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Women and the City in Novels of the Romantic Period

Martha Musgrove

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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For the PhD Degree in English Literature

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ABSTRACT

"Women and the City in Novels of the Romantic Period" investigates how women writers used the novel to explore a dynamic relationship between femininity and urban space. To provide an historical context, the thesis begins by summarizing contemporary accounts of how rapid urbanisation affected the lives of middle-class women. These records suggest what is also reflected in fiction of the period: by careful negotiation of social codes, women were able to find considerable latitude in the city for experimenting with different kinds of femininity. Turning next to selected novels of the Scottish writer Mary Brunton and Jane Austen, the thesis examines the evolution of a distinctive version of "domestic woman" shaped by urban influences. In Brunton's work, this new figure serves as a mediator between traditional and modern economies; in Austen's novel, the heroine unsettles images of the gentry estate as stable, enclosed and enduring. Next, the thesis identifies in the prose works and fiction of Mary Robinson, the Countess of Blessington, Elizabeth Inchbald and Elizabeth Hamilton, the presence of a "semi-detached *flâneuse*," a trope encapsulating feminine urban experiences. Taking pleasure in being part of the London scene, the *flâneuse* also justifies her presence in the city through the reformative functions she undertakes. Finally, the thesis looks at three London novels by Maria Edgeworth which depict heroines training themselves to take part in the political life of the nation by engaging in public sphere critical discourses. Moving into the foreground the largely overlooked relationship of women and the city, this dissertation shows that women's fiction developed new constructions of femininity, uniting the nurturing values of the ideal domestic woman with the rationality and agency born of modern urban experience. The novel of sentiment thus

emerges as more layered and complex than often charged, capable of confronting large themes and registering the transition of Britain from a homogeneous, settled, rural society to a diverse, mobile urban one.

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PREFACE

Writing from London to her sister Cassandra in 1813, Jane Austen described a day of riding about the city in a carriage, visiting shops and making calls. She reported, "I liked my solitary elegance very much, & was ready to laugh all the time, at my being where I was. — I could not but feel that I had naturally small right to be parading about London in a barouche."[1] Austen's reaction to her expedition — a mixture of delight and unease — is echoed in a number of novels written by women during the Romantic period (circa 1780-1830), works that depict their middle-class heroines testing the possibilities of urban experience even while acutely aware that their claim to a place in the city might be challenged. My dissertation, "Women and the City in Novels of the Romantic Period," considers how the conjunction of feminine body and metropolitan space helped shape women's writing at a pivotal moment in the history of all three categories named in its title: women, the city, the novel. It looks at representations of women negotiating the metropolis spatially and socially in selected British fiction in order to investigate how writers used the novel not only to express an understanding of the centrality of the city within modern life but also to explore a dynamic relationship between women and urban space.

Critical analysis of fiction written at the turn of nineteenth century tends to assume an essential opposition between women and the city. Gary Kelly, for example, has identified the novel as an important weapon in a cultural revolution whereby the professional middle-class joined with rural gentry to supplant an aristocratic court culture and establish a new

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[1] Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 213-14.

model of national community.[2] Central to this construct was "domestic woman," a figure dissociated from rationality, civic life and — especially — the alien city. Kelly further argues that writing about feminine domesticity and its gendered associations with emotion, the intimate realm and nature, was the primary means by which women writers could overcome objections to their entry into public discourse, particularly through the still-suspect genre of the novel. John Barrell makes a similar connection among women, the novel and the countryside when he argues that the eighteenth-century georgic celebrating rural life survived into the Romantic period by becoming attached to the novel of sentiment, a feminized genre "suitable for appropriation by women precisely because it no longer attempted the large masculine themes." Reiterating the motif of estrangement between women and the city, he associates this "domesticated georgic" with teaching a woman "to seek fulfilment not in the wide world but within herself."[3] Cultural historians account for a fictional preoccupation with rural femininity, in part, through a theory of compensation. Leonore Davidoff, for instance, suggests that the English response to unprecedented social and economic change engendered by the growth of industrial capitalism was the creation of a *beau ideal* that integrated femininity, home and the country village. The greatest threat to this defensive mechanism was "the promiscuous life of the city."[4] This ideology reaches an apotheosis in Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village*, a series of sketches published between 1824 and 1832 that describe a woman's daily life in a village south of London. Deidre Lynch points out that Mitford's work, which remained popular throughout the nineteenth century,

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[2] Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (New York, NY: Longman, 1989), 86.

[3] John Barrell, "Afterword: Moving Stories, Still Lives," in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 247.

[4] Leonore Davidoff with Jeanne L'Esperance and Howard Newby, "*Landscape with Figures*: Home and Community in English Society," in *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives in Gender and Class*, ed. Leonore Davidoff (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 54.

had the effect of installing "a national culture in this snug parochial place."[5] So pervasive has been the assumption that women were somehow alienated from the urban environment that the corollary — only men could engage with and represent the city in fiction — has inevitably taken hold.[6]

However, a qualifying view points out that, despite its potency, the ideal of rural femininity fails to account for the much more complex and diverse historical position of British women. Penelope Corfield has determined that, at the end of the long eighteenth-century, women formed a majority of the population in most British urban centres, including London, due in part to their greater longevity and to a female influx from the countryside in search of employment and greater independence.[7] In contrast to rural villages, the city offered women residents a much wider range of opportunities for taking part in public life. Davidoff suggests that women were "actors as well as spectators" in a proliferation of urban new institutions established for cultural, entertaining or philanthropic purposes, and Linda Colley argues that the period saw "a marked expansion in the range of British women's public and patriotic activities," many of which took place in urban centres.[8] Perhaps not surprisingly then, some women novelists of the period located their fiction in the cities and towns that had become increasingly familiar and important to their readers. The metropolis may be depicted as challenging territory for women, yet novels of the period suggest that urban experience is an inevitable, necessary element of female formation. The capaciousness

[5]Deidre Shauna Lynch, "Homes and Haunts: Austen's and Mitford's English Idylls," *PMLA* 115.5 (2000), 1104.

[6] A recent example of this view is Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005). Alter includes only one woman writer, Virginia Wolf, among the half-dozen novelists whose nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction deals with city themes.

[7]Penelope Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 99.

[8]Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History," in *Worlds Between*, 240; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 250.

and plasticity of the novel in this period gave women writers scope to define the metropolis in dynamic as well as didactic terms, and, in stories of women's daily lives, to open up the city's complex dimensions as a context for modern femininity. Women novelists' representations of the city confound conventional oppositions and political configurations to experiment with urban space as a site for self-definition, intellectual stimulation, economic independence, professional development and new forms of community.

The opening chapter of the dissertation provides the historical context for my subsequent analysis of novels. During the long eighteenth century, for most British readers, "the city" meant London.[9] Based on contemporary accounts, Chapter One focuses on the much documented growth of the capital and how the changes wrought by rapid urbanization affected the lives of middle-class women. Observers of London at this time seemed both exhilarated and bewildered by the crowded, protean, chaotic nature of the capital, and this mixed response encompassed attitudes towards women's presence in the city. On the one hand, London promoted the beneficial formation and refinement of the female character; on the other, women were implicated in many of the negative aspects of metropolitan life. The experiences of Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, described in their respective correspondence from London to family members, illustrate how, by careful negotiation of the social codes defining their acceptable behaviour in urban space, women were able to find considerable latitude for experimenting with different kinds of femininity.

Subsequent chapters turn to depictions of urban women in the dominant fictional genre of the period, the novel of sentiment. In these sections, I rely on the work of several theorists who have studied the modern metropolis. Although their sociological investigations

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[9]In Chapter 2, I take brief side trips to the urban centres of Edinburgh, Bath and Portsmouth, all experiencing conditions similar to those in London.

were conducted in the context of other cities and other times, they are helpful as an analytical framework because they speak to many of the same conditions that marked London during the period of my study and because they share with the women writers whose fiction I examine a fascination with the effect of the city on the individuals who live there. German social scientist Georg Simmel (1858-1918), for example, in his influential essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," speculated on the likely physiological and psychological responses to the material and economic conditions resulting from rapid urbanization, and he proposed that individuals developed a specific defensive mechanism, what he ironically terms a "blasé attitude," to ward off deracinating effects.[10] French theorist Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) looked at related modes of adaptation in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In particular, he described the creative tactics used by "common practitioners" to evade the technologies, built environments, and social codes that seek to impose homogeneity and discipline on urban residents.[11] Writing about late nineteenth-century Paris, German literary critic Walter Benjamin evoked the *flâneur* — a male figure whose 'profession' is to walk the city's shopping arcades, directing a dispassionate, discerning gaze on the passing crowds — to explain, like Simmel, the alienation engendered by the modern capitalist city. In his miscellany, *The Arcades Project* and in his writing on poet Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin transformed the *flâneur* into an enduring image of urban anomie. In contrast, for German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, a significant feature of the modern city was sociability rather than estrangement. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas located the birth of influential public

[10]Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings,* ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 175.
[11]Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 124.

opinion in new eighteenth-century urban institutions, especially the London coffee houses, which fostered rational discussions about political issues of common concern.[12]

Chapter 2 examines the evolution of a distinctive version of "domestic woman" shaped by urban influences in selected novels of the Scottish writer Mary Brunton (1778-1818) and Jane Austen (1778-1817). Closely identified with the conservative landed gentry, Brunton and Austen nevertheless shared an interest in women's urban experiences. Although her work remains largely neglected, Brunton's two completed novels, *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814), generated positive response from readers[13] and respectful critical attention from periodical reviewers in both London and Scotland.[14] At least one critic placed her work "in the higher, though not highest, class of novel."[15] The attention Brunton now receives most often places her in the context of Austen, who considered the Scottish writer a serious competitor.[16] Brunton's fiction is of particular relevance to this dissertation because of the explicit contrast she draws between country and metropolis and between the two largest cities in early nineteenth-century Britain. Towns figure surprisingly often in Austen's

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[12]On this point, see also Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Borsay observes that late eighteenth century middle-class culture relied on "sociable leisure" for self-definition, and, to this end, new institutions and built environments (concert halls, libraries, city squares and promenades), frequented by women as well as men, provided the socially ambitious with the necessary sites and occasions to demonstrate attainment of a desired status.

[13]*Self-Control* appeared in four editions between 1811 and 1812, was translated into French in 1829 and remained in print until 1850. *Discipline* was printed in three editions from 1814 to 1815, was translated into German in 1823 and remained in print until 1849. See Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel, 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 341 and 294.

[14]*Self-Control* was reviewed in nine journals; and *Discipline*, in seven. A posthumously published incomplete novel, *Emmeline* (1819) was reviewed in twelve journals. In comparison, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* were each reviewed in two periodicals; the combined volumes of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in three; only *Emma* was as widely reviewed as Brunton's work, in eight publications. See William S. Ward, *Literary Reviews in British Periodicals, 1779-1820: A Bibliography*, Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Garland, 1972), 177-78.

[15]*British Critic* 38 (September 1811), 213.

[16]In a recent presentation, Alyson Bardsley noted that Brunton suffers from a problem of categorization, and she "tends to be defined by what she is not:" that is, not Austen but also not Hannah More. "The Body as Valuable Object in Brunton's *Discipline*," *Romantic Diversity*, 16th Annual North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) Conference, University of Toronto, 21-24 August 2008.

novels, yet the function of women's urban experience in her fiction remains relatively unexplored. In the work of both novelists, women exposed to urban conditions take on the characteristics of what Simmel termed "the metropolitan type": a subjectivity fashioned out of the sharpened intellect, emotional reserve and pragmatism generated by the pressures of modernity (*MML* 175). Drawing on de Certeau's influential figure of the common practitioner, I suggest that, as she moves through the town, the heroine in the work of Brunton and Austen uses creative "ways of operating" to reshape urban places into conformity with her own interests (*Practice* xv). In Brunton's work, this new "domestic woman" serves as a mediator between traditional and modern economies; in Austen's novels, the figure unsettles images of the gentry estate as stable, enclosed and enduring.

Chapter 3 identifies in the prose works and fiction of Mary Robinson (1758-1800) and Marguerite, Countess of Blessington (1789-1849) the presence of what I term "the semi-detached *flâneuse*," a figure encapsulating the metropolitan experience of middle-class women. A long-standing complaint of feminist cultural historians is that women are invisible in accounts of modernity because there is no trope similar to Benjamin's *flâneur* to serve as a focal point for their presence in the city.[17] Both Robinson and Blessington were themselves quintessential urban women —*flâneurs* of a sort — who deliberately fashioned a public presence integrally linked to London. For both women, however, the notoriety attached to their personal lives has tended to overshadow their considerable professional accomplishments. Robinson achieved success in London as an actress, poet, journalist and novelist. Blessington is remembered as a writer of best-selling 'silver fork' novels, but she began her career in the early part of the nineteenth century with travel memoirs, including

[17]Janet Wolff, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory Culture and Society* 2.3 (1985): 37-46.

Conversations of Lord Byron (1832) based on her friendship with the poet while both were living in Italy. In their respective work, Robinson and Blessington present a suggestively similar female figure with roots in eighteenth-century moral philosophy but also gesturing toward a modern masculine image like the *flâneur*. Their *flâneuse* takes pleasure in being part of the urban scene but, as she directs an engaged, sympathetic gaze toward the human relationships in play around her, she also assumes an important reformative function, pointing to how the city is improved by the presence of women.

Chapter 4 focuses on Maria Edgeworth (1768-1848), the most respected woman novelist of her day. Although better known for her Irish tales and children's stories, Edgeworth wrote three novels set in London which establish city living as an essential step in an enlightened educational program for young women. Edgeworth's urban narratives are distinctive because her heroines train themselves to take an active role in the political life of the nation, participating in what Habermas termed the public sphere through their engagement in rational discourses located in sites of metropolitan sociability, especially the urban drawing room. Edgeworth illustrates how such discursive practices exert a reforming influence on both the domestic sphere of conjugal relations and on the political realm.

By moving into the foreground the largely overlooked relationship of women and the city in novels of the early nineteenth century, I show that women's fiction developed new constructions of femininity steeped in and shaped by the city, uniting the nurturing values of the ideal "domestic woman" with the rationality and agency born of modern urban experience. The novel of sentiment thus emerges as more layered and complex than often charged, capable of confronting "large masculine themes" and registering the transition of Britain from a homogeneous, settled, rural society to a diverse, mobile, urban one. Viewing

the modern city from an under-represented vantage point, women writers of the period portrayed it as a space of self-actualization where a woman could enjoy, and claim a right to enjoy, "parading about London in a barouche."

CHAPTER 1

"THE LONDON EVERYONE DELIGHTS TO SEE": THE CITY IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

In the autumn of 1831, Thomas Carlyle travelled to London from his Craigenputtoch exile to test the possibility of earning a living in the capital through writing and lecturing. In letters to family members in Scotland he frequently expressed disgust with the noxious brew of mud, dampness, fog and smoke that characterized a London winter and, more especially, with the "soul-and-body-deafening tumult" of the city. Yet he admitted he also found "great charm in being here; at the fountain-head and centre of British activity, in the busiest and quickest-moving spot that the whole Earth contains."[1] His divided response is symptomatic of encounters with the British metropolis in the early nineteenth century. As did Carlyle, many of those who first visited London during the period 1780-1830 found themselves responding in two ways. Even as they catalogue the difficulties associated with town life — noise, crowds, frenetic pace — contemporary observers also reveal what Raymond Williams calls the "sense of possibility" inherent in London.[2] Thus the Birmingham bookseller and local historian William Hutton recalls in his *Journey to London* (1818) the trepidation he felt on approaching the capital, mixed with excitement at being "in the midst of philosophers, poets, politicians, warriors; the eminent in every species of knowledge."[3] In such accounts,

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[1]Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh Carlyle, *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, 12 vols., ed. Charles Richard Sanders and Kenneth J. Fielding (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), Vol 6: 55, 95-96. Subsequent references are given within the text in parentheses noting volume and page number.
[2]Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 5.
[3]William Hutton, *Journey to London*, 2nd edition (London: J. Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1818), 10.

the city figures not simply as an agglomeration of streets and buildings but also as an experience, generating descriptions infused with expectation and response. As Romantic-era commentators on London wrote of the material city, they also wrote of their own hopes and disappointments, excitement and *ennui*, admiration and disgust.

This chapter looks at key features of the discourse on the metropolis that took shape with London's emergence as a world city at the end of the long eighteenth century. The capital had long been the subject of commentary, but, as rapid urbanization threw into sharp relief the positive and negative aspects of metropolitan life, a proliferation of letters, essays, memoirs and travel narratives attempted to capture the city's contradictions. Observers admired patterns of coherence, but they were also aware of an unsettling potential for disorder to erupt. This instability generated in residents and visitors alike an anxiety comprised equally of aspiration and apprehension. I argue that this disquiet converged on the multiple meanings of 'place' to refer to a locality, one's social position, and an activity whereby one assessed another's standing in the community. Providing freedom and opportunity, a city like London could underwrite individual social mobility, yet hard-won respectability might be suddenly compromised by injudicious intermingling with residents of a dubious reputation.

The problem of 'place' seemed particularly acute for women as their presence in the city generated contradictory responses. On the one hand, metropolitan experience comprised a recommended component in the formation and refinement of femininity. On the other, women were implicated in many of the temptations and vices associated with London, and were especially vulnerable to being 'mis-placed' as prostitutes. Indeed, a preoccupation with transgressive female activity in contemporary accounts suggests women were a receptacle

for a more general urban unease. Efforts to bring containment and order to the city as a whole found a parallel in social codes that defined respectable, middle-class female behaviour in the metropolis. Although these prescriptions for urban femininity imposed obvious restraints, they nevertheless opened up opportunities for women to claim their place in Romantic London.

The Urban Fact of London

Seven years before Carlyle moved to London to test his fortunes, he visited it for the first time as tutor to the Buller family. His description of his first sight of the capital memorably encapsulates the urban fact of the city. As the ship on which he travelled slowly moved up the Thames to Tower Wharf, Carlyle found that the "giant bustle, the coal-heavers, the bargemen, the black buildings, the ten thousand times ten thousand sounds and movements of that monstrous harbour formed the grandest object I had ever witnessed. One man seems as a drop in the ocean; you feel annihilated in the immensity of that heart of all the Earth" (*Letters* 3:84). For a traveller from rural Scotland there was something both appalling and majestic in a scene that coupled noise and confusion with pattern and purpose. Carlyle's observations identify two of the factors associated with London's status as a modern, world city: unprecedented growth and the attempt to impose coherence on the resulting chaos. As Oscar Handlin points out, a fundamental marker of urban modernity is the emergence of civic order to contain a rapid population increase. The economic changes that took place in Britain in the course of the eighteenth century from individual to centralized modes of production, he notes, required both large infusions of capital and a shift in the workforce from the countryside to city centres. Devising new concepts of urban

organization through the realignment of space promised protection for investment and a ready availability of labour.[4] To these criteria of growth and order, Emrys Jones adds a supra-national presence and technological innovation as features that distinguish a world city from the other modern urban centres that developed in the period. However, Jones observes, a common set of "pathologies" could partially offset these progressive features. [5]

The rapid population growth experienced in London during the Romantic period certainly made the establishment of order a matter of urgency. Comparing the mid-eighteenth century capital with that of the first decade of the nineteenth, the antiquary and topographical draftsman James Malcolm warned that the town was becoming "overwhelmed with population" as "the inhabitants of the Country watch for favourable opportunities of removing to this enormous magnet; or, if that cannot be accomplished, they send their offspring of both sexes."[6] The city's population rose in absolute terms throughout the eighteenth century, roughly doubling from an estimated 575,000 in 1700 to over one million at the time of the first official census in 1801.[7] Even more significant was the accelerating pace of this growth: during the period 1700-1750, the population increased by seventeen percent; between 1750 and 1800, the increase was forty-two percent; in the early nineteenth century, the city's population increased by twenty percent each decade.[8] By 1800 London

[4]Oscar Handlin, "The Modern City as a Field of Historical Study," in *The Historian and the City*, ed. Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1963), 1-26.
[5]Emrys Jones, *Metropolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 18.
[6]James Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London During the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 484-85.
[7]E.A.Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy," *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 37 (1967): 44-70.
[8] These figures are derived from Francis Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 363-64.

was twice the size of Paris and the largest city in the world outside Asia.[9] Aside from sheer numbers, the nature of its growth made London's population inherently unstable. A persistently high mortality rate meant that the city grew only by attracting migrants, primarily from the surrounding countryside, at an estimated rate of 9,000 each year.[10] Moreover, those drawn to the capital tended to be young and single, lacking roots either in the city itself or in individual domestic circles. Nor were new Londoners a homogeneous group. In 1786, the German novelist Sophie Von La Roche was startled by "the strange apparition of a Moorish funeral" on her way to Sadler's Wells; two decades later, Louis Simond, a French-born New York merchant, noticed East Indians in the streets, walking about "with immense umbrellas, particoloured, red and white."[11] As Britain's imperial power grew, immigrants from overseas colonies began to arrive in London, adding to the Irish and Scots, as well as the Jewish refugees from the Continent, who had collectively comprised the city's non-English population.[12]

These demographic changes were accompanied by topographical expansion, as the metropolis continued to spread beyond its original core. When the Lutheran pastor, grammarian and inventor Frederick Wendeborn, long resident in London, expressed concern about "the mad spirit of building" gripping the city in 1791, he was in a sense simply reinforcing observations made by Daniel Defoe earlier in the century.[13] Defoe had noted that "in the modern acceptation," London had already moved well beyond City walls to stretch

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[9]Penelope Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 10.
[10]Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 272-73.
[11]Sophie Von La Roche, *Sophie in London, 1784: Being the Diary of Sophie Von La Roche*, 2nd ed., trans. Clair Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), 131; Louis Simond, *An American in Regency England*, ed. Christopher Hibbert (London: The History Book Club, 1968), 161.
[12]Inwood, *A History of London*, 273-74.
[13]Frederick Wendeborn, *A View of England Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century,* 2 vols., (London: G.G.. and J. Robinson, 1791), Vol.1: 252.

from Blackwall in the East to Hyde Park Corner in the west, and from Southwark north to the Acton Road (now Marylebone High Street). Yet within this circumference, Defoe's London included large tracts of undeveloped or waste land and villages only loosely connected to the metropolis.[14] From the third quarter of the eighteenth century, a number of factors coalesced to create a dramatically different footprint for the city. Intensification of housing stock took place as multiple units sprang up on sites that once hosted a single large dwelling, and new buildings appeared on land previously undeveloped. The construction of new roads and additional bridges across the Thames made property on the city's margins available to wealthy merchants seeking more salubrious areas outside the City. Further, the end of the Seven Years War prompted a building revival that lasted, with only an occasional falter, through to the Victorian period.[15] By the time of the 1801 census, London had engulfed parts of parishes on both banks of the Thames in Surrey and Middlesex, and it now reached south to Camberwell and Bermondsey, north to Islington, and as far west as Twickenham and Ealing. By 1809, the Swedish poet and historian Erik Gustaf Geijer warned that the city's "miasma extends daily, for London swallows villages at a mouthful when they come too near its jaws."[16] Efforts to contain the consequences of a burgeoning, deracinated population propelled the rudiments of urban planning that emerged in the period, and the improvements that observers admired in London's built environment reflected a drive to establish a new spatial organization.

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[14]Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 4 vols., 7th ed. (London: Birt, Osborne, Browne, Hodges, Osborn, Millar and Robinson, 1748), Vol. 2: 89.
[15] George Rudé, *Hanoverian London 1714-1808* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), 17-19. Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges opened in 1750 and 1769 respectively. Vauxhall, Waterloo and Southwark Bridges were constructed between 1809 and 1819.
[16]Erik Gustaf Geijer, *Impressions of England, 1809-1810*, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge and Claude Napier (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), 82.

Central to this effort was the imposition of what Donald Olsen terms "rationally conceived patterns of growth and development," especially on new areas of the city.[17] Although a great deal of construction proceeded haphazardly, visitors to London were invariably impressed with the orderly, planned residential developments located in the western parts of the metropolis. A visiting Prussian officer, Johann Von Archenholz, found the "very lofty, exceedingly commodious" houses in the area almost like palaces.[18] The buildings he admired were the products of a unique proprietary system that allowed private landowners to exert extraordinary influence over the design and development of large sections of the city. Since the early seventeenth century, members of the British aristocracy had amassed land holdings in what is now London's West End through purchase, marriage or crown grants.[19] A combination of commercial acumen and what P.J. Atkins describes as "deliberate social distancing" governed the subsequent development of these holdings.[20] Establishment and preservation of order were central to the achievement of both objectives. Ground landlords retained ownership of their property, parcelling out sections on long leases, typically ninety-nine years, to speculative builders who agreed to construct according to precise specifications. Olsen stresses that the "whole character — social, architectural, and economic — of a neighbourhood could be determined by the kind of street plan the landlord chose to impose, the kind of leases he chose to grant, and the kind of control he chose to

[17]Donald Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 6.
[18]Johann Wilhelm Von Archenholz, *A Picture of England,* 2 vols. (London: Edward Jeffery, 1789), Vol. 1:128.
[19]For a more detailed description of London estate development, see Olsen, Chapter 1; Inwood, Chapter 9; Sheppard, Chapter 10; and Sir John Summerson, *Georgian London*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1963), Chapter 7.
[20]P.J. Atkins, "The Spatial Configuration of Class Solidarity in London's West End 1792-1939," *Urban History Yearbook* 17 (1990), 39.

exercise over his tenants."[21] The rationale for landowners' building requirements went beyond aesthetic considerations. To protect the value of their reversionary rights, ground landlords were particularly anxious to attract desirable tenants through ensuring the quality and exclusivity of any development on their property. The Building Act of 1774 enhanced their authority to do so by defining a structural code and establishing categories or 'rates' for housing, based on size and consequent value. By requiring such standardization, the Act conferred "some degree of order and dignity" on subsequent estate development.[22] The resulting visual message of conformity was unmistakable. In her 1814 guide to London, author and philanthropist Priscilla Wakefield argued that Paris might boast magnificent public edifices, but London compensated for this lack with its "great uniformity."[23]

The basic design unit on aristocratic urban estates was the square, a spatial configuration ideally suited for "an inward looking locality of like-minded people."[24] The draftsman Malcolm enthused over the pattern: "Pure air, so essential to the preservation of life, now circulates freely through the *new* streets; squares, calculated for ornament, health, and the higher ranks of the community, are judiciously dispersed, and their centres converted into beautiful gardens" (*Anecdotes* 742). Unlike its seventeenth-century precursor, the city square of the Romantic period was not anchored by a nobleman's palace. Rather, housing stock was designed to provide both temporary accommodation for those in town for 'the Season' and permanent residences for the new entrepreneurial and professional classes. Olsen describes the constant vigilance exerted by estate offices to establish and uphold

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[21]Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 8.
[22]Summerson, *Georgian London*, 125.
[23]Priscilla Wakefield, *Perambulations in London*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, 1814), 16.
[24]Atkins, "The Spatial Configuration of Class Solidarity in London's West End," 39.

respectability. Businesses were generally denied premises in residential squares; accommodation for domestic servants and tradesmen was tucked out of sight in rear mews along with the mundane apparatus associated with domestic comfort; and sub-letting space for lodgings or offices was prohibited. As one contemporary observed, the handsome iron railings used to surround the central squares and to enclose residential entrances and service areas had a double benefit: they offered protection "against the populace" but did not "intercept the view."[25] Of particular importance was maintaining access to the fashionable sections of town while erecting barriers — in effect, forming gated communities — to discourage traffic from less desirable districts.[26] As a result of these early exercises in town planning, the West End became identified as a distinctive place with characteristic features of spaciousness, uniformity and restraint; at the same time, its design principles ensured that any out-of-place elements could be readily identified and eliminated.

One of the few publicly-directed developments in London during the period adopted a similar approach to containment. The 'Metropolitan Improvements' (as they were designated) designed by John Nash, at the behest of the Prince of Wales, linked Carlton House on Pall Mall with Marylebone Park to the north. Nash's objective was to create a unified artery, "perfectly balanced" in both design and use, to function as an instrument of spatial definition.[27] His initial proposal included a royal summer palace, private villas, parkland and a handsome thoroughfare connecting the new development to St. James's Park. In his first report to the Surveyor-General, Nash set out a vision for Regent Street that offered specific accommodation for the wealthy and leisured through a series of arcades to

[25]Simond, *An American in Regency England*, 26.
[26]Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 113 and 145.
[27]Christopher Hibbert, *London: The Biography of a City* (London: Allen Lane, 1977),128.

protect from inclement weather "those who have nothing to do but walk about and amuse themselves."[28] At the same time, Nash promised that the new approach to Regent's Park would itself constitute "a boundary and complete separation between the Streets and Squares occupied by the Nobility and Gentry, and the narrow Streets and meaner houses occupied by mechanics and the trading part of the community."[29] Nash's design thus established Regent Street as a place of monied leisure opening out to the gracious environs of Mayfair, even as it turned its back on — and blocked access from — the teeming rookeries of St. Giles and Soho.[30]

The rational patterns adopted for West End estate development and Nash's 'Metropolitan Improvements' reflected and relied on prosperity derived in large measure from Britain's supra-national position as an imperial trading nation. Visitors frequently commented on London's role as a warehouse for goods arriving from other parts of Britain and abroad. Jeanne-Marie Roland, wife of a former French minister, was struck by the "very noble spectacle ... presented by the Thames, the rendezvous of ships of all nations bringing to London their commodities and riches."[31] As new industrial towns developed in the Midlands and around coastal ports, London's share of Britain's international trade lessened during the Romantic period. Nevertheless, the value and volume of the city's imports and exports, especially from the East Indies, continued to increase, necessitating by the early

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[28]The concept of a covered walkway in the midst of a shopping street was subsequently replicated by Lord Cavendish in his redevelopment of Burlington House in 1815-19 and by Nash and George Repton during construction of the Royal Opera House in the Haymarket a few years later.
[29]Quoted in Terence Davis, *John Nash: The Prince Regent's Architect* (Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles, 1973), 64-65.
[30]On this point, see also, Edward Copeland, "Crossing Oxford Street: Silverfork Geopolitics," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25 (Spring 2001): 116-34. Copeland notes that an additional objective for Nash was to link new residential development north of Oxford Street to the centre of political power in Westminister. Copeland traces the significance of the new artery as the conduit for a shift in political, economic, social and cultural power featured in early Victorian novels.
[31]Jeanne-Marie Roland, *The Works of Jeanne-Marie Philipon Roland* (London: J. Johnson, 1800), 196.

nineteenth-century the construction of four large new docks downstream from Tower Wharf.[32] Although much of the merchandise received in London was directed to continental markets, a great deal also wound up in the capital, and the town's shopping districts testified to the scope of Britain's commercial reach. A Swiss traveller and agent for European royalty Jacques-Henri Meister was amazed by "the variety of merchandize of every kind exhibited in the windows of the different shops and warehouses, displaying in the most ingenious manner a sight of the production of all parts of the habitable globe."[33] The pleasure London's shops afforded contemporaries seemed as much aesthetic and improving as acquisitive. Displays of silver, jewellery and fashion drew admiring glances, but the exhibits of engineering, mathematical and scientific instruments were of equal interest to men and women. Charles Moritz, a Lutheran pastor from Berlin, maintained that the city's shopping districts were so edifying as to serve for the instruction of children. He reported in 1795 that "here it is contrived as much as possible, to place in view for the public inspection, every production of art, and every effort of industry," and he observed that a row of shops resembled nothing so much as "a well regulated cabinet of curiosities."[34]

What struck visitors most was the innovation used by London shopkeepers to display their goods. Mme Roland noticed that everything was placed to advantage in the shops "behind beautiful glasses that protect them from every inconvenience. Even fruit, pastry, fish, and butcher's meat are set out with this luxury of cleanliness" (*Works* 175-76). Von La Roche was particularly taken with "a cunning device for showing women's materials.

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[32]Hibbert, *London: The Biography of a City*, 179.
[33]Jacques-Henri Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England*, trans. Henry Meister (London: Longman and Rees, 1799), 192.
[34]Charles P. Moritz, *Travels, Chiefly on Foot, Through Several Parts of England* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 268.

Whether they are silks, chintzes or muslins, they hang down in folds behind the fine high windows so that the effect of this or that material, as it would be in the ordinary folds of a woman's dress, can be studied" (*Diary* 87). Although there is considerable debate among historians on the timing of and impetus for a consumer revolution in the early modern period, there appears to be general consensus that at the turn of the nineteenth century "English shopkeeping expanded, rationalized, and became particularly innovative."[35] Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna Mui, for instance, note that improvements in inland and overseas transportation and communication, coupled with an increase in disposable income, created conditions for a new system of retail trade unique to Britain.[36] Within this framework, London merchants introduced a number of innovative marketing and sales techniques to capitalize on rising consumer demand. Bright interior lighting from Argand oil lamps, plate glass windows, and bow-shaped store fronts, inaugurated in the mid-eighteenth century but still a novelty to visitors from the counties and the continent, were among the new practices that distinguished the city's main shopping districts. What tied these innovations together was the imposition of order on the purchasing process. Advertisements appeared in newspapers and handbills; price-ticketing replaced bartering; and cash transactions gradually took the place of unlimited credit.[37] Meister observed that shop windows, seeming to promise infinite selection from among "so many things laid open to view," at the same time

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[35]Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11. The parameters of this debate are contained in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England,* ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982) and Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

[36]Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[37]Dorothy Davis, *Fairs, Shops and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1966.

imposed discipline through the "art and attention" with which the goods were arranged (*Letters* 17). Mme Roland complained that "the handsomest articles" were set out on display but once in a shop, a buyer would discover that her choice was limited (*Works* 211). Even street markets became more orderly and convenient; Von Archenholz reported that they featured "certain fixed stations, where neither the buyers nor sellers need fear being run over by the wheels of carriages, or trampled upon by the hoofs of the horses" (*Picture* 1:133). The regulation encouraging transformation of the late eighteenth-century retail sector from the medieval practice of haphazard bartering in sprawling, open markets into a system of enclosed specialized sales outlets, indicated the desire by local authorities to establish tighter control over the urban environment.[38]

This resolve to manage public, commercial space seems to imply the presence of a strong, centralized municipal authority. In fact, throughout the period London was governed by a "disorderly jumble" of local assemblies and parish vestries.[39] Yet, by the turn of the century, the city was a byword for new approaches to the provision of public services, especially street lights and paved thoroughfares. Moritz was "astonished at the admirable manner in which the streets are lighted up," lending the city an air of "festive illumination."[40] Meister was equally impressed with the new pedestrian footways "so that you may walk along the streets with as much ease as in your chamber" (*Letters* 83). A gradual shift in responsibility for lighting and street maintenance from individual building owners to

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[38]Michael Winstanley, "Temples of Commerce: Revolutions in Shopping and Banking" in *The English Urban Landscape*, ed. Philip Waller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154.
[39]Sheppard, *London: A History*, 214. In 1800, there were at least 90 separate administrative bodies in addition to the City of London.
[40]Moritz, *Travels, Chiefly on Foot, through Several Parts of England*, 28. The novelty of London's municipal lighting seems to have given rise to an urban legend in which a dignitary visiting from the Continent mistook town lights for illuminations specially installed in his honour. The tale is told with variations in Von Archenholz (1:136), Moritz (28) and Hughson, *Walks Through London* (2).

corporate bodies with paid employees made provision of such amenities possible. From the mid-eighteenth century, a series of Acts of Parliament allowed private sector commissions to levy taxes on home and business owners to finance the paving, lighting, cleaning and policing of London's streets. The spread of municipal utilities was neither uniform nor progressive. Many parishes lagged behind their wealthier counterparts, and there were frequent power struggles between local governments and independent commissioners. Despite occasional setbacks, however, an 1802 guide to London could boast with some truth that the "streets are wide and airy; and surpass all others in Europe, in their convenience for trade, and the accomodation (sic) of passengers of every description."[41]

Advances in municipal design and technology such as the installation of gutters and sewers to aid street cleaning or the introduction of gas-fired street lamps early in the nineteenth century clearly supported London's private commercial interests. Exterior lighting extended business hours and safer, cleaner streets enticed shoppers to linger and spend. Pastor Wendeborn reported that "More people are seen in the streets of London at midnight than in many considerable towns of Europe at noon-day" (*View* 264). Sophie Von La Roche appreciated the wide sidewalks of Oxford Street that could "stand six people deep and allow one to gaze at the splendidly lit shop fronts in comfort" (*Diary* 141). But such innovation also supported civic order. Broad pavements promoted the swift, efficient movement of the crowds that thronged the city, and a clearly-defined spatial code imposed discipline on pedestrians. A gentleman, for example, was required to ensure a lady kept close to the wall while walking along the pavements, safe from being splattered with mud by passing coaches or hit by projectiles from above. Geijer cited the unwritten rules governing

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[41]Richard Phillips, *The Picture of London for 1802* (London: R. Phillips, 1802), 13.

personal navigation of London streets: "The art is to go with the stream. Two such move incessantly in opposite directions on the broad pavements on both sides of the streets, while the middle is filled with those riding and driving. I pity him who gets into the wrong channel. If you should bump into anyone it is advisable not to look back. It appears then to have happened intentionally" (*Impressions* 91). London's size, topographical ordering and civic amenities stamped it as a distinctive place, as a world city. At the same time, these features also exemplified the overriding objective of establishing order on the chaos caused by unprecedented growth. For contemporaries, this goal seems to have been implemented with some success. In his frequent forays throughout the city, Meister observed that he "met with fewer disturbances and frays than are to be seen in Paris in one morning" (*Letters* 20). For Geijer, London was remarkable as a mature, complete community. "Manners, government, education — all is here *one* piece, if I may put it so, and a solid whole," he observed. "Each part knows its place and is steadily that which in such a system it can be" (*Impressions* 245).

However, while much in their description of material London testified to the city's coherence, observers also saw signs of disorder. Mme Roland, for one, was perplexed that "so many sources of crimes and virtues" could co-exist in the city and wondered that "the national cleanliness and public order which are peculiar to it are almost always at variance with the climate and certain customs" (*Works* 192). This contrast attested to the fact that the innovation characteristic of world cities cannot entirely offset the "common pathologies" arising when population growth outpaces civic improvement.[42] Mixed in with admiring accounts of London's streets and shops were reports of troubling, negative aspects of the

[42]Jones, *Metropolis*, 18.

city's growth. Although because of its geographical spread, London was less densely populated than many of its European counterparts, its bustling streets appeared congested.[43] William Hutton complained that there was "nothing in London so much wanted as room; ... there is money to buy, but no space to be bought" (*Journey* 15). And even order and dignity could pall. Meister found in the uniform streets a "sameness which is intolerable" (*Letters* 188). Perhaps more seriously, feeding, housing and keeping the city's inhabitants warm inevitably resulted in environmental degradation. Smart new shopping districts did not entirely replace markets dealing in basic food commodities. Throughout the city there were specialized sites for the sale of fish, poultry and meat, and up to the first decades of the nineteenth century, cattle were still driven through town to a central slaughterhouse at Smithfield.[44] Carlyle captures the chaos of the market in his description of "coaches and wains and sheep and oxen and wild people rushing on with bellowings and shrieks and thundering din as if the earth in general were gone distracted" (*Letters* 3:218). Pastor Moritz was disgusted with London's butcher shops where "[g]uts and all the nastiness are thrown into the middle of the street, and cause an insupportable stench" (*Travels* 266). Equally evident were the fog and smoke that seemed so often to envelop the city. Since the seventeenth century, Londoners had burned sea coal for residential and industrial uses, and the ensuing soot filled the air and corroded the stonework of public buildings. New Yorker Simond complained that "the smoke of fossil coals forms an atmosphere, perceivable for many miles, like a great round cloud attached to earth. ... The air, in the mean time, is loaded with small flakes of smoke, in sublimation — a sort of flower of soot, so light as to float

[43]Sheppard, *London: A History*, 207.
[44]Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 193.

without falling. This black snow sticks to your clothes and linen, or lights on your face" (*Journal* 33). As an additional hazard, London's crowds generated tumultuous noise, and even genteel young ladies might suffer from the confusion. In her epistolary guidebook, Wakefield presents a young woman unable to sleep during her first few nights in London, disturbed by the "rattling of coaches, conveying company home from places of public amusement" in the evening and by "the cries of chimney-sweepers, old clothes-men, milk-women, and muffin-sellers" in the early morning (*Perambulations*145-46).

