, London.

¹⁴² According to Duffy and Hedley's recent catalogue of the Wallace Collection, the more significant reason that Gainsborough withdrew the portrait was that it had been unfavorably compared with the two other portraits of Mary Robinson by Romney and Reynolds (167).

Gainsborough's portrait of Mary Robinson depicts her as Perdita – her most famous dramatic role not least because it was the one that she played when the Prince first set eyes on and fell in love with her. Byrne observes that the portrait is “a clear evocation of her abandonment: she is Perdita the lost one, the pensive and thoughtful shepherdess, alone in a melancholy romantic landscape that is painted dreamily” and in “sharp contrast to the usual Gainsborough landscape style of realistically representing the great estates of the aristocrats” (155). Munteanu suggests that Robinson's overall presence and solidity in this portrait suggests a “corporeal command” that is at odds with a very similar portrait by Gainsborough – that of Elizabeth Linley (138). She also maintains that her oblique look here reflects the “dominant gaze politics of the day” ensuring her representation as a proper woman (138). While it might have been too late to maintain Robinson's air of modest propriety with any credibility at this point in her public life, it is clear that this portrait differs from the more explicitly seductive rendition of Robinson by Reynolds. However, the idyllic dress and the bucolic setting do not necessarily conspire to convey innocence. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the following pages, this portrait represents yet another carefully orchestrated interplay of multiple gazes including those of the artist, the sitter, the spectator, and the Prince of Wales.

Robinson's averted look invites the viewer to follow her line of sight which disappears outside the frame. This elision of the spectator's gaze is noteworthy in Robinson's portraiture. Even her most demure representation in paint by George Romney, where she appears in the modest dress of a Quaker, has her unflinchingly encountering the look of her spectators. This dispersal of the sitter's gaze beyond the

bounds of the portrait and the absence of an identifiable target of her sight, reinforce the portrait's emphasis on interiority. The question the portrait seems to pose is *How does Robinson feel about her separation from the Prince?* While this open-endedness might at first seem prosaic and uneventful, the portrait's focus on the sitter's affective state was at odds with the tenor of sensationalist periodicals that depicted Robinson as a conniving whore, whose seductive arsenal relied on her gaze for its effectiveness in the visual sphere – this last part of the narrative corroborated by the Reynolds portrait. A telling passage in *The Morning Herald*, 18 January 1782, captures Robinson's visual mastery in martial terms, suggesting that Robinson had acquired a strategically situated corner box at the opera in order to “angularly dart the artillery of her eyes against a certain Royal breast-work, and that with so much skill, that it is generally conceived she will be able to make another breach in it before the close of the season, and march in with all the honors of love!” This military figuration of Robinson's gaze foregrounds her familiarly deliberate self-insertion into the visual sphere but also represents such a practice in aggressively masculine terms. Robinson's gaze here is calculated to seduce but not merely through static exhibitionism, as in the Reynolds portrait. Her seduction is active, intrusive, even penetrative. Given that the target of her piercing, phallic gaze is the Prince of Wales, her gaze acquires political significance. Her visual appropriation of conventionally male prerogatives speaks to the public anxieties associated with the direct address of the Waddesdon portrait. Robinson's fearlessly assertive gaze is not only inappropriate but a veritable public menace, a threat to the governing body. In this

context, Gainsborough and Robinson's decision to omit the direct address is remarkable and worth examining at length.

Robinson's gaze is not the only one that is ostensibly being elided here. The miniature the sitter holds in her hand is blurry, but the Star of the Order of the Garter is decipherable. The nebulous depiction of the Prince of Wales could be a matter of discretion, though one is immediately prompted to ask why Gainsborough would even bother, given the ubiquitous reports of the intimate details of the affair. Moreover, effacing the image of the Prince might have been considerably more reckless than its clear depiction in the hand of his former lover, especially since the painting was not exhibited in the Royal Academy. Robinson's possession of the miniature was a matter of some debate. In her *Memoirs*, she declares that the Prince had it commissioned for her, and Lord Malden, the mediator between the two of them, delivered it to her (Robinson vol 2; 47). The miniature was engraved with the words "*Je ne change qu'en mourant*" on one side and "Unalterable to my Perdita through life" on the other (Robinson vol 2: 47). The Duchess of Devonshire, however, tells a different story, maintaining that Robinson claimed the miniature, though it was ostensibly designed for the Prince's German relations. It was Robinson herself who had it set in diamonds and engraved with the words "*gage de mon amour*" (Byrne 186). The portrait seems to support Robinson's version of events, especially given its melancholy mood and the presence of the dog, commonly associated with fidelity, a quality that the portrait accuses the Prince of lacking. The blurry image of the Prince on the miniature signals his self-expulsion from Robinson's life, but it is also a forward choice for the artist who represented the Prince of

Wales in such a dismissive manner. This erasure of the Prince and his gaze questions the possibility that the Prince still looks at Robinson while she looks away from him, as Munteanu maintains (136-137). The artist's representation of the Prince frustrates his gaze all together and privileges instead, the artist's gaze, the only party that we know with certainty has been looking directly at Robinson during the sitting. So while the portrait dismisses the Prince's gaze along with his broken promises, Gainsborough steps in to enjoy the sitter in the always already eroticized process of sitting for one's portrait. The freedom with which the Prince is treated in this portrait is doubly puzzling because of his role as a patron, which would normally entail considerable agency in the creation of the portrait and one would think, surely his own representation in it. One would think that the Prince would not have been eager to endorse the "abandoned woman" narrative and the accusations of infidelity on his part. To complicate the matter, the Prince was sitting for his equestrian portrait by Gainsborough at the same time as Robinson, so he could have seen the Robinson portrait with minimal effort. We can only speculate that perhaps the Prince was too busy enjoying the portrait of Grace Dalrymple, his new lover, who was also sitting for her portrait by Gainsborough during this time (Byrne 155-156). Whatever the Prince's reaction to the portrait, it couldn't have been a very negative one since he had the portrait hung at Carlton House in his gallery until he gave it to the 2nd Marquess of Hertford in 1818 (Ingamells vol 1; 97).

The sitter's gaze, unlike that of the Prince, does not entirely appear powerless here, despite her elision of the direct address. Robinson's offering of the miniature to the viewer – she extends the hand in which she holds the miniature toward us – is a way for

her to assert visual dominance. Having frustrated the Prince's gaze in collaboration with Gainsborough, she now invites the viewer to squint and strain his eyes in an effort to decipher the mangled visual text before him. This gesture serves to occlude the very visibility that it promises, paradoxically foregrounding the impossibility of the look, even as it solicits it, thus insisting on its exclusive ownership by the co-authors of the portrait – Gainsborough and his beautiful sitter. In de Bolla's terms, the viewer and the Prince of Wales are denied entry into the space of representation, which emerges as the managed collaborative product of the artist and the sitter.

The specific space of representation that Robinson occupies in this portrait has been tacitly attributed to the overall *Perdita* theme that justifies the pastoral location and Robinson's shepherdess garment. Like other similar portraits of women in a bucolic setting, this one also features Gainsborough's loose and vaporous brush work that blurs the lines between the sitter and her surroundings, the hem of her dress disappearing into the grass and the dog's fur blending into the texture of the recess.¹⁴³ What interests me about this technique that Gainsborough pioneered and used throughout his landscape and portrait painting is its erasure of detail, which paired with Robinson's location makes for an interesting revision of gendered Romantic spaces. In her important study of Romantic attitudes toward landscape, Jacqueline Labbe has noted that male Romantic poets claimed the proprietary view, often situated on an elevation, overlooking a vast and nebulous expanse of land – the perfect example of this being the Mount Snowdon episode in Book

¹⁴³ Munteanu points out that this portrait, unlike its closest companion by Gainsborough, that of Elizabeth Linley, showcases less indistinct contours, but I would argue that the difference is negligible, given that both are such a departure from Gainsborough's less stylistically experimental portraits in similar landscape settings such as *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* (136).

XIV of *The Prelude*. While this self-positioning will become more important to Robinson's poetics in the second half of this chapter, here I am more interested in what male poets often saw as antithetical to this position of empowerment, the feminized bower. The bower is an enclosed space in the flower garden, generally located near the house and associated with flowers, virtuous femininity, and confinement.¹⁴⁴ Unlike the formal landscape garden that serves to fortify masculinity by invoking the public sphere and political power, the bower threatens masculinity through a seductive return to an infantile space of blissful restriction.¹⁴⁵ For women however, the bower is a more ambiguous space that can promise not only protection but even self-empowerment, though often at the expense of autonomy (80). Robinson's bower-like retreat in the Gainsborough portrait is certainly an unlikely location for a woman whose outdoor adventures took place in highly managed urban spaces like Vauxhall and Ranelagh, spaces of display and spectacle that were both empowering and liberating. However, the shaded enclosure Gainsborough has painted here does not jeopardize her mobility, as the path leading to it implies both a way in and a way out. Choosing then to confine herself to this space to indulge her melancholy mood becomes a matter of sought-after solitude, a luxury indeed, for a woman oppressed by the relentless publicity she could not control during this time of her life.

Robinson's poetry confirms the portrait's sensibility by pairing solitude with pastoral settings. Although she identifies a range of scenes that personified Solitude

¹⁴⁴ In her analysis of Hannah More's *Strictures* on the garden and *female* cultivation, Labbe concludes that female here applies both to women as gardeners and as the gardened (77).

¹⁴⁵ See Labbe's reading of Wordsworth's "The Nutting" and Coleridge's "This Lime Tree Bower, My Prison" in "Cultivating One's Understanding: The Garden and the Bower."

haunts in the eponymous poem, the speaker chooses to “court” her in her “gentlest form” which includes “lonely grottos” and “verdant glens/Where the slow brook runs babbling from its source” (“Solitude” 47-49). The space in which Gainsborough has painted the meditative sitter, likely exhausted from the incessant assaults of periodicals and graphic prints, recreates the “cool, and unfrequented bow’r” where “oblivious slumbers can lull [her] mind” (15; 82). Similarly, Robinson’s “To Meditation” paints the protagonist as a “Maid serene,/With folded arms and pensive mien” in a “lone and still domain” invoking her own pose in the Gainsborough (*Selected Poems* 1-2, 17). These pastoral spaces are first and foremost safe havens for the speakers who court retreat in the form of solitude or meditation as a way to escape such urban ills as “pallid Guilt,” “Madd’ning AMBITION,” “Lean AVARICE,” “Hypocrisy,” and “Soft FLATT’RY” (16, 19-22).

The attenuation of material detail resulting from Gainsborough’s technique is also at odds with the attention to detail that usually accompanies the female experience in the garden. John Barrell identifies this female tendency as one of the main distinctions between the public prospect and the private view in the eighteenth century. He would locate the portrait’s setting among the kind of “low, sunken situations from which only the nearest objects are visible, only in close-up” (23). Moreover, Barrell argues that this view does not allow for the abstract generalization that requires deriving the whole picture from the several parts, reminding us of Wordsworth’s assertion that the “unmanageable sight” of urban chaos becomes manageable if one “sees the parts/As parts but with a feeling of the whole” (VII. 735-736) Hence, the limited confines of the bower or other “occluded landscapes” such as a “cottage embosomed in trees” – a recurring

motif in Robinson's solitary arcades – is emblematic of a situation in life from which no wider prospect is visible" (34).¹⁴⁶ Gainsborough's misty dreamscape, however, refuses to be neatly categorized as a feminized natural space, one that would need to be mired in details and by extension missing the panoramic whole. The only subject that emerges with any degree of detail in this space is the sitter's thoughtful face, her meditative gaze disappearing in the distance. Indeed, the erasure of the miniature insists on rejecting minutia all together, significant as a gesture not least because Robinson wore the miniature on her chest as an ornament.¹⁴⁷ As Labbe reminds us, jewelry was one of the few objects of value that women were legally permitted to own, being excluded from owning land, the foundation for the link between male privilege and the prospect view, or the proprietary view, as Labbe terms it (20-21). Robinson's removal of the miniature and its defacement signals both the Prince's unceremonious exit from her life but also her disregard for such hollow material substitutes for real wealth – let's not forget that Robinson blackmailed the Prince for £20,000, a dazzling fortune that could have ensured her material comfort for the rest of her life.

In neglecting to explore beyond the title of the portrait, scholars have missed the less obvious dimensions of the portrait's superficial theme. Perdita, the lost one, is not so only because she has been abandoned in the woods, her royal parentage eclipsed. Her pastoral residence is also her shelter from a vengeful and murderous king whose arbitrary

¹⁴⁶ Robinsons wishes for precisely such a cottage in "Solitude" – one that though "lowly" is "secure from harm" in "some shelter'd Valley" (74).

¹⁴⁷ The miniature is famously what causes Marie Antoinette to scrutinize Robinson's bosom when they meet (*Memoirs* vol 2; 94-95).

governance is detrimental to women. Much like Leontes in *A Winter's Tale*, George III first responded to Robinson's threat to publish the Prince's letters if the promised payment wasn't delivered, by publishing the spurious *Letters from Perdita to a Certain Israelite*, detailing the poet's financial misadventures during her early marriage (Byrne 238). Robinson's withdrawal from the public eye into the portrait's idyllic enclosure is an attempt to evade such persecutions and to recover her peace and quiet. Of course, even as the portrait stages a retreat from visibility, it does so in the most public way possible, through a visual document, initially intended for display in the most public visual event of the year, the Royal Academy Exhibition. Although the portrait never made it to the exhibit, it was talked about, vetted, and had a long public life in the Prince's gallery at Carlton House. Hence, Robinson's real path in and out of this imaginary bower, where she has chosen to take temporary refuge instead of being trapped in it, is through the portrait, a medium that she could co-manage as she wished, at times even against the interests of the party that commissioned it.

Romantic Looking: Robinson's Spectatorial Poetics

The next portrait I will examine takes Robinson out of the bower and places her most brazenly on a promontory (figure 47). This remarkable Reynolds portrait is perhaps the most intriguing representation of the gaze in Robinson's portraiture, and it has been often cited as the visual chronicle of the transition between Robinson's active relationship with visibility in the public sphere to her self-transformation into a woman of letters, after

the paralysis that followed her accident.¹⁴⁸ Reynolds was working on this second portrait of Mary Robinson while she was indeed ill. James Northcote mentions that he saw her being carried up the stairs of Reynolds's studio by servants during one of her appointments for the sitting (qtd. in *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* 160). The portrait was never finished, but we know that it was nonetheless Mary Robinson's favorite visual representation of herself (Byrne 171).



Figure 47. *Mrs. Robinson*, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1783. Printed by William Russell Birch, 1792. British Museum, London.

¹⁴⁸ Mannings, Mellor, Munteanu, and Engel concur that this portrait marks Robinson's retreat from visuality into the realm of letters.