Wakefield's young woman also worried about the prospect of a city fire, a reminder that personal safety was often compromised in London. Hutton was taxed by a "great number of starving beggars" when he walked through the town (*Journey* 47). Geijer, too, noticed great disparity in the city: "One sees large houses, but also wretched hovels, ragged children and, what one has not hitherto seen in England, people whose whole character is permeated by want and depravity" (*Impressions* 82). Working-class neighbourhoods adjacent to elegant West End Squares were often characterized by "planlessness and squalor."[45] Possibly because of this visible inequity, concerns about crime, long a staple of urban representation, were acute. Although there were no reliable statistics to indicate that London was less safe during the period, the difficulty of maintaining order faced by a police force fragmented among local authorities was more evident in areas of urban concentration than in the countryside.[46] Police magistrate Patrick Colquhoun's startling assertion that one in ten Londoners lived on proceeds from criminal activity was among the factors prompting

[45]William Ashworth, *The Genesis of Modern British Town Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 33.
[46]Inwood, *A History of London*, 370.

a gradual transition to a unified, professional police service in 1829.[47] Stimulated by fresh memories of the Gordon Riots and reinforced by events in Revolutionary France, unease extended from fears of urban criminal classes to apprehension of a more general insurrection. Von La Roche described how even a well-to-do audience attending a Covent Garden performance could turn into an unruly mob when caught in a crush. Packed into a staircase, unable to move forward or retreat, gentlemen "lost their hats and cloaks; clothes were torn, arms crushed," and "many a charming person had to suffer for the lovely ringlets hanging over her shoulders, which were tangled and tugged enough to make their owners scream" (*Diary* 218). Geijer was both fascinated and appalled by the prolonged unrest (known as the O.P. riots) that greeted attempts by the proprietors of the new Covent Garden Theatre in the autumn of 1809 to increase admission fees. For weeks, performances were interrupted by crowds voicing their disapproval with catcalls and noisemakers. So high were feelings, he reported, that "Even women tried to speak, and these speeches were regularly reported next day in the papers." The Swede determined that the real issue driving dissent was not price alone but the right "of Englishmen freely to pronounce their judgments in the theatre so long as they refrained from damage and violence" (*Impressions* 99). For James Malcolm, the greatest threat to security lay with London's underclass whose "progress through the streets is marked by impetuosity and a constant exertion of strength" (*Anecdotes* 481). At best, the mob taunted respectable citizens with obscene insults; at worst, they might explode into violence.

Perhaps because of these stark contrasts of wealth and poverty, order and confusion, progress and suffering, contemporary observers often resorted to images of St. Paul's

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[47]Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 2nd ed. (London: C. Dilly, 1976), xi-xii.

Cathedral to represent the double condition of London. The cathedral was an obligatory stop for tourists, but visitors seemed as interested in the relationship between the structure and its surroundings as in its architectural features or interior decoration. Von Archenholz complained that the site concealed from spectators the cathedral's "proper point of view," and as a consequence, hid "all its beauties" (*Picture* 86). For Von La Roche, "the magnificent great stone pile" seemed constricted by narrow surrounding streets (*Diary* 123). Moritz saw the church as a force of nature, rearing up through the fog "like some huge mountain, above the enormous mass of smaller buildings" (*Travels* 9). Geijer fancifully ascribed to the cathedral an "indignation on the race of shopkeepers who buy and barter beneath its walls"(*Impressions* 83), an impression shared by Carlyle. The latter relates his experience (common even today) of "hurrying along Cheapside into Newgate-street amid a thousand bustling pigmies" when, looking up "there stood Paul's," seeming "to frown with a rebuking pity on the vain scramble which it over-looked" (*Letters* 3:93-4). Visible for miles and often a visitor's first sign of the city, Wren's majestic edifice lent concrete form to the urban fact of the metropolis. Its splendid dome testified to the order and achievement that made London a world city; yet the jumble of buildings crowding the cathedral's base compromised these messages of stability and decorum with negative images of confusion and crassness.

Anxiety of Place

For those seeking to make their way in the capital, a complementary resonance flowed from St Paul's, representing that singular compound of anticipation and apprehension associated with urban anxiety. From its dome, the cathedral offered viewers the opportunity

to encompass the immeasurable, to knit together a totalized whole of the city from fragmentary impressions. Berliner Pastor Moritz was among those who spent hours on the outdoor observation gallery, delighting in his ability "at one view to see a world in miniature" (*Travels* 101). In his meditation on the practice of walking urban streets, French historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau suggests that there are two sources of pleasure in being able to view a city from above. First, the body is "lifted out of the city's grasp," literally rising above the myriad sensory impressions that threaten to overwhelm an individual at ground level. Moreover, a panoptic view presents the city as a stable text, melding oppositions into a fixed, readable pattern.[48] Moritz's ambition to comprehend the city as a whole, thereby containing its heterogeneity, was common among his contemporaries and resulted in innovative approaches and technologies to familiarize newcomers to London. The Lutheran Reverend Wendeborn advised any visitor to obtain one of the new maps of London immediately on arrival, "as the best means to survey such a heap of buildings, and to find his way through thousands of streets, which perplex even those who have resided many years together in this extensive town" (*View* 308). The town directories that proliferated in the late eighteenth century promised that the city "could be rendered intelligible, decipherable and finite, however mysterious, inchoate and vast it might outwardly appear."[49] In their introduction to *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840,* James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin point out that Robert Barker introduced in this period an innovative technique to replicate precisely the view of a

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[48]Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 92.
[49]Penelope Corfield, "'Giving Directions to the Town': The Early Town Directories," *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), 22.

city in the round, as seen from an observation point on high. Termed *panorama*, Barker's application of a three hundred and sixty degree perspective to painting provided those unable or unwilling to make the climb with an accurate representation of an entire city scape. His exhibits, including a 1791 showing in the capital of *London from the Roof of Albion's Mills*, whetted such "sensational appetites" for panoramas that his work subsequently went on tour through the continent and North America, and other artists soon took up the technique.[50] Chandler and Gilmartin discuss the significance of the panorama in the context of a discourse that dissolved opposition between the city and its rural surroundings. However, like the view from the dome of St. Paul's, the panorama also provided viewers with the converse, more comforting impression that London was indeed contained and finite. From their elevated position — actual or represented — viewers found their status enhanced and protected from the chaos below, and from this distance they might map out a path to achievement within the city's visible limits.

As Certeau notes, however, another city always exists below the serene prospect, one shaped from spontaneous movement and contingent event. Operating at street level and confronting a city in constant flux, the individual can only negotiate urban space with "an opaque and blind mobility," and thus loses any sense of participation in an overall plan (93). In a collection of annotated London scenes, the publisher Rudolph Ackermann reminds his readers of their place in both the readable and also the unscripted city. *The Microcosm of London* (1808-1811) was directed to both residents of and visitors to the capital. Each of the one hundred and four sections of the work provides the type of commentary one might

[50]James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, "Introduction. Engaging the Eidometropolis" in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005),1-41.

expect from a combined urban history and guidebook: the site's origin and current status, significant architectural and decorative features and anecdotes relating to its use. But Ackermann was equally intent on conveying the human dimension of the metropolis. To this end, he commissioned aquatint illustrations designed jointly by Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson to accompany each entry, the former detailing architectural accomplishment, while the latter provided "exact delineations of the sort of company" who frequented the public places of London.[51] Given his emphasis on wealth, continuity and adaptability of the institutions described, Ackermann seems to have intended the work to be a celebration of the city's role as capital of the British empire. Yet there is a troubling note, possibly inadvertent, in reminders to readers that many of the landmarks depicted were established to deal with the results of urban pathologies: asylums for deserted girls, prisons for the criminal classes, workhouses for the indigent, bankruptcy courts for the improvident and hospitals for the insane. The work thus draws attention to the vulnerability of individuals in the metropolis. Ackermann's description of the prospect from St. Paul's draws attention to both readings of London. A bird's eye view from the top of the cathedral may very well reveal "the extent and variety of the surrounding country," he notes, but it is also a reminder of "the diminished state of all living and moving objects" below. For those seeking to rise in the world, the view from St. Paul's suggested tantalizing possibilities for establishing their place in London's "geographical grandeur," but simultaneously it contributed to insecurity by providing a sobering lesson in their own "pigmy minuteness" (*Microcosm* 3: 150).

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[51]Rudolph Ackermann, *The Microcosm of London, or London in Miniature*, 3 vols., 1808-1811 (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 1: 23.

Certainly, many of those encountering London came equipped with lofty ambition. Thomas Gisborne, Church of England clergyman and well-known author of conduct literature, suggested that those attracted to the capital usually wished to improve their position in some way. He observed that "Business, interest and curiosity, the love of pleasure, the desire of knowledge, the thirst for change, the ambition to be deemed polite, occasion a continual influx into the metropolis from every corner of the kingdom."[52] Carlyle arrived determined that "[t]he talent which God has given me shall not rust unused" (*Letters* 8:54). More modestly, the Scottish poet and memoirist Anne Grant visited the capital in 1805 to find a London publisher for her work and to expand her contacts within "a very desirable circle of acquaintance."[53] Even tourists hoped to benefit in some way from their experience of the metropolis. Firm Anglophile before her visit, German novelist Sophie Von La Roche eagerly looked forward to engaging with "the centre of a nation prominent throughout so many centuries, ... the home of Newton and of Addison" (*Diary* 85). Swedish poet Geijer's translator believes that London "released [the young Swede's] powers" so that, returning home after a prolonged stay in the capital, he stepped forward "as a profound thinker in the fields of philosophy, education, history and aesthetics" (*Impressions* 21). Exposure to the capital seemed to equip aspirants with the raw materials required to realize their ambitions.

Contemporary accounts suggest London was characterized by one such ingredient: energizing movement. On his walking tour, Berliner Moritz was excited by "the constant

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[52]Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797), 312-13.
[53]Anne Grant, *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan*, ed. J.P. Grant (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1844), 50.

walking, riding and driving up and down in the streets" (*Travels* 84), while the "animation and spirit" noted by the Swiss traveller Meister made the leap from anticipation to realization of success seem possible (*Letters* 191). The city's vigorous pulse appeared to stimulate a physical response in its residents and to serve as both tonic and inspiration. Anne Grant enjoyed the novelty of finding herself "blended in the gay and busy crowd," and if she later fell asleep during a performance at the Opera, it was only because she had worn herself out exploring the warren of by-ways between Soho and Westminster Bridge (*Memoir* 50). When she moved to the capital in 1834, Jane Welsh Carlyle immediately pronounced "this stirring life is more to my mind" (and, moreover, good for her bowels), and she proved this assertion by walking miles from a visit near Regent's Park back to her home in Chelsea (*Letters* 7:251). Essayist Charles Lamb confessed that when depressed, he "rushed out into [London's] crowded Strand, and fed [his] humour, till tears have wetted [his] cheek for unutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture."[54] Much as he might complain about the surrounding tumult, even Carlyle admitted he found his mind "much stimulated, and as it were filled with new matter to elaborate" as a result of urban bustle (*Letters* 7: 177).

An additional spur to achievement was the civic and personal freedom offered by London. Wendeborn claimed that the British capital was unique in this regard, noting "[t]here is no place in the world, where a man may live more according to his own mind, or even his whims, than in London. For this reason, I believe, that in no place are to be found a greater number of original characters, which are the offspring of such freedom" (*View*

[54]Charles Lamb, "The Londoner," 1802, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols., ed. E.V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1903), Vol. 1: 39-40.

1:257). Contemporaries cited several reasons to account for such latitude. Continental visitors in particular pointed to Britain's relatively long history of institutions that allowed a modicum of civic participation. Others noted the liberating anonymity arising from being one among a multitude. Geijer, for instance, discovered that, within the barrier erected by British reserve, a Londoner enjoyed considerable leeway for self-expression: "My place in society, my speech and answer, my silence, my pleasure, so long as it does not interfere with that of others, is here as much respected as all other property" (*Impressions* 126). Jane Carlyle attributed the scope offered individuals by the city to a toleration grounded in diversity. As she explained to an Edinburgh connection, "if there is any one thing to be learnt more than another, by living in London it is a due Catholicism of taste. One sees so many things which one has been used to consider antagonists and irreconcilable, existing along side of one another in peace and harmony" (*Letters* 9:168-69). Her assessment is born out in an account given by Sophie Von La Roche of a luncheon she attended in Knightsbridge, hosted by the Italian adventurer Comte Cagliostro, where she met and discussed education and religion with politician and agitator Lord George Gordon. She relates that she "had to laugh at the tricks of a fortune which contrived for an Asiatic charlatan to introduce an English fanatic to a German novelist" (*Diary* 137).

In this heady atmosphere of freedom and toleration, observers noted that London offered many occasions — formal and informal — for the realization of individual potential. Although their accounts of the city included descriptions of places for entertainment and amusement, contemporaries placed equal, arguably greater, emphasis on institutions associated with self-improvement. An 1817 guide to the city numbered close to five

thousand educational establishments, including schools, colleges and Inns of Court.[55] These were supplemented by a number of public associations such as the London and Surrey Institutions that promoted learning in science, literature and the fine arts. The period from the 1763 Treaty of Paris to the early nineteenth century witnessed "an astonishing number" of additions to the list of London's public buildings, including many affiliated with improvement by means of professional, trade and educational organizations.[56] What impressed observers about these educational facilities was their relative accessibility. Annual admission to the lectures, library and reading room of the Royal Society, for example, was four guineas for gentlemen and two guineas for ladies. Guidebook author Wakefield reminded her young readers that entrance to the various debating societies that had sprung up across the town was priced "within the reach of the common order of people; and the liberty of haranguing the audience is granted to every one who has a sufficient share of self-confidence to believe himself qualified for the task" (*Perambulations* 412). At the apex of urban galleries and collections sat the British Museum, which by the early nineteenth century offered free admission to its immense and valuable collection. Moritz was impressed with the demotic mix of visitors to the Museum, reporting "[t]he company, who saw it when and as I did, was various, and some of all sorts; some, I believe, of the very lowest classes of the people, of both sexes" (*Travels* 69).

Contemporaries also stressed the informal means by which Londoners might improve their station. Wendeborn claimed that a "man of learning ... may gratify here his favourite inclinations, for libraries, for new publications, for learned acquaintance" (*View* 259).

[55]David Hughson, *Walks through London* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1817), 2.
[56]Hibbert, *London: The Biography of a City*, 135.

Established in the eighteenth century as the "natural home" of the country's print culture, the city provided residents with greatly increased quantities of political and other information.[57] The enterprising Moritz found a shop in the City where he could read as many newspapers as he wished for half-pence a day. Bookstalls selling out-of-fashion works or single volumes of sets at low prices abounded, and those unable to buy might, Wakefield pointed out, visit circulating libraries that diffused "useful knowledge to multitudes, who, without their aid, would have no opportunity of cultivating their minds at all" (*Perambulations* 415). Many in the city seemed to avail themselves of these opportunities. Moritz was impressed with the spread of literacy among London's general population, reporting "the English national authors are in all hands, and read by all people, of which the innumerable editions they have gone through, are a sufficient proof." Even his landlady — "only a taylor's widow"— could read Milton with the proper emphasis (*Travels* 38). In affording proximity to the great and famous, London also encouraged individual initiative. Von La Roche was able to find a temporary place for her son Carl to study with a well-regarded chemist, and while he was trying to establish himself in the city, Carlyle was glad of the chance to meet Wordsworth, "the greatest Literary character at present in England" (*Letters* 8: 85). For William Hazlitt, the very act of living in London was enriching. A Londoner was linked to his fellow citizens in "a community of ideas and knowledge," and he could see the world "in the stream of human life pouring along the streets — its comforts and embellishments piled up in the shops — the houses are proofs of the industry, the public buildings of the art and

[57]Sheppard, *London: A History*, 250.

magnificence of man."[58] The stimulation, latitude and intellectual richness of London convinced Carlyle that he had a future in the city. Early in his permanent move to the capital he confided to his brother John "Here, so long as I can hold out, is the place for me; I must learn here to live; or renounce the hope of ever doing it in these climates or under any known conditions" (*Letters* 8:169).

Despite his apparent confidence, there is a note of panic beneath Carlyle's determination to claim a place in the metropolis. For it was all too easy to lose one's way in the city's vastness, and a hallucinatory quality frequently seeps through contemporary descriptions of urban experience. Carlyle himself related one such incident when, arriving back in town late one evening, he mistook his disembarkation point and entered into a nightmarish chase through the "labyrinthine streets and alleys" of unfamiliar territory, amid "the unearthly cries of fruiterers and oyster-men and piemen and all the mighty din of London" as he tried to keep up with the porter carrying his portmanteau (*Letters* 3: 158). For New York merchant Louis Simond, the very size of the capital — the crowds and its maze of streets — induced a kind of lassitude. The city, he complained, was a "palpable immensity" with "something in it very heavy and stupefying" (*Journal* 127). Yet, paradoxically, he also found the capital amorphous and in constant flux. The ever-present clouds of fog and smoke that wreathed the city emphasized its insubstantiality. London was not a 'place' at all, he declared, but merely a temporary "encampment for business and pleasure, where every body thinks of himself" (*Journal* 147).

[58]William Hazlitt, "On Londoners and Country People,"1826, *Complete Works*, 21 vols., ed. P.P. Howe after the edition of A.R. Waller and Arnold Glove (New York: AMS Press, 1967), Vol.12: 77.

The city's size, coupled with its rootless quality, fostered individual alienation. The reality of urban isolation was poignantly revealed to Thomas and Jane Carlyle when they witnessed the sudden death of a respectable, middle-aged woman in Sloane Street. Despite the immediate materialization of a policeman and a crowd of on-lookers, "there the poor woman lay, nobody knowing who she was," vivid testament to the lack of social intercourse in the city (*Letters* 8:99). Such disengagement engendered a feeling of estrangement among visitors and immigrants alike. Geijer, newly settled in the city and feeling himself "lonely among a million," experienced for the first time "the sensation of being a stranger" (*Impressions* 83). Having arrived in London out of season and with few introductions, Simond despaired of ever finding his place. "London is a giant" he claimed, "strangers can only reach his feet" (*Journal* 29). Occasionally, unexpected connections were made. Visiting a friend in Covent Garden, Von La Roche learned that a woman living nearby was a distant relation, while in the crowds of Piccadilly, Carlyle was amused to glimpse the face of a Scottish acquaintance. Yet the contingent nature of such encounters only served to emphasize the haphazard nature of human relations in the city. Even as London seemed to promise avenues for advancement, those who spent any time in the capital were equally aware of the vulnerability of their position.

Compounding this anxiety was an ambiguity peculiar to the city that centred on difficulties in 'placing' other residents with any accuracy. In rural settlements, an individual's status could be determined through community memory and frequent face-to-face encounters. But in the city, one had to make an immediate assessment based only on visual clues. Clothing, for example, was notoriously unreliable as a marker of class. A thriving trade in secondhand apparel provided Londoners with the opportunity to dress in

clothes that "bespoke a higher station."[59] Wendeborn complained "To guess at the rank in life of those who appear in the streets, or in public places, is a difficult matter. The rich man dresses frequently as if he had but a small income; and he, whose circumstances are very narrow, is desirous of being supposed to be in affluence" (*View* 1:265-66). Wakefield wryly noted that the pawnshop, a distinctively urban institution, allowed even the indigent to present a "gay appearance," however temporary (*Perambulations*150). Nor were manners a dependable clue to status. Hazlitt warned that in the city's close quarters, a member of the lower orders could easily come into contact with those of superior rank, and thereby adopt "a little of the gilding" (*Works* 12:67). An inability to identify accurately another's position made social interaction a minefield; it was disconcertingly easy to look foolish by cultivating the wrong acquaintance. The importance Londoners consequently attached to the precise identification of rank appears in an anecdote related by Geijer about a stranger who appeared at a fancy dress ball. The man's appearance was equivocal: he wore buckles that seemed to be set with diamonds, but his clothes were unkempt. Geijer was amazed at the urgency with which the crowd sought to determine the unknown's provenance. He reported that "every single person in the room crowded around him without the least regard for decency or excuse" until "the crush became insufferable" (*Impressions* 158-59). Speculation was rife — and noticeably audible — on the man's racial origin and possible wealth, and it was deflating for all to discover eventually that the interloper was only a strolling actor. In light of the political instability that characterized the Romantic period, such instances of mis-identification held greater significance than the production of mere chagrin. The ability of

[59]Beverly Lemire, "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes," *Journal of British Studies* 27.1 (1988), 4.

lower orders to lay claim on the basis of their appearance alone to the status of their superiors, while in theory an admirable lack of distinction among ranks, was in practice a sign of the fragility of social categories. It thus contributed to a disorienting sense that little in the city afforded reassuring permanence.

Women presented observers with a particularly difficult problem of categorization. Distinguishing between a gentlewoman and her female domestic was difficult enough but, the Prussian officer Von Archenholz noted, when it came to a lady's maid, "the eye of the most skilful connoisseur can scarcely distinguish her from the mistress. The appearance of a waiting-woman is that of an opulent and a fashionable person" (*Picture* 2:119). Even trickier was ascertaining whether women appearing in public were respectable. The best London prostitutes were noted for their air of reserve and gentility. Noticing "light girls" occupying a box at Sadler's Wells, Sophie Von La Roche was saddened to see that "not one of them looked older than twenty, and every one so made that the best father or husband would be proud of having a virtuous daughter or wife with such stature and good features" (*Diary* 133). Conversely, a decent woman could be mistaken for a streetwalker, depending on the places she frequented. Lady Hester Stanhope complained that, because she was unable to afford a private carriage, her movements in public were severely constrained. If she walked out with a servant for protection, she was compromised because "there are so many women of the town now who flaunt about with a smart footman, that [she] ran the hazard of being taken for one of them."[60] If she walked alone, she risked being joined by a male acquaintance, suggesting to passers-by some impropriety. And even if she strolled through St James's Park with her uncle the Prime Minister, they might be 'cut' by those who

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[60]Charles Meryon, *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1845), Vol. 2: 5.

assumed "Mr. Pitt was escorting some mistress he had got" (*Memoirs* 26-27). Stanhope learned to exercise caution through experience, but even strangers to London quickly identified and internalized the codes governing women's presence in public places. For example, at the end of a Covent Garden performance, Von La Roche wanted to linger and watch the fashionable audience disperse, but she knew "it was quite impossible for me to loiter outside the theatre with the crowd of light women, although they were all better dressed than I, and looked extremely pretty" (*Diary* 122).

The tendency to conflate women in public with public women is reflected in the prostitution narratives that inform many accounts of London in the period. Mistresses kept by the wealthy and powerful might claim something of a celebrity status. In her memoirs, Laetitia Hawkins describes various sightings of Kitty Frederick, a well-known courtesan, who reportedly rode about London in a glamorous chariot with her own father as one of the footmen.[61] Common prostitutes, on the other hand, were described in the lexicon of a plague, remarkable for their numbers, their boldness, and the nuisance they posed for respectable citizens. Geijer observed that "the open and naked effrontery of the immoral transcends all description. They swarm round the streets of London at all hours of the day and night. They gather in crowds at the theatres which are regular market places for such wares, and the business is done in English fashion, coarsely and openly" (*Impressions* 249). The institutions established to punish or redeem fallen women indicate that prostitution was a serious problem in the city. In Bridewell Prison women convicted of soliciting might be flogged or set to pick hemp. In a more compassionate response, the Magdalen Charity offered shelter

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[61]Laetitia-Maltilda Hawkins, *Memoirs, Anecdotes, Facts, and Opinions*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1824), Vol.1:14.

and training in domestic service for girls rescued from the street. Yet calculations of the numbers of women considered to be active streetwalkers in the period suggest a response to a long-standing practice bordering on the hysterical. The Swiss traveller Meister insisted "that there are more common women in London than in Paris" (*Letters* 287), and police magistrate Colquhoun estimated that in 1796 there were fifty thousand prostitutes in the British capital, along with two thousand brothel keepers (*Treatise* 452). If his assessment was accurate, it means (based on 1801 census figures) that one female in twelve living in London at the time would have been engaging in the profession.[62] To some extent, preoccupation with prostitution can be attributed to prurience. It seemed to be a rite of urban passage for male visitors to the city to be accosted by a woman of the town and then to report on the experience. Even the moralizing Reverend Wendeborn provided explicit advice to his readers on the availability and contents of annual guides to Covent Garden courtesans. Concerns about prostitution were also prompted by the knowledge of how easy it was for even the most respectable girl to fall into vice. Attracted by the pleasures of the capital or enticed by the prospect of being free to marry whom she wished, a young woman who came to London could easily find herself abandoned by her lover, rejected by her family and bereft of the credentials or resources to secure an honest living. "One need not be astonished, after this," maintained Von Archenholz "to hear that there are so many unfortunate women, who often possess all the virtues, and all the good qualities, which we admire and cherish in their sex" reduced to ruin (*Picture* 2: 94-95). Exaggerated estimates of the number of prostitutes

[62]The 1801 census listed 483,781 males living in the capital and 615, 323 females. By 1863, presumably with the advent of more precise data gathering, the estimate of prostitutes working in London had fallen to about 5,500, yielding a much lower ratio of one suspected prostitute among 576 female residents. See F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 184 n 16.

active in the capital were also the opening salvoes in a debate over public morality that reached fever pitch by the 1850s. Reformers like Colquhoun may have inflated numbers to draw attention to a persistent social problem and the consequent need for both repressive legislation and additional institutions to house, train and care for women and children with no other resources.[63] Prostitution was also associated with concerns about the negative effects of rapid urban growth, especially the worry that poverty, filth and disease might spread from London's rookeries into wealthier districts. Prostitutes thus became the symbol of "the feared intrusion of the 'night side' of the city into fashionable and respectable life."[64] Further, there was a tendency to conflate "hardened offender" with "abandoned prostitute;" that is, a woman convicted of any crime would be simultaneously labelled harlot.[65] Colquhoun's estimate may also be rooted in a clash between bourgeois notions of respectability and common working class behaviour, so that a single woman living alone or in a common law marriage, even females socializing in public places during the evening, might be taken as evidence of immorality.[66] Nevertheless, that his assessment was assumed to be accurate and repeated frequently in contemporary descriptions of the city suggests an elevated level of anxiety surrounding the presence of women in London.

A less overt explanation for the near-obsession with the moral status of urban women might have been a general discomfort with the number of young females migrating to London. Throughout the eighteenth century, more women than men had moved to the capital, and by the turn of the century, there were approximately 130,000 more females than

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[63]Trevor Fisher, *Prostitution and the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), viii.
[64]Keith Nield, *Prostitution in the Victorian Age* (Farnborough, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1973), 3.
[65]Michael Sturma, "Eye of the Beholder: The Stereotype of Women Convicts, 1788-1852," *Labour History* 34 (May 1978), 6.
[66]Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996), 80.

males living in the metropolis. Virtually all British towns, including London, had a majority of women both because of the wider range of female employment opportunities in cities than in the countryside and because women tended to live longer than men in urban areas.[67] This imbalance may have been more acute in the capital because Britain's frequent embroilments in foreign wars during the century decimated the male population, and young men were consequently wary of encountering press gangs in the metropolis.[68] Many of the women who were attracted to London were employed in domestic service, but large numbers also worked outside private households, in both traditional (millinery or dress-making) and non-traditional (street hawking, market gardening, shopkeeping and even apprenticed trades) occupations and thus would have had significant visibility in the city.[69] Discomfort with this urban "female face" could easily translate into both assumption of female transgression and a search for ways to exert social control through circumscribing women's freedom of movement.[70] Certainly, discussion of the prostitution problem contained thinly-veiled advice for respectable women about suspect urban spaces they ought to avoid. Colquhoun cautioned that streetwalkers made "the situation of modest women at once irksome and unsafe, either in places of public entertainment, or while passing along the most public streets of the Metropolis, particularly in the evening" (*Treatise* 338). Although eighteenth-century London streets were considered dangerous for everyone, by the turn of the century there was a new

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[67]Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800*, 99.
[68]Walter Besant, *London in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902), 76. The practice of forcing men into naval service continued to the end of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.
[69]Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: University College London, 1994), Chapters 6 and 9.
[70]This argument is made in both Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1994), 386; and in Anna Clark, "Whores and Gossips: Sexual Reputation in London 1770-1825," in *Current Issues in Women's History*, ed. Arina Angerman et al (London: Routledge, 1989), 231.

emphasis on the threat of sexual assault women faced in public places. Anna Clark argues that in court records and newspapers, magistrates, judges, and journalists "began to introduce the idea that rape imperilled women's safety in evening streets; while men could travel freely, 'respectable' women would be safe only at home."[71] By 1822, the Vagrancy Acts had been amended explicitly to control women's movement through the city at night. The Acts now required women who were encountered by authorities in the street during the evening to give a satisfactory account of their business or face charges.[72] These signs of unease at women's visible urban presence are transformed, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, into an explicit correlation between rising rates of crime and female economic and spatial independence.[73]

The city thus presented respectable women with a conundrum. They might, like their male counterparts, find the city a place for self-improvement and advancement. Yet they were equally likely to find themselves out of place in the metropolis, labelled as undesirable, even dangerous. The challenge for women in Romantic London became, therefore, to negotiate openings in the social codes that circumscribed their urban presence in order to immerse themselves in the city.

Negotiating Urban Femininity

Thomas Carlyle was in no doubt that a taste of city life was a positive factor, if not perhaps in the formation of all women, then at least in the refinement of his own wife. Prior

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[71]Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845* (London: Pandora, 1987), 2.

[72]Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 57.

[73]Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, 152-53.

to their marriage, he encouraged Jane to visit the capital because there was much in "this monster of a city, that will amuse you and awaken you to new thoughts; and with all its imperfections it is London, the London every one delights to see or to have seen" (*Letters* 3:216). On an exploratory visit to the capital in 1832, he reported to his mother that, although Jane had visited few of London's notable monuments, she had met with "some valuable people; and I believe has improved herself in more ways than one" (*Letters* 6:131). Through the complicated histories of their domestic servants, however, the Carlyles were equally aware of how women could succumb to the city's temptations: one otherwise exemplary maid developed a severe drinking problem, and a second gave birth to an illegitimate child in their first floor china closet.[74] Such failings, although less dramatic than a fall into prostitution, nevertheless constituted serious breaches of acceptable behaviour for women of any class. The Carlyles were occasionally prepared to flout convention themselves — for example, they accepted John Stuart Mill's intimate friendship with Harriet Taylor — but they were also sensitive to the consequences of even minor excursions beyond the social boundaries defining women's presence in the city. Thomas knew his refusal to dismiss a servant thought to have been involved with a married man might result in their "being *cut* by all respectable women," and Jane speculated that one of her social calls had not been reciprocated because "she had shocked them all by walking thither alone" (*Letters* 7:216, 294-95). Other contemporary accounts reinforce this experience, suggesting that women were tolerated, even welcomed, as active participants in much that London had to offer,

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[74]See Thea Holme, *The Carlyles at Home* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), Chapters 2, 3 and 11 for a discussion of their servant problems. Carlyle considered female inability to resist urban seductions the cause of his difficulty in retaining servants, relating to his mother the maxim "Country girls do very well in London for nearly two years; but the terror of the place having worn off, and unwise acquaintances having been formed in that time, the Country girl finds it suitable to shift" (*Letters* 9: 231).

provided they conformed to and were contained within the parameters of an ideal urban femininity.

For Thomas Gisborne, place was an essential element in the formation of female character. He considered the most serious threat London posed for middle-class women to be not the spectre of sexual impropriety but rather displacement from their domestic responsibilities. Isolated in the country, young women would be more likely to take up pursuits to improve themselves and benefit those around them, if only to stave off boredom. But in the city, unless steadied by the principles of moderation and sobriety, they might well be "sucked into the vortex, and whirled, day after day, and year after year, in a never-ending round of giddiness and dissipation" (*Enquiry* 208). Gisborne warned of three dangers specific to London to which women were especially susceptible. The diversions and attractions of the capital encroached on a woman's time, leaving her too distracted and enervated to engage in useful occupations or improving pursuits. Moreover, participation in a wide social circle governed by artificial rules of etiquette entailed the sacrifice of genuine sympathy, so that a woman would find "she has too many acquaintances to have a friend" (*Enquiry* 314). What Gisborne considered most dangerous, however, was the wide field that London offered for the gratification of female ambition, nurturing "the love of eminence and the thirst of admiration" (*Enquiry* 325). The features that made the capital a distinctive place — its wealth, distinguished residents, the trappings of power — could also ignite an obsession for costly possessions, social climbing or political intrigue. Gisborne warned that the results of such aspirations were devastating. City life would coarsen a woman, inuring her to inappropriate conversation and conduct. Preoccupied with diversions and steeped in metropolitan "extremes of folly, of pride, of envy, of extravagance," she would neglect the

moral welfare of her servants (*Enquiry* 325). Most serious, as husbands and wives increasingly led separate lives, the very foundations of conjugal happiness could be undermined.

Despite these strictures, Gisborne did not rule out the prospect of finding an appropriate place for women in London. Indeed, he argued that women had important public, as well as private, functions in the city, creating and sustaining their domestic circles, and serving as positive examples for others. Gisborne's model of urban femininity combines moderation with agency: the ideal woman restricts her acquaintance to a small, select circle; keeps regular hours; and tempers expenditures of her time and money. But what makes her distinctively urban is the active public role she plays in taking a stance against fashionable city vices. Through such conduct, a woman might do much "to improve the general tone of social intercourse" within the metropolis (*Enquiry* 333). For James Fordyce (like Gisborne a writer of conduct literature for young people), the very whirl of the city itself presented opportunities to women for self-improvement and for edifying others:

> To minds capable of reflection, the pageant, as it passes in review, may occasion many observations on the emptiness and perturbation of all but piety, worth, and heart-felt enjoyment. Nor is it altogether impossible, that a more correct appearance, a more composed address, friendly hints dropped by accident, improving remarks suggested by good sense, without the affectation of unseasonable gravity, may sometimes leave useful impressions, where they were least expected.[75]

Whereas Fordyce and Gisborne present explicit models toward which middle-class women might aspire, other writers on London in the period implicitly defined prevailing notions of

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[75]James Fordyce, *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex,* 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1776), 23.

urban femininity through their observations of and editorializing on women who inhabit city space.

As the prostitution discourse suggests, women were highly visible in Romantic London. But not all monitoring of the female presence was sexualized, or even gendered. From their descriptions—both approving and censorious—male and female contemporaries set out the boundaries for an urban femininity encompassing appearance, deportment and occupation. The Prussian officer Von Archenholz observed that, when she appeared in public, a respectable middle-class London woman displayed a dignified demeanour and modesty of dress. Her beauty, not unlike that of the city itself, was characterized by the "most exact proportions ... and features at once regular and charming" (*Picture* 2: 132). Swiss traveller Meister, clearly a connoisseur of feminine pulchritude, claimed that "English ladies possess a style of beauty which appears to have more calmness and dignity than that of the handsome ladies in Paris" (*Letters* 281). Moreover, it seemed to be a natural beauty, not reliant on the props of rouge and powder used more extensively on the continent. What set the London woman apart, according to Von Archenholz, was "neatness ... which seems actually to be a *rage* amongst them" (*Picture* 2: 135). Moderation was equally important. German novelist Von La Roche was disappointed to find some London women adopting extreme continental styles of dress, and she reports with satisfaction the case of four such fashion victims. Attending a Covent Garden performance, the ladies, having too slavishly followed the dictates of the current mode, "were received by the entire audience with loud derision" and forced to flee the ridicule (*Diary* 95). Despite frequently expressed concern about the ease with which prostitutes could disguise themselves behind a demure exterior, contemporary observers tended to correlate appearance with moral worth. Meister claimed

"it appears impossible to have that perfection of beauty which the English ladies possess, without that habitual calmness and serenity of mind attending a state of entire freedom from importunate necessity ... [and] an absolute command of temper and happy disposition of mind and character" (*Letters* 277). Such an equable disposition, in turn, was associated with women who were less occupied with pleasure than with domestic responsibilities. Even though she encouraged young women to become familiar with the city, Priscilla Wakefield insisted that females of the middle rank were "admirable patterns of conjugal and maternal virtue" only if they devoted themselves "to the regulation of their families, with a cheerful perseverance, and well-directed attention" (*Perambulations* 17). Von La Roche offers an intriguing glimpse of a distinctively urban domesticity when she describes "a very pleasant sight" encountered during an evening visit to shops with adjoining family accommodation. She notes that "through the excellently illuminated shop one can see many a charming family-scene enacted: some are still at work, others drinking tea, a third party is entertaining a friendly visitor; in a fourth parents are joking and playing with their children" (*Diary* 142). The wife of a French diplomat, Mme Roland, noticed that women in London led somewhat segregated domestic lives. While their husbands repaired to their businesses or clubs, their wives were "not diverted from the management of their family; the house and the children are in their department, to these they confine themselves" (*Works* 190). However, such containment did not necessarily mean these women were reclusive. Roland observed that they had time to read a great deal and thus to inform themselves. Indeed, important features of an urban woman's formation were an interest in and knowledge of public affairs. Noting the British passion for politics, Von Archenholz claimed that a London husband "is always sure to find in his wife a person with whom he may converse concerning those topics which

interest him most," and such mutual absorption was often a masculine inducement to marriage (*Picture* 2: 134). Yet feminine modesty prevailed, and it was considered unfeminine to flaunt accomplishment. New Yorker Simond noticed that, while they could be "still more violent and extravagant than the men" when discussing politics, women "do not speak much in numerous and mixed company" (*Journal* 35). Thus, rather than being 'mis-placed' in the city, a woman might use her urban experience for self-improvement and as the basis for service to others, provided she maintained acceptable standards of decorum and fulfilled her domestic and civic responsibilities.

Within these boundaries, there was considerable latitude for women to engage in a range of distinctively urban activities. Letters written from London by Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth provide insight into how middle-class women might exercise a degree of freedom and independence in the city while remaining firmly inside the parameters of respectability. Neither woman seems a likely model for metropolitan femininity: Austen is generally associated with the conservative English landed gentry, Edgeworth with Anglo-Irish estate owners. Yet both paid frequent and lengthy visits to the capital, and each also knew at least parts of the city well. Not only does London feature in their fiction but, as their letters indicate, each considered her metropolitan experience an important part of her own formation. Because so much of Austen's correspondence has not survived, the full extent of her journeys to the city cannot be determined.[76] However, it is certain that she often stayed with her brother Henry during his residence in London from 1801 to 1816. On these

[76]On this point, see Deirdre Le Faye "Letters," in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33, Le Faye notes that of the estimated 3000 letters Austen probably wrote, only 160 are extant.. In addition to recorded visits in 1796, 1801, 1811, 1813, 1814 and 1815, Austen may well have passed through London on other occasions, en route to her brother Edward's home in Godmersham, Kent.

occasions Austen was able to taste the quotidian aspects of urban life in addition to the more transient impressions of a visitor. Maria Edgeworth's much more extensive epistolary record reveals that her exposure to London fell into several distinct periods. Of these, three are particularly significant. In 1813, she accompanied her father and step-mother on a six-week stay in the capital. As an acclaimed author, Edgeworth entered an exclusive literary and fashionable urban milieu, yet she maintained a child-like reliance on her parents to organize and manage her movement about the city. Not until the period 1818-1822 did she truly experience the city as an adult, responsible for conducting family business including the introduction of her younger half-sisters to London's social and cultural resources. In 1830-31, when her favourite sibling Fanny married and moved to the capital, Edgeworth was able during lengthy stays to enter fully into domestic life in the city.