An engraved version of it by Thomas Burke was used as the frontispiece to *Poems* (1791) and *Lyrical Tales* (1800). In many ways, the portrait resembles that of Gainsborough, in that it prioritizes the sitter's interiority. However, her depiction in lost profile is a curious choice for a woman who was not only famous for her beauty, but as should be clear by now, capitalized on it quite skillfully. According to Mannings, "the pose and setting, profile, looking out to sea, alludes to the sitter's changed life, following the paralysis of her legs, from actress and society beauty to contemplative writer" (394). Mellor reads this portrait as yet another image endorsing the narrative of the unprotected/abandoned wife, "filled with melancholy, gazing with sorrow upon a tempestuous sea and a horizon where the sun sinks and no ship appears" (241). According to Mellor, Robinson is "an eighteenth-century Ariadne, confined upon a rock, waiting for a lover who never comes" (241).¹⁴⁹ Hallett echoes Mellor's interpretation of Robinson as Ariadne and connect it to a memorable passage from her *Memoirs* (*Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* 160).

Destitute and abandoned by her lover again – this time by Banastre Tarleton – she

beguiled her anxiety by contemplating the ocean, whose successive waves breaking upon the shore, beat against the wall of their little garden. To a mind naturally susceptible, and tinctured by circumstances with sadness, this occupation afforded a melancholy pleasure which could scarcely be relinquished without regret: Whole nights were passed at her window, in deep meditation, contrasting with her present situation the scenes of her former life.

(vol 2; 115-116)

While it may very well be the case, as Hallett suggest, that Reynolds painted Robinson in the tradition of Veronese's *The Dream of Saint Helena* and even inspired others to follow suit, I propose that this image cannot be divorced from Robinson's own continued

¹⁴⁹ Munteanu agrees with Mellor here, and so does Laura Engel.

interest in visuality.¹⁵⁰ It is indeed possible that Reynolds produced an allegorized version of Robinson in the guise of Ariadne, but it is also likely, given Robinson's attention to her self-image, that he was painting another abandoned woman – one that encompasses the narrative of transition advanced by most scholars, but whose role as a forlorn lover collapses into that of the more significant role of the poet, i.e., the English Sappho.¹⁵¹ In this section I will examine how this remarkable portrait, strategically used as a frontispiece for two of Robinson's poetic collections, represents a deliberately fashioned poetic persona that much like the Gainsborough portrait both invokes and revises certain tenets of Romantic visuality.

The telling passage from her *Memoirs* is only one of many similar instances of contemplative spectatorship that are inextricable from Robinson's poetics. Judith Pascoe has already examined how Robinson's urban flâneurie generated a poet-spectator that used the metropolis as her inspirational ground for celebrating industry and opportunity, especially as both became more available to women (150). It is not until the *Memoirs* though, that we see her repeated verbal self-portraits as a poet-spectator. On another occasion recounted by her daughter, Robinson watched from her window as several fishermen retrieved the body of a man from the sea. His corpse remained uninterred for days, as the authorities refused to bury a man that did not belong to their parish. Having

¹⁵⁰ Reynolds would have seen Veronese's painting, which was in England during his lifetime and widely known through engravings (*Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* 161). In 1787 Romney painted a similar portrait of Mrs. Crouch. (163). A recent x-ray of the painting has also revealed that the sketch for the portrait, still visible under the current version has the sitter's face resting on her right arm, like St. Helena (160).

¹⁵¹ It is somewhat puzzling that scholars have insisted on exclusively connecting the portrait to Ariadne, the exemplar of the abandoned woman, despite Robinson's investment in her image as "The English Sappho" – a term she likely circulated and popularized herself (Pascoe 25).

failed to procure a collection from the women of the parish to fund the burial of the stranger, Robinson resigns him to the unceremonious heap of stones on the cliff (168). Viewing these events from the window of her cottage inspired one of her most famous compositions “The Haunted Beach” – one of Coleridge’s favorite pieces (Ledbetter 46). The instance of “mad Jemmy” reiterates this same association between spectatorship and poetic generativity. Robinson, again immobilized at her window, watches as the brutal mob harasses an “unfortunate maniac, known only by the appellation of *mad Jemmy*. The situation of this miserable being seized her imagination, and became the subject of her attention: she would wait whole hours for the appearance of the poor maniac, and whatever were her occupations, the voice of *mad Jemmy* was sure to allure her to the window” (171). Her obsession culminates with her own version of Coleridge’s more famous laudanum-induced poetic vision “Kubla Khan.” After a few hours of laudanum-infused sleep, Robinson awakes and asks her daughter to write what she would dictate. Although her daughter attempts to dissuade her, “the spirit of inspiration was not to be subdued” and “The Maniac” was born, as Robinson dictated in an opium-stupor “with her eyes closed” and repeating like a person in her sleep, with no recollection of the events the morning after (172). The narrator concludes her account with a meaningful declaration: “This affecting performance, produced in circumstances so singular, does no less credit to the genius than to the heart of the author” (172). Such biographical snippets certainly lay claim to a genius that in its emphasis on the “spontaneous overflow of

powerful feeling” is unambiguously Romantic.¹⁵² The narrator’s description of this poetic outpouring as an “affecting performance” aligns Robinson’s process of composition with the theatre, reminding the reader of the poet’s former career, and simultaneously calling into question the authenticity of the events.¹⁵³ The theatricality of Robinson’s impromptu poetic effusion is then brought into question by the narrator’s reminder that the performance also displays the “heart of the author.” While the process of Robinson’s composition both confirms and questions the innateness of her poetic genius, a theme that her *Memoirs* labor to convey as early as her childhood, her “heart” also adds an element of empathetic relationality that is absent in the works of her male contemporaries.

We know that Robinson had read “Kubla-Khan” in manuscript from her references to its landscapes in dedicatory poem to Coleridge included in her *Memoirs*.¹⁵⁴ However, Robinson’s instances of poetic genius differ from a composition such as “Kubla Khan” in that they are inspired by the author’s identification with the maniac’s destitution and ostracism. The celebratory attitude of male exceptionalism that inspires Coleridge is absent from Robinson’s story. Her genius is stirred into action by the plight of kindred spirits that she observes from the confinement of her domestic space,

¹⁵² See Linda Petersen’s brief discussion of Robinson’s Romantic authorship in the *Memoirs*. See also Ashley Cross’s persuasive analysis of Robinson’s bid for Romantic authorship in her *Lyrical Tales* in conversation with Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s work. Jerome McGann’s “Robinson and the Myth of Sappho” is not quite about Romantic authorship per se, but he does examine the politics of Robinson’s poetics in *Sappho and Phaon*.

¹⁵³ See Pascoe for an extensive treatment of the subject of theatricality in Robinson’s work and the ways she questions the authenticity claimed by the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

¹⁵⁴ See Kathryn Ledbetter’s “A Woman of Undoubted Genius: Mary Robinson and S. T. Coleridge” and Martin Levy’s “Coleridge, Mary Robinson, and Kubla Khan” on Robinson, Coleridge, and the “Kubla Khan” manuscript.

seemingly confirming Mellor's argument of distinctly gendered Romanticisms.¹⁵⁵

Although in "The Maniac" it might appear that she is invoking the same image of the poetic genius as madman, Robinson's lunatic is anything but an empowered creator; he's disabled and feeble, at the mercy of the crude mob that hates him without fearing him. In fact, the speaker's interest in the pitiful madman is entirely empathetic. The impetus of the poem is a call for communication, as the speaker repeatedly asks the maniac to share the cause of his raving. As she offers possible explanatory narratives for his madness, she also asks him to relate his sorrows and declares: "With THINE my mingling tear shall flow, / And I will share thy pangs, and make thy griefs my OWN" (*Selected Poems* 53-54). "The Haunted Beach" is less concerned with empathy than it is with justice in the absence of empathy. Upon failing to invoke the empathy of her fellow parishioners and watching the unidentified body that washed ashore be treated without a modicum of care, in her poetic retelling of the story, Robinson ensures that the anonymity of the dead sailor does not foreclose the possibility of retribution for his supposed murder. His ghostly shipmates, a "Spectre band" return to haunt the spot where he was murdered by a lone fisherman who lives on the beach (55). In the poetic recreation of the spectacle she witnessed, Robinson manages to attribute responsibility to the neglectful spectators of the tragic event, while invoking a higher justice for the implied crime.

¹⁵⁵ In *Romanticism and Gender*, Mellor posits two distinctly gendered Romanticisms that were not necessarily limited to either gender but that were defined either by a monolithic masculine self-sufficiency, or a feminine, community-oriented relationality (1-15). I would hesitate to extend this reading to other female poets who addressed the same subject, however. Charlotte Smith's similar sonnet on a madman "On Being Cautioned Against Walking on a Headland" is one notable example. While the identification of the poet with the lunatic is apparent, Smith celebrates the madman's oblivion, and envies his lack of self-knowledge. Moreover, she relocates the lunatic on the promontory, a location at which she aspires.

It is in the context of such spectatorial literary production that the import of the second Reynolds portrait can proceed beyond an uncomplicated abandoned woman narrative. Indeed, as it will become clear from the forthcoming analysis, this portrait constitutes her most masterful display of control over her visibility by *staging* her retreat from the visual field, while using that same visual field to add narrative profundity to her identity as a poet. The lost profile pose seems to corroborate the scholarly consent of sincere withdrawal from the visual sphere; the sitter turns away from the onlooker, refusing to offer him her full face, so often made the object of the gaze on stage, on canvass, and in print. This is a different kind of unavailability when compared to the Gainsborough portrait, which makes Robinson fully available to the onlooker, albeit in the isolated privacy of a vaporous arcadia. This refusal of the gaze is confirmed by the awkward position of her body, which in facing us disrupts the spatial unity of her figure, reminding the onlooker that she has turned away from him. The evasive gaze of the lost profile situates the sitter within a third person narrative, as opposed to the customary first-person narrative that characterizes most portraits that use the three-quarter profile or the full frontal address.¹⁵⁶ The third person profile allows for a three-dimensional characterization, a narrative fullness that portraits have traditionally been accused of lacking due to their spatial rather than temporal structure.¹⁵⁷

The almost ungainly incongruity of Robinson's positionality is also a painful reminder that her body is no longer her own to command at will. Reynolds's depiction of

¹⁵⁶ Meyer Schapiro examines this distinction in *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (qtd. in Wendorf 15).

¹⁵⁷ See my first chapter for a discussion of this structural difference.

her in a medium length portrait does not increase the proximity between us and the sitter in this case, as it does in his first portrait of her. If anything, it heightens the sense of distance as the sitter pulls her head away from the picture plane. But more importantly, it also serves as a reminder of her disability; by cutting the image off at the waist Reynolds isolates Robinson's functional physicality. To read the portrait only in these terms, however, is to neglect the complexity of Robinson's immersion in the culture of visuality as both spectacle and spectator. This portrait does not only depict a refusal to encounter the gaze of the spectator; it also depicts a spectator in the act of looking, a significantly charged image in the context of Romantic visuality.

While the instances of looking that Robinson and her daughter recount in her *Memoirs* place her within the confines of domesticity, the Reynolds portrait unshackles her from that feminized sphere but insists on retaining her elevated vantage point. Robinson now stands on a cliff overlooking the sea, the edges of the frame recreating the window from which she looked out in her cottage. Reynolds extracts her from a space associated with limited vision and material detail and places her on a promontory associated with the proprietary view, a favorite location of male Romantic poets. Unlike the poet-spectator that Pascoe theorizes in Robinson's urban adventures, this image of the sitter aims for a different kind of spectatorial poetics. Removed from the materiality of the metropolis, withdrawn into her own interiority, Robinson looks upon a blurry whole, the sum of its unimportant parts, pulling a Wordsworth, so to speak.

The indeterminacy of the vista she looks upon is apparent in the indistinct temporality of the portrait. The enervated light that emerges timidly from the left side of

the painting could refer to the sun sinking below the horizon, as Mellor claims, but it could also refer to the sun rising, thus simultaneously imaging a beginning and an end (241). Reynolds's uncharacteristic brushwork here, more reminiscent of George Romney's technique than his own work, contributes to the spatial and temporal ambiguity of the portrait.¹⁵⁸ This misty panorama, the third person perspective, and Robinson's spectatorial poetics conspire to associate the portrait less with Reynolds's other portraits of nonliterary melancholy women and more with Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wanderer Above the Mists* (figure 48). While in no way a conventional *rückenfigur*, because the sitter's back is not turned to the viewer, Robinson's refusal to encounter the gaze of the onlooker paired with her vantage point suggests that the onlooker is witnessing a spectator in the act of looking.¹⁵⁹ The association between the Friedrich painting and spectatorial poetics has been examined at length by Joseph Leo Koerner who compares Friedrich's "halted traveller" to Wordsworth's recurring image of the peripatetic wanderer throughout his poetry ("Borrowed Sight").¹⁶⁰ Echoing the Romantic poet's retreat from the materially visible into the imaginative appropriation of the visible, Friedrich himself declared that "the artist should paint not only what he sees before him but also what he sees within him. If however he sees nothing within him, then he should also omit to paint that which he sees before him" (qtd. in Koerner *Caspar David*

¹⁵⁸ The rough brushwork at the edges of the portrait could also be due to its being unfinished. However, another very rough sketch of this portrait located at The Yale Center for British Art, begun later than the Wallace portrait but never completed, suggests that the Wallace portrait is the final product rather than an early sketch (*Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* 160-162).

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Leo Koerner defines the *rückenfigur* as "a figure in a painting whose back is turned to the beholder and who gazes at the scene before it" (151).

¹⁶⁰ William Galperin also examines what he terms "the photographic impulse" in both Friedrich and Wordsworth's travelers (207-243).

Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape 90). As Koerner explains, Friedrich's practice reflected Wordsworth's poetic process, most notably exemplified in "Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798" as "emotion recollected in tranquility," by painting from the memory of an earlier seeing self in his studio ("Borrowed Sight" 155).

Perched on a rock, caught between facing the onlooker and turning away from him, as if in the process of having been or about to become a *rückenfigur*, Robinson is also a halted traveler, reaching into the past for an earlier spectatorial self. However, unlike Wordsworth and Friedrich, her physical confinement precludes the effortless continuation of her spectatorial activity, and her halted *flânerie* becomes permanent. In a sense, Robinson's retreat into her interior vision is a last resort due to material circumstances, but it is precisely at this point of apparent retreat from the visual field that her gaze becomes more prominent than ever, or more accurately, when Robinson becomes all gaze.

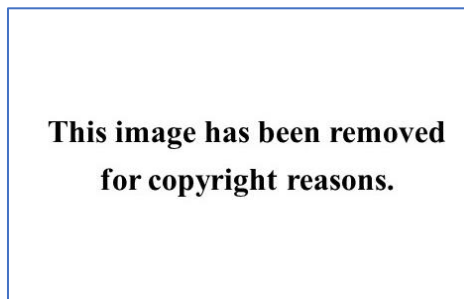


Figure 48. *The Wanderer above the Mists*, 1818, Caspar David Friedrich. Kuntshalle.