For both women, London seemed to be a state of mind as much as a place, an abstraction compounded of excitement, stimulation and contingency. Austen conceives of the city as a phantasmagoria encompassing "the Regions of Wit, Elegance, fashion, Elephants & Kangaroons."[77] In this shifting scene, anything seemed possible. A clergyman's daughter left on her own in town might, she fantasizes, "walk the Hospitals, Enter at the Temple, or mount Guard at St James" (*Letters* 12), and this potentiality lent the city an air of piquancy. When Cassandra Austen took her turn visiting Henry, her sister advised her to "be sure to have something odd happen to you, see somebody that you do not expect, meet with some surprise or other" (*Letters* 246). Even the city's reputation for danger affords her more titillation than concern. During her first recorded visit to London in 1796, she reports that "in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, ... I begin already to find my Morals corrupted," and she

[77]Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, 3rd ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80.

returns to this theme two years later, speculating that an impromptu journey to the city might expose her to "the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer" (*Letters* 5, 12). Such levity transforms the prospect of corruption into an oddly liberating opportunity. On her part, Edgeworth found London a spectacle marked by insubstantiality. At its worst, the city was debilitating, a whirl of social engagements that not only tired her but also failed to leave a distinct impression. At the end of a particularly busy period, she complains "Many! many! dinners and evening parties have rolled over one another and are swept out of my memory by the tide of the last fortnight."[78] At best, London was "a brilliant panorama" that amused but did not satisfy. Perhaps concerned that family members in Ireland would suspect her of being swept away by her city adventures, she reassures them that "I am much amused by all the fine things and fine people I see here and enjoy the panorama by day light and candle light as much as any of my friends or acquaintances could wish but I would not for any consideration live always such a rantipole life." (*Letters from England* 63).

Despite her reservations, Edgeworth — like Austen — responded with enthusiasm to material London, energetically engaging in high and low culture designed to amuse and instruct. For example, visits to private and public art galleries and events such as the annual exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Oil and Water Colours formed an important part of their itinerary. Both women were in London in the spring of 1813 and, intriguingly, attended in the same fortnight a commemorative showing of Sir Joshua Reynolds's paintings

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[78]Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England 1813-1844,* ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 381.

held in Pall Mall.[79] But Austen's interests were more authorial than aesthetic. Although she "had great amusement among the Pictures," she was disappointed not to find any portrait reminiscent of Elizabeth Bennet included in Reynolds's works (*Letters* 213). Edgeworth, on the other hand, reported more conventionally her finding that "His children from the sublime infant Samuel to the arch gipsey child are admirable" (*Letters from England* 55). Because Henry Austen maintained boxes at both Covent Garden and the Lyceum, Austen — perhaps oblivious or indifferent to the clandestine activity that so upset Patrick Colquhoun — "seized the opportunity of being in London to go to anything that was on."[80] Although disappointed not to see Sarah Siddons perform, she was impressed with Edmund Kean (then taking the town by storm); however, she was just as likely to be "highly amused" with a farce or pantomime as with an opera (*Letters* 260). Edgeworth was more fortunate in being able to attend a reading of *Measure for Measure* given by Mrs Siddons, but she was somewhat let down by her performance, not least because the actress's "looking through spectacle glasses at the book from time to time breaks all illusion" (*Letters from England* 55). Like Austen, Edgeworth occasionally admitted to boredom at the theatre, condemning the play *Alfred the Great* as "the most lengthy stupid thing I ever saw," yet finding the entr'acte diorama of Switzerland captivating (*Letters from England* 540-41). Entertaining younger family members offered both women the opportunity to sample popular pastimes. Austen took a niece to see a troupe of Indian jugglers; Edgeworth joined her younger sisters in inspecting "two young Lapland ladies who have come over to gratify their curiosity with the sight of London" and, even more bizarre, the preserved head of Oliver Cromwell (*Letters from*

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[79]Edgeworth visited on May 15; Austen, on May 24.
[80]David Selwyn, *Jane Austen and Leisure* (London: Hambledon Press, 1999), 244.

England 324, 364). Given her more extensive contacts, longer periods of residence in the city, and professional interests, Edgeworth's excursions about town were more likely than Austen's forays to emphasize education. Edgeworth peered through a ventilator in the false ceiling of St. Stephen's Chapel to watch House of Commons debates;[81] she walked the women's wards at Newgate prison with Elizabeth Fry. During one visit, she "spent a happy hour at the [British] Museum with Raphaels prints;" at a later date, she marvelled that a new double feeder power press could produce "the thoughts embodied on paper for an hours reading in one minute" (*Letters from England* 397, 538). The variety and bustle of the city itself offered diversion, and both Austen and Edgeworth liked to people-watch. After visiting the Liverpool Museum and the British Gallery, Austen admitted "my preference for Men & Women, always inclines me to attend more to the company than the sight" (*Letters* 179). The very indifference of the urban crowd encouraged spectatorship. Waiting for her father outside Joseph Johnson's book shop, Edgeworth was "much amused by the continually flowing crowd all with faces intent on their own interests and minding us and our chaise no more than if we and it had not existed" (*Letters from England* 46).

However, London meant business to the women as much as leisure, and both came to the city entrusted with lengthy lists of commissions from family members. Enticing as were the urban shops and the fashion trends seen on the female heads and backs parading city streets, much of the commerce conducted by both women centred on the more prosaic tasks of household provisioning and family management. Austen paid tradesmen's bills on behalf of her mother; Edgeworth inspected potential schools for her brothers; both accompanied

[81] In 1778, the House of Commons barred women from listening to its debates from the gallery or the floor of the House.

young relatives on visits to the dentist. London also signified the business of publishing, and each woman used her visits to the city to further her work. Henry Austen served as his sister's literary agent, and when she stayed with him, Jane's letters back to Hampshire detailed readers' opinions, sales and profits, prospects for second editions, and frustrating delays in obtaining proof sheets. When her brother's health deteriorated and he became preoccupied with his own failing enterprise, Austen took a more direct role in her publishing career, soliciting an interview with her publisher John Murray and negotiating with the Prince Regent's chaplain over a dedication for *Emma*. Edgeworth used her London visits to meet her English publisher, to edit manuscripts, and to consult with trusted advisors on the content of both her own fiction and her father's memoir.

Their direct involvement in business of various kinds points to the independence both women were able to exercise in an urban context. For Austen, this freedom emerges in her ability to move about the city relatively unencumbered: she enjoyed walking to West End shops accompanied only by a maid or strolling through Kensington Gardens. But what most pleased her was access to her brother's barouche. With such stylish and convenient transport, she was able to spend an entire day roaming about the city, undertaking commissions and paying calls. When Cassandra visited London, Austen enviously imagined her "going about together in Henry's carriage, seeing sights" (*Letters* 254). Mobility also features in Edgeworth's developing independence. On her first venture into the city without parental guidance, she nervously directed a hired postillion, determined the most efficient route for their carriage through a complicated itinerary, located an elusive address and finally sorted through conflicting medical advice. Undertaken much in the spirit of an overseas expedition, her successful exploration of the *terra incognita* between Hampstead and the City became a

significant milestone in her gradual emergence into autonomy. As she details a lengthy list of obstacles met and overcome, Edgeworth triumphantly and rhetorically asks her step-mother "Could I four years ago have believed if it had been prophecied to me that I poor little i [sic] should this day have been driving about London with Honora *alone*" (*Letters from England* 126).

With such independence came an expansion of horizons enriching for individual development and essential to the growth of an author. For Austen, a London visit meant the opportunity "to lay in a stock of intelligence that may procure me amusement for a twelvemonth to come," suggesting that a rural idyll might still need the occasional fillip (*Letters* 78-79). Edgeworth, too, anticipates using her London engagement diary "as a little text book hereafter for sofa and fireside conversations" (*Letters from England* 192). She considered city experience particularly significant in the formation of a young woman. When her sister Fanny seemed on the verge of an imprudent marriage, a visit to the capital was recommended to expose her "to persons and variety of life" sufficiently tantalizing to derail the union, at least temporarily. Edgeworth herself revelled in the "great variety of society in London and the solidity of the sense and information to be gathered from conversation," and she boasted of knowing "at least 5 or 6 different and totally independent sets—of scientific—literary—political—travelled—*artist* society and fine and fashionable—of various shades" (*Letters from England* 390). For both women, London provided grist for their novelistic mills. Austen's much-anticipated visit to Astley's equestrian exhibition, her jaunts to Bond Street shops and her walks in Kensington Gardens reappear in *Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility*. On her side, Edgeworth, although she eventually tired of the

"insincerity of this London life," anticipated learning "some good lessons" from fashionable urban society to incorporate in her final novel, *Helen* (*Letters from England* 510).

The divided responses to the capital reported by Austen and Edgeworth conform in many ways to the accounts of their male contemporaries, suggesting men and women experienced London in the Romantic period in much the same way. Yet there are distinctive features, missing from masculine versions, discernible in the travel discourses of Austen and Edgeworth. There is an air of self-justification — evident, for instance, in their insistence on the improving aspects of city life — in both women's descriptions of their sorties about town. This deference, in turn, hints at an awareness that their presence in the city could well be contested. At the same time, there is a sense of experimentation underlying their urban existence as both try out different roles: female rake, fashionable woman about town, intrepid explorer, Enlightenment improver. This interest in testing different aspects of urban femininity extends to their fiction as they, along with many of their contemporaries, address the influence of urbanization on women's formation. In subsequent chapters, I address the emergence in novels of the period of a distinctive figure, one Austen and Edgeworth themselves exemplified: the respectable middle-class female town dweller. Whether mediating between traditional and modern social formations, serving as a sympathetic reformer, or contributing to the political life of the nation through the discursive practices of urban sociability, the female figures Austen, Edgeworth and their contemporaries depict share one feature: determination to claim their place in what Carlyle termed "the London everyone delights to see."

CHAPTER 2

CITY PRACTITIONERS IN THE NOVELS OF MARY BRUNTON AND JANE AUSTEN

In April 1811, while in London correcting proof sheets of *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen was disconcerted to learn of the publication of Mary Brunton's first work, *Self-Control.*[1] Having fruitlessly searched for a copy, Austen confessed "I *should* like to know what her Estimate is—but am always half afraid of finding a clever novel *too clever*—& of finding my own story & my own people all forestalled."[2] That Austen might consider Brunton a serious competitor whose writing would eclipse her own is not surprising. The Scottish writer had made a successful literary debut earlier in the year with the publication of her novel in Edinburgh (and later London), garnering positive critical attention and selling sufficient copies to warrant three editions in one year. Not until she had read Brunton's novel twice did Austen feel confident enough to dismiss it as "an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it" (*Letters*, 234). Austen might equally have worried about *Self-Control* preempting *Mansfield Park*, which she had just begun planning.[3] Certainly there are sufficient similarities between these two novels that could have prompted such a concern. In both works the heroine is exiled from

[1]Austen must have learned about the novel from one of the early notices in Scottish periodicals, namely, *Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine and Review* (March 1811), *Glasgow Magazine* (March-April 1811), or *The Scots Magazine* (March 1811).
[2] Jane Austen, Jane Austen's Letters, 3rd ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 186.
[3]William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: A Family Record,* 1913, revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye (London: British Library, 1989), 176.

home because of parental improvidence; she struggles to defend her moral judgements in an environment indifferent to her values; and she must resist familial pressure to form an unsuitable attachment. In both, her patience and perseverance are finally rewarded with an appropriate partner and domestic establishment. A body of modern critical opinion, particularly among those who place *Mansfield Park* within the genre of conservative or Evangelical didactic literature, does indeed point to thematic and stylistic resemblances between the two novels. Marilyn Butler, for example, notes the emphasis both works place on the role of early education in inculcating self-command in young women. Ann Jones argues that Austen learned to portray Fanny Price's interiority largely from Brunton's depiction of *her* heroine's practice of resolving internal conflicts through rigorous self-examination.[4] An additional, significant connection between the two works — and one largely overlooked — is their respective explorations of women's experiences in urban space.

Within a framework of the sociological, cultural and spatial theories developed by Georg Simmel, Michel de Certeau and Doreen Massey, this chapter examines the evolution of a distinctive model of domestic femininity shaped by urban influences in Brunton's *Self-Control* and *Discipline* (1814) and Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1818). All three theorists address the mutually constitutive relationship between individuals and space, investigating both the effects of the metropolis on social relations and the ability of

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[4]Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 55; Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), Chapter Three. See also Katrin Burlin, "'At the Crossroads': Sister Authors and the Sister Arts," in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists 1670-1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986), 60-86; Lynne Vallone, *Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), Chapter 4; and Marylea Meyersohn, "What Fanny Knew: A Quiet Auditor of the Whole," *Women and Literature* 3 (1983): 224-230.

urban dwellers to reshape town places through their everyday behaviour. Drawing on Certeau's influential figure of the urban individual, I want to suggest that, as she moves through the town by coach, in hackney cabs or on foot, the female protagonist in the work of Brunton and Austen becomes a "common practitioner."[5] As such, she is alert to opportunities for taking advantage of what Massey terms the "unfixed, contested and multiple" identities of place to reshape it into conformance with her own interests.[6] Similarly, in the work of both novelists, women exposed to urban influences come to downplay the powers of sentiment, instead taking on the characteristics of what Simmel calls "the metropolitan type:" a subjectivity fashioned out of the sharpened intellect, emotional reserve and pragmatism generated by the pressures of modernity.[7] Brunton's fiction depicts as generally positive the overlay of a metropolitan consciousness on domestic femininity. As a result of their city experiences, her women achieve a remarkable degree of independence which equips them to act as mediators between traditional and modern social formations. In *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion,* Austen shows how urban experience disrupts the conventional association of femininity with an enclosed, static, rural domestic place. As her heroines change their social 'place' by renegotiating their position in networks of relationships, they draw attention to the malleability of geographical 'place', especially the landed gentry estate. In their respective interpretations of town influences, Brunton and Austen contribute to rewriting the convention of the domestic woman, showing how this

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[5]Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), Chapter 7.
[6]Doreen Massey, General Introduction to *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 5.
[7]Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 174-185.

figure, while remaining primarily in a rural environment, can be infused with and transformed by urban energies.

The Practices of City Space

A vision of the modern metropolis that encompasses both problems and possibilities is central to the urban investigations of German cultural philosopher and social scientist Georg Simmel (1858-1918). The first to theorize a connection among space, spatial practices and subjectivities, Simmel offers an explanation for the transformative power of the city through his explicit contrasts between modern urban existence and traditional modes of life in small centres and the countryside. His short essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," describes most cogently his theory of the physiological and psychological consequences of city living. Derived from the longer and more formally conceived monograph, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), the essay was originally delivered as a lecture in conjunction with an exhibition celebrating the modern metropolis held in Dresden over the winter of 1902-3. As David Frisby notes, Simmel's lecture adopted the tone of the exhibition itself, rejecting contemporary Germans' distrust of the city, even while acknowledging its often difficult social and physical conditions.[8] Although he based his analysis on his own experience of Berlin in the 1890s, where (much like Thomas Carlyle in 1830s London) he daily confronted "the strangeness of a city in which nothing today is like it had been yesterday," Simmel's city is at the same time abstract and concrete, "a representational space

[8]David Frisby, "Social Space, the City and the Metropolis," in *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 98-117; see also, Dietmar Jazbensek, "The Metropolis and the Mental Life of Georg Simmel: On the History of an Antipathy," *Journal of Urban History* 30.1 (November 2007): 102-125.

within which a mass of transitory, fleeting and fortuitous interactions take place."[9] Both empirical and theoretical, simultaneously referencing and transcending a specific time and place, Simmel's observations about the effects of urbanization are as relevant to early nineteenth-century London as to German cities a century later.

"The Metropolis and Mental Life" addresses how individuals evolve to preserve their subjectivity against the enervating and levelling forces of the modern city. In Simmel's account, there are two separate but interrelated shaping influences: the extreme sensory stimulation of the material city and the dissociating effect of the urban money economy. To defend their nervous systems against over-excitation induced by "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions," city dwellers adopt what Simmel ironically terms a "blasé attitude" (175). This defensive stance combines an enhanced intellectuality, a reduced capacity to respond to sensation and a reserve that erects a barrier of social distance between one's self and the physical proximity of others. At the same time, in an urban money economy indifferent to human individuality, Simmel's metropolitan types reveal "calculating economic egoisms" that are solely preoccupied with quantitative measures at the expense of personal relationships (176). Yet Simmel also identifies features of urban life that compensate in some measure for these alienating tendencies. The metropolitan subject learns to separate the objective and emotional aspects of city living so that, beneath the protective carapace of a blasé attitude, there is considerable scope to develop a rich inner life. Similarly, Simmel argues, the very indifference of a city crowd preoccupied with money allows a degree of personal freedom impossible in rural domestic circles where social

[9]James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 11.

cohesion is jealously defended against disruptive individuality. Moreover, because it is the nature of a metropolis to overflow its physical boundaries through regional, national and international interconnections, the resulting heterogeneity grants city residents a wider perspective, freeing them from "the pettiness and prejudices" confining those in smaller centres (181). Finally, the division of labour required by the money economy encourages, indeed requires, each town dweller to emphasize his difference from others, thereby fostering the acquisition of distinctive knowledge and skills.

Although he does not specifically identify his metropolitan type by gender, a somewhat later essay by Simmel suggests his belief in a fundamental antithesis between women and the city. In "Female Culture" (1911), he argues that masculine and feminine natures are essentially different because women exhibit a highly integrated psyche, while men have the capacity to separate their objective activities from their subjective life. Thus men are able to thrive in the challenging and frequently disorienting city environment by establishing a clear demarcation between their inner life and the external world. In contrast, the unified female nature precludes any such separation; rather, women are characterized by deep, emotional relationships made possible by the slow pace, repetition and continuity that Simmel associates with a traditional way of life.[10] Simmel was sympathetic to women's desire to participate more fully in civic life and adamant that the difference between female and male cultures did not denote a deficiency in the former. Nevertheless, as Rita Felski points out, the inevitable conclusion arising from his analysis is that if women take part in

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[10]George Simmel, "Female Culture," in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 46-54.

modern urban society, they will inevitably assume masculine characteristics.[11] For Simmel, then, where one lives is fundamental in forming subjectivity, accounting for what he identifies as the separate and opposing natures of those pursuing a traditional way of life and those living in towns. The former are characterized by a psyche grounded in emotion, instinct and intuition; by the warmth and depth of their intimate relationships; and by their limited opportunities for self-development. In contrast, metropolitan types present a highly developed intellect, distanced social relations, open-mindedness and personal freedom.

Simmel's emphasis on the human capacity to adapt to conditions imposed by the modern city resonates in the investigations of the modalities of daily existence conducted by French historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau (1925-1986). Arising from a late 1970s study of contemporary culture, his well-known *The Practice of Everyday Life* examines ways in which individual identity can be self-fashioned within an established metropolitan social order. Much of Certeau's investigation responds to the historical account contained in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* wherein a mechanism comprised of impersonal disciplinary procedures imposes a thorough and incontestable homogeneity on the social body. Challenging Foucault's assumption that consumers must passively adopt the products of this machinery, Certeau investigates the creative tactics or "ways of operating" that individuals develop to evade or even appropriate the technologies of discipline and to insinuate different forms into a seemingly homogeneous social fabric (xv). Certeau emphasizes that his interest lies more with the process of evasion than with those who carry out these operations. Nevertheless, his work suggests there is considerable scope for individuality through appropriating aspects of and devising unconventional uses for the

[11]Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 48.

products of the dominant culture. Certeau's common practitioner and Simmel's metropolitan type are linked in several important ways. Both figures are required to operate within an often hostile environment, and they are marked by this experience; however, both learn to employ practices that allow them to compensate for or evade alienating features of the city. Further, to be a successful common practitioner requires the qualities of intelligence, resilience, inventiveness and acute awareness that Simmel associates with a metropolitan consciousness. Finally, both figures creatively marshal urban resources to establish selfhood and to find an acceptable balance between conformity and individuality.

Central to Certeau's common practitioner model is a distinction between 'place' and 'space'. He argues that place consists of a configuration of elements ordered through the mechanisms of authority so that each occupies and defines a specific location. Governed by what he terms "the law of the 'proper,'" place projects an image of stability, uniformity and legitimacy (117). In contrast, he suggests, space is an effect occurring when 'placed' elements, stimulated by the infiltration of individual practices or ways of operating, begin to intersect, collide or combine.[12] Although derived from place, space displays the opposing characteristics of mobility, diversity and subversion. Certeau observes that the transition from place to space is particularly evident in an urban context. As an example, he points to how spontaneous, idiosyncratic pedestrian movement has the effect of redesigning the built environment of streets, buildings or parks, turning a place designated for a 'proper' purpose into space enabling unsanctioned uses. Certeau's analysis suggests that city and subject are

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[12]On this point, see also Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space,* 1974, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Lefebvre makes a spatial differentiation similar to that of Certeau, suggesting that relations of power, by imposing technology on pre-existing space (for example, constructing a military parade ground in a park in the middle of a city), create *dominated space.* Operating independently, a group or individual may modify such dominated space through daily living habits to suit other objectives, turning it into *appropriated space* (165).

mutually constituted in this process. His common practitioners are situated within and inevitably shaped by a network of imposed systems and procedures; yet, as individuals manipulate and adapt these urban elements to their own purposes, they effectively impose their identity, however temporarily, on the city's spatial formations. Beryl Langer argues that Certeau implicitly labels his common practitioner male by failing to take into account the relatively limited possibilities open to women for operating in an urban environment.[13] Her critique, however, overlooks Certeau's core thesis that the very purpose of spatial practices is to overcome such power imbalances. He observes that common practitioners inhabit those spaces of the city "where visibility ends," suggesting that a marginal status, such as the one traditionally assigned to women, might actually enhance their tactical advantages (124). Beneath an appearance of demure conformity, women too may find openings in the imposed order to transform place into space for the cultivation of self-determination and independence.

Although British feminist geographer Doreen Massey takes a different theoretical approach, her conceptualizations of 'place' and 'space' help account for what Certeau identifies as the transmuting power of individual ways of operating. Through her interest in spatial involvement with cultural constructions of gender, Massey problematizes notions of space and place as absolute, essential dimensions. Rather, she proposes that social relations constitute space and that, in turn, place is a realization or grounding of a particular set of these interconnections. In her formulation, place may seem to display a stable form or content, but it is always "open and porous," neither fixed nor contained, partly because of

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[13]Beryl Langer, Review of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, *Contemporary Sociology* 17.1 (January 1988): 122-24.

the inherently dynamic nature of a social relations network, and partly because these interactions spill over material and cognitive boundaries to form new connections with other networks.[14] The identity of a place is thus constantly being contested because any shift in its formative social relations alters its constitution. Despite their different starting points, the definitions of place and space proposed by Certeau and Massey share two important elements: in both, place is associated with normative, established practices, and space with unformed potential; and both emphasize the vulnerability of place to appropriation and change.

Massey argues that social relations, as the bearers of power, have the ability to fix individuals into a specific network of interactions, effectively 'putting them in their place' and assigning them a related identity. She points, for example, to the gender implications of confining women to a set of private, patriarchal interactions designated 'home'.[15] However, she notes, individuals themselves can be the carriers of powerfully destabilizing influences that undermine any assumed connection between place and a sense of permanency. Similar to the effect of a common practitioner's appropriating tactics, in Massey's model an individual functions as a channel for unsettling diversity through her social connections that extend beyond any denoted place. These influences enable her to alter the grounding network of relations in which she is situated, thereby recasting both her position and the identity of the place she inhabits. Axiomatically, as an individual's freedom to move (and to

[14]Doreen Massey, "Place and Identity," in *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 120.

[15]On a related point, see Jos Boys, "Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?" *Built Environment* 10.1 (1984): 25-34. Boys describes how architecture gives material form to social relations, not only separating public and private, but also effectively establishing gendered zones within, for instance, domestic space, coding various rooms as masculine or feminine. She argues that such physical segregation reinforces socially-imposed limitations.

engage in tactical manoeuvres) increases, so does her ability to transfuse new relationships into an existing system of connections. Therefore, exposure to the kind of metropolitan heterogeneity identified by Simmel ought, in Massey's account, to instill in a woman the tactical power to subvert any understanding of place as distinctive, ordered or enduring.

Mary Brunton's Mediating Women

A writer who lived over half her life on the geographical margins of Britain seems an unlikely candidate to record the everyday life of women in the metropolis. However, through her family, Mary Balfour Brunton (1778-1818) had connections to and familiarity with upper middle-class society in both Edinburgh and London. Born on the Orkney island of Burray, Brunton was related through her father, Colonel Thomas Balfour, to a long-established family of estate owners active in local and national civic life. Her father trained as a doctor at the University of Edinburgh before entering the British Army at the time of the American War of Independence. Colonel Balfour was stationed in London for several years until, following his marriage, he retired from active service to manage his large estate on Shapinsay Island. A successful and respected laird, Balfour nevertheless led a double life, maintaining throughout his marriage a mistress and daughter in Brentwood, just outside London.[16] There is a similar mix of respectable and racy in the life of the author's mother. Frances Ligonier Balfour was the illegitimate daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Ligonier, a Huguenot refugee who, with his brother, had risen rapidly through the ranks of

[16]See Mary McKerrow, *Mary Brunton: The Forgotten Scottish Novelist* (Kirkwall, UK: The Orcadian Ltd, 2001), 58.

the British Army. When her father died at the Battle of Falkirk in 1746 fighting with Hanoverian forces against the Jacobites, Frances became the ward of her uncle, The Right Honourable John Lord Viscount Ligonier, Field-Marshall and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army under George II. From her home in North Audley Street, she commanded a place in London's aristocratic and military circles. Scandal attached to the Ligonier family when Frances's brother Edward, the second Earl, fought a duel in Green Park over his wife's very public liaison with Italian patriot and playwright Count Vittorio Amadeo Alfieri. Frances may have been relieved to quit London on her marriage to Thomas Balfour, but she ensured that her daughter Mary received, both at home and in an Edinburgh private girls' academy, all the accomplishments in music, French and Italian languages, dancing and general deportment to equip her eventually for the role of London debutante. On the brink of being sent to the capital to live with her godmother, Viscountess Wentworth, Mary eloped with the Reverend Alexander Brunton, a Church of Scotland minister, whom she had met when he served as tutor to her brothers. Family legend has it that Mary had been dispatched to the remote island of Gairsay in an attempt to thwart the match, but Brunton disrupted the plan by rowing to the island to claim his bride.[17]

Despite this romantic beginning, Brunton happily settled into the tranquil and predictable routine of a minister's wife in the rural East Lothian village of Bolton. A retired country life appealed to her, and her husband noted the deep regret she felt in leaving "her little quiet residence" when he was appointed to the Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh.[18] Despite these misgivings, however, Alexander Brunton believed town life had a beneficial

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[17]McKerrow, *Forgotten Scottish Novelist*, 58.
[18]Rev. Alexander Brunton, "Memoir," in *Discipline* by Mary Brunton, 1814 (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1832), 7.

effect on his wife. Among her small circle of acquaintance in Bolton, Mary appeared only "as an active and prudent young housewife," and she had no-one except her husband with whom she might discuss her study of philosophy, history and *belles lettres*; but in Edinburgh, she was able to develop a new intellectual independence. The Rev. Brunton describes how in town,

> she mingled more with those whose talents and acquirements she had respected at a distance. She found herself able to take her share in their conversation; and, though nothing could be farther from the tone of her mind than either pedantry or dogmatism, she came by degrees, instead of receiving opinions implicitly, to examine those of others and to defend her own. (8)

Brunton's horizons were further widened through extended tours to England, including London, in 1812 and 1815.

According to her husband, Brunton's career as an author came about as a direct result of her move to the city and, especially, her friendship with an Edinburgh neighbour, Mrs. Izett. The two women met frequently to read and discuss literature, and it was "for the employment of accidental intervals of leisure" when her friend was otherwise engaged that Brunton first began to write (9). Despite this apparently casual introduction to literary production, a wealth of intertextual references in both *Self-Control* and *Discipline* suggests Brunton had a long-standing interest in and detailed knowledge of contemporary fiction, perhaps stimulated by her London godmother who regularly forwarded the latest novels to her Orkney connections. Although Brunton's objective in writing was undoubtedly didactic, her attachment to fiction extended beyond exemplary content to an elevation of the genre

itself. In correspondence with Mrs. Izett announcing the completion of *Discipline*, Brunton asked

> Why should an epic or a tragedy be supposed to hold such an exalted place in composition, while a novel is almost a nickname for a book? Does not a novel admit of as noble sentiments—as lively description—as natural character—as perfect unity of action—and a moral as irresistible as either of them? I protest, I think a fiction containing a just representation of human beings and of their actions—a connected, interesting, and probable story, conducting to a useful and impressive moral lesson—might be one of the greatest efforts of human genius. Let the admirable construction of fable in Tom Jones be employed to unfold characters like Miss Edgeworth's—let it lead to a moral like Richardson's—let it be told with the eloquence of Rousseau, and with the simplicity of Goldsmith—let it be all this, and Milton need not have been ashamed of the work![19]

Arguably, locating her work in contemporary urban settings enabled Brunton herself to attempt achieving the claims she makes for the novel. For her heroines, establishing an honourable independence while encountering and overcoming those metropolitan dangers against which conduct writers such as Thomas Gisborne thundered is analogous to an epic quest. At the same time, her fiction offers a "probable story" in its acknowledgment of the central relevance of the city in quotidian life at the turn of the century. Thus Brunton's interest in urban settings may be attributed to a mix of family history, her own experience and her lofty ambitions for the novel genre.

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[19]Brunton, "Memoir," 37. Brunton's defense of the novel is reminiscent of Austen's *apologia* in *Northanger Abbey*.

"A Feeling of Dignity and Independence:" Brunton's Street Walkers

Brunton characterizes her women by a social and material placelessness foregrounded through their movement within an unstable urban landscape. Laura Montreville of *Self-Control*, daughter of a half-pay officer "of a family ancient and respectable" and tenant of a small holding, travels with her father from Scotland to London in an attempt to restore the small annuity that is to be her sole means of support.[20] The Montrevilles lead a rootless existence in city lodgings, far from friends and familiar surroundings. Although the granddaughter of a City knight, Laura has lost all but a tenuous claim to fashionable society in London as a result of her parents' fecklessness. The status of Ellen Percy, heroine of *Discipline*, is equally uncertain. The indulged daughter of a prosperous West India merchant, Ellen pursues a hectic life of pleasure, thoughtlessly indulging in the enticements the capital presents to young women. Her father's wealth purchases her access to the most select social circles, but when news spreads of Mr. Percy's bankruptcy and subsequent suicide, Ellen is jilted by her aristocratic lover, abandoned by self-serving friends and left penniless. Too proud to endure the pity and patronage of her London acquaintances, she exiles herself to Edinburgh where, alone and friendless, she walks the town in search of ways to earn a living. Certeau associates the kind of deracination Brunton's women experience with the restless movement characteristic of the modern metropolis. To walk is "the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper," he argues, and urban space so multiplies and concentrates movement that the city itself

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[20]Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, 1811 (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), 1. All further references are to this edition and are included in parentheses in the text.

becomes "an immense social experience of lacking a place" (103). Emerging from fractured and impoverished domestic circles and without the connections required to occupy a clearly-defined social position, Brunton's women are surely vulnerable within the city. Yet their lack of a proper place also presents them with opportunity. Through their physical engagement with the city, her heroines find ways to reorganize spatial order and restructure the conditions of their own lives.

Brunton's fiction is especially alert to the signifying power of bodily movements, particularly drawing attention to the centrality of the female body in defining the social boundaries of urban places. She shows, for instance, that a young woman's presence at the theatre in the company of suitable companions passes without negative comment, but her walking at mid-day alone through a wealthy section of town will prompt an unwelcome, frank stare. Her women themselves have internalized the codes governing their passage through proper city places, so that when Ellen in *Discipline* longs for fresh air and exercise after being confined to her Edinburgh lodgings for a week, she is nevertheless sceptical of her landlady's assurance "that even women of condition might with safety and decorum traverse her native city unattended."[21] For her part, Laura is always careful to walk through London streets with a female companion; when poverty and isolation deprive her of even this modest protection, she finds it impossible "to think of living alone and unprotected, in the human chaos that surrounded her" (230). Despite their intuitive absorption of the gendered code imposed by a dominant culture on spatial order, Brunton's heroines challenge its force through their insistence on moving within places defined as masculine. Brunton

[21]Mary Brunton, *Discipline*, 1814 (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1832), 321. All further references are to this edition and are included in parenthesis in the text.

makes it clear that these forays are deliberate exercises, incorporating a rational weighing of necessity against risk. Moreover, by writing out male figures at moments when her heroines face their most daunting crises, she highlights a femininity that must rely on its own intelligence in the struggle for existence in the city.[22] To be sure, as exemplary figures, Brunton's heroines are primarily motivated to undertake excursions into masculine places by a sense of duty to others, but they are also driven by personal considerations, especially the search for what Ellen terms "a feeling of dignity and independence" (317).

As city practitioners, the women change — albeit temporarily — the places they appropriate. In *Self-Control*, Laura Montreville's challenge to the rules governing London places is enacted as a result of her determination to "relieve the wants or increase the comforts of her father's age" by becoming a commercial artist (32). Because she has no patron and must try to sell her work herself, she is forced to move through the city to negotiate directly with gallery owners. That she defies social and spatial codes in doing so is evidenced by the reaction she elicits. Her first contact, misled by her elegance, thinks Laura is a person of consequence wishing to purchase an addition to her collection; a second thinks she must be sexually available; while a third assumes that a woman is necessarily ignorant of current aesthetic trends. Dismayed but not daunted, Laura refuses to consent to this masculine misreading of her public presence. She responds with intellect rather than emotion, placing the encounters on a different footing by insisting on the value of her work and on her right to be treated as a professional. When one dealer offers to purchase her painting for an insulting amount, Laura firmly responds "I shall not, I think, be disposed to

[22]Among the dangers from which Laura rescues herself is kidnapping, followed by forcible confinement in the wilds of Canada. On the brink of death, she steals a canoe and, strapping herself in, shoots the Montmorency Falls to safety.

part with it at that price" (76). Her determination and self-confidence (admittedly assisted by beauty and obvious distress) eventually elicit more sympathetic treatment, and she receives both praise for her talent and an opportunity to exhibit her work. In her representation of Laura's encroachment on places identified as inaccessible to women, Brunton reconfigures female presence in the city. Streets are no longer necessarily places of female transgression but possible conduits to self-reliance; art galleries are not just commercial markets denied to women but also spaces for feminine self-determination.

Laura's presence transforms urban places, but she too changes as a result of her experiences. While she lived in a quiet, secluded Scottish village, her psyche was similar to that ascribed by Simmel both to rural inhabitants and also to a feminine culture, one residing in stable, "deeply felt and emotional relationships"(*MML*, 175). Having spent her youth away from "scenes of dissipation and frivolity," Laura acquires "a grave and contemplative turn of mind" (5). Her country reticence is evident in her first encounter with London, where she clings to her father for support, conscious that "among these myriads she should, but for him, be alone" (54). In this formation, she is typical of the heroines in didactic literature of the period. Lisa Wood points out that the ideal woman portrayed by Evangelical writers (among whom she includes Brunton) was represented as "pious, submissive, retiring, companionable, modest and charitable."[23] Lucilla Stanley, heroine of Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), for example, is noted for being "gentle, feeling, animated, modest," and — especially — silent.[24] After several weeks' residence in the capital, however, Laura evolves into an adept city practitioner, using ways of operating to

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[23] Lisa Wood, *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism and the Novel after the French Revolution* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 123.
[24]Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, 2 vols.,1808 (London: James Blackwood & Co., 1880), 80.

evade with courage and wit the advances of a wealthy would-be seducer. Tricked by the promise of a visit to the British Museum, Laura enters his curricle and is whisked away to the suburbs and probable ruin. But the young woman, who once faced the prospect of city crowds with dread, responds to this danger with "calm contempt." Seizing the reins, she stops the horses, jumps down from the carriage, and briskly walks back to town, "leaving her inammorato in the utmost astonishment at her self-possession, as well as rage at her disdainful treatment"(128). Laura's physical courage is matched by economic self-reliance. Despite the setbacks she encounters in her career as artist, she nevertheless revels in her ability to achieve "the only real independence, by making [herself] independent of all but [her] own exertions" (114). Her confident use of the social practices necessary for establishing agency in the city illustrates the extent of Laura's transformation from a meek and self-effacing femininity to a model of womanhood exhibiting those characteristics of assertiveness and self-reliance that Simmel ascribes to masculine, urban culture.

In sites where the unwritten rules governing spatial and social practices are readily apparent, an individual has clear responsive choices, but Brunton is equally interested in how women operate in places that are less obviously defined either because of their multiplicity of use or because of the shifting social relations underpinning them. In such settings, the inventiveness and adaptability associated by Certeau with common practitioners become crucial. Lodgings represent one such example. Both novels depict young women learning to live in these distinctively urban places which are made especially porous and unstable, on the one hand, by their being at once private accommodation and locations for commercial transaction and, on the other, by the changing nature of the authority they represent. The Holborn lodgings of the Montrevilles in second floor apartments above a grocery shop

illustrate this ambiguity. At least one contemporary reviewer of the novel was scandalised by the setting, scoffing that "any reasonable person would as soon expect to meet Una and her lion in Hyde Park as a Miss Montreville at a grocer's in Holborn."[25] Located between the City and the West End, Holborn was indefinite space, encompassing both rookeries and those venerable institutions of learning, the Inns of Court. The district had once claimed some pretension to fashionable status when City merchants relocated there after the Great Fire, but by the late eighteenth century, it was no longer considered a genteel address. In fiction of the period Holborn is represented as a sector of London where one's rank might equally rise or fall. The heroine of Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), for instance, barely endures the shame of having to live in the district with her vulgar Branghton relatives. In Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1793), Orlando Somerive meets a former country housemaid, transformed into a successful prostitute, ensconced in a flashy carriage mounting Holborn Hill. Yet it is also from the Bartlett Buildings in Holborn that Lucy Steele launches her eventually successful campaign to snare Robert Ferrars in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

Placing the Montrevilles in Holborn lodgings allows Brunton a material expression for the ideological shift from the values of the landed gentry to those of the commercial middle-class that underwrites much eighteenth and early nineteenth-century fiction. In the context of *Self-Control*, Holborn offers a modicum of affordable respectability for those, like Captain Montreville, in straitened circumstances. Clean and sufficiently large, the rooms he rents constitute private space, offering the possibility of being shaped into a temporary home to travellers. But the lodgings are also anonymous, public places lacking any sense of

[25] *British Critic* 13 (February 1820): 166-67.

stable domesticity because of the multiple social relations interacting within and beyond their physical confines. Moreover, their lodgings offer the Montrevilles no escape from the benign incursions of their landlady, who is equally difficult to categorize. Although loquacious and slightly foolish, Mrs. Dawkins owns and manages two thriving businesses, and she has astutely married her elder daughter to a wealthy haberdasher. If Brunton expects readers to be amused (as is her heroine) by the Dawkins family's insularity and credulity, she equally emphasizes their competence and material success, in stark contrast to Captain Montreville's ineffectiveness and poverty. For her part, Mrs. Dawkins admires the genteel Laura and seeks her advice, but she is at the same time complacently aware that wealth constitutes its own authority. In the space of Holborn lodgings the distinction between the commercial, public world and the private, personal world blurs, as Mrs. Dawkins invites the Montrevilles to share her tea table and intimate details of family life, while she in turn assists Laura in her professional ambitions.

In her use of a shifting city site like Holborn, Brunton gives a geographical locus to a debate over values, morals and ethics that, according to Liz Bellamy, dominated public discourse throughout the long eighteenth century.[26] With ties to both military and gentry circles, Captain Montreville embodies an heroic code of conduct associated with the landed aristocracy. So strict is his adherence to this standard that Laura believes she must conceal the improper behaviour of her libertine suitor Colonel Hargrave, lest "her father ... avenge her wrongs at the expense of his virtue and his life" (13). Yet Brunton questions this ethic by showing how incapable Montreville is of actually defending his daughter. Enervated and

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[26]Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6-7.

compromised (he promotes Hargrave's suit with Laura despite his own suspicions of the young man's probity), Montreville is immobile in a world of mobility, gradually subsiding into hypochondriacal stasis. His reluctance to move from his temporary hearth signals his inability to decipher and respond to the new commercial relations governing the city. Accustomed to slow-paced and intimate country life, he is unable to understand town business practices, and he must cede responsibility for their financial survival to his daughter. In charting Captain Montreville's disintegration, Brunton shows that family pride and a chivalric code are anachronisms, wholly ineffective when compared to the business sensibility of the metropolis. In contrast, Laura uses an urbanized intellect to discern change, and adapts her social practices accordingly. Poised in Holborn on a threshold between genteel stagnation and bourgeois energy, she picks the latter. She descends, figuratively and literally, from her inexpensive second floor rooms to dine and visit the theatre with the Dawkins family. Laura's bodily movements, helping to prepare a meal and listening with apparent interest to her landlady's tips for "improving the cleanliness, beauty, and comfort of her dwelling," illustrate her confident occupation of middle-class urban space (119). Her open-minded receptivity to shifts in the urban environment is the key to her survival in the city, equipping her to confront the arduous adventures in which she will engage before the novel's end. At the same time, her presence in Holborn lends touches of grace and domestic comfort to a potentially alienating urban setting. For a short time, she endows an impersonal place with the new identity of home.

In her representation of Laura's ways of operating, Brunton suggests that a feminine presence in the city initiates a mutually constitutive process. By using the tactics of common practitioners, women appropriate proper places to accommodate feminine self-determination,

and in the course of doing so, they change the nature of the urban social relations defining spatial order. At the same time, the ability to respond to urban contingency prompts a dramatic expansion of conventional notions of femininity. Rather than resulting in the estrangement that Simmel's analysis of female culture suggests, experience of the city allows Brunton's women to overlay agency, forthrightness and courage onto the deeply felt emotion associated with the conventional model of domestic woman.

"Narrow, Dark and Airless": Brunton's Metropolitan Consciousness

In his discussion of the relationship between the city and the novel genre, Robert Alter invokes what he calls "the shifting pulse of experience" felt by individuals confronting the modern metropolis. Speculating that the rapid growth of European towns in the nineteenth century radically changed the nature of urban encounters, he argues that novelists were best able to register this transformation through an "experiential realism" that recorded the physical and mental reactions of their characters to the city.[27] In describing this narrative technique, Alter alludes to a set of images and metaphors that equate the human — and, especially, female — body with the metropolis. Like the body, the city is permeable, with veins and arteries that allow human traffic to penetrate to its heart; like a womb, urban space may offer temporary shelter to the most vulnerable.[28] He suggests that it is through the body that the city is experienced and that, like the body, city space is vital and dynamic.

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[27]Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005), x-xi.

[28]For a genealogy of these images see Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), Chapter 1.

Perhaps because so many of the urban practices in which they engage take place at street level, Brunton's women seem particularly receptive, in ways reflecting the distinctive characteristics of the cities they inhabit, to metropolitan sensory stimulation. In both novels, Brunton emphasizes Edinburgh's medieval past erupting into a modern present. On first entering the city en route to London, Laura's attention is "rivetted by the castle and its rocks, now frowning majestic in the shades of twilight, and by the antique piles that seemed the work of giants" (49). Ellen, too, is intrigued with "the strangely varied prospect of antique grandeur and modern regularity" which lends the northern capital an air of mystery. Used to the lights and crowds of London, she notices the silence of Edinburgh, and is unsettled to find that "in the midst of a large city, all seemed still and forsaken. The bustle of business or amusement was silent here. Single carriages, passing now and then at long intervals, sounded through the vacant street till the noise died in the distance" (310). In contrast, Brunton depicts London as a busy, noisy centre of commerce. Fresh from her Scottish retreat, Laura shrinks from the "mingled discord" of the capital where the "thundering of loaded carriages, the wild cries of the sailors, the strange dialect, the ferocious oaths of the populace, seemed but parts of the deafening tumult" (53). Despite these differences, London and Edinburgh generate similar effects; the external features of both cities penetrate the bodies of Brunton's female characters, creating the kind of experiential realism identified by Alter. As she moves through the city, the Brunton heroine suffers from cold, fatigue, hunger and even stress-induced nose-bleeds, pointing to an explicit relationship between her physical response and her emotional state. Attending a performance of Edward Moore's *The Gamester*, for instance, Laura is overwhelmed by "the glare of the lights and the brilliancy of the company and confused with the murmur of innumerable voices," her bewilderment in a

public place mimicking her private, troubled response to Hargrave who is also a gambler (122). Similarly, as she flees in a hackney coach from the scene of her father's suicide, Ellen becomes "sensible to the extreme disorder of [her] frame;" the noise of the streets and jostling of the cab were "torture to nerves already in the highest state of irritation" (251). Weakened by fever and still in shock at her father's death, Ellen is suddenly aware of the grim cityscape from which wealth had previously protected her. Looking out the window of her room in miserable East End lodgings located down "a narrow, dark, and airless lane," she sees the sun, barely visible through the polluted air, as "a dull ray upon the chimney crags" that form her horizon (250, 254). However, as their exposure to conditions in both Edinburgh and London increases, the young women become somewhat desensitized. Their gradual accommodation to urban stimulation is akin to the condition Simmel designates as the metropolitan blasé attitude.

The concentration and diversity of impressions generated by the city, Simmel argues, initially provoke an intensified response in the individual, but over time the subject's nervous system can no longer sustain this heightened sensitivity. Hence it lapses into an opposite state marked by a reduced capacity to respond either to the material city or to its other inhabitants. This blasé attitude affords the subject something like a protective carapace to ward off a destructive over-excitation of the nervous system. In the absence of such a defence mechanism, those who continued to react intensely to the plethora of people and impressions in the city would be "atomized internally" and simply disintegrate (179). Simmel considers the eventual intellectual and emotional hardening experienced by city residents to be something of a trade-off. Metropolitan aloofness dissolves personal connections and forces the individual inward, resulting in a sense of alienation, but the same

reserve also acts as a concealing screen behind which the subject may develop greater personal freedom.

A pair of scenes in *Discipline*, each depicting the desperate sale of possessions, illustrates how, through just such a gradual desensitizing in her response to the city, a young woman might gain a measure of independence. Ironically, Brunton sets these pieces in shops, urban institutions frequently associated with female submission. For example, Neil McKendrick places women in the forefront of the consumer revolution he locates in the eighteenth century, not least because of apparent female susceptibility to new retail marketing strategies. Similarly, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace uses gendered terms to describe retail practices in the period whereby male clerks enact the role of seducer, and women are characterized by their malleableness.[29] Jane Rendell points to the tension that developed in early nineteenth-century London between the objectives of capitalism and the patriarchy. Even as concern grew about female presence in public places, there was a recognition that women were essential as clerks and consumers to support the burgeoning retail trade.[30] Perhaps because women were thus tolerated as occupiers of commercial place, writers of the period frequently used shops as settings to reveal intricacies of urban social relations. In Amelia Opie's *Dangers of Coquetry* (1790), for example, a chance encounter in a Bond Street jewellery store between two women, one mired in thoughtless indiscretion and the other in humiliating poverty, leads to a generous action that, in turn, transforms a place

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[29]Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 9-33; Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[30]Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone Press, 2002), Chapter 1.

of material consumption to a space of supportive feminine community. Similarly, in Brunton's novels, shops are much less places identified by commercially-based social relations (Ellen Percy's early selfish extravagance notwithstanding) than spaces where women transform themselves and learn to exercise agency.

In the first episode, Ellen (having been taken to Greenwich by a family friend after her father's suicide), realizes that the resources of her ailing hostess are all but exhausted, and she resolves to return to London to sell her last piece of jewellery, a ring that once belonged to her mother. No longer insulated by her father's wealth, Ellen experiences a radically different city when she is forced to travel in a public stage coach amid "vulgar, prying, and communicative companions" (288). With insufficient funds for a hackney cab, she makes her way through crowded streets, suffering the indignity of being accosted by passers-by. She reaches a Mayfair jewellery shop thoroughly unsettled by this unfamiliar experience and ill-prepared to engage in a successful transaction. A distressed woman forced to sell her last remaining trinket is a staple scene in novels of the period. Intended to evoke pathos, the image highlights the limited economic opportunities available to women, as well as a feminine propensity toward self-sacrifice in order to secure the interests of others. In Brunton's depiction, however, the scene takes on a third function, revealing different stages in the development of an urban consciousness. In this first iteration of the scene, Ellen, newly exposed to undiluted city impressions and weakened by the over-stimulation resulting from her journey into town, displays a nervous intensity that engulfs both mind and body. She falters in her negotiations and sinks to a chair in a near stupor. In contrast, the jeweller, clearly a practised metropolitan type, remains unmoved by the young woman's suffering. Proving no match for his bargaining, Ellen parts with the last memento of her mother for a

sum much less than its value. A companion scene later in the novel demonstrates how Ellen's nervous system becomes inured to the city. Unable to find a suitable position in Edinburgh, she again resorts to selling her possessions, in this case some of her clothes. By now, she is habituated to the shocks and rebuffs of urban existence, and she consequently has become more detached and calculating. Hesitating "to expose [her] poverty, by asking instructions," she uses various contrivances and concealment to elicit from her acquaintances the information she needs to carry out her necessary transaction. Further, she has learned to engage in these negotiations briskly and pragmatically, finding it "easier ... to resolve upon parting with [her] superfluous apparel" than to be forced into begging assistance from strangers (339). Ellen's journey from a Bond Street jewellery shop to an Edinburgh used clothing store thus charts her growing agency: a young woman once easily overwhelmed by gritty urban reality faces potentially degrading adversity with competence and dignity.

The two settings also serve to illustrate the dimensionality of urban places, their capacity to assume personal and social resonance. In Bond Street, the newly vulnerable Ellen unexpectedly encounters her false friend Juliet Arnold and her social rival Lady Maria De Burgh, and their interactions re-shape the place from an impersonal site of commercial transaction into a forum where class boundaries are drawn and personal animosities played out. The young women's movements draw attention to the gulf in social relations that has opened between Ellen and her acquaintances. Eager to learn the nature of her business as a clue to her material circumstances, her rivals occupy the shop with ease and a sense of entitlement, boldly eavesdropping and choosing whether or when to acknowledge her. Their bodies establish invisible, yet palpable, boundaries that exclude their now-impoverished companion. Still agitated by her journey through the rough and tumble of London streets,

Ellen hurriedly retreats from the encounter, "exhausted and dispirited," yet resolved, should she meet her adversaries again, to summon the strength to "treat them with that cool, guarded courtesy which is the unalienable right of all human kind" (290-91). A scene featuring an unexpected encounter between estranged friends reappears, but with different significance, in the Edinburgh setting of *Discipline*. Forced for the second time to sell pieces from her wardrobe, Ellen discovers a now-destitute Juliet in the used clothing store, and she is astonished at her former friend's alteration: "Sickness, want and sorrow were written in her face. I remembered it bright with all the sportive graces of youth and gaiety. The contrast overcame me" (399). Yet her own exposure to want endows Ellen with the strength to carry out her earlier resolution. Their bodies delineate the new social relations being established between the two women: Juliet averts her face and flushes with shame, while Ellen hesitates, remembering her friend's past ingratitude, then moves forward to embrace her. Through her gesture of forgiveness, Ellen reconfigures the identity of the shop from a squalid, impersonal place into an intimate space of reconciliation.

As Brunton's women accustom themselves to the city, their responses to stimuli become less impulsive and more reasoned, and they display a new determination to withstand metropolitan distractions and dangers. This emotional hardening supports Brunton's didactic aims. Eschewing intuitive or ecstatic religious revelation, she depicts her female protagonists adopting a rational approach to understanding Christian principles. Early in Ellen's spiritual education, for example, she visits a Dissenting chapel and, attracted by the zeal of the preacher, finds herself roused "at once to all the energy of passion" (283). Where once she might have allowed her enthusiasm (and the prospect of confounding her elders) to lure her from the established church, Ellen's experience now prompts her to turn to

reason as the basis for her understanding, and she avoids a rash conversion. Much like Simmel, Brunton proposes that city living results in both a heightened intellectuality and a reduced capacity for emotional response. For her women, the resulting blasé attitude offers a fair exchange: a diminished sensibility is the price paid for the conditions that prompt their moral and spiritual growth.

"Every Face is Full of Business": Entering the Money Economy

On their first arriving in London, the Montrevilles stay at an inn until they can find suitable lodgings. Laura watches the passing crowd from a front parlour window and is immediately struck by the way that, in contrast to Edinburgh where residents might walk the streets for "mere amusement," in London "every face is full of business" (54). Having spent her young life among "the quiet beauties of her native valley," she feels herself removed from commercial preoccupations (49); yet Laura too is in town to make money, to earn an income through her painting. As her plans falter and family resources dwindle, she becomes as preoccupied with business as the crowd passing beneath her window. Similarly, cast out from her privileged world by the death of her father, Ellen must turn to her own labour as the "only means of obtaining shelter or subsistence" (295).

Sarah Smith has suggested that one of Brunton's contributions to the novel genre is an "almost uniquely unromantic attention to the subject of money."[31] By placing both heroines in the urban economy, Brunton is participating in a conversation about femininity and money which, as Edward Copeland has argued, characterizes women's fiction of the

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[31]Sarah Smith, "Men, Women and Money: The Case of Mary Brunton," in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists 1670-1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986), 49.

Romantic period.[32] To some extent, Brunton covers territory made familiar by both reform and conservative novelists. Woefully ill-prepared to earn a living, Laura and Ellen exemplify the inadequacies of education offered to middle-class young women, especially when shifts in family circumstances not infrequently lent urgency to their financial independence. At the same time, Brunton situates the question of female employment in the didactic frame of private and public morality. Their ability to earn allows her young women to support their respective domestic circles and to undertake charitable acts, while it obviates their need to engage in the degradation of improvident marriage or, worse, begging (prostitution is never an option for Brunton's heroines). Where she extends the conversation concerning women and money is in her explicit linkage of participation in urban employment with attainment of the knowledge essential to self-determination. Thus, in *Self-Control*, Laura's engagement in city business provides her with a shrewd insight that enables her to decode her own and others' motivations, while in *Discipline,* commerce stimulates Ellen's transition from an object of exchange in the marriage market to a subject marked by self-reliance and self-respect. As Brunton depicts her heroines earning, spending and carefully reckoning to balance means against necessities, she expands the concept of business to take into account the necessary presence of women in the city.

Laura's profession as artist is instrumental in bringing into focus her problematic relationship with her own sexuality. A conscientious practitioner of the "habit of self-examination, early formed, and steadily maintained," she regularly reviews the purity and prudence of her conduct (5). Yet in one area of her life she is deliberately obtuse. Even as

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[32]Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

she suspects Hargrave is attracted to her primarily by her physical appearance, and even as she worries that such passion will prove too ephemeral and degrading to serve as the basis for lasting happiness, Laura buries her concerns beneath images of the "domestic peace and literary leisure" she will share with her suitor (8). However, her repressed feelings emerge on her canvases, and Brunton makes it clear that Laura's painterly gaze is as eroticised as that of Hargrave. Distracted by his handsome appearance, she misreads his undisciplined character, as she would not have done "had it been exhibited in the person of a little red-haired man, with bandy legs, who spoke broad Scotch, and smoked tobacco" (102). Although conscious of Hargrave's sexual response to her, she mis-represents him to such an extent as to paint the young officer, who is ruled by desire and addicted to stimulation, as the Spartan hero Leonidas. Katrin Burlin points out that Laura equally avoids the question of her own sexual desire by refusing to represent herself as a desiring being.[33] When she inserts a self-portrait as the figure of Pleasure in a painting depicting the choice of Hercules, she finds that she cannot "portray what she would have shrunk from beholding—a female voluptuary" (144). Living in seclusion, little acquainted with the ways of the world and relying on instinct and emotion, Laura is able to rationalize, even justify, Hargrave's passionate behaviour and her own ambiguous response. Even though the young woman is as sexually vulnerable in the country as she is in the city, the attention her appearance elicits in urban places — she is stared at by both sexes and rudely accosted on the street by a party of young men — pierces her deliberate ignorance. Reshaped by her engagement in the money economy, she learns to read her sexuality with a new exactness.

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[33]Katrin Burlin, "'At the Crossroads': Sister Authors and the Sister Arts," 65.

Suggestively, Laura's gradual awakening both to Hargrave's true nature and to her own sexual infatuation with him is sparked by an encounter in the urban institution of the print shop to which her business has brought her. Laura's entire career as an artist, as Sarah Smith has suggested, is presented in pragmatic terms of commerce rather than as an aesthetic endeavour (42). Unable to earn the money she needs through her paintings of historical scenes, she switches to more readily marketable decorative chalk drawings, carefully reckoning how many sketches she must produce to cover living expenses. When art gallery owners refuse to purchase her work, she leaves her paintings on consignment with a print seller. Print shops of the period openly displayed critical, often salacious, caricatures of leading figures, as in the case of the affair between actress and author Mary Robinson and the Prince of Wales, which was charted through a series of obscene prints posted in shop windows. When Laura unexpectedly meets Hargrave in the shop where her paintings are displayed, he is examining just such a book of caricatures, suggesting his alignment with undisciplined sexuality. Moreover, he then involves her in a serious lapse of respectability through his characteristic impetuosity. Weakened by her struggle to support her father and overcome with emotion at the long-awaited reunion with her lover, Laura allows him to embrace her in the public display area of the shop, and then carry her into a private adjoining parlour. She is then humiliated to realize her indiscretion has been viewed by the print seller and his shop boys, who all assume her acquiescence in the manoeuvre. In the ensuing conflict between instinct and rationality, the latter prevails, and Laura regains sufficient composure and resolution to regard her suitor with a cool, metropolitan reserve.

In her use of the print shop, Brunton builds on a connection established in the period between visual and print cultures as forms of reading. Engravings posted in print shop

windows served as "free picture galleries," enabling pedestrians to keep up to date by scanning or 'reading' about developing national affairs as they passed by.[34] Further, the proprietors of two of London's best known print shops, Rudolf Ackermann and John Bell, each launched a monthly periodical to translate the visual aspects of their business (fabric, furnishings, decorative items) into printed advice on fashion and home decor.[35] The importance of careful reading, a recurring theme in both *Self-Control* and *Discipline,* is central to Brunton's didactic message: the regular practice of devotional reading, along with rigorous self-examination, leads the way toward rational assent to Christian principles. Reading is thus a key ingredient in the formation of her characters. Hargrave's first step on the path of unconstrained self-indulgence comes when he stumbles on a volume of Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*, which he "devoured with great eagerness" (45). But Brunton is also interested in reading in its sense of being able to grasp immediately the social position and character of others based only on visual clues. Following a quick scan of her face during a street encounter, a new acquaintance claims to 'read' Laura's goodness, asserting "had Lavater seen her, he could scarcely have believed her human" (84), and Laura herself attempts to decipher the complex character of her aunt, Lady Pelham, by painting her portrait. Brunton establishes Laura as a prolific reader — the young woman arrives in London already well-versed in the popular novels of the period — but she is not necessarily a careful one. Because she first encountered Hargrave in the sort of small, rural circle Simmel associates with instinct and emotion, Laura was able to imagine her lover as a figure

[34]Alison Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 54.

[35]These were *The Repository of the Arts* and *La Belle Assemblée* respectively. See Ann Bermingham, "Urbanity and the Spectacle of Art," in *Romantic Metropolis*, ed. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin. Bermingham describes how printsellers like Ackermann, Bell and Lackington Allen created shops that were "places of social intercourse, commercial exchange, and aesthetic instruction" (155).

in a romantic fantasy, implicitly equating him with the "[t]ruly generous and inflexibly upright" hero of Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (73), representing him accordingly in her paintings. Once strengthened by her involvement in the metropolitan money culture, however, Laura comes to a much different understanding. She is now equipped to read her print shop encounter with an urban calculation, recognizing her own infatuation for Hargrave both as a sexual response and as misplaced idealism, and seeing his importunate pursuit of her as part of a pattern of unconstrained licentiousness.

Although she too charts a trajectory toward self-knowledge, Ellen Percy's journey is not one from rural ingenuousness to city reserve but an amendment of her metropolitan blasé attitude, as she moves from thoughtless self-absorption toward a concern for others. Brunton sets *Discipline*, as she did *Self-Control*, in an urban milieu characterized by middle-class striving for economic dominance. As she registers a shift in London's power base, Brunton underscores the function of urban woman as a tradeable commodity. Embodying what Liz Bellamy terms a "progressive commercial and bourgeois masculine ethic"(162), Ellen's father would seem to sit in triumphant opposition to Captain Montreville in the debate over values and morality. Yet Brunton is as critical of his position as she is of the latter's outdated aristocratic ideals. Where Montreville is enervated and incompetent, John Percy is a crass bully. A self-made man determined both to establish his own commercial dynasty and to show his disdain for the aristocracy, he makes little effort to conceal his disappointment that Ellen cannot contribute directly to the achievement of his ambitions. He complains that "it is a confounded pity she is a girl. If she had been of the right sort, she might have got into Parliament, and made a figure with the best of them" (67). Nevertheless, he determines to use his daughter's beauty and accomplishments to achieve his goals indirectly. In his

scheme, Ellen is little more than an embodiment of the bait Percy uses to attract the ideal suitor. Although he enjoys teasing Ellen's aristocratic beaux with the prospect of wedding his wealth, he makes his intentions clear to her:

> I can give you three hundred thousand pounds, and I have a scheme in my head that may make it twice as much; – and I'll have your eldest son called John Percy, ay, and his son after him; and you shall marry no proud, saucy, aristocratical beggar, to look down upon the man who was the making of him; d—m me, if you do, Ellen Percy. (231)

Child and fortune are equally considered assets to be handed over to the most acceptable bidder. Percy's conception of his daughter as a bargaining chip in the marriage market is reflected in the way he chooses to educate her. At the most fashionable and expensive London academy, girls like Ellen and Juliet Arnold are taught the art of merchandising themselves. As they engage in the pursuit of matrimony, "the grand purpose of a lady's existence," they learn the art of self-display, that is "what to withdraw from the view, and what to prepare for exhibition" (79-80).

Yielding to her father's expectations for her, Ellen is shrewdly aware of the game in which she functions as both inducement and enabler. As she explains to a potential suitor: "The creatures that dangle after me want either a toy upon which to throw away their money, or money to throw away upon their toys" (215). Ellen's internalization of her status as a commodity is reflected in her view of marriage as, at best, an equitable bargain in which money is exchanged for status. How she regards herself and how she is seen by others is underscored during her aborted elopement with the fortune-hunting Lord Frederick de Burgh. Awaiting her lover in a Barnet inn, Ellen's attention is drawn to portraits of the

Durham Ox and the Godolphin Arabian hanging on the parlour walls. Like the animals in the paintings, she too is a prized possession to be displayed and used for dynastic breeding. Not until Ellen is expelled from the marriage market following the loss of her father's wealth is she able to gain a true sense of herself and to act with rational independence.

Again, Brunton uses contrasting scenes set in commercial places to underscore her transformation. The first occurs in fashionable London auction rooms where the household goods of a woman left homeless by a creditor's execution takes place. Unmoved by the occasion for the sale, Ellen is initially detached and amused by the instinctive acquisitiveness of the women bidders as they enact their function as consumers. Yet soon she herself is swept up in the action, and begins to bid on an elaborately inlaid tortoise-shell dressing-case, an object she likens to "fine ladies" like herself, because "it was useless and expensive in proportion to its finery" (145). Driven by pride, Ellen is as anxious to win the bidding competition as she is to possess the box, and she forces up the price of the case. Her relish of victory is short-lived, however, when she realizes she does not have the funds to pay for her purchase, as the auction rules demand. In order to quit the sale room with dignity, she must borrow money from Lord Frederick, precisely the result he had schemed to achieve. The episode as a whole highlights how Ellen's lack of self-control further implicates her as a pawn in the plans of others.

Entering the money economy frees Ellen from this dependency. Left penniless and alone and looking for ways to earn a living, she discovers her expensive education has provided her with few options. With no connections in Edinburgh, she must find her own employment, and she soon experiences Simmel's maxim that, if the urban worker is to find a secure position, "it is necessary to specialize in one's services" (*MML*, 183). When she

receives no response to an advertisement she has placed, Ellen visits every music shop and boarding school in the town in search of a position. She discovers the absolute necessity of demonstrating her own distinctiveness when she is informed "that every department of tuition was already overstocked with teachers of pre-eminent skill" (340). Ellen eventually establishes a modest market niche for herself as the manufacturer of the sort of decorative objects well-bred young ladies were taught to create, and she proves, in her subsequent dealings, to have absorbed astute urban business practices from her father. She negotiates with reluctant buyers, speculates her limited resources on materials, and, when her profit margin becomes too thin, eliminates the middle man by selling her products directly. No longer just another pampered city miss, she has become a woman with marketable skills. Although she remains a reluctant member of the money economy, Ellen finds a new source of satisfaction in earning her own living, clearly preferable to being bargained away in the service of someone else's ambitions.

Ellen's self-sufficiency is reflected in a companion scene to the fashionable London sale, an Edinburgh rouping. Like an auction, a rouping involves the sale of household goods in order to satisfy the creditors of a bankrupt or to settle the estate of the deceased. Brunton uses a number of contrasts and comparisons between the two scenes to underline Ellen's progress toward full subjectivity. In London, she is taken to the auction in the carriage of aristocratic friends; in Edinburgh, she walks to the rouping in company with her coarse-mannered landlady. Unlike the wealthy clientele of the auction, buyers from "the lowest orders of mankind" frequent the rouping (322). Initially, as in the London scene, Ellen assumes the role of spectator, both amazed and repulsed by the teeming, filthy, multi-storeyed Old Town tenement in which the event is held. Once again, she gazes on a crowd

avidly intent on acquisition, and again she suddenly shifts from watcher to participant. However, at the rouping, Ellen is no longer driven by pride or acquisitive urges and thus no longer behaves as a thoughtless consumer. As the sale begins, she is attracted by the obvious distress of a young Highland clanswoman whose meagre household effects are to be sold. When she learns that the woman is most upset at the prospect of losing some fabric she has woven, Ellen steps in to buy and restore the cloth. Like her pursuit of the tortoise-shell box, the purchase seems impulsive, but Brunton casts it as a conscious and rational act, one that takes place only after Ellen conducts a quick internal debate on the relative merits of aiding another or prudently preserving dwindling resources for future use. Her ability to exercise charitable agency in this instance does not cause her to exult in her own virtue. In prosperity, she spun fantasies about easing her conscience through dispensing favours on the deserving and grateful poor. Her own exposure to poverty "in all its loathsomeness" has taught her the dangers of finding consolation in complacent self-approbation (266). As with Laura, the city becomes for Ellen the site of the painful self-awareness necessary to achieve independence and spiritual growth.

In the end, neither Laura nor Ellen remains in the city. Marriage takes each to rural felicity: Laura moves to an estate in the south of England; Ellen joins a clan society in the Scottish Highlands. Posited as it is on a femininity forged through urban experience, these closing movements are more complex than the nostalgic Arcadian resolution typically associated with women's fiction of the period. Lisa Wood suggests that the urban experiences of Brunton's heroines are intended as a test of their faith (121). Yet in the formation she charts for her heroines, Brunton seems to have more in mind than individual salvation. Both novels expose their female protagonists early on to older guides like the

Scottish country clergyman's wife of *Self-Control,* who is commended for being "reserved in her manners, gentle in her temper, pious, humble, and upright" (4). But for Brunton these attributes are clearly insufficient to make a modern heroine. To the exemplary qualities of their mentors, the young women add the urban traits of intelligence, reserve and pragmatism. Modern femininity, Brunton suggests, is active, assertive and resourceful, a balanced amalgam of rural excellence and urban independence that unites the nurturing values embodied, for example, in a figure like Louisa Dudley, heroine of Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1797), with a rationality and agency born of modern urban experience. Brunton's women are remarkably self-sufficient. Having demonstrated their ability to extricate themselves from an escalating series of perils, they marry not to escape or resolve distress but to engage in new social formations.

Their city experiences equip Brunton's heroines to mediate between old and new values, between rural and urban worlds. Sharon Alker identifies the significance of Brunton's fiction, especially *Discipline*, in promoting a reconciliation between traditional and commercial values.[36] Central to this enterprise, as Liz Bellamy points out, are her heroes, lineal descendants of Sir Charles Grandison in their preoccupation with "the commercial virtues of thrift, economic prudence and careful management" (108). Less noticed is the prominence Brunton lends to women in this union. As metropolitan types, her heroines are able to form partnerships that preserve traditional values by imbuing them with urban energy. Brunton's depiction of gentry estate life and a Highland community, both governed by the concepts of improvement and progress, opens a space for her heroines to apply the

[36]Sharon Alker, "The Business of Romance: Mary Brunton and the Virtue of Commerce," *European Romantic Review* 13 (2002): 199-205.

astuteness and forthrightness honed in the city to the quasi-public roles they assume in the countryside. At Norwood, Laura will at last enact her "day-dreams of social happiness" as she assists with the estate enhancements and engages in works of charity among her husband's tenants (354). In Glen Eredine, women share civic responsibility equally with men and assume "the duties consequent upon being not only joint housewives, ... but school-mistresses, chamber-council, physicians, apothecaries, and listeners-general" (471). Relocating women from what Lynne Vallone describes as "an insular, private home" to the heart of a social order mediating old and new economies, these endings do not so much escape as incorporate the city.[37]

Jane Austen's Homemaking Women

Unlike that of Mary Brunton, an Austen *künstlerroman* seems to credit the countryside as a stimulus for creative impulse. Influenced by early family memoirs, a consistent Austen narrative emerges that organizes her development as a writer around geographical sites and regions.[38] In his classic account, for example, Lord David Cecil, argues that Hampshire county society provided Austen with fodder for "her first great creative period, that in which her genius, now pretty well matured, irresistibly poured itself forth;" however, exile to Bath and, later, Southampton resulted in literary aridity. Only on returning to rural retirement at Chawton did she again find "the needed time and incentive

[37]Vallone, *Disciplines of Virtue*, 69.

[38] See, for example, J.E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 1870 (London: Century, 1987); Honan Park, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987); David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Farrer, Straus, and Giroux, 1997); and Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). The Table of Contents in each of these works, as in Cecil cited below, is arranged by geographical location.

for her genius to operate."[39] Although more recent biographers have modified this story,[40] the presence and function of urban experience in Austen's life and fiction remain relatively unexplored. Despite her frequently quoted preference for writing about "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village," towns figure surprisingly often in her novels, suggesting an interest in how she herself and society as a whole were being affected by the rapid spread of urbanization throughout early nineteenth-century Britain.[41]

Four Austen novels — *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* — feature specific town settings, but she weaves references to urban centres into all her major works, where they exert an important, generally positive, influence on female formation.[42] Drawing attention to the attractions of the modern metropolis, Austen represents the city as a place of entertainment that provides women with a welcome respite from — and thereby enabling continued endurance of — the confinement and monotonous routines of rural domesticity. Thus, en route to visiting the newly-married Mr. and Mrs. Collins, Elizabeth Bennet is happy to escape her family and enjoy a day in London spent "most pleasantly away; the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres."[43] In addition to stimulation, Austen shows the city encouraging female refinement. Mrs. Dashwood urges her daughters to accept an invitation to stay in town, confiding to

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[39]Lord David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 80, 111.
[40]See, for example, Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen* (London: Viking, 1997), Chapter 21; and Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), Chapter 3. Both biographers stress the cosmopolitan influence of Austen's cousin and later sister-in-law, Eliza de Feuillide, and the writer's evident enjoyment of visits to the capital. In her succinct summary of close to two centuries of Austen criticism, Jocelyn Harris concludes that Austen had many "links to the outside world;" *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's Persuasion* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 17.
[41]Austen, *Letters*, 275.
[42]On this point, see also, Celia Easton, "Austen's Urban Redemption: Rejecting Richardson's View of the City," *Persuasions* 26 (2004): 121-135. Easton argues that Austen, unlike her eighteenth-century predecessors, "refuses to demonize urban life" (121); rather, her fiction illustrates the benefits of intimacy with city ways.
[43]Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172.

them "I would have every young woman of your condition in life, acquainted with the manners and amusements of London,"[44] and Jane Fairfax achieves her exemplary level of accomplishment only because an upbringing in the capital has given her access to the best instructors. Importantly, the city teaches young women to moderate their erotic expectations. As a result of their London visits, both Marianne Dashwood and Harriet Smith abandon their respective romantic fantasies, reconciling themselves to more pragmatic matches. These instances suggest that for Austen the metropolis served to reinforce the placement of women in a conventional model of femininity associated with home and countryside. However, in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion,* she uses urban influences to disrupt rather than uphold this connection between female identity and an enclosed, rural domestic circle. In these novels, playing on a double meaning of place to indicate both status and location, Austen makes feminine experience of the town central to a questioning of landed gentry values, especially the core trope of the estate. The urban energies her heroines absorb grant them the autonomy and agency necessary to reconfigure their position within and beyond the social relationships designated 'home'. With only tenuous attachments to specific sites, the heroines in both novels illustrate through their physical and social mobility that the particularity of any place, including an estate, is derived not from an internally-generated history emphasizing order, exclusivity and continuity, but from an unstable mix of connections and influences moving back and forth through highly permeable boundaries. For Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, there is indeed no place like home.

[44]Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility,* 1811, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177.

"The Influence of the Place:" Open House in *Mansfield Park*

Austen's understanding and examination of place in *Mansfield Park* relate more closely to Doreen Massey's formulation of a grounded set of social relations than to physical structures or topography.[45] Early in the novel, Edmund Bertram chides Londoner Mary Crawford for her flippant dismissal of locale in determining the efficacy of religious devotion, reminding her that "the influence of the place and of example may often arouse better feelings than are begun with."[46] Through Edmund's assertion, Austen points to the potentially positive effects of geographical location, using a medical lexicon to suggest the emotional and physical consequences of a change in venue.[47] However, the Mansfield Park and Portsmouth settings in the novel serve primarily as frames for an exploration of relationships in the respective Bertram and Price households. Austen's heroine Fanny Price can claim a place in neither: considered expendable by her biological family in the town, she lives on the margins of her adoptive family on a country estate.[48] In *Mansfield Park*, Austen shows how the influence of place plays out through changes — corporeal as well as social — in Fanny's position. Her search for a home of her own requires the young woman to renegotiate her place from the margins to the centre of the Bertram family, and her experiences of town life charge her with the energy and determination to fulfill this quest.

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[45]See also P. Keiko Kagawa, "Jane Austen, The Architect: (Re)Building Spaces at *Mansfield Park*," *Women's Studies* 35.2 (2006): 125-43. Kagawa argues persuasively that Austen had knowledge of and a keen interest in contemporary architectural and design theory, but that she used these in her fiction primarily to accommodate social behaviour.
[46]Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 1814, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102-3. All further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
[47]For example, Mrs. Grant is confident "Mansfield shall cure" the cynicism of Mary and Henry Crawford (54); alternatively, Fanny is confident "London would soon bring its cure" to what she sees as Henry Crawford's infatuation with her (374); and Sir Thomas Bertram sends Fanny to Portsmouth to correct her "diseased" understanding (425).
[48]See Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Brownstein observes that "all Austen's novels are about girls who are in some sense homeless and in the end find a home"(95).

The central irony that Austen creates in the novel is that Fanny succeeds in establishing herself at the heart of what she perceives as a secure and enduring place only by engaging in tactics that draw attention to its vulnerability and malleability. In showing how her placeless heroine is able to breach and alter the social relations that comprise Mansfield, Austen strips sentimentality from the concept of home and undermines the notion of the estate as impregnable against change.

Through the figure of Sir Thomas Bertram, Austen endows the Mansfield Park estate with the characteristics of order and exclusivity, those attributes that comprise the "nostalgia and timeless stasis" that Massey associates with essentialist constructions of home (*Space, Place and Gender* 121). Receiving his identity as "master of the house" from estate ownership, Sir Thomas manifests a two-way flow of influence between an individual and the social relations forming place (223). Just as he is shaped by Mansfield Park, so the authority vested in his position at the apex of a patriarchal system allows him to form the ethos of his family circle, creating what Mary Poovey has described as "a citadel in a turbulent world."[49] Such a construction relies on both cohesion within his family and separation from other, external relationships. Sir Thomas is particularly admired by his neighbour Mrs. Grant for "a fine dignified manner, which suits the head of such a house, and keeps every body in their place" (189-90). The places, or identities, which he creates for those living at Mansfield serve to consolidate his family. Thus he constructs his elder son Tom as prospective estate owner; Edmund as a serious, resident clergyman; his daughters as elegant and accomplished

[49]Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 213. Nancy Armstrong observes that Austen typically juxtaposes a "closed community of polite country people" against metropolitan influences in her novels; *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 135.

young women likely to contract marriages offering "respectability and influence" (235); and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Norris, as his lieutenant in ensuring these plans come to fruition. Missing from the Bertram circle is a strong, cohesive maternal presence. Rather, notable features of the identities Sir Thomas shapes for women family members are immobility and tractability, exemplified in the figure of Lady Bertram typically settled on the drawing-room sofa, engaged in useless handwork and oblivious to the concerns of her family.

The treatment Sir Thomas affords his niece underscores his vigilance in protecting the integrity of Mansfield Park against external influences.[50] Although acknowledging his connection with the Price family, Sir Thomas nevertheless initially considers Fanny as belonging to an alien world outside the estate. Massey points out that conventional readings of place as home insist on establishing difference through a "negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries" (169).[51] Austen makes clear that "the beloved circle" its patriarch forms at Mansfield depends on such an exclusionary distinction (211). Sir Thomas accepts Fanny into his system of social relations only with reservations, emphasizing that "she is not a *Miss Bertram*," and that she will be dispatched back to Portsmouth should the influences he fears she will import from the town — "gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner" — prove contagious (11). Despite being a victim of Sir Thomas's discriminations, Fanny shares her uncle's vision of the Bertram

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[50]Austen also uses the narrative development of staging *Lovers' Vows* to emphasize the importance placed on exclusivity at Mansfield. Although anarchy breaks out during Sir Thomas's absence in Antigua, family members have so absorbed his values that even the most enthusiastic proponents of acting, Tom and Maria Bertram, are uncomfortably aware of the impropriety of introducing outsiders into the family circle. On his return, Sir Thomas quickly restores the estate to its habitual "sameness and gloom" (229). Mr. Yates is tactfully dispatched back to town, and the Crawfords must wait to be summoned from Mansfield rectory.