Robinson published a series of essays from the perspective of an invisible and prescient Sylphid between 29 October 1799 and 2 January 1800 in the *Morning Post*

(Pascoe 159). The essays were then published collectively under the title *The Sylphid* in her posthumous *Memoirs* in 1801. Pascoe relates the periodical to an earlier series titled *The Sylph* (1795-1796) inspired by Pope's Ariel in *The Rape of the Lock* and written by a male spectator who finds the female gaze disconcerting (159). I would also add a much earlier text written by a woman equally concerned with urban spectatorship as a potential source for Robinson's *The Sylphid*. Eliza Haywood's *The Invisible Spy*, the exact term Robinson uses to describe herself in the introductory sentence to *The Sylphid*, centers on a similar premise. Its protagonist, who does not disclose its gender, has the power of invisibility through a magical belt which is paired with a "concomitant" tablet where the spy documents the results of her surreptitious spectatorship (vol 1; 11-13). Though Robinson's *Sylphid* has no such tablet, it possesses prescience which allows it to "regulate the chequered tablet of human events" (*Memoirs* vol 3; 3). Like Robinson, Haywood was also engaging with early eighteenth-century acts of literary spectatorship by men; indeed, her periodical *The Female Spectator* was a direct response to Addison's *The Spectator*, and it conceptualized a collective of female *flâneuses* who, inspired by what they saw and heard in London society, produced admonishing essays designed to ensure the moral and physical safety of women. It is possible that Robinson was reworking Haywood's spectatorial scenarios, especially in *The Invisible Spy*, given its protagonist's similar attempt to elide gender.

Pascoe argues that Robinson's adoption of the *Sylphid* form "with her unlimited range of movement" represents "an escape from her body" and "a reaction to the limitations of the carriage view" which had become her chief mode of transportation in

the metropolis after her illness (160-161). She adds that it could also represent an “attempt to transcend (literally) a female subject position” and develop an affinity with the gaze of the Romantic male writer, though unlike the fixed positionality of the latter, the Sylphid’s gaze is ubiquitous (161). I believe that Robinson’s Haywood-like elision of gender in *The Sylphid*, rather than exchanging one gender’s limitations for the privileges of the other, aims to fuse the two, and thus retain advantages associated with each. The Sylphid exhibits Robinson’s visual attention to material minutia, especially in its tendency to assume the form of a variety of insects that facilitate a macro-focus of its gaze. However, it also repeatedly associates itself with elevated perspectives that enable it to zoom out and consider the sum of minute parts. Indeed, the Sylphid is born in the “sun-gilded altitudes of Sicily” (*Memoirs* vol 3; 9). And immediately after realizing its powers of rapid motion facilitated by a pair of wings, the Sylphid begins its journey over Italy, eventually resting on one of Robinson’s favored bucolic locations, the clay-reared cottage of the laborious peasant” (vol 3; 10). From the isolated but happy pastoral retreat, the Sylphid ventures over the Alpine hills and “solitudes of snow, where mortal feet have never wandered. Terrific altitudes! sacred to the God of Nature! More intrusive to the philosophic mind than all the sophistry of man, or all the lessons of sanctified law-givers” (vol 3; 10). This aerial journey of vertical extremes echoes the spatial contrast between the Gainsborough and Reynolds portraits; in the guise of the Sylphid, Robinson occupies

both the lowly feminized bower and the proprietary masculine view of Friedrich's wanderer.¹⁶¹

Although the Sylphid recognizes the poetic potential of the craggy Alpine heights, it does not limit itself to the materially averse inclination that male poets pair with them. It still condescends to dive into the ordinary and obscure recesses of daily urban life. Among these lowly spaces, it often locates instances of poetic potential at the mercy of obtuse patrons. On such occasions, the Sylphid becomes muse when "by skimming with light wings over [the poet's] busy brain, [it] impregnate[s] his mind with all the fantastic forms which" it can display (vol 3; 5). Allowing for the cultivation of genius from the garret to the sublime altitudes of the Alps, the Sylphid claims for poetic generativity a versatility and a resilience that question the anti-materiality of Romantic male poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. The Sylphid locates artistic potential among the "romantic scenery of the Welsh mountains" where she invokes "the spirit of imagination" and witnesses a "long train of dauntless visions, such as are described by the inspired and magic pen of Gray!" (vol 3; 18). Quoting Gray's line on "the steep of Snowden's shaggy side" the Sylphid conjures another favored Romantic elevation (vol 3; 18). Instants later, it again descends to the "abode of neglected genius" and beholds "the genuine sons and daughters of the Muses, pining in obscure poverty, and laboring incessantly for a scanty pittance" (vol 3; 19). The Sylphid's extreme vertical shifts foreground the ineluctable

¹⁶¹ Friedrich's *The Large Enclosure* (1832) might actually capture the Sylphid's movement even better than his *Wanderer above the Mists*. Though devoid of a *rückenfigur* the painting's perspective is clear. The slight curvature of the globe apparent on the surface of the depicted enclosure requires the spectator to be "suspended in mid-air" as Friedrich Wilhelm Basilius von Ramdohr put it (qtd. in Wollheim 136). Robinson's Sylphid would be precisely the unlikely spectator – mobile and winged – that this point of view presupposes.

influence of materiality on the life of the poet, but not by imbuing the prospect view with exclusive access to philosophy and imagination. We know from the Sylphid's Muse-like function that inspiration can take place in the obscure garret as well as the high altitudes of the Alps. What the Sylphid labors to make clear is what preoccupies Robinson throughout her work, the reign of the intellectually barren but materially privileged, who decide the poet's fate. It becomes clear throughout *The Sylphid* that the fashionable hordes of the "vulgar rich" and the "ostentatious ignorant" (vol 3; 55) prefer foreign merchandise – intellectual or otherwise – such as French perfumes and French translations instead of English genius (vol 3; 60-62). Echoing Robinson's indictment of such preferences in "Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England," the Sylphid laments the absence of a Siddons, a Cowley, a "sweetly plaintive Smith," a "tuneful Seward," a Siddons, and a Jordan from the fashionable and unpatriotic assemblage (vol 3; 61-62).

Robinson's evolved relationship with visuality emerges in the Sylphid's comparative valuation of Taste and Fashion. Robinson now associates the "melting eye" that she had previously praised in the work of Reynolds with the "distorted Sylph," i.e. Fashion (vol 3; 23). She now relates "languishing eyes" with the "canvass-breathing sensualist, Sir Peter Lely" and excessive ornament with the "garish profusion of degenerated fancy" (vol 3; 24). By contrast, in a direct invocation of Reynolds's grand style, Robinson declares Taste to be "of Grecian extraction, simply but elegantly adorned" associated with the "warm glow [of] the pencil of Claude de Lorraine," "the figures of a Michael Angelo" and "the breathing pencil of Titian" (vol 3; 24-25). The

visual distinction Robinson makes between Fashion and Taste speaks to her fluency in contemporary aesthetic debates at the heart of the hierarchy of painting advanced by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses on Art*. Her subordination of ornament to the superiority of natural simplicity echoes Reynolds's censorious opinion of the Venetian school's sensual celebration of detail and color (*Discourses on Art* 63-69). Reynolds prefers the unified presentation of harmonious parts as exemplified by the Roman, Florentine, and Bolognese schools, famously prioritizing timeless generality over individual specificity and mechanical dexterity.¹⁶² Robinson's comprehensive understanding of Reynolds is particularly apparent in her inclusion of Claude de Lorraine on the list, who although a landscape painter and as such limited in his claim to the grand style, is nonetheless recognized by Reynolds as employing the same idealizing principles of the grand style that he espoused (*Discourses on Art* 70).