[51]Simmel makes a similar observation, noting that the traditional rural family unit survives by shutting itself off from others, exerting a "centripetal unity" to protect its members against "neighbouring, strange or in some way antagonistic circles" (*MML* 180).

home. From her exile in Portsmouth, her idealizing memory conjures up the estate as a place of "elegance, propriety, regularity, [and] harmony" that she attributes to social conformity (453). In contrast, her own family's characteristic "noise, disorder, and impropriety" arise, she speculates, from an individualism that prevents each member from ever being "in their right place" (450). Preferring, like Sir Thomas, the "quietness" and "repose of [the Bertram] family circle," Fanny views any new influences introduced to Mansfield with suspicion and concern, and she is frankly relieved whenever its society contracts (229). Yet Sir Thomas and Fanny perceive the enclosed world of the estate from radically different places: he guards it from within, while she seeks to penetrate from without.

Austen relies on domestic spatial formation to explore the tension underlying these respective positions. In particular, she depicts the East room of the Mansfield house as both site and symbol of her heroine's largely self-propelled journey to a place of importance in the Bertram family.[52] Once a 'proper' place, a school room, associated with the training of girls into marriageable young women through the acquisition of conventional accomplishments, the East room has reverted to undefined space, emptied of specific social meaning. Indeed, Fanny is allowed to become mistress of the disused room only *because* it is unallocated and unwanted. Giving material form to Fanny's ambiguous status, Mrs. Norris determines that rooms far from the centre of the house are "much the best place" for her Portsmouth niece (10-11), and her insistence that there be no fire in the East Room draws attention to the lack of genuine warmth afforded Fanny by the Bertrams. For her part,

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[52]See also, Lucy M. Schneider, "The 'Little White Attic' and the East Room: Their Function in *Mansfield Park*," *Modern Philology* 63.3 (1966): 227-35. Arguing that Austen uses background elements to symbolize character development, Schneider reads the East Room as a way station on Fanny's progress to the public rooms, and hence the heart, of Mansfield Park.

Fanny's use of the space as refuge underlines her separateness. Amid the cheerful bustle of staging *Lovers' Vows*, for instance, she knows that "she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the East room, without being seen or missed" (187). Yet much like one of Certeau's common practitioners, Fanny engages in ways of operating to appropriate and refashion the East room for her own purposes. Through a subtle accretion, the urban child "so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into" ownership of the space that, as a young woman, Fanny is able to transform it into her own "little establishment" (177, 183). John Skinner points out that Austen uses the term 'establishment' frequently in *Mansfield Park* to denote both material and social attainment of place; that is, a house, a circle of family and friends and sufficient wealth to support both.[53] Through the device of the East room, Austen proposes a further meaning, a place where feminine self-formation may flourish. As Fanny adds to the room objects reflecting her tastes and interests — books, plants, writing desk, "works of charity and ingenuity" — she constructs herself as intelligent, resourceful and caring (178). These attributes form the basis of a determined independence even as they contribute to her growing usefulness to the Bertram family. From her isolation in the East room, for example, Fanny justifies to herself the objections that she alone holds toward the acting scheme, and this stance establishes her as something of a moral authority in Mansfield Park. The small parade of visitors (Edmund, Mary Crawford, even Sir Thomas himself) seeking out Fanny in her room marks a change in her status from insignificant to important and its evolution from space to place, giving a

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[53]John Skinner, "Exploring Space: The Constellations of *Mansfield Park*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 4.2 (1991): 125-148.

spatial dimension to a shift in, and a slight opening of, the closed system of Bertram family relations.

Austen makes further use of the East room to draw attention to the futility of attempting to cordon off and stabilize the social relations comprising home, representing Fanny's own meagre possessions and the family detritus littering the room as signifiers of her heroine's connections within and beyond the Mansfield estate.[54] For Fanny, every object in the room is infused with an association: "Every thing was a friend, or bore her thoughts to a friend" (178). Her affection for the shabby furniture, carelessly given gifts and a collection of family profiles testifies to her longing to transform her tenuous links to the Bertrams into an established place. At the same time, her books, the transparencies decorating window panes, and especially the pride of place given to a sketch of her brother William's ship, the H.M.S. Antwerp, point to imaginative and emotional ties beyond the confines of Mansfield Park. Austen explores the complex and contradictory ramifications of such diverse interconnections through a confrontation between Sir Thomas and Fanny staged, suggestively, in the East room. Here, as he conveys Henry Crawford's proposal to Fanny, Sir Thomas acts as mediator between his niece and the world outside Mansfield. His implicit promise is that she will earn his approval and a consequent full membership in his family only by agreeing to this new, external attachment. The regular fires he orders for Fanny's sitting room provide her with a taste of the familial warmth her submission will bring. Yet Fanny can achieve her desire for a legitimate place in the Bertram fold only by refusing the

[54]Even as she represents Mansfield Park as a closed circle, Austen provides virtually every member of the Bertram establishment with exterior connections: Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris to their Portsmouth sister; Tom to a fashionable racing circle; and Edmund with the Owen family at Peterborough. Even Nanny has a brother in London.

Crawford connection, and the autonomy fostered by her outsider status strengthens her insistence on making her own choice of partner. Thus she interprets the East room fire as offering neither acceptance nor comfort, but rather as a subtle accusation of ingratitude. Sir Thomas's chastisement of his niece for her "wilful and perverse" behaviour suggests the threat such female independence poses to Mansfield as a distinctive place (367). Austen breaks the stalemate between her two stalwart defenders of home only by transferring her heroine from the closed world of Mansfield to the open diversity of Portsmouth.

Austen depicts the town as a place of robust, centrifugal mobility resisting spatial confinement and infusing the social relationships of its residents. A scene set on the harbour ramparts, for instance, suggests the vitality and potential implicit in the town. A sociable place where women like Mrs. Price may enjoy an opening out of their domestic life through the sharing of news and companionship, the ramparts also look down on the navy fleet at anchor, a reminder of Portsmouth's connection to a national purpose and a much wider world. Walking the heights with Henry Crawford on a fine spring day, Fanny delights in "the effects of the shadows pursuing each other, on the ships at Spithead and the island beyond, with the ever-varying hues of the sea now at high water, dancing in its glee and dashing against the ramparts with so fine a sound" (474). The vibrancy and promise implicit in this prospect also contribute to individual formation. Members of the Price family, for example, are particularly notable both for their inability to stay quietly at home and for their consequent series of interconnections outside their circle. Despite (or perhaps because) of household chaos and slovenliness, each member exhibits independence and an expanded, outward-looking consciousness. Three of the Price sons — William, John and Richard — are making their way in professions, and those remaining at home show signs of similar

initiative. Sam Price, for one, is "clever and intelligent, and glad to be employed in any errand in town" (452), and Fanny's sister Susan eagerly seizes opportunities to escape family circumstances. Austen's respective renderings of the Bertram and Price family relations confound easy assumptions about the relative merits of traditional and metropolitan domesticity. While Bertram family members, lulled by rural routine and confined within an autocratic circle, await whatever futures their father will select for them, a combination of parental fecklessness and urban vigour propels the Price siblings from home in response to the modern requirement of fashioning their own places in society.

Such independence, however, also contributes to Austen's disruption of any sentimental connection between women and home. En route to Portsmouth, Fanny anticipates being "at home again," in the centre of a circle where she is "loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before" (426). Yet her expectations falter in the face of familial indifference. In a household of individuals each preoccupied with separate concerns, Fanny is as placeless as she was at Mansfield Park. Particularly painful is her estrangement from her mother who, Fanny believes, has "no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better; no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company" (452). Through Mrs. Price's maternal indifference — akin to that of her sister, Lady Bertram — Austen erases the notion of home founded on innate, consanguineous ties bound together by feminine influence and affection. Rather, she presents home as only one among sets of constantly evolving associations that an individual chooses to enter, form or sustain. Thus when Fanny decides "Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home" (499), she chooses not so much a country estate over a ramshackle house in town as the elegant tranquillity of

the Bertram family (and especially her cousin Edmund), over what she has come to see as the disorienting otherness of her urban relations.

As she rewrites traditional concepts of domesticity, Austen suggests that the diversity and instability of urban social relations may have a beneficial effect on female formation. Even as Fanny condemns the mismanagement and discomfort that constitute the Price household, she absorbs at least some of its characteristic robust determination. Her Portsmouth experience especially invests her with the agency needed to renegotiate her position in her chosen home. Jan Fergus has observed that Austen's fiction allows the possibility of "growth, assertion and achievement" for women, but only in a wider context than that provided by gentry society.[55] Freed from the conformity that distinguishes Bertram family relations, Fanny undergoes a transformation in the town. For the first time, she assumes "an office of authority," tactfully exerting her influence to shape her sister Susan's deportment and understanding (459). She further discovers the power conferred by her control of wealth, and she uses this to resolve a long-standing family quarrel and to indulge, without anyone's direction, her taste for reading by purchasing a circulating library subscription. Fanny herself is aware of how she is altered by these independent actions; she is "amazed at being anything *in propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way" (461). Further, the urban tendency toward a wider perspective, looking beyond immediate, intimate social relations to a broad range of interconnections, instills greater clarity in Fanny's thinking: now she is able to acknowledge to herself her uncle's unkindness, Edmund's irritating vacillation and her own dislike of Mary Crawford. Portsmouth teaches her to value head over heart, subsuming her instinctual emotional responses in clear-eyed

[55]Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 146.

rationality. If Fanny is relieved to escape the material conditions of Portsmouth and if her refusal of Henry Crawford is an explicit rejection of fashionable metropolitan life, she nevertheless brings back to Mansfield Park a consciousness re-shaped by her exposure to urban experience. Portsmouth ignites in her an urban egoism. Try as she might, Fanny cannot help being overjoyed that the crises erupting in the Bertram family — Tom's illness and Maria's elopement with Henry Crawford — work to her advantage. While sensitive to the seriousness of these events, at the same time Fanny is "in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable" (513). The agency she developed in town is now directed to securing her own interests, and she proves capable of acting decisively and somewhat ruthlessly on her own behalf. When it appears that Edmund is wavering in his rejection of Mary, Fanny feels "more than justified in adding to his knowledge" of her rival's "real character," and her action forecloses any possibility of a reconciliation (531).

Although her heroine's transformation and return to the countryside might suggest that Austen — like Brunton — advocates a reshaped femininity mediating between rural and urban social formations,[56] the tension and ambiguity evident in the novel's conclusion undermine any tidy synthesis of a traditional gentry estate revitalised by an infusion of modern urban energy. On the one hand, Austen enlists her two advocates of the distinctiveness of place to propose a conservative resolution. Fanny indeed finds a home, assuming a place within the Mansfield Park orbit as a dutiful daughter and "prime comfort to her uncle" (546). For his part, Sir Thomas moves instinctively to restore family cohesion

[56]For this view, see Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967). Fleishman proposes that *Mansfield Park* is a novel of reciprocal reformation, offering both "an affirmation of a dynamic culture and a denial of the ideal of isolation"(13).

through binding "by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity" (545-46). Those who threaten the apparently stable, changeless identity of Mansfield Park are subdued or, like Maria Bertram, "placed" outside the family circle (537). On the other hand, the family over which Sir Thomas now presides has been fundamentally changed, with neither his direction nor approval, through a realignment of old and the establishment of new social relations. Further, the "active principle," including "self-denial and humility," that he now adopts as the Mansfield Park ethos is one embodied in Fanny, the once urban outsider (536). Austen's brief closing allusion to "the general well-doing and success" of Price family members is a timely reminder of the complex connections beyond Mansfield Park that might once again infiltrate and reshape the estate (547). Gary Kelly contends that, in late eighteenth-century England, domesticity was identified with "the idea of home as a refuge from a hostile and competitive social world."[57] *Mansfield Park* challenges such a construct through its heroine who exposes the openness of country house society by serving as a conduit for unsettling external influences.[58] At the same time, Austen suggests, urban experiences are not entirely unpleasant for women. They need not, she proposes, be like the "medicinal project" that Sir Thomas devised for the purpose of directing Fanny back to her submissive place in the Mansfield patriarchy (426). Rather, she emphasises that the town instils in women the energy, independence and agency necessary to create their own place in a world of fluid, unpredictable relations.

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[57]Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 12.
[58]The instability Fanny represents may account for the anxiety that, John Wiltshire argues, is pervasive in the novel. See, Introduction to *Mansfield Park* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Walking "In Happy Independence": Mobile Homes in *Persuasion*

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen suggests home is a vulnerable place, but in *Persuasion*, her concept of home transcends fixed spatial formations altogether to become, as Janet Todd and Antje Blank suggest, "a state of mind."[59] From her friend Lady Russell's carriage, Anne Elliot frequently sees Admiral and Mrs. Croft, tenants of her father's Kellynch estate, walking through the streets of Bath. What strikes Anne about these sightings is the couple's ability to appropriate urban places to create their own zone of domesticity. Even in the midst of a busy urban thoroughfare, they move "in happy independence" and project "a most attractive picture of happiness," equally content with each other and the friends they chance to meet.[60] The Crofts illustrate one of those "domestic virtues" Austen ascribes to the naval profession, the ability to establish a home in whatever circumstances they find themselves (275), and this model proves invaluable to her heroine. As *Persuasion* opens, Anne Elliot, like Fanny Price, is placeless, disregarded within her immediate family and about to be made homeless by an imminent removal from Kellynch Hall. Yet Austen makes clear that such enforced mobility may actually benefit a young woman. As Anne moves away from the "long, uneventful residence in one country circle" that characterizes gentry estate life, she comes into contact with new social networks, each with its own distinct identity (9). These include "an old country family of respectability and large fortune" (6), a group of naval officers, urban businessmen, and working women. Buoyed by such encounters and her town experiences, Anne acts much like a Brunton heroine, "independent of all but [her] own

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[59]Janet Todd and Antje Blank, Introduction to *Persuasion* by Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxvi. See also, Melissa Sodeman, "Domestic Mobility in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*," *Studies in English Literature* 45.5 (2005): 787-812. Sodeman suggests that in Austen's redefinition of home, the domestic is "linked to and constituted by local, national, and even global concerns" (788).

[60]Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 1817, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxvi. All further references are to this edition.

exertions," gaining the confidence and seizing opportunities to secure her own version of home.

A number of critics have addressed the tension Austen sets up in *Persuasion* between the gentry and professional classes.[61] However, the novel also explores an allied opposition, one less frequently discussed, between closed and accessible systems of social relations. In this dichotomy Austen's sympathies rest unequivocally with the latter. Her portraits of Sir Walter Elliot and his eldest daughter Elizabeth establish them as proponents of a select social order, tied to inherited property and aristocratic connections. Austen's ironic portrayal of the two renders this conception retrograde and hypocritical. Sir Walter takes satisfaction in being "of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire" (1), but he has already disrupted through his mismanagement the continuity associated with a gentry estate, and he shows no sense of "the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder" (149). Elizabeth's expectation of being "properly solicited by baronet-blood" leaves her uneasily facing the prospect of spinsterhood (7). While insisting on the exclusivity of their connections, both are nevertheless quite willing to accept either flattery or a pleasing appearance as sufficient qualification for entry to their clique. Conversely, Austen's heroine understands the advantages of entering and accommodating herself to each new "little social commonwealth" she encounters in her progress away from country house society (46). Austen illustrates how Anne Elliot's movement into ever-widening social circles generates positive psychological and physical responses. Confined to the country and deliberately excluded from annual trips to London,

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[61]See for example, Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); and Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1988).

Anne has had few diversions to alleviate the sorrow caused by her mother's death and her broken engagement to Frederick Wentworth. Sadness and disappointment alter her beyond recognition, and her constitution and spirits improve only with a change of place. First at Uppercross and then at Lyme, the interest associated with new connections grants Anne a "second spring of youth and beauty" not obtainable in the closed world of Kellynch (134). Moreover, a wider perspective reveals to her the stultifying pettiness arising from her family's insistence on a fixed identity based on rank and a country place. At Lyme, she contrasts the easy, generous hospitality offered "from the heart" by the naval Harville family with the "formality and display" marking Elliot social engagements (105), and in Bath she sees how the mere presence of the elder Elliots alters a happy family gathering: "the comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister" (245). Mary Lascelles, an early twentieth-century commentator on *Persuasion*, has suggested that the novel marks "the last phase of Jane Austen's treatment of *place*" because Anne Elliot's world progressively widens throughout the narrative, effectively "bursting open ... the prison" of the rural gentry estate.[62] In Lascelles's observation, the place from which Austen's heroine escapes has specific geographical and social connotations: namely, isolation in a country house and a position in a narrow aristocratic class. However, Austen does not so much reject the overall concept of place as propose that women fashion their own positions at a nexus of open and diverse social relations.

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[62]Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and her Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 181. Similar arguments about the significance of setting in *Persuasion* are made by W.A. Craik, *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (London: Methuen, 1968); Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Bernard Paris, *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978); and Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer.*

Persuasion implicates the city in this process as the active campaign Anne Elliot launches to establish her own place intensifies with her move to Bath. Anticipating Certeau's linking of walking in the city with a "search for a proper place" (*Practice* 103), Austen draws attention to her heroine's bodily movements through the public places of the town as signifiers of Anne's refusal to accept an arbitrary categorization dictated by family and class interests. Steven Gores observes how, in her Bath descriptions, Austen spatializes social relations: individuals are seemingly fixed to locations that define their status, so that their identity is subsumed in an address.[63] However, next to this world of social fixity, she juxtaposes a second Bath, a swirl of sensory impressions where "the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen, muffin-men and milk-men, and the ceaseless clink of patterns" announce energetic mobility and heterogeneity (146). Moreover, Austen suggests, this second urban realm is as capable of supporting a warm domesticity, despite its noisy instability, as the Great House parlour at Uppercross. Admiral and Mrs. Croft make themselves snug in town lodgings, and the extended Musgrove family import the cheerful chaos of their country home to temporary accommodation at the White Hart Inn. Anne, too, aligns herself with the movement and heterogeneity of the modern town. On arriving, in Bath, she makes no more claim to the social position indicated by her family's Camden-place address than she had while living at Kellynch Hall.[64] When her cousin William Elliot emphasises the particular importance of her establishing a connection with Laura-place — that is, with her aristocratic relation Lady Dalrymple — Anne responds

[63]Steven J. Gores, *Psychosocial Spaces: Verbal and Visual Readings of British Culture 1750-1820* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.
[64]Harris notes the irony that Camden Place buildings were poorly constructed and unstable, much like Sir Walter himself; *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, 164-65.

with a pun on both her status and location, claiming "I certainly am proud, too proud to enjoy a welcome which depends so entirely on place" (163). Indifferent to the distinctions on which her family insists, Anne moves freely through the town, crossing the class barriers signified by address, to visit a former governess, renew acquaintance with an old school-friend, sustain friendships with the Croft and Musgrove families and deepen an intimacy with naval friends met at Lyme.

Austen shows how her heroine's physical immersion in urban space opens up possibilities for her, including new models of femininity. The women who befriend Anne in the town are notable for their self-confidence, social mobility and enthusiastic engagement with those outside their immediate circle. Confined neither to a specific spatial formation nor to a conventionally domestic role, these women are in a sense as placeless as Anne. Yet each establishes a position for herself — a home — that incorporates personal autonomy with social interaction. Margaret Kirkham observes, for instance, that the character of Mrs. Croft is distinctive in her ability to circumvent the traditional definition of a woman's place without compromising an essentially feminine nature.[65] Having spent most of her married life at sea in the masculine environment of a navy ship, Mrs. Croft is equally comfortable as the mistress of a gentry estate house or a recipient of Musgrove family confidences in the White Hart Inn sitting room. The distinctive sense of self that allows her to engage on an equal basis with her husband's navy colleagues reflects her insistence that women too are rational beings. Anne notices that her new friend's manners are "open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself and no doubts of what to do" (52). Anne's former

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[65]Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton, UK: The Harvester Press, 1983), Chapter 19.

school-friend, Mrs. Smith, shows a similar self-confidence through an "elasticity of mind" that sustains her in, and allows her to rise above, distressed circumstances (167). Disabled and exiled from her place in London's fashionable world through the death of her husband, Mrs. Smith nevertheless creates a home for herself in lodgings made bearable by her lively interest in others. Making tactical use of a modest skill in handwork, she enters different social categories by using the money she earns from sales of goods to wealthy contacts to help poor families in the neighbourhood. Even though physically confined, she manages to move vicariously through the town, relishing news of all its residents. Her virtual mobility is made possible by Mrs. Rooke, a professional nurse identifiable as a metropolitan type by her "shrewd, intelligent, sensible" nature. Like Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Smith, Nurse Rooke exemplifies both spatial and social mobility. With a varied acquaintance arising from her profession, she passes easily between her own temporary living quarters and the homes of her well-to-do patients, and her "fund of good sense and observation" makes her an informed, interesting companion (168). With these examples of urban femininity before her, Anne learns to seize opportunities offered by the town while evading limitations imposed by proper spatial order.

Using the sort of tactics Certeau ascribes to a common practitioner, Anne appropriates public places of Bath in her increasingly assertive efforts to bring about a full reconciliation with Captain Wentworth. An urban setting is particularly well-suited for such an initiative. As a centre of commercial and cultural production, Bath provides Anne with legitimate reasons to occupy public places, while the self-absorption of town dwellers offers a screen of indifference behind which she may operate. Thus, seeking news of Wentworth and recalling Admiral Croft's regular exercise routine, Anne engineers a 'chance' encounter,

and while her friend is preoccupied in contemplating a print in a Milson Street shop, she skilfully steers the conversation until she elicits the required information. Armed with this intelligence, she is then better prepared to come upon Wentworth himself shortly afterwards in Molland's shop. Austen depicts this commercial place as the backdrop for a complex series of spatial manoeuvres that uncover the social and erotic objectives of the two Elliot sisters. Elizabeth Elliot's bodily movement intentionally underlines what she considers her prominence within a select society. She turns away from Wentworth, whom she regards as an inferior, "with unalterable coldness," while creating a sufficient bustle to make "all the little crowd in the shop understand that Lady Dalrymple was calling to convey Miss Elliot" (192). Anne's own tactics are scarcely less transparent. Positioning herself near the shop window, she gains an advantage over Frederick by anticipating their encounter, and she further adds to his confusion by placing herself close to William Elliot. As she leaves the shop (not coincidentally) on the arm of her admiring cousin, Anne draws Wentworth's attention to her own desirability, precipitating a jealousy that reignites his feelings for her. Through the tactics her heroine employs, Austen underscores the occasions women might find in urban space to take the initiative in furthering their own emotional attachments.

Anne's spatial manoeuvres in these commercial places serve as a dress rehearsal for her pivotal meeting with Frederick in the Bath concert rooms. With reference to *Mansfield Park*, John Wiltshire admires Austen's skill in registering "the precise positions and movements of [her] characters within space."[66] A similar exactitude is at work in *Persuasion* where Austen uses the concert episode to draw attention to the gulf between the Elliot family's closed, aristocratic circle and her heroine's mobility and receptivity. For Sir Walter

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[66]John Wiltshire, Introduction to *Mansfield Park*, lxxxi.

and his party, the occasion is one to reinforce inflated self-images, to "be of all the consequence in their power" (201). To this end, his group remains fixed in a strategic, prominent position by a central fireplace. Although now prepared to admit Wentworth to their orbit, Sir Walter and Elizabeth make only the slightest use of social gestures — "a distant bow" on his part and "a slight curtsey" on hers — to signify their approval (197). The pair is galvanised into decisive movement only to join the retinue of aristocratic Lady Dalrymple. In contrast, Anne is constantly in motion, decisively appropriating place to establish a position physically and socially apart from her family. Confident the music-loving Wentworth will attend the concert, she is ready with a bold ploy as soon as he appears. Tellingly, she quickly moves away from her family and toward Frederick, forcing him to engage with her. Her tactics succeed, and in the ensuing conversation she learns enough to be certain that he reciprocates her feelings, and this knowledge prompts her to extend her spatial manipulations. She anxiously scans the room for Wentworth when they are separated and, through "a little scheming of her own," ensures both her own visibility and a vacant place beside her for him to occupy (206). Anne's careful execution of her plan reshapes the meaning of a public place, transforming it from a formation sustaining rigid social groupings to a flexible, private space of intimacy.

The success of her heroine's ways of operating suggests Austen's view of the importance of urban experience to women. In her debate with Captain Harville on the gendered nature of fidelity, Anne argues that women are more constant because of the closed and unvarying circles they occupy: "We live at home quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion" (232). Yet it is only through the opportunities the town provides women to escape such confinement that Anne is able to secure her own happiness.

Resisting the temptation to assume her "dear mother's place" (173), comprised of the social importance of a title and the stability of a country estate, Anne fashions instead a new kind of domesticity in which, as Monica Cohn points out, "Company substitutes for property; rented rooms stand in for a manor house."[67] Embarking on a nomadic life with a new set of personal and professional connections, Anne Elliot chooses an uncertain, mobile 'home', next to her naval husband, in a "very pretty landaulette" (272).

[67]Monica Cohn, "Persuading the Navy Home: Austen and Married Women's Professional Property," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 29.3 (1996), 348.

CHAPTER 3

THE SEMI-DETACHED *FLÂNEUSE*: FEMININE SPECTATORSHIP IN PROSE WORKS BY MARY ROBINSON AND THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON

Recent cultural histories encourage a re-thinking of London's place in British Romanticism, especially challenging the conventional city-country polarity. For example, in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Romantic Metropolis*, James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin argue that a wider contextualization of Romanticism reveals it "not as a movement against the city, but as an aesthetic that developed along with — and contributed to — the ascendancy of metropolitan life."[1] However, such investigations of the capital's complexity and significance tend to overlook one figure: the respectable, middle-class female town dweller. Without a trope to encapsulate women's metropolitan experiences, there is no focal point around which a feminine literature of modernity might coalesce. Among those who have identified this gap, Janet Wolff points out in her influential critique of early sociological studies of the metropolis that the figures used most often to denote modern urban life — rambler, idler, loiterer, lounger, dandy and especially, *flâneur* — are always male.[2] Furthermore, she notes, female city dwellers who are considered in early urban studies tend to be marginal or transgressive: the poor, the elderly, widows, demireps,

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[1]*Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also, Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry and Joseph P. Ward, ed., Introduction to *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-23. MacLean *et al* relocate an emerging metropolitan literature — that is, representations of and from the city — from the middle to the turn of the nineteenth century.

[2]Janet Wolff, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory Culture and Society* 2.3 (1985): 37-46.

thieves or prostitutes. Wolff attributes the omission of middle-class women from histories of modernity partly to the androcentric perspective of those writing about the metropolis and partly to the significant difference in masculine and feminine urban experiences. She contends that men, enjoying much greater liberty of movement in the nineteenth-century city than women, were consequently more open to those "fleeting, ephemeral, impersonal" encounters characteristic of town life (38). Moreover, in a fast-paced, heterogeneous world where the visual — observation and display — was crucial in quickly establishing the status of those encountered, only men could both direct and accept with impunity an appraising gaze.[3] For this reason, Wolff argues that existing models of urban individuality cannot simply be reconstituted from masculine to feminine, from *flâneur* to *flâneuse*.[4] In a later study, Wolff describes a recursive process that also limits female urban representation: because they were not full participants in public life, women writers of the period were curtailed in describing the range of metropolitan possibilities, and without such records, their female readers lacked information about and models for living in the city.[5] She concludes that, without an urban female image, the resulting accounts of modernity are incomplete, omitting its domestic aspects, failing to explore the constitutive interaction between public and private realms, and overlooking the diverse experiences of those respectable women who were present in urban public life.

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[3]On this point also see Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), Chapter 3. In her study of nineteenth-century women painters, Pollock argues that because they were not considered "normal occupants" of public urban space, women "did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch" (71). Rather, women were exclusively positioned as the objects of the male gaze.

[4]The 1871 *Larousse dictionnaire universal du dix-neuvième siècle* actually includes gendered forms of the noun, but its taxonomic essay is clearly limited to a masculine version of the type.

[5]Janet Wolff, "The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life," in *Feminist Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 12-33.

Early nineteenth-century women did indeed have a city story to tell, one that involved access not only to an expanded range of urban diversions, from debating societies to window shopping, but also to new roles, from politics to philanthropy.[6] Mica Nava points out, for instance, that philanthropy provided respectable women with the freedom to range widely through the city and, in the process of gathering information to support their work, to indulge in "the pleasures of urban spectatorship."[7] Some models have been suggested for a figure that might capture such feminine experiences. As her candidate, Wolff nominates the Parisian woman described in Charles Baudelaire's 1861 poem, "À Une Passante." In this work, the poet's *femme passante* walks along a Parisian street with apparent independence, showing an awareness of her erotic power by confidently meeting his gaze. Yet she is problematic as an emblem of women's urban participation: she is marginalised by her status as a widow; she is objectified by the poet's lingering admiration of her tall, slender form; most of all, she is without agency in this fleeting encounter. Although she boldly acknowledges the poet's interest, *he* has selected *her* for attention; *she* is merely a player in *his* fantasy.

In this chapter I argue that the figure feminist cultural historians like Wolff seek does indeed exist, but we have been looking for her in the wrong place and in the wrong time. British women's writing of the Romantic period engaged in significant experimentation with

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[6]See, for example, Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Russell argues that women were "the main beneficiaries" of new forms of public entertainment appearing after 1760 (4). Colley notes that women were involved in political and patriotic activities in the period (Chapter 6); and Vickery suggests that in the second half of the century, "there was a proliferation of charitable institutions through which women could garner a new kind of public standing" (10).

[7]Mica Nava, "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store," in *The Shopping Experience*, ed. Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (London: Sage, 1997), 62.

different forms of femininity, including an exploration of the scope for a feminine presence in the city. Two striking examples of those Romantic-era women whom Nava describes as "engaged in the project of making themselves at home in the maelstrom of modern life" (64), appear in prose sketches by Mary Robinson and Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington. Professional writers who each achieved considerable success in the London literary marketplace, both women engaged fully in the visual aspects of the metropolis. Each rose quickly to public prominence through exploiting the opportunities for self-fashioning that the capital provided. But for both women fame shifted to notoriety, and they also endured overt and wide-spread accusations of impropriety. The suggestively similar urban female figures they represent in their sketches seem to serve as antidotes to their own mixed experiences of city life, allowing them to replace their objective status with subject positions. The metropolitan women Robinson and Blessington represent have roots in eighteenth-century periodical literature and moral philosophy, exhibiting the urbanity exemplified in Addison and Steele's *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, the improving agenda contained in Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*, and the discernment embodied in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Yet their women gesture equally toward a modern masculine image like the *flâneur*, especially as this figure appeared in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Like the *flâneur*, the metropolitan women of Robinson and Blessington take pleasure in being part of the urban scene, moving independently through the city's sites for sociable leisure, and applying an acute perceptiveness to their active spectatorship. However, they differ from the *flâneur* in one important respect. While the male gaze is disinterested and clinical, female observation — although also cast from a physical distance — is nevertheless

engaged and sympathetic, preoccupied with the interplay of human relationships. In effect, Robinson and Blessington transform the detached *flâneur* into a semi-detached *flâneuse* by suggesting public, reformative functions for a female urban presence, and by endowing their women with the personal stature to participate fully in London life as cultural producers and moral guides. With the occasional glance back to eighteenth-century models of sympathy while looking forward to the modern metropolis, variations of their women appear as both fictional characters and narrative voice in prose and novels of the period. These semi-detached *flâneuses* expand the possibilities for a female urban presence, describe a femininity markedly different from conventional stereotypes and serve as a lens through which to recover and consolidate a more complete portrait of modernity.

A Genealogy of Spectatorship

Frequently invoked in written and visual representations to express the anomie of modern urban living, the *flâneur* has both a theoretical basis and an historical profile. Walter Benjamin, the most frequently-invoked expositor of the figure, locates the *flâneur* in a specific place and time, namely the gas-lit Parisian arcades of the 1860s. From his perspective in the twentieth century, Benjamin understood the *flâneur* as a direct response to an "uneasiness of a special sort" generated by a "new and rather strange situation" that he, like Georg Simmel, associated with the modern capitalist city.[8] Influenced by the essays and poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin incorporates into his description of the *flâneur* a series of tensions and paradoxes: he is at home in the busy arcades but at the same time

[8]Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 37.

always in solitude; he is a "chronicler and philosopher" who meticulously notes and considers what he sees, yet he also surrenders himself to the sensory intoxication of the city;[9] apparently idle, he is continually at work, much like a detective, reading faces to discern the guilty secret that lies in the heart of each member of the urban crowd. Inhabiting the ambiguous space of the arcades where interior and exterior, street and residence, day and night meet and meld, his *flâneur* is both the enabler and victim of capitalism. He is an "observer of the marketplace," operating as "a spy for the capitalists," but he also is aware that, through his association with cultural production, he too is a commodity, much like the goods displayed in shop windows lining the arcades (*AP*, 427). Able to counter his loneliness only by filling himself with "the borrowed — and fictitious — isolations of strangers," Benjamin's *flâneur* takes on a mythic quality, emblematising the overarching alienation of modernity (*CB*, 58). As Raymond Williams observes, the modern city is now inextricably linked with the image of "a man walking, as if alone, in its streets."[10]

However, like gas lighting and shopping arcades, the *flâneur* as historical figure appears considerably earlier in the century than Benjamin suggests, and in a significantly different incarnation. Noting that the *flâneur* evolves in step with historical circumstances, Priscilla Ferguson traces the figure's formation in Paris through the nineteenth century, beginning with its emergence in a pamphlet published anonymously in 1806.[11] The hero of

[9]Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 440.

[10]Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 233.

[11]Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994): 22-42. Although the *flâneur*'s British antecedents are outside the scope of Ferguson's study, the figure clearly has some affinity with Addison and Steele's "Spectator of Mankind" and the members of his "Club" (*Spectator* 1). However, while the latter are associated with metropolitan culture, they remain by and large fixed within a single, masculine institution, the coffee-house, while the former ranges

Le Flâneur au salon ou M. Bon-Homme: examen joyeux des tableaux, mêlé de vaudevilles is by occupation an observer, fascinated by anything new he encounters on his regular strolls through the city: innovative technology, a shop window display, nuances of fashion. Over the next four decades, the *flâneur* developed in terms of elegance, spontaneity and sophistication, but M. Bon-Homme embodies the fundamental characteristics of *flânerie* that endure throughout the century: mobility, self-sufficient detachment from quotidian relations and responsibilities, association with urban space and a vague connection to aesthetic pursuits that Honoré de Balzac and, later, Baudelaire transformed into the artist *flâneur*. Ferguson points out that an implicit fundamental attribute of the figure is masculinity. Because urban women of the period were generally associated with shopping and consumption, they were considered too emotionally undisciplined and therefore too susceptible to city allurements to maintain the disengagement required by a true *flâneur*. Their function was to be the object, not agent, of observation.

Although his separation from the striving world of the bourgeoisie attracted disapproval,[12] the *flâneur* nevertheless performed an important, respectable and creative function as mediator between the modern city and its denizens. Unlike the men-about-town protagonists of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1820-21) who frequent a louche night-time world of taverns, cockfights and bagnios, the early Parisian *flâneur* spent his daytime hours in the new leisure places of the city: boulevards, public gardens, bookseller displays along the quais of the Seine, cafes, auction salesrooms, libraries, Sorbonne lecture halls and, of

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widely throughout the city. Moreover, the latter deal with fundamental moral and philosophical issues, while the *flâneur* is most interested in metropolitan visual displays.

[12]In its ironic description of the *flâneur*, the Larousse notes: "[Il] est une variété du paresseux; à ce titre, les lecteurs du *Grand Dictionnaire* n'ont pas besoin que nous leur exposions la répugnance que nous inspire ce type inutile qui encombre les rues des grandes villes et y gêne la circulation. Toutefois, il y a dans la paresse du flâneur un côté original, artistique."

course, the arcades. From these sites, the *flâneur* gained an intimate knowledge that, in turn, informed new modes of writing: brief, witty sketches of urban manners and studies of urban types known respectively as *feuilletons* and *physiologies*.[13] Benjamin dismisses such articles as "soothing little remedies" that merely smooth over the disquieting aspects of urban life and deceive readers with the implicit promise that the city can be contained and comprehended (*CB*, 40). However, Martina Lauster counters that Benjamin misunderstood the importance of these sketches to an increasingly mutable metropolitan world where the accurate reading of social signs was essential. She maintains that in these pieces, the *flâneur* (or his recorder) provided a semiological interpretation of the city, helping "to sharpen contemporaries' perceptions of their surroundings."[14] Charles Baudelaire expands on this heuristic role, maintaining that the task is nothing less than to explain modernity by somehow capturing and distilling "the mysterious beauty of the age." In this sense, the *feuilletons* served as "precious archives of civilized life," analogous to the magazine illustrations of Constantine Guys, Baudelaire's own conception of the perfect *flâneur*.[15]

Ferguson argues that it is only in the latter part of the century when the figure retreats from his mobile and celebratory roles that he comes to be associated with the urban estrangement identified by Benjamin. Also suggesting that the *flâneur* be separated into pre- and post-1850 manifestations, Richard Burton points to significant differences between the two versions. The former is notable for his "purposefulness and vigour;" the latter, for

[13]The London equivalent of such publications included *La Belle Assemblée* and *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons: A Monthly Publication dedicated to High Life, Fashionables, Fashions, Polite Literature, Fine Arts, the Opera, Theatres, embellished with London and Parisian Fashions, and Costumes of all Nations.* The 'Talk of the Town' section of *The New Yorker* is an extant version of these modes.
[14]Martina Lauster, "Walter Benjamin's Myth of the *Flâneur*," *Modern Language Review* 102 (2007), 152.
[15]Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 40. In the 1830s and 1840s, Guys worked as an illustrator for two *feuilleton*-like British publications: *Illustrated London News* and *Punch.*

"passivity and despair." One exerts his subjectivity by embracing "the dynamism and vitality of urban society;" the other loses his individuality by fusing himself in the "undifferentiated and anonymous mass" of the urban crowd.[16] Yet the two versions are linked through their passion for an observation that seeks not merely to scan the urban scene, but also to study, dissect and theorize. As Ferguson notes, a *flâneur* requires a stout constitution to move through city streets, but his "most essential appendage is the eye" ("The *Flâneur*" 27).

This kind of active spectatorship is also a starting point for Adam Smith's moral philosophy. A central tenet of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is the visual basis on which behavioural codes are formed. Smith suggests that our earliest notions of what is proper arise from an awareness that, just as we cast a critical look at the actions of others, so too they examine and judge our behaviour. Society thus serves as a specular guide, "the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct" and adjust our actions accordingly.[17] However, what Tzvetan Todorov terms "this constitutive dependency of the human being with relation to the gaze of the other," is insufficient as the sole foundation for morality.[18] Slavish emulation of social mores precludes agency in making moral judgements; moreover, as Smith cautions, not all of society's spectators are created equal. Apart from lacking knowledge of the context and motivations prompting individual actions, the "great mob of mankind" is likely to be too influenced by "gaudy and glittering" externalities, while only "a small party ... are the real and steady admirers of wisdom and virtue" (62). As Vivienne Brown suggests, these two

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[16]Richard D. E. Burton, *The Flâneur and His City: Patterns of Daily Life in Paris 1815-1851* (Durham, UK: University of Durham Press, 1994), 5-6.
[17]Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759, ed. D.D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 112.
[18]Tzvetan Todorov, "Living Alone Together," *New Literary History* 27 (1996), 7.

categories of spectator imply, in turn, two kinds of gaze: an unthinking, uncritical, social gaze that is attracted only by the outward trappings of fashion, wealth and power; and a perceptive, sensitive, moral gaze able to discern and approve the prompting of a virtuous conscience.[19] This latter kind of observation is central to Smith's construct of the "impartial spectator" through which he retains the social aspect of values formation, while placing moral responsibility squarely with the individual (110). He suggests that we form our consciences by supposing ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, imaginatively directing the scrutiny of a knowledgeable, fair and impartial observer toward our conduct. Unlike actual spectators, this internalized tribunal, the "jurisdiction of the man within," is able to distinguish between actions designed only to attract worldly acclaim, and those that are genuinely praise-worthy (114). Although Smith advocates placing our greatest reliance on this internal monitor, he emphasizes that the individual conscience functions best in "the day-light of the world and of society" (154). Therefore, the internalized abstract observer that guides the "man within" will frequently need the counter-balance of a real on-looker to ensure that value judgements and consequent conduct remain within the web of social relations.