According to Labbe, Reynolds's persistence in differentiating between the ornamental and the grand style is informed by a gendered subtext. This gendered distinction between excessive attention to distracting minutia and the harmonious whole becomes apparent in the sensual physicality associated with the Venetian school and the manly sublimity of the Roman school (Labbe 156). The canvass on which the Sylphid's interest in this distinction manifests is femininity. In what appears to be a move largely informed by a nationalist sensibility, the Sylphid maps the ornamental onto the exotic bodies of "the disgusting Hottentots" and the "cramped" feet of the Chinese with their "half-closed heavy eye-lids" (*Memoirs* vol 3; 23). The Sylphid's definition of Taste, on

¹⁶² See my extended discussion of Reynolds's hierarchy in Chapter 2.

the other hand, finds its most exemplary expression in the “glossy tresses of Circassian virgins,” “the Medicean Venus,” and “the poetry of Sappho” (vol 3; 24). The excessive physicality of the former is countered by the varied disembodiment of the latter.

Although the Sylphid lists the Western exemplar of sensuality in the Venus alongside the intact bodies of Circassian virgins, the Venus she invokes is sculptural, precisely the kind of frozen model of femininity that William Hogarth had critiqued in his *Analysis of Beauty* almost half a century earlier.¹⁶³

Sappho’s presence, though at first sight a logical inclusion in the Sylphid’s Grecian crew, is not without some baggage that questions the neatness of the Sylphid’s dichotomous distinction. In a self-serving move, Robinson’s invocation of the acclaimed Greek poet as an exemplar of the grand style conjures her own self-styling as the English Sappho. Sappho’s poetry, recovered in fragments, was famous for its intense sentiment. She entered eighteenth-century culture through Alexander Pope’s translation of Ovid’s epistle “Sappho to Phaon,” in the sexually sanitized version of her story in his *Heroides* (DeJean 46). The eighteenth-century Sappho had been purged of her queerness; her story had been heteronormativized by fashioning the inconstant Phaon as the object of her desire.¹⁶⁴ The Sappho whom Robinson knew and identified with in her sonnet series *Sappho and Phaon* was indeed the abandoned woman longing for her absent lover, ultimately resorting to suicide by jumping into the sea from the Leucadian rock. I believe this image of the suicidal Sappho, driven to despair by her desire, to be a more likely

¹⁶³ See my first chapter for a longer discussion of Hogarth’s critique of classical feminine aesthetics.

¹⁶⁴ DeJean discusses the possible origin of Phaon and his eventual inclusion in Sappho’s narrative at length. See her first chapter, “Female Desire and the Foundations of the Novelistic Order.”

source of inspiration for Reynolds's portrait of Robinson than the more generic Ariadne, though it is of course possible the portrait would invoke both. The Sylphid's association of Sappho with the grand style confirms the propriety of the depiction by Reynolds. Her placement on the craggy heights of the Leucadian rock justifies her elevated vantage point in the portrait, and more importantly, it confirms Robinson's spectatorial poetics. The Sylphid itself asserts a connection to Sappho through its birthplace, Sicily, where Sappho was temporarily exiled, and through its function as muse – Sappho was famously called the Muse of Mytilene (DeJean 5).

Reynolds's grand style was defined by its propensity toward the general rather than the particular. He articulates this difference in terms of longevity, juxtaposing the eternal to the quotidian, hence, privileging the historical and mythological over the passing trends of modernity (48-49). These principles result in attempts to extract the sitter from any specific man-made temporality and award her a kind of immortality through temporal transcendence by allegorizing her representation through elements of the historical or the mythological.¹⁶⁵ The difference is palpable in Reynolds's two portraits of Robinson; the Rubens reference in the first portrait, while a nod to a great artist, was also an example of a fashionable trend. The Rubens dress appeared in several

¹⁶⁵ Desmond Shawe-Taylor, however, claims that an allegorical representation is not entirely compatible with the grand style. The classicization of the sitter is often undermined by the acknowledged silliness of the comparison between the individual and the mythological character – be she a goddess, a queen, or a mortal (166). Shawe-Taylor suggests, instead, that such depictions of female sitters stemmed from a combination of gallantry and playfulness associated with eighteenth-century masquerades and the theatre (168-169). Robinson's frequent depiction as Perdita certainly confirms this theory. Her representation as Ariadne would also be in a similar theatrical vein. Sappho, however, would be a bit more difficult to reduce to mere play-acting, in light of her literary stature and the appropriation of her style by the likes of Alexander Pope in *Eloisa to Abelard*. For more on the male poets' claim to the literary maternity that Sappho represents, see DeJean's (71-72).

portraits citing the same style and reducing the reference to a costume (Hallett 396). Its interchangeability was evident in Fanny Burney's choice of the same pose and dress in her portrait by Edward Francisco Burney. Burney, who was considerably more cautious with her reputation than Robinson, would have surely refused being painted in this dress, if it hadn't been considered an acceptable fashion trend, and if any impropriety had been suggested by its association with a less modest wearer.

The rough treatment of the details in the second portrait makes it difficult to assess the exact sort of dress that Robinsons would have been wearing, had the portrait been finished. Her garment looks contemporary, but its indistinct contours blending with the rock on which she sits minimize these contemporary elements and focus the onlooker's attention on her pensive face, the only complete element of the painting. The formal incompleteness of the portrait echoes Sappho's own fragmented status. Her work survived in fragments – the most famous ones being Fragment 1 and Fragment 31. Even her poetic practice, in fact, relies on deliberate fragmentation. As Margaret Reynolds puts it in her discussion of Fragment 31, Sappho “takes her bodily self apart, breaks herself into pieces, dismembers her parts, anatomizes herself, and then puts herself back together” (2). Robinson emulates this affective dismemberment in her own sonnet series *Sappho and Phaon*, dissecting Sappho's internal struggle, splitting it into love, jealousy, reason, despair, and longing. The sonnet form she chooses to address this internal fragmentation is itself an example of a highly managed fragment. In her “Preface” to *Sappho and Phaon*, Robinson explains that she chose the ancient or “legitimate” sonnet over the modern sonnet because the latter “confines the poet's fancy” and “occasions an

abrupt termination of a beautiful and interesting picture” (*Selected Poems* 144). The legitimate sonnet, on the other hand, eliminates this interruption by facilitating a “series of sketches, composing, in parts, one historical or imaginary subject, and forming in the whole a complete and connected story” (144). This remarkable sentence manages to capture the dialectic between the part and the whole as it unfolds in both literary and visual terms for Robinson. In an astounding display of conceptual frugality, Robinson lays claim to the entire landscape of Romantic visuality by explaining the interrelated function of the fragment and the whole, recognizing the integral value of the part to a harmonious union. Unlike Wordsworth, she does not dismiss the detail by relegating it to a blurry corner of the nebulous literary vista. She insists, instead, on fixing her meticulous attention to the part, catering to its potential, refusing to force an artificial formal unity upon it.