Smith's influence appears in the concept of "sympathetick curiosity" that motivated Joanna Baillie's series of plays on the passions.[20] In her *apologia* for encouraging theatre attendance during a period when playhouses were somewhat suspect, especially for women, Baillie identifies an innate human propensity to observe the behaviour of others in order to

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[19]Vivienne Brown, "Dialogism, the Gaze, and the Emergence of Economic Discourse," *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 697-710.

[20]Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourse" to *A Series of Plays in Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind* (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies, 1798), 4.

study and categorize their character traits.[21] Like Smith, she considers this fascination with spectatorship as instructive rather than intrusive, serving as a supplement to the individual conscience represented by the former's "man within." However, while Smith determined that the object of observation benefits from scrutiny, Baillie emphasizes the improvement accruing to those who do the looking. She maintains that watching how others perform in everyday circumstances, and even more so under stress, teaches us not only "the proprieties and decencies of ordinary life," but also how to cope with "distressing and difficult situations." Moreover, she suggests, through such spectatorship we become "more just, more merciful, more compassionate," and we spread these qualities through society as a whole by acts of kindness and respect for others.[22] In a convincing contestation of exclusive male ownership of the gaze, Daryl Ogden traces multiple versions of women observers represented in fiction throughout the eighteenth century. Ogden describes a trajectory by which an autonomous, relatively open, even sexualized, female gaze is gradually disciplined, re-directed and ultimately confined to private space. Nevertheless, he shows how, in the Romantic period, women writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley reasserted their right to exercise an independent, aesthetic female vision that extended beyond domestic concerns.[23] Analogously, Baillie's notion of "sympathetick curiosity" sets out the basis for a reformative gaze, opening up a new role for women as autonomous urban spectators, and

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[21]On this point, see also Peter Duthie, Introduction to *Plays on the Passions* by Joanna Baillie (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001).

[22]Baillie, "Introductory Discourse," 12. Regina Hewitt places Baillie among those Romantic writers whose publications performed "a kind of social work" in extending sympathy to others, and whose influence appears in the careers of such late nineteenth-century social reformers as the American Jane Addams. See Regina Hewitt, *Symbolic Interactions: Social Problems and Literary Interventions in the Works of Baillie, Scott, and Landor* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 7.

[23]Daryl Ogden, *The Language of the Eyes: Science, Sexuality, and Female Vision in English Literature and Culture, 1690-1927* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), Chapter 1.

offering them a defensible, socially productive reason to look at other people while themselves enjoying the city's attractions.

Bruce Mazlish claims that the high capitalism of mid-nineteenth century cities eclipsed the social formations on which Smith and Baillie based their theories, and the wise and sympathetic onlooker, literally or imaginatively engaged with those observed, was displaced by the *flâneur* and his distant, cool, objectifying gaze.[24] However, this interpretation does not preclude an interregnum at the turn of the century during which a female figure embraced city life with all the enthusiasm of the early *flâneur* while directing an improving, moral gaze as a means of accommodating her presence within metropolitan space. Unlike the demure, deferential feminine observers Ogden identifies in the late eighteenth-century novel of manners, this version of female spectator undertakes a wide-ranging, critical yet sympathetic appraisal of the passing urban scene. Arguably this is the figure, the "semi-detached *flâneuse*," that appears in some women's writing of the period.

Mary Robinson's Working *Flâneuses*

Visibility — seeing and being seen — is a predominant theme in the personal and professional life of Mary Darby Robinson (1756-1800). As Anne Mellor observes, accounts of Robinson's life and exploits were a staple of contemporary London's popular visual and print culture, and in her posthumously published *Memoirs*, Robinson herself reveals the deliberate tactics she practised to attract attention.[25] The daughter of a Bristol merchant with

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[24]Bruce Mazlish, "The *Flâneur:* From Spectator to Representation," in *The Flâneur*. ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 46.

[25]Anne K. Mellor, "Mary Robinson and the Scripts of Female Sexuality," in *Representations of the Self from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Patrick Coleman, Jayne Lewis, Jill Kowalik (Cambridge: Cambridge

interests in the North American fishery, Robinson enjoyed an indulged childhood, including instruction from tutors and at academies for young women in those accomplishments — music, dancing, painting, conversational French — designed to draw notice and enhance value in the marriage market.[26] In the late 1760s, following her father's business failure and her parents' estrangement, she and her mother moved to London where she embarked on a succession of 'careers' as leader of fashion, actress and courtesan that depended for their success on her being the focal point of public interest. Although primarily prompted in these choices by financial necessity, Robinson displayed an early affinity for self-publicity and an intuitive sense of what would excite the social gaze of Londoners. For example, conscious that her appearance was the key to establishing herself in fashionable society, she wagered that "a new face, a young person dressed with peculiar but simple elegance, was sure to attract attention at places of public entertainment." Consequently, on her first visit to the Ranelagh pleasure gardens, she reports that she deliberately dressed against the grain, "so singularly plain and quaker-like, that all eyes were fixed upon me."[27] Such ploys proved remarkably successful. As Judith Pascoe notes, Robinson became "the most attractive object in a large urban display," aped in fashion, mobbed in shops and featured in portraits by such leading artists of the day as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough and George Romney.[28]

University Press, 2000), 230-259; Mary Robinson, *The Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson. Written by Herself. With Some Posthumous Pieces*, 4 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1801).

[26]Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson* (New York: Random House, 2004), 7-8.

[27]Robinson, *Memoirs*, 95.

[28]Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry and Spectatorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 140. Byrne reports that there are some seventy extant portraits of Robinson and that the March 1782 Royal Academy exhibition included four paintings of her (173, 178).

Robinson soon discovered, however, that such prominence was a double-edged sword. As she became widely-known in the capital, first for her stage success and then as mistress of a series of famous men, including the Prince of Wales, she effectively lost control of her public image. Mellor describes, for instance, how portrait painters used the interplay between the respective gazes of sitter and viewer to create, with varying degrees of sympathy, interpretations of Robinson's character, ranging from mistreated wife to whore (231). In addition, a plethora of scurrilous written and visual texts — pamphlets, newspaper squibs, caricatures and prints — drew a less discerning public's gaze to her erotic status. A contemporary account illustrates how intrusive and cruel such attention could be. Laetitia Hawkins describes, with evident *schadenfreude*, encountering the by now severely disabled Robinson sitting alone in the foyer of the Opera house where "she was not noticed, except by the eye of pity," while she waited to be carried out to her carriage by two retainers.[29] Paula Byrne suggests that Robinson was astute enough to detect public satiation with titillating gossip about her so that, in 1788, on her return from a stay in France, she began to remake her public profile into that of a serious writer (243-44). Throughout her subsequent prolific and successful career as poet, novelist, playwright and journalist, Robinson assumed the role of observer, focussing her attention on the social, political and cultural life of London.

Robinson's Invisible Spy

In two late-century series of essays that parallel her own progression from spectacle to spectator, Robinson sketches a model of femininity suitable for leading an active and

[29]Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, *Memoirs, Anecdotes, Facts and Opinions*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), 2:34.

respectable life in London.[30] What distinguishes her urban woman is not only her lively interest and involvement in the full panoply of city life but also the nature of the gaze she directs. The first set of essays, *The Sylphid*, appeared as fourteen notional letters to the editor of the *Morning Post* from October 1799 to January 1800, and later as Volume 3 of her *Memoirs*.[31] As a governing conceit for the series, Robinson adopts the persona of an aerial being who, anticipating Benjamin's *flâneur*, visits London to operate as "an invisible Spy over the actions of unconscious mortals" (3). Sharon Setzer contends Robinson chose the image for both professional and personal reasons. Through allusion to Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, Robinson could engage in a dialogue with male authors, challenging those who promoted misogynist versions of femininity. In addition, by adopting this ethereal voice, Robinson dissociated herself from eroticised portrayals of her own body.[32] However, she is surely also alluding to Eliza Haywood's *The Invisible Spy* (1755). In this didactic fantasy, the narrator, having donned a belt that renders its wearer imperceptible, visits various fashionable places in London, defending her incursions on moral grounds:

> I have it in my power to pluck off the mask of hypocrisy from the seeming saint; — to expose vice and folly in all their various modes and attitudes; ... At the same time, I have also the means to rescue injured innocence from the cruel attacks begun by envy and scandal, and propagated by prejudice and ill-nature.[33]

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[30]Judith Pascoe similarly traces this shift in Robinson's urban poetry in which the poet reveals a *flâneur*-like mobility and pleasure in the visual and aural minutiae of urban living; see *Romantic Theatricality*, Chapter 5.
[31]All quotations from *The Sylphid* are taken from this latter edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.
[32]Sharon Setzer, "Mary Robinson's Sylphid Self: The End of Feminine Self-Fashioning," *Philological Quarterly* 75.4 (Fall 1996): 501-520.
[33]Eliza Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, 1755, 2nd ed. (London: H. Gardner, 1773), 14.

Despite this exalted justification, Haywood's narrator confesses that invisibility also gratifies her personal interests, allowing her to feed "an enquiring mind" with news of public events and to track down items of gossip flying "swiftly through each quarter of this great metropolis" (13-14). Thus, social reformation intersects nicely with enthusiastic participation in city amusements.

In a similar fashion, Robinson's Sylphid figure mixes moral purpose with the pleasures of taking part in the London scene. Her protean assumption of various insect guises makes her inconspicuous so that, roaming without restriction across the town, she is equally able to penetrate such public places as shops, theatres or gambling dens as the intimate space of the tea-table. Her tactic of changing her appearance to suit the occasion, reminiscent of Robinson's own sartorial ways of operating, incorporates that urban practice, identified by Michel de Certeau, of seizing opportunities to appropriate and transform proper city places. Through a sudden change from butterfly to grub, for example, the Sylphid turns the dressing-table where a coquette prepares for social conquests into a classroom for teaching "the lesson of mortality" (7). Her shape-changing ability also endows the Sylphid with agency, enabling her to control her urban presence by directing her gaze where she wishes, while escaping the notice of those she observes. Such wide-ranging, independent movement is essential to one engaged in active, purposeful spectatorship, for the Sylphid claims a purpose for her observation of city residents. Like Haywood's wearer of the invisibility belt, she will "draw forth merit; protect unfriended genius; unveil pretended chastity; goad with the thorn of conscious reproof the ostentatious bosom; and expose the specious violator of domestic joy, the oppressor of the unhappy" (16). Through her urban figure, Robinson rewrites Pope's diminutive sylphs, turning beings solely preoccupied with a

young woman's chastity into an independent female figure whose presence in the city is fully vindicated by the important work she initiates.

The city in which the Sylphid embarks on her specular mission is in evident need of her ministrations. In her portrayal of London, Robinson concentrates less on the material city of landmarks and institutions, and more on social relations, sketching studies of urban types (would-be man of fashion, ingratiating tutor, socially ambitious woman) reminiscent of the portraits contained in early and mid eighteenth-century periodicals including Haywood's own *The Female Spectator*, but even closer to the quick character studies contained in later Parisian *physiologies*. Much like Georg Simmel's metropolitan type, the residents of the "overgrown metropolis" that the Sylphid encounters are enervated and bored by "unvaried rounds of dissipated pursuits" (63). The little energy they do expend is directed toward a self-fashioning designed solely to attract an undiscerning social gaze that will establish and confirm their status. The Sylphid reports, for instance, on the tricks used by a woman of doubtful reputation to distinguish herself from the crowd:

> At the Theatre she takes the centre seat of a front row, where she annoys the actors, and disturbs the audience by her vulgar and injudicious remarks; while, at frequent intervals, she looks wistfully around for attention or for approbation. (36-37)

By means of a visually constitutive process similar to that identified by Todorov, the Londoners the Sylphid observes thus come into being only when noticed by others.

In contrast, the Sylphid establishes her subjectivity by choosing the role of observer, not observed, directing a moral rather than social gaze on the city and its inhabitants, in keeping with her dual heuristic and reforming functions. Her range of interests, detailed

knowledge of the urban scene and social mobility equip her for the role of *flâneuse*. In this position, she is particularly alert to discern and draw attention to those subtle behavioural shifts signifying a city dweller's donning of a contrived public image. She sees, for instance, how a male coquet "changes according to the scene: effeminate at court; hearty in Hyde-park; rattling fop at the play" (63). At the same time, her fascination with patterns of social relations aligns her with Smith's internalized and actual impartial spectators. Her cogent descriptions of urban types have the effect of holding up a mirror in which metropolitan readers can recognize their own thoughtless, selfish conduct. In a scene that comes close to drawing attention to Robinson's own history, the Sylphid critically studies Mrs. Prominent, who having raised herself from obscure origins and outlived a scandalous reputation, now reviles "the sinking daughters of poverty," refusing to show any sensitivity to or sympathy for those women subjected to the misery and degradation she herself once endured (78-9). Through such scenes, Robinson suggests that the urban practice of establishing place by courting approbation from an undiscerning public exacts a price in the form of a ruptured subjectivity, a forgetting of the true self. Although she serves as a stern arbiter of such behaviour, the Sylphid also uses her moral gaze to establish a tenuous, sympathetic connection with those she watches, and she is moved to contempt, pity, amusement or indignation at the social interactions unfolding before her. Hinting at her own presence, Robinson portrays the Sylphid as especially sensitive to men and women writers "pining in obscure poverty, and labouring incessantly for a scanty pittance" (19). By chance discovering the "obscure dwelling" of one such "son of Genius," she laments that an independent mind subjected to such a miserable existence is no match for "the *resistless* power of Adversity" (55). As *flâneuse,* the Sylphid teaches her readers how to decipher the

social codes governing the metropolis; as an impartial observer, she points out modes of living to avoid; and as a sympathetic gazer, she directs compassionate attention toward those who maintain their integrity in an unsupportive environment.

Although the Sylphid is critical of both genders, the sketches as a whole seem directed particularly to female readers. Built on the assumption that women may claim a place in the city, *The Sylphid* letters provide, through unflattering portraits, a reminder of the need for discretion in private and public life while exercising this right. Moreover, in the character of the Sylphid herself, Robinson tentatively outlines the contours of an urban femininity that is at once empowering and troubling. On the one hand, the Sylphid shares the masculine entitlement to move independently through London, fulfilling an important function as urban guide and interpreter. Her probity and seriousness make her an implicit counterpoise to the models of selfish and frivolous femininity encountered in the capital, and her compassion allows her to penetrate the barriers erected in a society where relentless striving for position has displaced communal sympathy and understanding. On the other hand, despite her knowledge, the Sylphid remains on the margins of urban life, a visitor with no enduring attachment to the city. Further, the conceit has the effect of drawing attention to, rather than transcending, the vulnerable female body. Ostensibly disembodied, the Sylphid nevertheless feels the cold, loses her way in the fog and must occasionally pause to repair her shattered wings. Ultimately, an agency that relies on being inconspicuous for its effectiveness is of limited value to women seeking to engage in the city activities. The underlying message of *The Sylphid* is thus oddly paradoxical: women have the potential to be valued citizens of the metropolis through the exercise of a discriminating and sympathetic

moral gaze, yet they can fulfill this purpose only by transforming, even abandoning, their physical self.

Robinson's Metropolitan Gaze

In Robinson's later four-part essay, "Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England" ("Metropolis"), published from August to November 1800 in the *Monthly Magazine*, any equivocation concerning women's presence in the city is completely eclipsed by a confident, authoritative authorial voice.[34] As did *The Sylphid*, "Metropolis" enlists readers as spectators of the urban scene, but, although one can discern a similar didactic purpose in both series, the later essay displays a much broader scope, in keeping with a more ambitious objective. The particular gaze the Sylphid directs when sketching individual *physiologies* primarily situated in domestic space refocuses in "Metropolis" to a panoramic scan that aims to capture the very essence of the modern city. Moreover, Robinson substitutes the relentlessly moralizing stance of the Sylphid with a more nuanced, worldly perspective. Serving herself as a model of urban femininity, the author of "Metropolis" justifies her public presence in London through her intimate knowledge of the city and, especially, her contribution to the capital's cultural life.

Robinson characterizes the London of "Metropolis" as an economic and intellectual beacon for the nation, serving not only as "the great emporium of commerce" but also as "the centre of attraction for the full exercise of talents, and the liberal display of all that can embellish the arts and sciences" (August, 35). A governing meritocracy ensures cultural

[34]Mary Robinson, "Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England," *Monthly Magazine* (August), 35-38; (September), 138-140; (October), 218-222; (November), 305-306. Further citations are given by month of publication and page number.

opportunity and achievement are unrestricted, and a diverse, literate, discerning public eagerly absorbs the fruits of this activity. The fabric of the city — its architecture, streets, public squares — also shows improvement as beneficial continental influences are absorbed. Within domestic space, amelioration of household design and decoration contributes to the cleanliness and comfort of the populace, while a revolution in dress has freed the urban body from the deforming, unhealthy dictates of fashion. Introducing a theme developed more fully by Joanna Baillie, Robinson emphasizes the improving nature of the urban spectacle. Theatres especially are "open schools of public manners," encouraging audiences to emulate the refined behaviour and sympathetic responses displayed on stage, and exhibitions of painting and sculpture are "fostering spheres for the expansion of genius" (August, 35-36). Yet, against what Adriana Craciun terms this "manifesto of metropolitan culture,"[35] Robinson juxtaposes an urban malaise constituted both from vestiges of an earlier, coarser regime and from those difficulties (later delineated by Simmel and Benjamin) that modernity imposes on town dwellers. Evidence of the past erupts, for instance, in the figure of an aristocrat who espouses egalitarian principles but still insists on his ancient right to deference; in public executions considered a legitimate form of civic entertainment; and in noisome slaughter-houses still located in the heart of the modern city. The present also generates its stresses, including war with France, political censorship, tax increases and high prices for basic provisions. This collision of past and present, Robinson suggests, presents a particular dilemma for those involved in the arts because no effective means of recognition replaces the earlier patronage system. Although the general public encourages cultural

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[35]Adriana Craciun, "Mary Robinson, the *Monthly Magazine*, and the Free Press," *Prose Studies* 25.1 (April 2002), 28.

production in the capital, "miserable discriminations [that] are the off-spring of the present age" operate to exclude middle-class men and women engaged in creativity from participating in polite society (October, 220). Jon Klancher describes "Metropolis" as "a curious blend of city guidebook and cultural criticism."[36] But at the heart of the essay is a realistic portrait, drawn by one who was an active and knowledgeable participant, of an urban realm of striving, achievement and disappointment carried out within a complex, evolving environment.

The very instability of this city in transition, Robinson suggests, opens a space for women to engage actively in the cultural sphere of arts and letters. In an earlier treatise, *Thoughts on the Condition of Women, and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, she had argued that women are "the partners, the equal associates of man," bolstering her claim with an extensive listing of historical and contemporary female accomplishment in the arts, sciences and government.[37] "Metropolis" associates such achievement explicitly with urban space. In London, Robinson observes, women make a significant contribution to metropolitan cultural production as authors, translators, actresses, sculptors and painters, and they "have reached an altitude of mental excellence, far above those of any other nation"(September, 111). To the extent that the female body is on display, Robinson argues that its function is either productive or instructive, and not erotic. The young women she observes in the streets are workers engaged in commercial or domestic tasks, labouring in physically demanding conditions, "at all seasons, and in all weathers" (October, 117).

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[36]Jon Klancher, "Discriminations, or Romantic Cosmopolitanisms in London," in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840,* ed. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65-82.
[37]Mary Robinson, *Thoughts on the Condition of Women, and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman and Rees, 1799), 3.

Implicitly defending her own stage career, Robinson points to actresses like Sarah Siddons and Fanny Kemble as "models of dignity and taste," and she praises Lady Emma Hamilton and her 'poses' for teaching English women "an easy elegance of manner" (November, 305). Rather than featuring as the focal point for an objectivising male gaze or seeking to avoid observation altogether, women in the London of "Metropolis" are visible and legitimate participants in — indeed creators of — a productive and improving urban scene.

Unlike the Sylphid nervously hovering at the edge of city places, in "Metropolis" Robinson places herself firmly among those women actively engaged in city life, taking on the twin functions of guide and arbiter, *flâneuse* and impartial spectator. As she directs readers through London, Robinson embraces all things urban, revealing many of the characteristics of *flânerie*. Her interest in aesthetic pursuits embraces architecture, fashion, literature, the theatre, painting, music and sculpture. She keeps abreast of new developments in the professions; she is intimately acquainted with public places of congregation, be it St. Paul's Cathedral or the Hyde Park promenade. She has the taste and discernment to distinguish between those foreign influences that result in improvement and those that are dangerously enervating. Most of all, like the later M. Bon-Homme, she specializes in people-watching, fixing her sharp eye on minute but telling detail. Conversant with the latest trends in ornamentation, she has no difficulty picking out the otherwise "scarcely distinguishable" difference between a nobleman and his groom (September, 138). Like the Sylphid, she is particularly sensitive to the ruses adopted by individuals at all levels to set themselves apart by attracting the social gaze of the urban crowd:

> For this important purpose, we behold authors writing in contradiction to their avowed principles; actors caricaturing nature, till they deprive her of every

> grace; painters presenting to the eye imaginary forms, disproportioned—distorted—and unlike any thing human; men effeminised like women; and women assuming the masculine deportment of the other sex; all eagerly pursuing the popular phantom, NOTORIETY! (October, 218)

Robinson is most *flâneur*-like as she charts London's uneven shift towards modernity in a series of discontinuous glimpses and short meditations mimetic of both the city itself in all its urgency, disruption and contingency, and of a distinctively metropolitan consciousness. Thus, her discussion of the Italian opera's popularity suddenly jumps to a complaint against medical experiments on corpses, and a critique of John Dryden's *Ode to St. Cecilia* abruptly switches to an account of the levelling benefits of the capital's many daily and monthly publications. In an approach advocated by Baudelaire later in the century, Robinson seeks to capture what it is like to encounter "the fantastic reality" of a modern city's richly diverse life.[38]

A fundamental component of Robinson's metropolitan consciousness is the nature of the gaze she directs. At times, she is as detached and cool as any *flâneur*, noting with amusement fashionable obsessions within all ranks for tea table conversation, novel reading and anything from France. The moral gaze she directs is often equally distant. Much like the notional looking-glass of Smith's wise and virtuous observer, she uses the public press as a reflective surface "where folly may see its own likeness, and vice contemplate the magnitude of its deformity" (November, 1800). But she also steps through the boundary signifying impartiality to reveal her personal interests and concerns through a series of judgements on the social interactions taking place in the city. She is sympathetic to the urban desire to seek

[38]Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," 15.

respite from "gloomy and painful rumination in the retirement of the chamber" by indulging in light entertainment (September, 138). The double standard that punishes the petty gambler while condoning aristocratic profligacy angers her, as does the noxious example set by casual immorality in the fashionable world. Perhaps not surprisingly, her concerned gaze is directed most explicitly at the group to which she belongs, professional women writers. She points out that even though "England may enumerate ... a phalanx of enlightened women, such as no other nation ever boasted," its members are marginalised, "neglected, unsought, alienated from society" (October, 220). Rather than attributing such isolation to a general absence of sympathy symptomatic of the modern city, Robinson specifically indicts the indifference of her sister authors. Too preoccupied in securing their own reputation amid difficult circumstances, women writers lack that "genuine impulse of affection, originating in congeniality of mind" needed to take pride in and promote the success of others. She briefly conjures a vision of an influential urban female solidarity in which individual women writers earn approving public attention through their accomplishments but share equally the benefits: "How powerful might such a phalanx become, were it to act in union of sentiment, and sympathy of feeling; and by a participation of public fame secure, to the end of time, the admiration of posterity" (October, 220). Achieving such an ideal, Robinson suggests, requires the kind of sympathetic engagement she herself practices as a semi-detached *flâneuse*.

Despite the absence of such female unity, Robinson invests urban women with considerable prominence in "Metropolis," making them, as Craciun points out, "central agents of change" (28). If *The Sylphid* presents a problematic model of feminine freedom and agency, the women of the later essay, and especially the persona projected by its author,

are fully and pragmatically engaged in making their livelihood in a recognizable civic realm. Such a female presence in London, Robinson suggests, is a two-fold necessity. As cultural producers, women contribute to an enlightenment that serves all classes and makes London an exemplar for the British empire. In addition, assuming the role of semi-detached *flâneuses* who direct a moral gaze at city inhabitants but who also temper their censure with understanding, women have the capacity to create remedies for the alienating effects of modernity.

Enlightened Spectatorship in Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*

In her 1799 novel, *The Natural Daughter, with Portraits of the Leadenhead Family*, Robinson explores more extensively the conditions necessary to form the supportive community of productive, creative women that she would later conjure in "Metropolis." Much of the novel takes place in urban settings that both encourage and complicate realization of her vision. Starting from the assumption that women are rightful participants in metropolitan public life, *The Natural Daughter* draws attention to the many opportunities available for those seeking economic independence in theatrical and literary marketplaces, without minimizing the difficulties and vulnerabilities they are likely to experience in an urban environment. However, the crux in establishing her ideal "phalanx of enlightened women," Robinson proposes, lies neither in women's abilities nor city dangers, but rather in the female gaze. *The Natural Daughter* sets out a binary spectatorship, primarily exercised by women in urban places. The undiscerning spectator, directing a social gaze solely preoccupied with the externalities of wealth and power, undermines her sisters and disrupts any possibility of female community with misinformed, mischievous, even malicious

interpretations of their characters. In contrast, the moral gaze of the semi-detached *flâneuse* penetrates outward trappings to identify the true inner worth of those observed, and, through understanding and practical assistance, she forms the basis for the "union of sentiment and sympathy of feeling" at the core of Robinson's urban ideal.

Incorporating autobiographical elements with allusions to the life of Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Natural Daughter* traces the journey to independence of its *flâneuse*-like heroine, Martha Morley. Eleanor Ty places Robinson among late eighteenth-century women novelists who resisted "facile prescriptions of female passivity and helplessness," in part by endowing conventional female characteristics and roles with enhanced social value.[39] Yet Robinson's heroine occupies positions considerably outside even an augmented code of appropriate, virtuous feminine behaviour. The elder daughter of a wealthy City merchant, Martha is an outsider in her own family, too honest and forthright to engage in the excessive sentimentality that, Robinson ironically suggests, would make her "a model of feminine excellence" like her sister Julia.[40] Wrongly accused of sexual impropriety and expelled from her marital home, Martha returns to London where she strives to support herself in occupations available to distressed gentlewomen: lady's companion, actress, novelist, poet, teacher. Much like her creator, Martha proves to be a capable and confident urban woman, exhibiting traces of *flânerie* in her purposefulness, physical and social mobility, somewhat rakish lifestyle, and astute interpretations of the city interactions she observes. Although she achieves a measure of success, she is hounded from each of the positions she attains because

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[39]Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 10.

[40]Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter, with Portraits of the Leadenhead Family*. 2 vols. (London: Longman and Rees, 1799), 1:7. Further volume and page references are provided in the text.

of misinterpretations of her character and behaviour fostered by an unforgiving social gaze. However, she neither succumbs to such prejudice nor apologizes for her public presence.[41] Armed with the pride and "courage to resist oppression" (2: 67), she insists that exercising her talents to support herself confers no disgrace, and she meets each professional setback with resilience. The conventional rewards of wealth and marital happiness that she eventually receives come only after she, much like Mary Brunton's heroines, has endured and extricated herself from a series of tribulations.

Chief among Martha's persecutors is Lady Penelope Pryer who is indefatigable in scrutinizing other women with an unsympathetic social gaze. Lady Pen presides in a scopic urban world where each resident watches and is watched, and where the primary goal of spectatorship is to establish status. Thus when Martha and her family visit a circulating library on their first arriving in Bath from London, they are immediately subjected to the appraisal of Lady Pen who demands to know: "Who are they? Where do they come from? What are they doing at Bath? I never saw them before! What rank do they hold in society?" (1: 55). Robinson stresses that those who draw conclusions from such superficial examinations are often mistaken. Martha's husband, for instance, proposes to her because, based on his surreptitious observations, he incorrectly imagines that "he might govern her with facility; believing that the sense of obligations for her removal from parental tyranny, would render her passive when he asserted the authority of an husband" (2: 73).[42] The possibility of such errors increase, Robinson suggests, when the observer herself is morally

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[41]In this regard, Robinson's heroine is in striking contrast to the protagonists of novels by her contemporaries, including Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Mary Hays's *Victim of Prejudice* (1798) and Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbry* (1808) who all eventually sink beneath public disapprobation of what is assumed to be their sexual impropriety.

[42]Even Robinson's heroine is occasionally guilty of misconstruing circumstantial evidence, assuming that her admirer lord Francis Sherville is the debaucher of a young woman and father of an illegitimate child.

flawed. As one character in *The Natural Daughter* notes, "The outside of most things is the best badge of importance with weak minds" (2: 104). Robinson depicts Lady Pen's weak mind through the character's inconstancy, sexual jealousy, and cruelty, as well as her exclusive preoccupation with externalities.

The mistakes Lady Pen makes in her observations become pernicious when accompanied by her harsh moral judgements. Because Martha cares for an abandoned baby, Lady Pen assumes (and tells others) that she is the child's mother; because Martha becomes a strolling actress, her nemesis deems her an unfit associate. When the young woman assumes an alias to escape her past, her tormenter discovers the disguise and publicly exposes her as "the runaway wife of Mr. Morley, and the avowed mistress of lord Francis Sherville" (1: 187). Martha's experiences illustrate an argument central to Robinson's feminist writing, which women are especially vulnerable to slanderous misjudgements because of their inability to act in defence of their own honour. In *Thoughts on the Condition of Women*, she complains that a man may take extreme measures in response to an insult, but a woman is prohibited from engaging in similar action:

> Thus, custom says, you must be free from error; you must possess an unsullied fame: yet, if a slanderer, or a libertine, even by the most unpardonable falshoods [sic], deprive you of either reputation or repose, you have no remedy. (5)

As Julie Shaffer has noted, Robinson insists that cultural pressure to condemn what appears to be sexually irregular female behaviour has wide-spread and significant social repercussions, and that women who dispense such judgements are especially culpable in causing harm. If suspected women are labelled incorrigible, regardless of their intrinsic

merit, and excluded from respectable female society, Robinson warns that they may be forced to engage in even more reprehensible conduct.[43] Lady Pen's tainted assessments are clearly implicated in damaging the prospects of individual women and disrupting their domestic relations. Because of the false and malicious rumours Lady Pen spreads, a mother abandons her child, a wife is estranged from her husband, and a young woman is expelled from her family and forsaken by her friends. Frustrated in her attempts to achieve independence through the exercise of her dramatic and literary talents, Martha comes to believe that "lady Pen was created to diffuse a perpetual cloud over all her prospects: every corner of the globe appeared to present this evil genius" (2: 167). Martha's only recourse is to abandon one attempt at self-support after another, and, at her lowest ebb, she too contemplates sinking to the expedient of becoming a mistress. In *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson demonstrates the social consequences of Adam Smith's realization that actual observers seldom have sufficient knowledge for accurate moral assessments. If even a wise and virtuous spectator can get it wrong, she implies, how much more harmful to the possibilities of feminine community are the mistaken and unforgiving judgements dispensed by social gazers like Lady Penelope.

At the same time, the novel shows how a moral gaze, exercised with sympathetic understanding, may indeed accurately ascertain character through observation, and as a result, draw women together in productive and creative social relations. Robinson uses a window motif throughout *The Natural Daughter* to illustrate this admittedly rare capability in her heroine. Judith Pascoe has argued that the perspective Robinson adopted in her urban

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[43]Julie Shaffer, "Ruined Women and Illegitimate Daughters: Revolution and Female Sexuality," in *Lewd & Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Katharine Kitteredge (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003): 283-318.

poetry — looking out at the city from her carriage window — resulted in a limited view that minimized challenging urban conditions.[44] In the novel, however, windows operate much like theatrical devices, focussing readers' attention on and encouraging them to share in the heroine's engagement with those she encounters.[45] As a discerning spectator, Martha stands in sharp contrast to other members of her family. To Alderman Bradford, a lame soldier seen from a carriage window is an opportunist who uses his disability only to extract money from the unsuspecting. However, his daughter's more discriminating gaze discovers the beggar's genuine need and neglected valour, and she therefore regards the man as a symbol, reminding the wealthy to whom they owe all "that is truly valuable — private safety and national honour" (1: 32). At one point in the novel, Martha's sister Julia watches from her chamber window the various inhabitants of and visitors to Morley House assembled in groups on the lawn. The narrator suggests that the young woman's gaze might have been used to tranquillize "a perturbed imagination" or to harmonize "the chords of domestic unison" (1: 127). Instead, interested only in attaining wealth and rank, Julia deliberately misconstrues the relationships set out before her, using her observations to further her own selfish interests by disturbing friendships, inciting the jealousy of an admirer and encouraging Morley's suspicions of his wife. In a contrasting scene, her sister stands in the window of modest lodgings in London's West End, looking down "with a sigh of commiseration on the weary children of folly and dissipation" (2: 61). Her extensive urban experience gives Martha an astute, *flâneur*-like ability to decode accurately the urban

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[44]Judith Pascoe, "The Spectacular *Flâneuse*: Mary Robinson and the City of London," *Wordsworth Circle* 23.3 (1992): 163-171.

[45]See also Nora Nachumi, "'Those Simple Signs': The Performance of Emotion in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11.3 (1999): 317-338. Nachumi points to the fertile interrelationship that existed between theatre and the novel in the late eighteenth-century, and she includes Robinson among those women writers who used dramatic techniques to generate empathy for their characters.

superficialities she observes.[46] She is particularly struck by the reliance Londoners, like Smith's "great mob of mankind," place on insubstantial outward trappings. From her post,

> she observed the passing throngs, like the gaudy ephemera of a summer noon; the glittering atoms, which dazzle for an hour, and then shrink into nothing. There did she contemplate, with a philosophic smile, the motley idols of capricious fortune: the light gossomary [sic] visions of a day, borne on the gale and towering in the warm regions of a prosperous destiny; or shrinking from the cutting blasts of poverty, and creeping to oblivion. (2: 61)

Her residence in "this temporary sphere of busy observation" (2: 66) teaches Robinson's heroine important lessons about the untrustworthiness of social relations based only on worldly considerations. What Martha finds especially painful to see is the communal dislocation fostered by those who direct and court the social gaze. Genuine merit is discredited; ingratitude forgets its former reliance on charitable impulses; and adversity dissolves friendships. She is particularly alert to the hypocrisy of women who, covering their own moral lapses with "prodigality and tasteless show" (2: 64), claim superiority over their less fortunate sisters. Her detached observations are corroborated by personal experience when, reunited with her wealthy husband, she watches from another window, this one located in a Mayfair mansion, those acquaintances who scorned her when she was in need now seeking to reinstate themselves, using "the servile bow and the soft smile of pliant condescension" (2: 257).

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[46]On this point, see also, Ann Close, "Into the Public: The Sexual Heroine in Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* and Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17.1 (2004): 35-52.

Her heroine's distanced surveillance may lead to discouraging, if nevertheless accurate, conclusions about metropolitan life, yet Robinson maintains the possibility of genuine urban friendship, instigated by a moral and compassionate gaze that penetrates the obstacles erected by fashionable society. Moreover, she makes such alliances central to women's successful contributions to cultural production. The friendships Martha initiates are distinctive both because of the sympathy on which they are based and because of their linkage to women's participation in the labour market. Throughout the novel, Martha, spurred on by her astute visual assessments, comes to the assistance of other distressed women, regardless of their reputations or circumstances. Although aware of how society judges a woman's moral standing, she refuses to use arbitrary standards to censure or punish. She even helps Julia and lady Pen because, she explains, "I cannot enter into the modern system of tormenting my own sex" (2: 172). One of her encounters stands out for its mutually supportive foundation. Early in the novel, Martha anonymously provides financial aid to an unknown actress. When she later discovers that the woman, Mrs. Sedgley, had once entered into a 'Revolutionary marriage' and subsequently gave birth to and abandoned the natural child of the novel's title, Martha does not condemn her. She bases her support partly on her conviction of Mrs. Sedgley's innocence, despite appearances, and partly on her understanding that without help from their sisters, such women have little hope of regaining respectability. Thus she defends her charitable actions on both compassionate and practical grounds: "If none will feel for those that err, where are we to hope for reformation?" (2: 17).[47] Their friendship extends into a working partnership when Martha joins Mrs. Sedgley

[47]Martha receives similar help when, stranded on the continent, she is befriended by Georgina, duchess of Chatsworth, who ignores the rumours spread by lady Penelope and becomes "the avowed patroness of one,

in a provincial touring company. The women achieve considerable success in their profession, becoming "twin constellations in the dramatic hemisphere" (1: 249). Yet, unlike the false and competitive relationships Martha observes from her London window, she and Mrs. Sedgley form a supportive, creative union similar to the one Robinson envisions in "Metropolis." The two women work together in amity, united by the adversities they share and their complementary talents. When Martha is dismissed from the company, Mrs. Sedgley demonstrates her loyalty by offering to abandon her own career to join her friend in a search for another occupation. Although this creative feminine alliance is relatively short-lived, Robinson draws attention to its significance by closing *The Natural Daughter* with the two women allied in another version of her social ideal. Each now fully vindicated, Martha and Mrs. Sedgley (who has been revealed as Lady Susan Sherville) reunite in a new, cohesive formation based on the affection and congeniality that, in "Metropolis," Robinson cites as prerequisite to women's success in public life. Where once they sustained and celebrated each other's professional success, now the women share maternal responsibilities and material wealth.

Critics tend to be disappointed by the conclusion of *The Natural Daughter,* arguing that the heroine's apparent retreat into private life and a conventional female role forecloses the possibility of a productive public life for women.[48] But an alternative reading is possible, one that demonstrates how simple and attainable are the conditions that will foster a female presence in the city. The supportive friendship highlighted at the novel's end — especially when contrasted with the ignominious marriage lady Pen finally contracts — points to a

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who had nothing but talents to support her" (255).

[48]For example, in "Ruined Women and Illegitimate Daughters," Julie Shaffer argues that the novel "does not finally carve out an alternative to retired domesticity for women" (310).

process for improving women's positions. Experience in public life equips women with the knowledge and confidence to discount fashionable practices and to form their own moral judgements, based on sympathetic understanding. This enlightened approach, in turn, motivates the pragmatic support that sustains women's participation in public life. Thus, the compassionate spectatorship of Robinson's *flâneuse* supports what Eleanor Ty describes as "an alternative, empowering script" (72), thereby opening up new possibilities for women in the city.

The Countess of Blessington's Philanthropic *Flâneuse*

Like Mary Robinson, Marguerite Gardiner, the Countess of Blessington (1789-1849) enjoyed and, at times, endured a highly visible public presence in Regency London. Although her journey from obscurity to the heart of the capital's political and cultural elite may have been less contrived than that of Robinson, Blessington nevertheless adroitly used her beauty and charm to become what one biographer terms "the observed of all observers."[49] The third child of an improvident and intemperate Irish Roman Catholic landholder, Margaret Power (as she then was) was forced, at age fourteen and a half, into marriage with Captain Maurice St Leger Farmer, a British soldier who had been stationed near her home in Clonmel. Soon separated from her abusive husband, she was rescued from life as an unwelcome dependent on the fringes of her family by another British officer, Captain Thomas Jenkins. Living for a decade in a *soi-disant* platonic relationship with Jenkins in Hampshire and later London, Blessington became what Ernest Lovell describes as

[49]H. Davenport Adams, *Women of Fashion and Representative Women in Letters and Society: A Series of Biographical and Critical Studies*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1878), 2: 181.