This painstaking attention to detail had made Robinsons the subject of criticism as one of the Della-Cruscan disciples of Robert Merry whose style was defined by his dedication to the excessively ornamental. Jerome McGann’s persuasive reading of Robinson’s *Sapho and Phaon* has successfully recovered her “too glowing” poetry of sensibility as capable of being an effective “vehicle for dealing with transcendent matters” (66).¹⁶⁶ From the viewpoint of Romantic visuality I would add that Robinson’s decorative style, her ostensibly excessive attention to minutia does not foreclose her comprehension of totality; her mobile immersion in visuality enables access to both. Like

¹⁶⁶ McGann reads Phaon as a mere instrument of Robinson’s progressive agenda, the exemplar of one who is not yet enlightened (62). Margaret Reynolds goes even further and calls Phaon a “nothing” (37). The sonnets make clear by their very presence that Phaon is himself unimportant. Even as Sappho laments the loss of her poetic capability because of him, the elaborate sonnet series begs to differ.

the Sylphid's gaze, Sappho's travels with equal ease over the "bow'r of Pleasure" in "yon vale beneath" in Sonnet III and the "rock, coeval with the skies" in Sonnet II (*Selected Poems* 1, 1). Hence, the Sylphid's association of Sappho with the grand style is not as seamless as it would appear; indeed, Robinson's vision of Sappho poses a hybrid challenge to the grand style that sees the ornamental as enmeshed with it rather than antithetical to it. Moreover, the grand style's concern with longevity is better answered by the part than the whole. In other words, the fragment endures precisely because it is a fragment and not a whole, and Sappho as a "magnificent text in fragments" illustrates this most clearly (DeJean xv).

On January 18, 1782, an article in *The Morning Herald* called for its readers to "look at Mrs. Robinson's eyes!" The author described her eye as "full of rhetoric and elocution full of invitations and forbiddings." In Robinson, the author had seen "a woman with an eye of such wit" that he had been struck dumb "with a repartee flash, without the assistance of a single word." In this chapter I have reiterated the anonymous author's call to look at Robinson's eyes, to re-examine her visual encounters with her public and with herself as they manifest in both pictorial and verbal modalities. Reading her poetry alongside her portraiture makes the complexity of her mobile, panoptic, and ever-adaptive gaze fully accessible. This revisionary gaze extended beyond the material landscape of the metropolis and wandered over such distinctly gendered spaces as the feminized bower and the craggy heights conventionally associated with Romantic masculinity. Perhaps like the individual sonnets of *Sappho and Phaon* and the complete series which they comprise, Robinson's portraits are also better understood as individual

sketches that compose a larger inter-connected vista. Each portrait tells its own story of Robinson's relationship to visuality, but together and alongside her poetry they make available one woman's continuous conversation with the shifting landscape of visual culture through the late eighteenth-century and the early Romantic period.

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Conclusion



Figure 49. *Mary Wollstonecraft*. John Opie. c. 1792. Tate Britain. London.

Looking, nay, *staring* at the viewer with impunity, Mary Wollstonecraft seems to demand an explanation for our interruption of her work (figure 1). The quill and inkpot to her left suggest that the papers in front of her are likely of her own creation. The image puts forth a woman writer, not by referring to an ancient poetess or by dressing her up in

the ethnic costume of her writing subjects, but by depicting her in the act of writing.¹⁶⁷ The medium-length portrait pulls us into the intimate space of Wollstonecraft's writing desk, allowing us to intrude voyeuristically into her work, but only to be brazenly confronted by the sitter, baffling us with her inquisitive stare. Unlike the portrait of the literary women I have discussed so far, Opie's depiction of Wollstonecraft seeks to neither aggrandize, nor flatter the sitter. Wollstonecraft appears here without frills and ribbons, her hair not meticulously arranged to reflect contemporary fashion, but though powdered, falling lank on her shoulders, her only adornment – if we can call it that – a headscarf holding the bulk of her hair away from her face.

This casual but polite aesthetic – Wollstonecraft is wearing what appears to be a silk gown – does not only reflect the candor of the portrait, which as we know from other images of literary women, generally amounted to a studied informality that was anything but casual. By being depicted in mid-writing, Wollstonecraft presents herself as she was, relatively neglectful of her personal aesthetic, and more invested in her work than her coiffure or any other physical adornments. Janet Todd describes her general appearance as “austere” (Todd 155). John Knowles called her a “philosophical sloven,” her “usual dress” being a “habit of coarse cloth, such as is now worn by milkwomen, black worsted stockings, and a beaver hat with her hair hanging lank about her shoulders” (qtd. in Todd 155). Repudiating superfluous ornament in women as an index of a natural fondness for dress that Wollstonecraft had critiqued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Carter was depicted with a quill in hand by Katherine Read (1765), but her gaze is averted and she sports the veil of the Roman Matron, all part of an effort to neutralize anxieties about the propriety of a woman engaged in public intellectual pursuits. The portrait is currently at Dr. Johnson's House in London.

Wollstonecraft may very well have been practicing what she preached. The portrait was painted the same year that Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication*, and the image of the author certainly corroborates her rejection of the maxim that “beauty is a woman’s scepter,” one taught to women from their infancy (64). In a proto-phenomenological move, Wollstonecraft warns that a woman’s “mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (64). Unlike the protagonists of my chapters, who sought to shape the contours of their gilt cages on their own terms, Wollstonecraft strips her prison of ornament and attempts to break down its walls by positing a utilitarian view of the body. It is no wonder Knowles compared her appearance to that of a milkwoman; the laboring physicality implied by his reference is precisely what Wollstonecraft championed in *A Vindication*, a physicality that should be inculcated as early as elementary day-school by allowing male and female children to “be usefully exercised” in a “large piece of ground” surrounding the school-room (*A Vindication* 202). Indeed, Wollstonecraft thought that this ought to be the main activity of children; other daily pursuits such as “reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy” should never interfere with “gymnastic plays in the open air” (203). The body that Wollstonecraft posits is designed to develop one’s strength and maintain the good health that was the antithesis of the delicate bodies of women who spent their days endlessly lounging in chaises, eating little to nothing to maintain an attractive sensibility.

The body Opie has outlined in the portrait above is first and foremost a sturdy, useful body, hunched over the pages of a manuscript, as its owner look up from her work.

The sitter's hands do not languish indolently as they often do in such portraits. One of them is shown holding the manuscript, while the writing instruments on the left remind us of the *manual* labor that must have produced it. Even as Opie posits a body at work, he does not neglect to also foreground the sitter's mind, whose acuity we are forcibly confronted with through the assault of the direct address, threatening to spill out of the canvas and onto the spectatorial space. The direct address was already always problematic for women, whose modesty relied on averted eyes. Wollstonecraft's direct address surpasses the knowing erotics of Robinson's gaze in her first portrait by Reynolds.¹⁶⁸ It is aggressive, inquisitive, severed from sexuality, her eyes wide open, expressive of the mind busy at work on the manuscript before her. The body we see here is not a prison, but a useful instrument in the service of the sitter's mind – not just a vessel for the mind, but a partner, who ought to be cared for according to its capacity as such.

That John Opie was the author of such an image of Wollstonecraft is unsurprising, given the friendship between him and the sitter. Opie admired Wollstonecraft and was an admirer of strong women in general. Todd suggests that he was inspired by women like Wollstonecraft to include portraits of Joan of Arc and Boadicea in his exhibit for Robert Bowyer's Historic Gallery in Pall Mall (406). In fact, he spent so much time alone with Wollstonecraft that Amelia Alderson suggested that they were likely going to be married, Opie reportedly more invested in this possibility than Wollstonecraft (406).¹⁶⁹ All this

¹⁶⁸ See my last chapter on Mary Robinson.

¹⁶⁹ Of course, Opie asked Alderson to marry him only a few months later and she accepted (Todd 406).

time around a painter must have inevitable taught Wollstonecraft an appreciation for the intricacies of the process. Moreover, her infatuation with Henry Fuseli, with whom she spent time regularly as well must have also contributed to her knowledge about art and the possibilities available to her as a sitter. We know from a letter that Wollstonecraft wrote to William Roscoe in October 1791, that she did seem to care about her visual representation. Roscoe had commissioned a portrait of her the year before the Opie portrait was painted and Wollstonecraft wrote to him about the sittings. She declared that she did not “imagine it [would] be a very striking likeness; but if [Roscoe did] not find [her] in it, [she would] send [him] a more faithful sketch – a book that [she was then] writing, in which [she herself] . . . shall certainly appear, head and heart” (*Collected Letters* 190). Her comment evinces a certain skepticism about portraiture and the perils of the shared authorship it entailed. As Lucy Peltz observes, she seemed to have been “uneasy about giving up control over the representation of herself,” an inevitable aspect of the portrait event (110).

The resilient relationship between Opie and Wollstonecraft would last through the sitter’s infatuation with Henry Fuseli and her relationship with William Godwin. Opie would paint one more portrait of Wollstonecraft, shortly before her death, while she was pregnant with her daughter Mary (figure 2). This image reiterates the prominent physicality of the 1792 portrait – her pregnancy undetectable – and depicts Wollstonecraft with averted eyes. She appears in even simpler dress, her hair unpowdered and crowned by the beaver hat that Knowles mentioned in

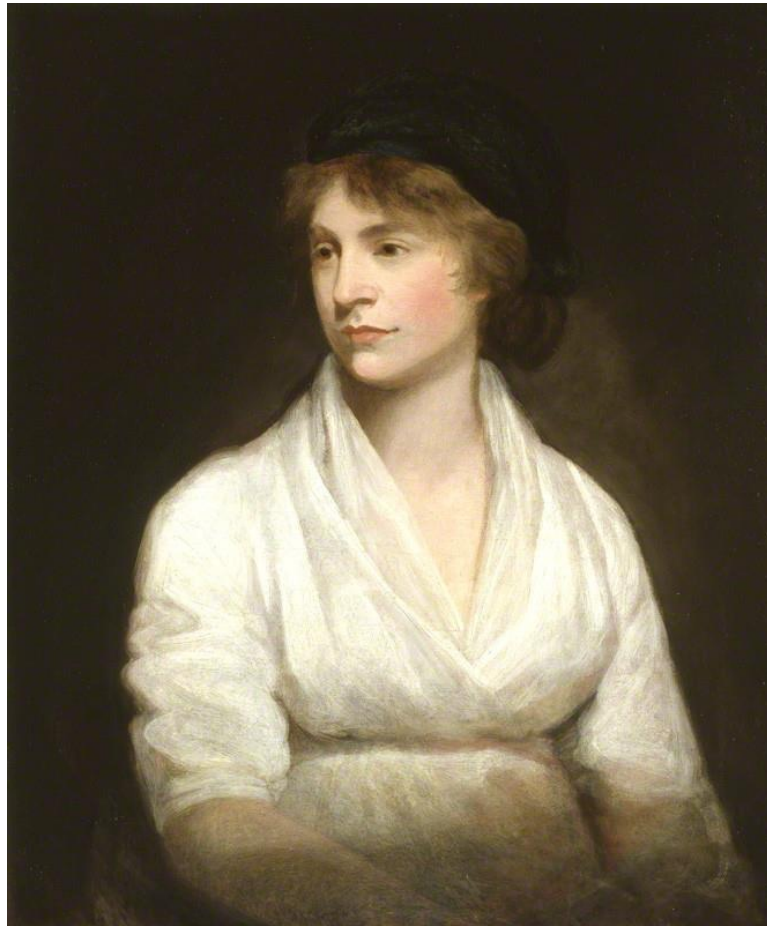


Figure 50. *Mary Wollstonecraft*. John Opie. 1797. National Portrait Gallery. London.

his unflattering description. Although devoid of the instruments of writing, the portrait insists on Wollstonecraft's intrepid spirit through the simplicity of her appearance. Her unadorned white dress echoes that of other strong women depicted by Opie, whose Joan of Arc and Boadicea are also depicted in white rustic gowns. Moreover, although the simple white shepherdess dress had been made fashionable by Mary Robinson upon her return from France, this one is starkly different from the ruffled and ribboned version

initially popularized by Marie Antoinette and apparent in other portraits of contemporary women by Opie, including his own wife and Charlotte Smith.

Such portraits of the woman writer mark a stark departure from the images I've discussed so far in their uncompromising authenticity of self-expression. Wollstonecraft allowed Opie to depict her as she was, or rather as the author of *A Vindication* would have liked to be depicted. That Wollstonecraft was a much more complicated woman, whose life and character were fraught with contradiction between the sensibility she so despised and the rationality she so esteemed, is evident from her letters and Todd's exhaustive biography. Opie's portraits, however, present us with an intimate view of the feminine aesthetic that Wollstonecraft championed, without elaborately engaging with contemporary fashions as Lady Mary did almost a century earlier and as the Duchess of Devonshire, Elizabeth Montagu, and Mary Robinson did, contemporaneously with Wollstonecraft. Eventually, however, Wollstonecraft's skepticism about shared authorship of her public representation would be justified. In her absence, and in the throes of grief and despair, her husband painted a portrait of Wollstonecraft, that, had she not been dead, might have very well killed her. The Wollstonecraft Godwin described in the *Memoirs* was a reconstruction of an absent sitter who could not pose for her own image. The distortion that followed this single-authored attempt at the portrait of the woman author famously produced a "female Werther" that Wollstonecraft would not have been thrilled with, to say the least. Mellor goes as far as to list Godwin's portrait of Wollstonecraft as one of the major reasons that Bluestocking influence faded at the end

of the century, its impact comparable to the reactionary response to the French Revolution.

Even if her portraits present a distinct aesthetic from that of many of her literary predecessors and contemporaries, Wollstonecraft shared with them a knowledge of and anxiety about the management of her image. In a sense, what Godwin did was what scholars have repeatedly perpetrated against female sitters, a neglect of their contributions to their own images. While we might excuse Godwin's actions given his state of mind, we can do more to remedy our continued scholarly slight. I have made the case for an interdisciplinary consideration of literary and visual materials that tell a more complicated story of visual culture in the long eighteenth century than what is available if such materials are interpreted in isolation. Like those of the literary women who came before her, Wollstonecraft's thoughts on the gendered politics of feminine aesthetics made their way into her portraiture. In Wollstonecraft's case, this interdisciplinary dialogue is perhaps more evident, given her explicit preoccupation with reforming feminine physicality through education. But even where the connection is less transparent, my analysis has shown that women writers in the eighteenth-century were active participants in conversations about portraiture and visual culture more generally. They contributed to such conversations in their writing and by strategically co-managing their own images as well as those of others. Exploring the full extent of such interdisciplinary encounters will unveil a more dynamic, even if less coherent, terrain of visual culture in the long eighteenth-century.

I want to conclude by reminding the reader that the modern implications of this continuing project are significant. The eighteenth-century marked the birth of visual culture and aesthetics as institutionalized systems defined by structures that we now take for granted, such as art academies, exhibitions galleries, and museums. Hence, restoring women's role in this narrative requires that we also revise our understanding of aesthetic modernity. Including their voices in the eighteenth-century debates that established what would qualify as art for centuries to come is crucial to our interpretation of the modern network of institutions that both support and circumscribe artistic expression.

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