"a professional charmer," acquiring the social polish and taste that were to become her hallmarks as a society hostess.[50] In the capital, Margaret (by now Marguerite) attracted the attention of Charles John Gardiner, the first Earl Blessington, an Irish peer with estates reputed to yield an annual income of over L20,000.[51] Equipped with her own advantages and her husband's wealth, Blessington entered an urban world of appearances. The couple established a salon in their St. James Square mansion following their marriage in 1818, and they attracted as guests eminent men of all professions. Similar to Robinson, Blessington assumed a wider public prominence through her fashion sense and portraiture. In his memoirs, Captain Gronow recalls how the Countess adopted and popularized a style of dress "chosen with artistic taste to suit exactly her style of beauty." In particular, a cap she habitually wore was "cunningly devised to shew off the fine brow and beautifully-shaped oval face of the deviser."[52] Thus strategically clothed, her image looked out from drawings, lithographs and paintings — such as the portrait exhibited by Sir Thomas Lawrence at the 1822 Royal Academy exhibition — that were replicated and placed in shop windows throughout London. Yet Blessington's equivocal past and meteoric rise generated, as Alison Adburgham notes, "gossip on a gorgeous scale,"[53] and the attention she attracted tended to be censorious. Her later relationship with Count Alfred D'Orsay is the main source of the

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[50]Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Introduction to *Conversations of Lord Byron* by Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, 1832 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 12.
[51]R.R. Madden, *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, Vol. 1 (London: T.C. Mewby, 1855), 50.
[52]Rees Howell Gronow, *The Reminiscences and Recollections of Captain Gronow*, 1862, ed. John Raymond (London: The Bodley Head, 1964), 240.
[53]Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print, Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 250.

opprobrium directed toward her,[54] but even from the first years of her marriage, she was regarded with suspicion by respectable women. One of her biographers, J. Fitzgerald Molloy, observes that because of the appearance of impropriety in her early life, Blessington faced "an insurmountable obstacle to social intercourse with her own sex," and she thus carefully avoided any social occasion where she ran the risk of being snubbed by prominent London hostesses.[55]

Such isolation may have been the catalyst for Blessington's writing career. Lovell suggests that, since Blessington was denied the friendship of other women, "books provided her with the only way of telling them who or what she really was: a woman of education, refinement, taste, and very high moral standards."[56] Although she began writing in the 1820s, she came to broad public notice as an author only with the 1832 serialized publication of her *Conversations of Lord Byron*, describing the friendship she formed with the poet while they were both living in Genoa. As in the case of Robinson, Blessington's personal life has tended to overshadow her professional accomplishments, yet in a career spanning nearly three decades to her death in 1849, she was a prolific and financially successful writer of

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[54]D'Orsay, a noted dandy, also achieved prominence in London through a well-crafted personal appearance. Having joined the Blessington household in 1822, he became the earl's heir through marriage to fifteen-year old Harriet Gardiner. Even after her husband's death and the end of D'Orsay's marriage, Blessington and the count continued to live together, and throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the London gutter press printed salacious interpretations of their relationship.

[55]J. Fitzgerald Molloy, *The Most Gorgeous Lady Blessington*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London: Downey & Co., 1896), 1: 275. Michael Sadleir suggests that envy rather than propriety was at the root of Blessington's social ostracism, as "match-making mamas" were aghast that an Irish nobody could capture so eligible a husband. See *Blessington-D'Orsay: A Masquerade*, 2nd ed. (London: Constable, 1947), 38.

[56]Lovell, Introduction to *Conversations of Lord Byron*, 20. On this point, see also Cecily Lambert, "Most Gorgeous Lady Blessington," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 25 (1974): 26-32.

novels, short stories, poetry, travel memoirs and annual gift books, astutely able "to gauge and respond to the desires of her readership."[57]

Social Work Case Studies in *The Magic Lantern*

Both her contemporaries and later critics tend to dismiss Blessington's first publication, finding it an exercise in self-exculpation and a dilettante's attempt to emulate the distinguished writers with whom she mingled. Her first biographer and friend, R.R. Madden, thought that *The Magic Lantern* betrayed the work of "one wholly inexperienced in the ways of authorship." Somewhat later, H. Davenport Adams called the sketches "flimsy but clever," and by mid-twentieth century, Michael Sadleir summed up the volume as "undistinguished but without affectation, [dealing with] matter trivial enough."[58] Published anonymously in 1822, *The Magic Lantern* evidently sold well enough to warrant a second edition, but it never yielded its author a profit. Blessington herself seemed to deprecate her first effort, referring to it subsequently as a "bagatelle" that was "too trifling to require a preface."[59] Yet, as G. Barnett Smith argued, however slight, Blessington's first work contains "a key to the whole," introducing the more substantive themes she would explore in her later fiction.[60] These include the disjunction between social convention and individual morality and the loss of identity that results from courting the social gaze of an undiscerning

[57]Ann Hawkins and Jeraldine Krever, Introduction to *The Victims of Society* by Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, 1837 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), xv. Hawkins and Krever identify a gender bias in Blessington criticism that privileges her femininity over her literary accomplishments. They note that "when she is serving as a hostess and promoting men's conversations, Blessington is exemplary, but when other issues like her literary work enter in, Blessington comes up lacking" (iv).
[58]Madden, *Literary Life and Correspondence*, 254; Adams, *Women of Fashion*, 235; Sadleir, *Blessington-D'Orsay*, 57.
[59]Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington, *Sketches and Fragments*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), iii. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses.
[60]G. Barrett Smith, *Women of Renown* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1893), 75.

crowd. Moreover, through the persona who guides readers through *The Magic Lantern*, Blessington sketches the contours of a metropolitan femininity allied with but distinct from Robinson's *flâneuse*. For the latter, observation is associated with her participation in paid employment; Blessington's *flâneuse* is an unpaid volunteer whose full-time occupation encompasses the duty of spectatorship. Moving with confidence and authority through city places, she shows a determination to rectify through exposure and empathy the fractured social relations she sees around her. She thus suggests an early prototype of those philanthropic urban women who appear later in the century.[61]

Blessington infuses *The Magic Lantern* with a theatrical quality that, much like Joanna Baillie's dramatic theory, assigns an improving social purpose to the deliberate act of looking. As her title suggests, the sketches throw into relief London's social mores by representing the types who frequent four sites of leisure and amusement: an auction held in a Mayfair residence, Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon, an exhibition of Belzoni's tomb in the Egyptian Hall[62] and the Italian Opera. Each sketch suggests careful staging, revealing Blessington's use of what Elizabeth Jenkins identified as a "very keen visual sense" to position recognizable *physiologies* — an East India knight, exquisites and dandies, antiquated spinsters, complaisant husbands, an elderly gentleman visiting from the country

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[61]Fictional examples include Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* and Margaret Hale in *North and South.* According to Deborah Nord Epstein, from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, middle-class women used philanthropic work to justify their participation in civic life, and much of their effort involved active observation of the lives of the urban poor. See *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), Chapter 7.

[62]Constructed by William Bullock in 1812, the Hall housed its owner's extensive and eclectic collection of art and natural history specimens, as well as special exhibitions. In 1821, amateur archeologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni displayed there plaster casts and a scale model of a tomb he had discovered at Thebes. See Susan M. Pearce, "Giovanni Battista Belzoni's Exhibition of the Reconstructed Tomb of Pharaoh Seti I in 1821," *Journal of the History of Collections* 12.1 (2000): 109-125.

— in familiar places.[63] Theatrical tropes occur frequently in Blessington's writing, partly perhaps as a way of capturing a sprawling urban panorama. In one of her later publications, she notes that the city "offers so many highly coloured pictures, which to be known need only to be seen," and she has a character exclaim "London is the grand theatre of England" (*SF* iv, 105). Her use of stage images may also reflect Blessington's own experiences of being on display in a world where it seemed as if one were either actor or audience.[64] More pragmatically, such images provide a resolution to the ethical dilemma of an intrusive gaze. In each site she describes, Blessington directs readers' attention to scenes of personal drama being enacted in those places where common and intimate concerns intersect. For instance, in the midst of the auction crowd, we are invited to look on as a woman confesses to an acquaintance how she was once rescued from a probable life of infamy and restored to a "course of usefulness and industry" by the watchful intervention and liberality of the family whose financial crash has prompted the sale.[65] To justify such emotional voyeurism, Blessington must draw a clear distinction between idle gawkers who visit scenes of distress only to find bargains or to exchange gossip and those ideal observers who look at such vignettes with the sympathetic curiosity invoked by Baillie. The playwright believed that drama illustrating the passions provided to viewers what Nathaniel Leach terms "a transparent window on human nature" that, in turn, enabled them to identify with and learn

[63]Elizabeth Jenkins, *Ten Fascinating Women*, 2nd ed. (London: MacDonald, 1968), 170.
[64]One Blessington heroine describes fashionable London women as "actresses, who play difficult parts on the stage of life, to audiences who are ever more prone to hiss than to applaud their performances." Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington, *The Victims of Society*, 1837, ed. Ann Hawkins and Jeraldine Krever (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 155.
[65]Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington, *The Magic Lantern*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), 21.Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses.

from represented responses to adversity.[66] In a similar fashion, Blessington's sketches draw attention to the educational and moral benefits to be gained from people-watching in the city, especially observing how Londoners respond to the often difficult conditions of urban modernity.

Blessington's London is characterized by high anxiety. Madden claimed that her love for the city was "of the same all-absorbing nature" as that of Madame de Staël for Paris (159), and there are examples in *The Magic Lantern* of the many enlightening and entertaining possibilities presented by the capital. Yet a restless uncertainty pervades each sketch. Londoners flock to public places, Blessington suggests, for "want of something to do" and "a love of show" (90, 93). The venues she describes all seem over-populated, seething with "a moving mass" (27), and the ensuing confusion provides a screen for impropriety that undermines conventional values. For instance, lovers brazenly conduct affairs in the full view of Hyde Park promenaders, and fashionable women attending the Opera collude to provide each other the appearance of decorum while engaging in illicit *tête-à-têtes*. Further, city places foster a disconcerting social levelling as members of the crowd intrude on each other. At the Egyptian exhibition, for example, "all ranks meet and jostle each other with impunity," so that "a fine lady who holds her vinaigrette to her nostrils" is elbowed "by a fat red-faced woman who looks like the mistress of a gin shop" (60).

Perhaps because of this promiscuous intermingling, a preoccupation with establishing or retaining place informs Blessington's urban world, and appearance is the main weapon in this struggle for status. The human tendency Adam Smith observed to

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[66]Nathaniel Leach, "Joanna Baillie's 'Great Moving Picture' and the Ethics of the Gaze in *De Monfort*," *European Romantic Review*, 18.2 (2007), 627.

constitute self through attracting the approving regard of another is in full play. However, Blessington's Londoners seek not the moral gaze of a wise and impartial spectator, but the social gaze of the undiscerning mob. To verify their own importance, individuals voluntarily put themselves on display, adopting the latest in fashion, catch-phrase and affected mannerisms. Those who fail in this goal elicit "looks of superiority and triumph" from an ubiquitous, assessing audience (87). The bewildering variety of equipages, from a "splendid vis-à-vis" to "the smart-turn-out of some pretender to fashion" tearing along the Hyde Park Row, serves as a vivid metaphor for this urban scramble to achieve upward mobility (27-28). Much as a poorly-controlled (if nevertheless fashionable) tilbury threatens the physical safety both of its City dandy driver and of passers-by, so too preoccupation with attracting the wrong kind of gaze will, Blessington warns, incur social, financial and moral pitfalls: excessive self-display elicits only humiliating derision from the observing crowd; competition for attention leads to overspending and debt; and preoccupation with status eclipses concern for others, engendering a solipsism so absolute that "each person thinks of self alone" (2). She suggests that middle-class women are the most susceptible to these effects, noting that, in their "passion for dress and idleness, ... extravagance succeeds extravagance. Their attendance at divine worship is often given up, because it may interfere with Park hours; and the expense of the dress to be worn there, leaves its wearer too poor to assist her fellow-creatures" (50-51). Yet she also identifies respectable middle-class women who frequent public places as a matter of course, but who either avoid or are oblivious to the mob's shallow approval. At the auction sale, one acts anonymously to restore some cherished items to the dispossessed family. In the Park, ladies riding with perfect command over their horses (and, implicitly, themselves) project an image of easy elegance. At

Belzoni's tomb, two "intelligent lady-like women" discuss the lessons to be learned by contemplating the artefacts of mortality (63); and an involuntary blush on the cheek of a girl attending the Opera verifies that she has not been tainted by the surrounding coarseness. Blessington represents the narrational position of *The Magic Lantern* — the I/eye — as gender neutral, suggesting that the figure's characteristics could as easily be embodied in a female as a male presence. If one assumes (as I do), from the sympathetic identification evinced and the intimate knowledge of feminine frailty revealed, that the persona is indeed a woman, then Blessington appears to offer readers a powerful ideal of urban femininity, in addition to a simple guide to distinguishing between imprudent and exemplary models of feminine city behaviour.

To fulfill her heuristic role, Blessington's persona engages in the practices of *flânerie*. Aligning herself with those who comfortably inhabit the city, she moves freely through London's public places with the confidence of membership. In command of her own time, she enjoys remarkable autonomy, allowing herself to be diverted from her intended destination by any new event or figure that catches her interest, and engaging in those "fleeting, ephemeral, impersonal" encounters that Wolff associates with masculine occupation of the city. She decides the terms on which she will engage with others, and she is authoritative enough to elicit confidential information or verify her impressions with a passing acquaintance. And in a world of spectators, she alone seems to escape observation. Like a *flâneur*, she is a connoisseur of the city, familiar with those places most likely to offer "a more interesting study to the reflecting mind, or a more entertaining scene to the lovers of character" (55). What Lovell describes as "a certain fashionable or dilettante knowledge of

music, painting, sculpture, and rare books" reveals her affinity for aesthetic pursuits.[67] However, the feature that most clearly marks Blessington's urban figure as a *flâneuse* is her detached, worldly, discerning gaze. She is amused by brief glimpses of absurdity: "a fat elderly gentleman" who falls from his horse and is fussed over by a servant (38); a grandmother who confuses a burial pyramid with "a pretty ornament for the centre of a table" (61); and striving mothers who celebrate a match-making success by strutting like pigeons through the Opera's Round Room. An habitué of fashionable places and knowledgeable in city ways, she is sufficiently experienced to know that "a silly flirtation, commenced in folly and pursued through idleness" will probably end in misery and disgrace (9). Anticipating the shrewdness of Benjamin's *flâneur*-detective, Blessington's persona is adept at discovering the guilty secrets of those she surveys. At the Italian Opera, for instance, she registers a small but intense domestic drama during which a married woman, humiliated at having no followers in her box with whom to flirt, vents her ill-humour and disappointment on her husband. From her place on the periphery, Blessington's *flâneuse* thus provides an encompassing view of the "vanity, idleness, [and] vice" that characterize the city (49).

Yet breaches in her detachment have the effect of collapsing the distance between the *flâneuse* and those she observes. Kathryn Tucker explains that Joanna Baillie advocated staging plays in small theatres in order to foster an "intimacy between observer and observed."[68] Compressing the physical distance between actor and audience, Baillie believed, heightened the emotional involvement necessary for effective moral instruction.

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[67]Lovell, Introduction to *Conversations of Lord Byron*, 16.
[68]Kathryn Tucker, "Joanna Baillie's and Elizabeth Inchbald's Moral Aesthetics: Humanizing Actors and Madmen," *European Romantic Review* 17.3 (2006), 337.

Similarly, Blessington plays with physical and emotional distance to achieve her didactic purposes. Her urban guide occupies a double position, simultaneously on the edge and within, a watcher who is also poised to participate in the scenes she observes. As she changes her place, her metropolitan aloofness melts into sympathetic engagement so that curiosity shifts to concern, and amusement to anger. The intensity of her response arises in part from her ability to identify with and draw inferences from the touching scenes she observes. At the auction sale, for instance, prompted by a series of family portraits, she imaginatively projects herself into a domestic scene of loss and displacement:

> I saw them cling to each other in an agony of affection, — I saw the last looks of parting sorrow which they cast on this scene of happy hours for ever gone by; and I saw the efforts they made to compose their tearful countenances, and to regain some portion of fortitude, while with hurried steps, as if afraid to trust themselves with another parting glance, they left the apartment. My heart bled at the picture which my fancy had painted, and I hastened into the room where the sale was going on, to lose the poignancy of my emotions.[69]

Despite her obvious empathy, Blessington's urban persona nevertheless exhibits the controlled, judging consciousness of Smith's impartial observer. Her objective is not simply to arouse feeling, but also to point out the broader social consequences of individual selfishness, extravagance and indiscretion. Her assessments are inclusive of age, class and gender. An apprentice milliner's love of finery makes her vulnerable "to the first designing

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[69]Blessington, *The Magic Lantern*, 405. As her first biographer, R.R. Madden observes, the scene anticipates Blessington's own life. During the auction sale prompted by her bankruptcy in 1849, a motley crowd of fashionables, creditors, money lenders and the merely curious thronged Gore House to gaze at the portraits of Blessington on the block. Madden, who attended the sale, reported that "People as they passed through ... made jests and ribald jokes on the scene they witnessed;" however, he also observed Albert Smith, a writer for *Punch* and a frequent guest at Gore House in better times, "who looked thoughtful and even sad" (204).

libertine who marks her for his victim" (51). A young man, imitating his fashionable superiors, pursues women of easy virtue and "loses the sense of shame that before restrained him" (52). The "rudeness and ill-breeding" of some gentlemen discourage the presence in leisure sites of "ladies of respectability" so that an important civilizing influence is lost (95). Blessington's urban guide is perhaps most attuned to the penetration of publicly displayed immorality into private relations, as she charts how the admiration a married woman receives from undiscerning on-lookers fosters a self-complacency that undermines her formerly principled behaviour. The effects of an ensuing indiscretion seep into the domestic circle, tainting family relationships and exposing the guilty party to the malicious contempt of her servants.

This catalogue of dangers seems to suggest that there is no safe place for anyone in urban space. Yet the guide's own unimpeachable presence in and evident enjoyment of the city — in addition to the other exemplars she extols — prevents any such reductive assumption. Rather, just as her successors later in the century will observe and enumerate the social ills caused by low wages, inadequate housing and cheap drink, so too Blessington's metropolitan persona functions as a kind of social worker, compiling a casebook to illustrate the personal and social ramifications of appeals to an undiscerning urban crowd. This philanthropic spectatorship provides, in turn, a defensible *raison d' être* for women wishing an active, engaged life in the city.

Philanthropic Spectatorship in the Fiction of Elizabeth Inchbald and Elizabeth Hamilton

When Blessington turned to fiction in the late 1830s, she chose the 'silver fork' genre, and although her novels feature London settings, her characters live in a cosmopolitan rather than metropolitan world, a cocoon of privilege separating them from the grittier realities of urban life. The city she represents in her fiction often consists of little more than private drawing rooms in the fashionable parts of town, places where women pursue the twin occupations of marrying well and attracting an approving social gaze. In one of her works, a cynical observer of the scene explains, "This is the state of London fashionable society, where appearances alone are judged, where not cause, but effect, is denounced, and where not crime but its exposure, is punished."[70] In describing this artificial and claustrophobic milieu, Blessington returns to themes she earlier introduced in *The Magic Lantern.* For Lady Augusta Annandale, heroine of *The Victims of Society*, for instance, the city resembles "a brilliant comedy where the curtain never drops, and where both actors and audience alike are wearied." The pressure of constantly appealing to an undiscerning crowd not only fatigues but also compromises subjectivity. In the midst of her first London season as a married woman, Lady Augusta complains that in the capital, "one is literally rendered incapable of self-recognition, or even self-communion" (112), and without a strong sense of her own principles, she enters into imprudent, if nonetheless innocent, friendships. Like Martha Morley of *The Natural Daughter*, Lady Augusta suffers from a hypocritical moral code administered by other women in her social circle who misinterpret and misjudge her behaviour. However, unlike Robinson's heroine, she is unable to rise above calumny, and

[70]Blessington, *The Victims of Society*, 160.

she loses — along with her reputation — her home, marriage and, ultimately, her life. Having provided yet another case study of the devastating effects of courting the urban social gaze, Blessington does not offer in her fiction, as she does in *The Magic Lantern,* a counter-balancing model who combines a self-confident enjoyment of the city with a sense of mission to rectify its social ills.[71] Perhaps because she restricts herself to a single, elevated social stratum, Blessington seems unable to conceive a female character with sufficient energy and independence to overcome a solipsism engendered by the rigid norms and values of her class so as to take up causes on behalf of the less fortunate.

Other women novelists of the period, however, who experiment with models of urban femininity create female characters who successfully mix the task of reform into their full participation in metropolitan life. Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), for instance, uses narration much like Robinson's trope of invisibility to suggest a female figure who engages in urban spectatorship from a privileged position but, at the same time, steps through class boundaries to investigate and suggest a remedy for urban anomie. In some ways, Inchbald herself exemplifies membership in Robinson's ideal "phalanx of enlightened women." The daughter of a Suffolk farmer, she moved to London in 1780 as a young widow, and there she earned financial independence and critical respect as an actress, playwright, editor, novelist and essayist. While building her own career, she forged warm friendships with other women participating in London's theatrical and literary worlds, including Elizabeth Farren, Sarah Siddons, Amelia Opie and Maria Edgeworth, and relationships among women figure centrally in her fiction. Her second novel, *Nature and Art* (1796), satirizes contemporary

[71]Lady Mary Howard Delaward, the sole character in *The Victims of Society* whose impeccable virtue and London experience might have equipped her for this role, confines herself to intimate, domestic concerns.

English society, drawing particular attention to the harmful effects of exporting the capital's shallow, self-serving mores to rural areas. The novel traces the careers of two brothers and their sons, focussing on their respective success in adapting to the corruption and hypocrisy with which Inchbald characterizes London. An important sub-plot traces the seduction and abandonment of an innocent country girl, Hannah Primrose, her ruin precipitated in part by the harsh moral judgements of socially-prominent women.

Presiding over this critique is Inchbald's narrator who combines the insider's knowledge required to analyse dispassionately the fashionable world with a genuine compassion for those who suffer from the dictates of a society fixated on appearances. Inchbald biographer Annibel Jenkins argues that the force of *Nature and Art* derives from "the wit and irony of the narrator's voice and opinions."[72] From this narrative voice, a distinct persona emerges, displaying the characteristics of what Jenkins calls "the Inchbald woman": intelligence, independence and generosity (167). Clearly at home in the city and familiar with its residents and customs, the narrator guides readers through London's public sphere, showing how careers are launched, favours dispensed and status upheld. With the detached discernment of a *flâneuse*, she homes in on the vanities and flexible morals that characterize fashionable women as they jostle for place. Where the foolish harm only themselves, the narrator looks on with amusement, drawing readers' attention, for instance, to the many attention-getting ruses and affectations adopted by Lady Clementina Norwynne, daughter of a poor and obscure Scottish earl, as she hurries from one London diversion to

[72]Annibel Jenkins, *"I'll Tell You What:" The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 377.

another "much less for the pleasure of *seeing* than for being *seen*."[73] The narrator takes pains to set herself apart from such women, siding instead with the "unprejudiced reader whose liberal observations are not confined to stations, but who consider all mankind alike deserving your investigation" (1: 139). The narrator's own spectatorship reveals her to be a social reformer with, as Anna Lott has pointed out, a particular interest in and affinity for "women who violated or appeared to violate existing standards of behaviour."[74] Her tone switches from amusement to heavy irony when she details the harm done by women who use their rank to impose a moral double standard on females of a less-elevated class. She describes, for example, how an aristocratic woman, Lady Bendham, winks at the London indiscretions of those whose influence she courts, but demands public chastisement for the lapses of country girls. "Some few were now and then found hanging or drowned" the narrator relates, "while no other cause could be assigned for their despair, than an imputation on their character, and dread of the harsh purity of Lady Bendham" (1: 122). To reinforce the impact of her general observations, the narrator drops her detachment to show the effect of this moveable virtue on a girl like Hannah. Entering the young woman's private realm, the narrator observes with compassion Hannah's struggle to resist her seducer's blandishments, her anguished decision to kill her illegitimate baby, and her joy when the child is saved and returned to her. In one particularly moving scene, the narrator invites readers to share the pathos of the young woman's painstaking attempt to discover a vestige of affection in a letter of "cold civility" sent by her lover:

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[73]Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art*, 2 vols. (London: G.G. and J. Robinson,1790), 1:89-90. All further references are to this edition and are given in text.

[74]Anna Lott, "Sexual Politics in Elizabeth Inchbald," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34 (1994), 640.

> To have beheld the illiterate Hannah try for two weeks, day and night, to find out the exact words of this letter, it would have struck the spectator with amazement to have understood the right, the delicate, the nicely proper sensations with which she was affected by every sentence it contained. (1: 162)

From her position of intimate spectatorship, the narrator accompanies Hannah to London and through the inexorable stages of humiliation, degradation and death that are, Inchbald suggests, the inevitable fate of those whose behaviour offends women of the higher social ranks. Watching Hannah confront adversity, the narrator insistently draws attention to those finer qualities — loyalty, selflessness, dignity, perseverance — that far outweigh the girl's initial indiscretion.

Yet, much as she sympathizes with Hannah, the narrator tempers sentiment with the pragmatism of an experienced social worker. As I noted in Chapter 1, late-century Londoners — visitors and residents alike — knew that girls with histories like Hannah's were all too common. The sexual double standard that robbed a young woman of her reputation also curtailed her ability to earn a respectable living, forcing her into a way of life that made reformation difficult. Eleanor Ty has proposed that Inchbald's innovation lay in showing readers the daily struggle of a "real woman, the destitute and suffering mother," so that they would be less likely to deliver harsh, ill-informed judgements.[75] Like Robinson and Blessington, Inchbald proposes that the key to rescuing such women lies first in a sympathetic identification made possible by reducing the distance between observer and observed. The *flâneuse*'s perceptive scan effectively identifies urban social problems, but

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[75]Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 110.

such knowledge must be accompanied by a softening of metropolitan detachment and the replacement of a social with a moral gaze. Often, the narrator observes, "smaller pains ... constitute greater virtues," and "private pity" is a more effective charitable instrument than "public munificence" designed only to impress the undiscerning mob (2: 146). Pointing to her emphasis on sentiment, Gary Kelly accuses Inchbald of offering, in *Nature and Art*, "a woman's solution to the ills of the age" and of escaping into "the romance of sympathy."[76] But, Inchbald's proposed remedy is considerably more sophisticated than Kelly's formulation suggests. Good works dispensed by the uninformed from a distance, the narrator intimates, are likely to be mis-directed and, at best, grudgingly received. Conversely, a sympathetic knowledge and understanding of the lives of the needy form the basis for a practical, targeted response, anticipating the professionalized philanthropy developed later in the century. Moreover, Inchbald's version of semi-detached *flânerie* is consistent with her broad social vision. Michael Tomka traces Inchbald's use of the theatre to advocate religious reconciliation amid the hostility aroused in Britain by an influx of French Catholic refugees from the Revolution. By linking "those domestic values of sympathy and compassion with decision-making in the public sphere," he observes, Inchbald's drama engages in a "politics of sympathy" that strengthens the nation by promoting tolerance within diversity.[77] *Nature and Art* makes an analogous argument, showing how a distanced, feminine social gaze contributes to bitter class divisions. However, women like Inchbald's narrator who practice

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[76]Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 112.
[77]Michael Tomka, "Remembering Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*: Romantic Cosmopolitanism, Sectarian History, and Religious Difference," *European Romantic Review* 19.1 (2008), 10.

compassionate spectatorship, the novel suggests, may play an important role in contributing to national reconciliation .[78]

Scottish novelist Elizabeth Hamilton (1758-1816) also proposes sympathetic observation as a means of strengthening communities. Raised in the Scottish Enlightenment's rational and pragmatic tradition, Hamilton began writing fiction in the 1790s, publishing her first major work, *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* in 1792. Critics tend to situate her novels in the debate surrounding British response to the French Revolution.[79] Although Hamilton's work reveals conservative tendencies, her strong advocacy of women's education and economic independence complicates definitive placement of her work within the spectrum of reaction and reform. Her parodic *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) relates the consequences — both tragic and comic — when two ill-educated young women thoughtlessly and literally adopt the principles of William Godwin's social and political theories. Hamilton emphasizes the extent of their folly by providing two patterns of ideal femininity. One, Martha Goodwin, conventionally encourages young women to modulate their romantic expectations and to find contentment in the private realm of rural domesticity. The second, Maria Fielding, offers the enticing prospect of a richly satisfying city life as society hostess, social reformer and purveyor of good works.

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[78]This reading may help explain what some critics see as the novel's disappointing ending. Mona Scheuermann, for example, argues that the conclusion to *Nature and Art* is a "failed vision" that comes close to attributing poverty to the indolence, ingratitude and unrealistic demands of the working class. See *Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 10. However, Inchbald may have been urging the poor, albeit somewhat awkwardly, to resist making the kind of ill-informed judgements about other classes that they themselves suffered.

[79]See, for example, Claire Grogan, Introduction to *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 1800 (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Fiona Price, "Democratizing Taste: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and Elizabeth Hamilton," *Romanticism* 8.2 (2002): 179-196.

What makes the character of Mrs. Fielding especially distinctive is Hamilton's grafting of an authoritative public role onto a conduct book paragon of private femininity. The well-educated and accomplished daughter of a Church of England clergyman, Maria was left destitute at a young age, forced to endure a life of humiliating servitude as paid companion to a domineering, capricious relative. She renounces her one chance of marital and maternal happiness on a point of religious doctrine, and when dismissed by her employer, she retires to a small village where

> she found means of employing her time to the advantage of the little circle by which she was surrounded. By her instructions she improved the young; by her sympathy she consoled the unfortunate; and by her example of unrepining patience, humility and piety, she edified all who came within the sphere of her observation.[80]

Yet, when she inherits a fortune, Maria leaves this rural idyll behind to move to London's fashionable Mayfair district. Here, she becomes a quintessential urban woman, keeping a carriage, visiting places of amusement, and maintaining a select salon where she encourages "the communication of ideas, the collision of wit, and the instructive observations of genius" (285). The city also offers her a much broader canvas on which to develop and deliver good works. To some extent, her philanthropy is an extension of those domestic responsibilities assigned to women.[81] However, her urban activities differ from her country charity in a number of important ways. First, unlike her rural retirement, in London her generosity earns her a public profile so that "[t]o be honoured with her acquaintance is a sufficient

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[80]Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 1800, 3 vols, ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000), 252. All references are to this edition.

[81]On this point, see also, Janice Thaddeus, "Elizabeth Hamilton's Domestic Politics," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 265-284. Thaddeus points out that by infusing philanthropy with domestic virtues "Hamilton creates a political philosophy which is the opposite of the patriarchal assumption that the best influences sift down from above" (275).

recommendation" to town businesses and trades people (278). Moreover, her presence in the city entitles her to join what Gary Kelly calls "the authoritative paternal chorus,"[82] and to wield considerable power within her domestic and social circles. She directs the career of a young protégé, Henry Sydney, improving his prospects through introductions to distinguished families and sweeping away rival candidates for a post in a London hospital. In exchange, she enlists him as an active participant in her charitable enterprises. In the same managing spirit, during an elaborate dinner party, she does not hesitate to lecture her gormandizing host about the "famished wretches" she has just seen outside his own palatial door (298). Further, unlike the reactive and distanced largesse associated with a social gaze, Mrs. Fielding engages in the kind of "philanthropic activism" that, as Jane Rendell points out, characterized Hamilton's own involvement in setting up institutions to deal with Edinburgh's social problems.[83]

Hamilton expressed a mistrust of the concept of imaginative sympathy advocated by Adam Smith and Joanna Baillie, unless such feelings were accompanied by pragmatic action.[84] She reveals her preferred approach in a scene during which, returning from the theatre one cold December evening, Mrs. Fielding sees from her carriage window a young woman begging in the street first beaten by a footman, then propositioned by a passer-by. Although indignant at the treatment meted out to such "an object of wretchedness," Mrs. Fielding's "sensibility was not of that nature which can content itself with dropping a

[82]Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790-1827*, 154.
[83]Jane Rendell, "'Women That Would Plague Me With Rational Conversation': Aspiring Women and Scottish Whigs," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 338.
[84]On this point, see Penny Warburton, "Theorising Public Opinion: Elizabeth Hamilton's Model of Self, Sympathy and Society" in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 257-273.

graceful tear to the misery which an active exertion of benevolence has power to relieve" (299). Accordingly, she risks censure from the affluent theatre crowd to save the girl, taking her not only into her carriage but also into her home. This initial rescue becomes the catalyst for her establishment of hostels to shelter young women facing a similar threat and to redeem those who had already fallen. Through her observations and actions, Mrs. Fielding is able to offer relief "to above a thousand destitute females" (301), and in so doing, she opens up philanthropic spectatorship as a possible occupation for urban women. Offered the chance to marry the man she once loved, she refuses, explaining "I have endeavoured to create to myself objects of interest that might occupy my attention, and engage my affections. These I have found in the large family of the unfortunate" (388). Her activities are thus neither an extension of nor adjunct to the responsibilities of a domestic role, but a new way for women to engage fully in metropolitan life.

The models of urban femininity suggested by Robinson, Blessington, Inchbald, and Hamilton all contain an element of fantasy, from invisibility to a timely inheritance. Nevertheless, they point to a prevailing interest in expanding women's possibilities for participation in public life. If, as Gary Kelly contends, her contemporaries considered a middle-class woman to be a "specialist in 'real life', local observation, the detail of quotidian life,"[85] women writers of the period found ways to capitalize on these attributes, using them as the means to establish an enhanced standing for women in the city as semi-detached *flâneuses*.

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[85]Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 16.

CHAPTER 4

SOMETHING TO DO WITH POLITICS: THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S URBAN DRAWING ROOMS

In Maria Edgeworth's final novel *Helen*,[1] an exemplary older woman confesses to her young protégée how a passion for politics once nearly ruined her life. Driven by fierce ambition and love of power, she alienated her husband's affections, neglected her child and exposed herself to the ridicule of her acquaintances. Despite this experience, however, Lady Davenant continues to insist on the importance of a young woman's extending her interests beyond fashionable and domestic concerns:

> Let me observe to you, that the position of women in society, is somewhat different from what it was a hundred years ago, or as it was sixty, or I will say thirty years since. Women are now so highly cultivated, and political subjects are at present of so much importance, of such high interest, to all human creatures who live together in society, you can hardly expect, Helen, that you, as a rational being, can go through the world as it now is, without forming any opinion on points of public importance. You cannot, I conceive, satisfy yourself with the common namby-pamby little missy phrase, "ladies have nothing to do with politics."[1]

Through her character's assertions, Edgeworth advances the proposition that women should participate, in some way, in the discourses shaping contemporary Britain. Forming and expressing views on political subjects, she suggests, are essential elements of a femininity

[1]Maria Edgeworth, *Helen*, 1834, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. 9, ed. Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 214. All further references are to this edition and are included in parentheses in the text.

that also incorporates reason, principle and independence. However, as Lady Davenant's history illustrates, fashioning such an ideal subjectivity requires careful negotiation between the poles of retirement and publicity. If she is too preoccupied with domesticity, a woman will fall short in her contributions to society, but if she succumbs to the excitement of political life, she will neglect family responsibilities. In *Helen*, Lady Davenant eventually finds a compromise between these extremes: as the novel draws to a conclusion, she has learned to direct attention and energy toward recuperating her troubled daughter, while she continues to serve as an important influence in her husband's ambassadorial career.

Finding an acceptable middle course that combines feminine propriety with engagement in life outside intimate relations is a recurring theme in Edgeworth's personal life and literary works. In her authoritative biography of the novelist, Marilyn Butler notes Edgeworth's tendency toward self-effacement and self-deprecation, revealed, for example, in her "obsessive desire" to promote the opinions of her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, especially his preference for domestic over public life.[2] Yet Butler also points out that Maria received a "wide-ranging, scientific, essentially factual education" from her father, including studies in political economy and constitutional law (153), and this training enabled the young woman to assist with and eventually take full responsibility for management of her family's estate. Moreover, despite her claim that politics were "far above my capacity and information,"[3] Edgeworth actively engaged in shaping public opinion through a literary collaboration with her father in which they jointly advocated positions on what Lady Davenant termed "points of public importance," including children's education, the position

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[2]Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 303.

[3]Edgeworth to her aunt, Mrs. Margaret Ruxton, October 1796; quoted in Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*, 113.

of Ireland within Britain, landowners' social and economic responsibilities and formation of the professional classes. Although the extent of her father's influence continues to arouse debate,[4] the fame her novels brought made Maria what James Newcomer describes as a "prosperous, successful, animated, intelligent woman of the world," able to participate in and benefit from mixing with intellectual circles in London and Edinburgh and on the continent.[5] Edgeworth was thus able to occupy simultaneously two quite different positions. As the eldest daughter living in the relative seclusion of the Edgeworthstown estate, she shared responsibility for the traditionally designated female tasks associated with raising a large family. At the same time, through correspondence, reading, conversation with visitors and the occasional sortie to urban centres, she kept abreast of political, cultural and scientific developments.[6] The range of her interests appears in her writing, and, through her fiction especially, she entered the ranks of those late eighteenth-century women writers whom Anne Mellor describes as participating "fully in a discursive public sphere."[7]

In her first work for adults, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), Edgeworth implicitly defends her own middle way. The initial set of correspondence in this work, based on letters exchanged in the 1780s between Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his close friend, the author

[4]The terms of this debate are represented by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Mitzi Myers, "My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority," in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 104-146. Kowaleski-Wallace considers Edgeworth little more than a mouthpiece for patriarchy; in contrast, Myers maintains Maria is "never simply the guileless filial conduit for a didactic father tongue" (110).

[5]James Newcomer, *Maria Edgeworth* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1973), 27.

[6]On this point see also Clíona Ó Gallchoir, "Gender, Nation and Revolution: Maria Edgeworth and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis," in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Ó Gallchoir observes that Maria saw her family's isolation "as a kind of pattern or example of the way in which lives could be lived locally and practically whilst also acting as experiments in the kind of progressive thought to which print gave access" (203).

[7]Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3.

Thomas Day, debates the most appropriate method of educating young women and the compatibility between feminine modesty and active participation in life outside the domestic circle. A "Gentleman," representing Day's views, argues that offering women a rational education (such as Edgeworth herself received) will betray them into "a miserable ostentation of their learning."[8] In consequence, they will disdain their traditional roles, and, seduced by the "desire of universal admiration," they will turn to literature, filling "the public eye" and exposing themselves to intrusive scrutiny of their personal life (38, 23). The Gentleman's friend, appropriating Richard Lovell Edgeworth's voice, vigorously counters this position, insisting on a consonance between femininity and participation in public discourse. Well-educated women, he argues, make important social contributions. Women who confine themselves to the roles of wife and mother understand that their influence is a "necessary and important link" between their families and the greater world (94). By cultivating their knowledge and understanding of political concerns, they equip themselves to supervise the early moral and intellectual development of those who will eventually take active roles in the cultural, political and economic life of the nation. Equally important, such women contribute to national stability through the creation of stimulating environments in their homes, promoting "the interests of society, by increasing domestic happiness" (111). The friend goes on to defend explicitly those women who, as authors, assume a profile outside their domestic circle.[9] He points out that, no longer mere attention-getting anomalies, women writers are valued contributors to British intellectual life: "On natural history, on criticism, on moral philosophy, on education, they have written with elegance, eloquence,

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[8]Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies,* 1795, 2nd ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1799), 24.

[9]In the advertisement for the second edition, Edgeworth indicates that she edited the friend's response specifically "to assert more distinctly the female right to literature"(v).

precision and ingenuity" (83). The friend further argues that sociability is an important instrument for women to chart an acceptable course between feminine modesty and an interest in public affairs. Social interaction assists a young woman in forming herself as a rational being. Shaping her own identity primarily through introspection supplemented with reading, she can best validate or correct the judgements she forms by "listening to the conversation of persons of sense and experience."[10] The friend further points out that social engagements provide a training ground where a young person learns to take part as an equal in discussions on the issues of the day with men and women of intelligence and wit. In *Letters for Literary Ladies,* Edgeworth thus presents sociability as both a process that assists the self toward completion and a mediating space between interiority and society.

She expands on this theme in three novels set primarily in London, demonstrating how her heroines engage with political issues through the discursive practices of urban sociability. In important ways, *Belinda* (1801), *Patronage* (1814), and *Helen* (1834) conform to what Andrew McCann terms novels of "domestic enlightenment, in which characters move inexorably towards the ideal of conjugal love and harmonious private space."[11] As a central plot line in each work, a young woman solidifies her subjectivity, learning to balance reason with emotion, and then selects a partner who shares her tastes and principles. Within intimate settings, the heroine observes and learns from both exemplary wives and mothers, as well as from women, clearly intended as cautionary models, who deliberately eschew

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[10]Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (103). In this sense, sociability performs a function similar to that of fiction. Catherine Gallagher points out that Edgeworth provides in her novels "a life pattern" against which a female reader could assess and revise her self-production. See *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 285. In a similar fashion, *Letters for Literary Ladies* suggests that social interaction exposes young women to patterns of behaviour worthy of emulation.

[11]Andrew McCann, "Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Context of Non-Identity in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 30.1 (1996), 56.

conventional feminine roles. However, there are three distinctive features to Edgeworth's courtship narratives. First, her heroines educate themselves not only as members of a domestic circle but also as equal participants in what Gary Kelly describes as "the Edgeworth program," advocating a fusion of the professional and gentry classes into a ruling consortium based on Enlightenment principles.[12] Second, their education occurs largely through their engagement in rational discourse. Finally, much of this formative discussion takes place in metropolitan sites of sociability such as parks, shops, exhibitions, theatres and — especially — the urban drawing room.

Edgeworth represents the urban drawing room as a liminal space, a material illustration of the oppositions between which her young women must negotiate. I rely on Paula Backscheider's definition of liminality, which is derived in turn from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. Backscheider understands liminal space as a site where antithetical aspects of binary systems overlap and interpenetrate, yielding "a complex matrix of relationships" and offering opportunities to critique conventional wisdom, to reinterpret experience and thus to produce new knowledge.[13] In particular, she stresses the potential of liminal space to bridge the divide between public and private. Edgeworth's fictional drawing room contains a number of significant oppositions. While located inside a family home, it nevertheless reverberates with a sense of the city beyond its doors. Acknowledged as feminine space where women set the tone, the drawing room also welcomes a masculine presence. It is both the secluded heart of family life and a busy intersection of commercial, professional and political interests. Providing refuge and respite from the metropolis, the

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[12]Gary Kelly, "Class, Gender, Nation, and Empire: Money and Merit in the Writing of the Edgeworths," *The Wordsworth Circle* 25.2 (1994), 89.
[13]Paula R. Backscheider, Introduction to *The Intersections of the Public and Private Spheres in Early Modern England* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 14.

drawing room is also where future participants in public life are recruited and trained. For Edgeworth's heroines especially it is a theatre for observation and performance, where they learn by watching others but also subject themselves to scrutiny. Finally, the drawing room is at the same time a site for the exchange of confidences and the location for reasoned debate over issues of the day.

Edgeworth's linkage of rational discourse with urban sociability recalls Jürgen Habermas's influential construct of the bourgeois public sphere where private individuals meet informally to discuss and agree on common concerns. By locating these discursive practices within metropolitan places of public sociability, Habermas effectively separates domestic life from issues of wider importance. Marilyn Butler makes a similar distinction, arguing that Edgeworth was able to tackle substantive political topics in her fiction only when she left behind "the woman's world of drawing rooms and husband-hunting" (334) and entered an urban, masculine realm. I argue, rather, that Edgeworth brings weighty issues *into* the drawing-room, effectively extending the public sphere into domestic space, thereby allowing women to become active participants in the rational discourses underpinning national life. At the same time, she broadens the definition of common concerns to include topics traditionally considered the sole purview of intimate relationships. Through their discursive engagements, Edgeworth's young women instill the roles of wife and mother with social value, equipping themselves to conduct useful lives both within and beyond their domestic responsibilities, lives that (following Lady Davenant's advice) have something to do with politics.

The Masculine Discourse of Habermas's Public Sphere

First published in an English translation in 1989, Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* seeks to explain the political, economic, and sociological basis for the emergence of public opinion as an influential political force. At once an historical account and philosophical ideal, his thesis proposes the formation at the turn of the eighteenth century of a "forum in which the private people come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion."[14] The constitutive elements of this assembly are persons, place and print: individuals gather as a collective body in public places to take part in rational debate; consensus reached in these discussions is then disseminated through publication to a wider audience and used to influence government decisions. Although he details national differences, Habermas points to common historical trends that led to the almost simultaneous development of a public sphere in Britain, France and Germany. These include the expansion of trade beyond national borders, which necessitated improved means of communication; the spread of literacy; the growth of publications such as newspapers and journals to fulfill the information requirements of new classes of readers; the consolidation of a professional and commercial middle class; and the expanding number of such urban sociable institutions as inns, taverns and coffee houses, where on-going discussions could take place among a diverse clientele. Encompassing political, literary and cultural activity, Habermas's public sphere fulfills two key functions: to monitor and offer critical assessments of public authority and to mediate between the state and society "through the

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[14]Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991), 25-26. Further references are provided in the text.

vehicle of public opinion" (31). In his model, the civic society (that is, the non-government or private realm) on whose behalf the public sphere intervenes includes both the market economy and the conjugal family. Using the mechanisms of reasoned discussion and sociability, the public sphere therefore wields considerable influence, defining the self-consciousness of a broad social stratum and serving as the primary location for the political activism of that segment.

Since its first appearance in 1962, Habermas's model of the public sphere has attracted extensive critical attention and analysis.[15] Those who take issue with his account tend to point to its restrictiveness and historical inaccuracies. Of particular concern are at least two unresolved tensions within his construct. In theory, the public sphere is an egalitarian, inclusive forum open to anyone with access to the cultural products and urban sites that stimulate and support discussion. Establishing consensus on general concerns depends on effective argumentation rather than a debater's economic or social status. In historical practice, Habermas concedes, membership was restricted to well-educated men of property who, on behalf of civic society at large, determined which subjects were of importance, and who would represent public opinion on these topics to state authority.[16] Similarly, Habermas points to the constitutive interrelationships between the component parts of the private realm, that is, the market economy, the domestic realm and the public sphere. In a circular fashion, individuals who participate in public discourse are shaped first by their intimate experiences; they then engage in debates centring on the rules governing

[15]For a useful summary of responses to Habermas, see for example, *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), and *The Phantom Public Sphere,* ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
[16]Thomas McCarthy, Introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991). McCarthy points out that Habermas's model disintegrates when membership in the public sphere expands beyond its masculine, bourgeois core (xii).

commodity exchange and social labour in the market economy; and this latter realm provides material support for the conjugal family. Despite these interpenetrations, however, Habermas excludes, on a *de facto* basis, the rational discourse at the heart of the public sphere from both the market economy and domestic space. He contends, for example, that conversation conducted with visitors in a late eighteenth-century bourgeois family's social space had lost its connection to the rational-critical discourse earlier centred in the *salons* of the nobility (46). Further, he dates the decline of the public sphere from the point at which political opinion, diffused among ever-widening interest groups, effectively became a marketable commodity. Thus, for Habermas, in the historical public sphere, the political power embedded in civic society is accessible to and wielded by an exclusive, masculine membership. These tensions have obvious ramifications for women. As Habermas notes, in his model the influential political public sphere "factually and legally" excluded women (56). Lumped in with servants and apprentices in his analysis, women were, at best, passive recipients of the public sphere's literary production, limited to reading the results of rational-critical discussions that took place in sites where they were generally excluded. Moreover, as Deidre Lynch has pointed out, Habermas implicates women in the disintegration of reasoned debate to its "sad, feminized sequel" of consumer culture.[17] Those who seek to reformulate his concept to acknowledge a female presence generally pursue either of two approaches: recovering actual instances in which women were active members of the public sphere as defined by Habermas, or alternatively, extending the definition of political engagement into areas of feminine involvement. Representative of the first approach, Anne Mellor points out

[17]Deidre Shauna Lynch, "Counter Publics: Shopping and Women's Sociability, " in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 213-4.

that during the Romantic era in Britain, women took part fully in what Habermas terms "the world of letters" and "the Town" (*Mothers* 30), most notably through their contributions, as authors and critics, to cultural production.[18] Lynch, on the other hand, challenges Habermas's narrow demarcations, particularly his segregation of the marketplace. Invoking the notion of counter public spheres as sites of alternative, oppositional mechanisms for engagement, Lynch suggests that the sociable practice of shopping offered women of the period sites and occupations that might serve as "a launching pad for political activism" (215). My argument in this chapter is an amalgam of these two approaches. Following Lynch, I suggest Edgeworth's fiction points to a more capacious understanding of the public sphere and political subjects than that contained in Habermas's model. On the other hand, I contend, with Mellor, that writers like Edgeworth were not necessarily advocating a counter agenda. Rather, the political role for women that Edgeworth promotes fits within the dominant discourses of the period.

Although subject to significant reservations, Habermas's basic public sphere schema remains a useful starting point for a discussion of the intersection of female sociability, urban space and political activity in Edgeworth's fiction. His framework helps to avoid some of the ambiguities associated with historically multivalent meanings of the terms 'public' and 'private'.[19] Moreover, his work seems especially pertinent when considering Edgeworth because of their shared valorization of discussion and consensus-building and their

[18]See also, Paula Backscheider, *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, Chapter 1. Backscheider dates women's involvement in the literary public sphere to the early decades of the eighteenth century.

[19]On this point, see Lawrence Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.1 (1995): 97-109. Arguing the inadequacy of binary oppositions to encapsulate human experience, Klein notes that in the eighteenth century, "private and public did not correspond to the distinction between home and not-home" frequently used in gender studies (105).

assumption of the political significance of the professional and gentry classes. Importantly, both shared an emphasis on rational discourse not only as an effective means to engage politically but also as the defining feature of a national self-awareness.[20] Where Habermas and Edgeworth differ is on the questions of what constitutes a common concern, where rational discourses on these issues might take place, and who might engage in meaningful political discussion and action. In contrast to Habermas's educated men of property exerting influence on state authorities by means of public opinions forged in impersonal urban places and disseminated through publication, Edgeworth proposes a more diffuse but nevertheless influential public presence for women as they meet at the nexus of political, commercial and intimate realms, forming themselves and influencing those around them through their rational conversations.

The Liminal Urban Drawing-Rooms of *Belinda*

Maria Edgeworth seems to have based her novel *Belinda* on the assumption that the exclusive site for developing and revealing essential female character was the domestic circle. The novel's counter heroine Lady Delacour, for instance, lets slip the façade she maintains to conceal her unhappiness only when she retreats from society. The narrator explains:

> Abroad, and at home, lady Delacour was two different persons. Abroad she appeared all life, spirit, and good humour — at home, listless, fretful and melancholy; she

[20]On this point, see Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Ferris points out that historical circumstances suggest a considerably different public discourse in early nineteenth-century Britain than Habermas's consensual model, yet a national cultural consciousness defined itself through a similar ideal. For example, she notes, "The critical self-understanding of periodicals like the *Edinburgh Review* remained very much tied to Enlightenment models of rationality and discipline" (3).

> seemed like a spoiled actress off the stage, over stimulated by applause, and exhausted by the exertions of supporting a fictitious character.[21]

However, Lady Delacour is *not* necessarily her true self at home. Conscious of being under observation even among intimates in her own drawing room, she keeps up her pose as indifferent wife, careless mother and equivocal flirt. Not until she is behind the closely guarded door of a small *boudoir* does she expose her real identity as a lonely, ailing, frightened woman, wracked by guilt. Through her depiction of this spatially based difference between her character's performative and genuine nature, Edgeworth draws attention to the difficulty Romantic era women faced in finding, even in intimate family space, the "redemptive privacy" Andrew McCann identifies as conducive to self-formation.[22] Although much of *Belinda* takes place within domestic interiors, these are neither secluded nor homogeneous. Rather, the major characters in the novel, including Lady Delacour, must learn to (re)form themselves as rational beings at the spatial intersection of those elements — political, commercial and conjugal — that comprise Habermas's private, non-state realm. Exposure to such diversity was an integral part of the Edgeworth family's approach to learning. In 1798, Edgeworth and her father published *Practical Education*, a manual advocating the instruction of young children through a program based on observation, experiment, practice, independent thought and conversation. Once equipped with basic reasoning skills and good habits, they advise, young people should be "left free as air" to

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[21]Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 1801, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. 2, ed. Siobhán Kilfeather (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 12. All further references are to this edition and are provided in the text.

[22]McCann, "Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject," 75. On this point, see also Ariane Fennetaux, "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20.3 (2008): 307-334. Fennetaux points out that because even relatively affluent middle-class women did not have access to a secure desk, much less a room of their own, detachable pockets were one of the few places where they could keep personal items in private.

"see the greatest variety of characters and hear the greatest variety of conversation and opinions."[23] Although they direct their methods equally to boys and girls, the Edgeworths took pains to downplay the importance of teaching young women fashionable accomplishments in favour of "the judicious cultivation of the female understanding" through self-directed acquisition of knowledge (2: 549). The liminal urban drawing rooms Edgeworth depicts in *Belinda* provide young women opportunities for the experiential, sociable learning at the centre of her educational approach. As she observes and participates in the matrix of relationships at play in sites of urban sociability, the heroine of *Belinda* acquires what Mona Narain terms the "exterior modulation" necessary to establish and confirm an enlightened subjectivity.[24]

The novel charts the choices made by a young woman poised between two very different models of femininity. Belinda Portman has been sent by a match-making aunt to live in London in the expectation that she will secure a wealthy husband. As the narrative begins, her character is in flux, "yet to be developed by circumstances"(9). Edgeworth maps her heroine's self-formation, particularly her struggle to reconcile apparently conflicting tastes for fashionable amusements and quiet domestic pleasures, in relation to two older women characters and their respective urban drawing rooms. Belinda's elegant and witty hostess, Lady Delacour, has rejected all family responsibilities to take up dual public sphere positions in both "the Town" (or the market of cultural products) and the political realm. She is a frequent visitor to the opera and theatre; she holds select parties to read and discuss the

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[23]Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2 vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 2: 715-16.

[24]Mona Narain, "Not the Angel in the House: Intersections of the Public and Private in Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales* and *Practical Education*," in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 62. Narain's argument relates to the formation of masculine subjectivity. She observes how Edgeworth, in her explicitly didactic works, "boldly redraws appropriate masculine behaviour" to include knowledge of household concerns (63).

latest in French literature; and, as Siobhán Kilfeather notes, her conversation "is peppered with references to eighteenth-century writers."[25] Moreover, she has become a public woman in the sense that newspaper accounts open up to a wide readership virtually every aspect of her personal life: her clothing, repartee, social contacts and family relations. Much like Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Delacour has had a great deal to do with politics, canvassing for a candidate in a contested county election and publishing caricatures of her political opponent. At the same time, her emotional history and intimate life are marked by selfish impulse. Her relationship with her husband is little more than a struggle over who will govern their household, and, having married solely to incite jealousy in her first love, she advises Belinda to adopt similar ploys with her suitors. Reflecting its mistress, Lady Delacour's drawing room in Berkeley Square is open to the "bustle, noise, [and] nonsense" of the city (33). The space is a magnet for "all the fashionable dissipated young men in London" (111), and, not coincidentally, becomes the backdrop for secrets and intrigues. All traces of conjugal ties have been expunged from the room: her daughter is exiled to the care of relations, and Lord Delacour is consigned to his own apartments, accessible by a separate staircase. As a result, the room — like the woman — offers "nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children, to engage [the] affections" (36).

Although initially attracted to the publicity Lady Delacour and her drawing room represent, Belinda is soon repelled by the falsity of fashionable values, especially after she meets an alternate exemplar in Lady Anne Percival. To an interested observer, Clarence Hervey, the contrast between Lady Delacour and Lady Anne is striking. He notices that in the former's "wit and gayety there was an appearance of art and effort," while the latter's

[25]Siobhán Kilfeather, Introduction to *Belinda* by Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. 2 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), xvii.

"unconstrained cheerfulness ... spoke a mind at ease" (77). Lady Anne's interests and energies are primarily directed to her conjugal roles as intellectual companion to her husband and educator of her children. Contrary to the stratagems of Lady Delacour, Lady Anne's counsel to Belinda is based on reason and utility, and these qualities pervade her family drawing room on Upper Grosvenor Street. Inhabited by a large and happy family, visited by guests from scientific and literary circles, its rational conversations marked by transparency and good nature, the Percival drawing room seems, like its maternal overseer, to inspire "a degree of happy social energy, unknown to the selfish solitary votaries of avarice and ambition" (169).

Despite their significant differences, however, the Delacour and Percival drawing rooms are both distinctively urban. Infiltrated by the energetic movement that characterizes the surrounding city, neither interior space is static. The adults and children who populate these rooms are constantly on the move, leaving for and returning from commercial, political or cultural expeditions to Bond Street shops, the House of Commons, a girls' boarding school in Sloane Square, a display of Henri Maillardet's automata, Hyde Park or an auction of china. This traffic, in turn, supports a dialectic between interior and exterior that brings domestic issues into public places even as matters of common concern enter what Habermas describes as "the conjugal family's internal space" (30). A scene set at an art exhibition, for example, demonstrates how intimate considerations infiltrate public sphere discourses, resulting in a complex cross-inflection. Two works on display have double significance for Belinda, introducing her to contemporary discourses of gender relations but also bringing her to an emotional reckoning. The first painting depicts a beautiful young woman in a tropical setting; the second is a drawing of Lady Anne Percival surrounded by her children. Susan

Egenolf points out that both works are rich in literary allusions.[26] Belinda easily identifies the young woman as the heroine of *Paul et Virginie* (1787), the pastoral romance by Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre that became a popular subject in the late eighteenth century for all kinds of cultural products. The family group is supposedly the work of Richard Westall (1765-1836), a painter with strong ties to literature as an illustrator of Shakespeare, Milton and such contemporary authors as Byron and Scott.

Both paintings allude in a number of ways to a discourse of masculine authority and female dependence. The portrait of Virginie, emphasizing her unspoiled innocence, provides a visual representation of de Saint-Pierre's valorization, after Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of a state of nature over the corrupting forces of conventional society. The painting thus also implicitly references Rousseau's authoritarian theories relating to female education.[27] Unbeknownst to Belinda, the girl portrayed is the object of an experiment being conducted by Clarence Hervey to train an ideal wife according to Rousseau's concepts.[28] The model for Virginie is really Rachel Hartly, an apparent orphan, whom Hervey adopts, renames as Virginia, and sets about training according to methods that insist on strict monitoring, submission to her instructor and isolation from all social influences. The Percival group, referencing a happy ending of fecund and prosperous motherhood common in women's fiction of the period (including Brunton's novels and *Mansfield Park*), celebrates the

[26]Susan Bolet Egenolf, "Edgeworth's *Belinda*: An Artful Composition," *Women's Studies* 31.3 (2002): 323-348.

[27]On this point, see Susan Manly, "Maria Edgeworth and 'The Light of Nature': Artifice, Autonomy and Anti-Sectarianism in *Practical Education* (1798)," in *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, ed. Heather Glen and Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 140-159. Manly reads *Practical Education* as the Edgeworths' critique of educational practices, including those of Rousseau, that rely on learning by rote and deference to authority.

[28]In "My Art Belongs to Daddy?" Myers traces the complex relationship between Maria Edgeworth and Thomas Day, probably the model for Hervey's experiment. Influenced by Rousseau, Day adopted and unsuccessfully attempted to mould two young female orphans into his ideal of femininity. Myers contends that much of Edgeworth's early writing, including *Letters for Literary Ladies* and *Belinda*, was intended to refute Day's repressive attitudes toward female education and engagement in public life.

national stability offered by conventional domesticity. The absence of male figures in the works speaks to a patriarchal right (also the sub-text of *Letters for Literary Ladies*) to determine the extent of a woman's exposure to public scrutiny. Finally, because they are commissioned cultural products, the portraits are a reminder of masculine power in the market economy. Taken together, then, the works summarize for Belinda contemporary political discussions relating to femininity.

Even as they encode general meanings, both works also incorporate intimate concerns, illustrating — much like the Delacour and Percival drawing rooms — the personal choices available to Edgeworth's heroine. As she moves through the exhibition, Belinda hears rumours that Virginia is really Clarence Hervey's mistress. Screened by the sociable banter and critical discourses of gallery patrons, Belinda's confused reaction to the portrait betrays her own instinctive attraction to Hervey. However, the painting's embedded messages complicate her initial response, reminding her of female vulnerability, the dangers of yielding to desire and the consequent need for prudence. Even as she admires her rival's beauty, Belinda expresses pity for the girl:

> "And what will become of her? can Mr. Hervey desert her? she looks like innocence itself! and so young, too! Can he leave her for ever to sorrow, and vice, and infamy?" thought Belinda, as she kept her eyes fixed, in silent anguish, upon the picture of Virginia. (150)

In contrast, the Percival family group, embodying the rewards of pre-nuptial self-restraint, represents the domestic ideal towards which Belinda aspires. Faced with the portrayed choices of dangerous erotic feeling on one hand and, on the other, the prudent "union of interests, occupations, taste, and affection" that characterize the Percival marriage (208),

Belinda implicitly selects the latter by resolving to think no more of Hervey as a possible suitor. In her depiction of the exhibition, Edgeworth presents a public sphere matrix where political and conjugal, aesthetic and economic, and individual and communal interests come into contact. This interplay, in turn, provides her heroine with a new understanding on which to base a decision that, while obviously personal, is also located within a wider political and social context.

A debate Belinda witnesses between Lady Anne's husband and Harriot Freke, an eccentric member of London's fashionable circle, illustrates how, in a reverse process, political discussion enters domestic space. When Mrs. Freke bursts into the Percival drawing room, she brings with her a rational-critical discourse emanating from British responses to the French Revolution. In Edgeworth's playful reenactment of the debate, Mrs. Freke spouts her version of the radical positions of Mary Wollstonecraft,[29] while Mr. Percival assumes the conservative mantle of Edmund Burke. Adopting egalitarian watchwords, Mrs. Freke advocates an extreme individualism to counter what she considers the hypocrisy of entrenched social customs, especially as these govern female behaviour. Mr. Percival counters with an emphasis on traditional, communal norms, including the public opinion that defines female delicacy. However, in the course of this general argument, the political rapidly becomes personal. The combatants are aware that they are speaking before an impressionable young woman, and they shape their positions accordingly. The "rights of woman" that Harriot champions are not necessarily to engage directly in the political realm

[29]For a range of views on the function of Harriot Freke in the novel, see, for example, Colin B. Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, "Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* and Women's Rights," *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 29.4 (1994): 117-131; and Deborah Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary *Belinda*: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19.4 (2007): 441-461. The Atkinsons argue that Edgeworth uses the figure of Harriot to discredit radical feminists and their ideology; Weiss suggests that Edgeworth intended to lampoon not Wollstonecraft herself but rather contemporary representations of her.

of the public sphere but rather to express erotic preferences openly and frankly. She asks, "To cut the matter short at once ... why, when a woman likes a man, does not she go and tell him so honestly"(179)? Apart from vindicating her own cross-gender frolics,[30] Mrs. Freke advocates sexual freedom as a self-serving strategy to detach Belinda from the Percival influence. For his part, when Mr. Percival, quoting Burke, defends "the decent drapery of life" as essential to individual and communal happiness (180), he surely hopes to preserve Belinda's attractions for a match with his ward, Augustus Vincent. If the goal of the debaters had been to use political discourse to stimulate their young listener into self-examination of her own preferences and values, they succeeded. Belinda finds that the debate "roused her, upon reflection, to examine by her reason the habits and principles which guided her conduct," and the conclusion she reaches reinforces her independence. What Belinda resists in Mrs. Freke is the prospect of being forced (in this case, abducted) into accepting another's opinion. Although rejecting the style of Mrs. Freke's argument, Belinda adopts its substance. She may choose to accept guidance from others, but she nevertheless insists on establishing "in her own understanding the exact boundaries between right and wrong upon many subjects" (181). Introducing Belinda to a variety of characters and conversations, the "rights of woman" debate proves to be exactly the kind of learning experience the Edgeworths advanced in *Practical Education.*

Belinda's deliberations following the Freke-Percival encounter thus underscore how varied, first hand experience informs private reflection. The novel's exemplary model of femininity, Lady Anne, promotes contemplation and retirement from London's fashionable society as essential to a young woman's development, especially her choice of marriage

[30]Mrs. Freke has a predilection for going about town in men's clothing, and she once appeared at the House of Commons in drag to hear Richard Sheridan deliver a speech.

partner. She contends that "A woman who has an opportunity of seeing her lover in private society, in domestic life, has infinite advantages; for if she has any sense and he has any sincerity, the real character of both may perhaps be developed" (232). Yet Belinda learns most about herself and others as a direct result of experience gained in liminal urban drawing rooms.[31] In two pivotal scenes, Edgeworth's heroine overhears conversations imbued with both intimate and general significance, and these occasions lead her to a new self-understanding, while involving her in a social critique. In the first instance, Belinda is humiliated to listen as a group of young men describe her as a commodity in the marriage market, fast running out of shelf life despite being hawked about by her aunt, "as well-advertised as Packwood's razor strops"(23). Significantly, when she hears this conversation, Belinda is not in her "real character," having donned a masquerade dress intended for Lady Delacour. However, the painful knowledge she gains from the incident forces her to assert her subjectivity by defining her own values: she will not be a "female adventurer" who marries for money or position (25). Apart from the personal barbs directed toward Belinda, the young men's raillery also highlights for her the harmful social effects of fashionable matching-making. Their gossip reveals that the commodification of women and duping of men inevitably lead to unsuccessful marriages and, hence, domestic instability within an influential segment of society. As a result of what she has heard, Belinda comes to a greater personal and political awareness. Much as Adam Smith described in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, she comes to realize that she lives in a social context where her behaviour is subject to scrutiny and judgement by impartial spectators. In response, she moves quickly to

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[31]In an ironic narrative twist, the serious character weaknesses of Mr. Percival's ward, Mr. Vincent, come to light not in the seclusion of the family's rural estate, but through the "slight and frivolous intercourse" of London sociability that Lady Anne so deprecates (232).

demonstrate that she is not, as Hervey has asserted, "a composition of art and affectation" designed to entrap an unwary spousal prospect (24). She withdraws from her aunt's ambitious schemes, refusing an offer from a wealthy, if foolish, baronet, and in doing so, she makes her own contribution to a discourse on the social significance of secure marriages based on a union of principles and tastes.

On the second occasion, Belinda has the opportunity to confirm her own judgements by observing the educational effect on masculine behaviour of the kind of semi-public chastisement she has received. During one of Lady's Delacour's select parties, Clarence Hervey is stimulated by the presence of a Spanish visitor to display his considerable competence in the world of letters. In fluent French and Italian, Clarence holds forth on the history of the game of chess, employing "all that could adorn his course from Indian antiquities or Asiatic researches" (88). Although most of the company, including Belinda, admire this performance, one observer, the authoritative medical and literary figure Dr. X—, criticizes the young man's ostentatious display of learning:

> What a pity Mr. Hervey, that a young man of your talents and acquirements, a man who might be any thing, should — pardon the expression — choose to be — nothing — should waste upon petty objects powers suited to the greatest; should lend his soul to every contest for frivolous superiority, when the same energy concentrated, might ensure honourable preeminence among the first men in his country. (90)

Clarence's humble, grateful response to the doctor's assessment gives Belinda increased confidence in her own discernment. Despite their troubled acquaintance, she had seen much to admire in Clarence, and she is now "proud of her own judgment, in having discerned his merit" (91). Further, as a result of the doctor's intervention, Belinda sees Clarence's

character from a new perspective. Up to this point, she had thought of him solely in his personal capacities, as a suspected lover of Lady Delacour and a potential suitor for her own hand. In drawing attention to the serious qualities hidden beneath Clarence's dilettante pose, Dr. X— highlights for Belinda the young man's capabilities for useful service in public life, as well as his suitability for the kind of rational domesticity to which she aspires.

Deborah Weiss points out that Edgeworth makes literature, along with reflection and self analysis, central to her heroine's "ability to navigate successfully in a complex world."[32] Yet, scenes played out in urban drawing rooms are equally important in modulating Belinda's subjectivity. Certainly Edgeworth allows her heroine to privilege participation over introspection. On one of the rare occasions in the novel when she spends any time alone, having declined to attend the monarch's birthday ball, Belinda is surprised to discover how much she has learned through her weeks of experiencing sociability in Lady Delacour's drawing room:

> It is singular, that my having spent a winter with one of the most dissipated women in England should have sobered my mind so completely. If I had never seen the utmost extent of the pleasures of the world, as they are called, my imagination might have misled me to the end of my life; but now I can judge from my own experience, and I am convinced that the life of a fine lady would never make me happy. (98)

If she rejects the fashionable model of femininity presented by Lady Delacour, Belinda does not necessarily fashion herself into a "common namby-pamby" little miss. Gary Kelly suggests that in emphasizing women's participation in Enlightenment discourses, Edgeworth was able to negotiate divisive post-Revolutionary gender debates by creating fictional

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[32]Deborah Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary *Belinda*: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher," 460.

heroines who are "at once intellectual and domestic."[33] Evidence of this creative negotiation appears in the deliberate contrast Edgeworth creates between Belinda and Virginia/Rachel. Clarence Hervey's Rousseauvian experiment results in a near disaster: the girl he has formed in isolation turns out to be "insipid," a passive, indiscriminate and impressionable consumer of sentimental novels, who enacts a role not unlike the one Habermas assigns to women in the world of letters. In contrast, as a result of her exposure to the public sphere, "Belinda had cultivated taste, an active understanding, a knowledge of literature, the power and habit of conducting herself." While Virginia/Rachel is equipped to be little more than Clarence's "pupil or plaything," Belinda's rational formation suits her to be his equal in a companionate marriage (292-3).

Edgeworth's emphasis on the positive influence of experiencing "the pleasures of the world" perhaps explains the novel's stylized, theatrical conclusion. With their minds newly sobered by their respective drawing room educations, Belinda and Clarence launch a plan to salvage the Delacour marriage by transforming it into the enlightened domesticity represented by the Percival family. Their project depends on enticing Lady Delacour to the Percival's rural, secluded Oakly-park estate where, they anticipate, she will recover both her physical stamina and moral health. Yet this removal to the countryside is always deferred, so that the novel concludes where it began, in a London drawing room. Her choice of final setting suggests Edgeworth wished to complicate the binary versions of fashionable/domestic, public/private femininity that introduce her narrative. She does not advocate active engagement by women in the political realm; in fact, both Lady Delacour and Harriot Freke come to physical grief when they appropriate too freely masculine

[33]Kelly, "Class, Gender, Nation, and Empire," 92.

entitlements. Nevertheless, when Lady Delacour determines to "assert [her] real character" by casting off dissipated habits and friends and reconciling with her husband and child (227), she retains her lively interest in and association with "the Town." Tellingly, she uses her knowledge of cultural products — yet another portrait and a dramatic tableau — to unpack and resolve tangled narrative threads. Edgeworth's return to the drawing room thus implies an interest in incorporating within domestic fiction the beneficial effects available from female participation in the public sphere.

The Enlightened Drawing Rooms of *Patronage*

With *Patronage*, Edgeworth steps outside domestic space to enter a wider, distinctively masculine world that encompasses all elements of Habermas's private realm/public authority schema. In addition to members of the landed gentry, her characters include men earning their living through practising professions or serving government ministers. This diverse cast opens up the novel to a range of political, medical, legal, military, mercantile and agricultural discourses; however, an overarching theme concerns the values and principles that should govern masculine conduct in civic and domestic life. Connor Carville and Marilyn Butler suggest two factors prompted these "most ambitious representations of the national community."[34] One of Edgeworth's advisors, the Swiss expatriate and utilitarian Étienne Dumont, had long urged her to introduce political themes into her domestic fiction. In addition, *Patronage* replicates, and thus extends to a wider audience, much of the content of the Edgeworths' *Essays on Professional Education* (1809),

[34]Connor Carville and Marilyn Butler, Introduction to *Patronage* by Maria Edgeworth, 1814, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vols. 6 and 7 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 6: xix-xx.

a detailed manual for preparing young middle-class men for adult life.[35] Public and critical response to Edgeworth's excursion beyond the drawing room was discouraging. Members of the professions she had depicted were quick to point out errors and improbabilities in her narrative.[36] As Ina Ferris has documented, periodical reviewers of *Patronage* tended to treat the novel as an illustration of what they considered limitations inherent in female-authored fiction, pointing to the prolix didactism that resulted from her focussed attention on social utility and the difficulty faced by women in representing accurately a public life they had not experienced first hand. Critics, in effect, advised the author "to cease her transgressions and stay in her place."[37] One of the main characters in *Patronage* makes a similar distinction between conjugal (and therefore feminine) and political (thus, masculine) concerns. Frustrated when his wife introduces her match-making into his patronage negotiations, Commissioner Falconer observes that "Love altogether has surprisingly little to do, in the real management and business of the world."[38] Yet throughout her novel, Edgeworth shows how affective relations influence political discourse. In doing so, she awards a significant role to her female characters as active, influential participants in the public sphere. From their drawing rooms, her exemplary women take part in discussions that elevate intimate issues to matters of national importance; they influence men's careers through the sociability

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[35]Although only Richard Lovell Edgeworth's name appears on the title page, Butler argues that Maria was responsible for the "two or more years' hard reading, and months of drudgery" involved in writing these essays. *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*, 210.

[36]On this point, see Carville and Butler, Textual Variants to *Patronage*, 6: 287. In her preface to the third edition of the novel, Edgeworth stresses that "several incidents which have been objected to as impossible or improbable were true." Nevertheless, her revisions to later editions focussed almost exclusively on answering these objections.

[37]Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 66.

[38]Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage*, 1814, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vols. 6 and 7, ed. Connor Carville and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 6:267. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

they foster; and they help craft a national identity through their own drawing room deportment.

Patronage charts the waxing and waning fortunes of two distantly-related landed gentry families. For the most part, the Falconers eschew life on their estate, preferring the political and fashionable circles of London. Commissioner Falconer, having neglected his three sons' moral and practical education, relies instead on a precise calculation of favours rendered and receivable to advance his own position with Lord Oldborough, a senior government minister, and to secure appointments for his sons in profitable public positions. In contrast, the Percy family prefers a life of private retirement on their estate, seldom visiting the capital. Nevertheless, Mr. Percy has educated his three sons to take up professions, using principles closely allied to those expressed in *Essays on Professional Education*: a will regulated by reason; a mind enlarged but not overly refined; an "independent, but not unsociable character;" and sole dependence on talent, integrity and effort to ensure their success.[39]

This prescription is applied equally to the Percy daughters. The primary task allotted to young women in the novel is to contract proper marriages, and, as they do with their young men, the Falconer and Percy parents take radically different preparatory approaches. Mrs. Falconer, having ensured her daughters have the requisite accomplishments to entice wealthy suitors, leaves nothing to chance or choice. She is a master strategist in employing "the patronage of fashion" that provides an entrée into select circles even for young women without impressive dowries, and she alone determines whom and when her daughters will wed (6: 123). Mr. and Mrs. Percy, on the other hand, "can not bear the thoughts of fitting

[39]R.L. Edgeworth, *Essays on Professional Education*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Johnson and Co., 1812), 314-15.

[their] daughters out, and sending them to the London market" (6:127). Rosamond and Caroline instead are equipped with a rational education supplemented with practical skills and left to make their own matrimonial decisions. As Mark Schoenfield observes, the Percy daughters learn to consider their part in courtship "as the female equivalent to the masculine work ethic of making one's way ... by labor and merit, not patronage."[40] The Percy approach proves successful, for it is Caroline's character and intellect that attract the highly eligible Count Altenberg, not Georgiana Falconer's polished performances.[41] In Caroline, the Count rejoices to find

> a woman possessing an enlarged, cultivated, embellished understanding, capable of comprehending all his views as a politician, and a statesman; yet without the slightest wish for power, or any desire to interfere in public business, or political intrigue. — Graced with knowledge and taste for literature and science, capable of being extended to the highest point of excellence, yet free from all pedantry or pretension — with wit, conversational talents, and love of good society. (7: 52)

Such an array of attributes suggests that Caroline, much like her brothers, has received the extensive, careful training necessary for the female vocations of conjugal partner and participant in enlightened sociability.

The characteristics that fit her for domestic life also enable Caroline to engage in the political realm. Edgeworth makes a sharp distinction between women who meddle inappropriately in politics and those who make a useful contribution, even from their distant,

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[40]Mark Schoenfield, "Novel Marriages, Romantic Labor, and the *Quarterly Press*," *Prose Studies* 25.1 (2002), 70.

[41]Drawing attention to the relationship between the market economy and courtship practices, in *Practical Education* the Edgeworths use commercial terms to critique an over emphasis on the place of accomplishments in enhancing a young woman's marriageability: "Parents are, and have been for some years, speculating in the same line; consequently the market is likely to be overstocked, and, of course, the value of the commodities must fall" (2: 529).

rural retirement. Mrs. Falconer, known to possess "infinite address, both as a political and hymeneal *intrigante*" (6: 69), finances her family's ambitions for political and social prominence with an influence-peddling scam. The discovery of her scheme irreparably damages her husband's career and eliminates any prospect of advantageous marriages for her daughters. The Percy women, in contrast, are much more discreet in their political engagement, exercising moral suasion rather than attempting power. In the sociability of country house drawing rooms, they observe and take part in discussions on such political and cultural issues as the nature and value of patriotism, or the ability of a translation to convey accurately the meaning of an originary text. However, through her depiction of two separate intimate conversations, Edgeworth shows how private interests — what Commissioner Falconer dismisses as merely "love" — also have the potential to influence society at large.

In the first instance, having learned that her suitor Buckhurst Falconer has seduced, then abandoned, a young country woman, Caroline discusses with her mother and sister how she ought to respond to such behaviour. All three women recognize that the question has ramifications beyond their domestic circle. Rosamond favours a direct confrontation in order to set an example. She argues:

> I am persuaded ... that if women would reprobate young men for such instances of profligacy and cruelty, instead of suffering such conduct to go under the fine plausible general names of gallantry and *wildness*, it would make a greater impression, than all the sermons that could be preached. (6: 118)

Mrs. Percy cautions that such an approach would only compromise Caroline's modesty by forcing her to comment publicly on an indelicate subject, and, moreover, would expose her to charges of prudery. Nevertheless, Mrs. Percy insists that women have a public role to play

in such cases. She argues that young women, spurred by romantic fiction, tend to favour feeling and gallantry in their suitors over principles and morals. In doing so, they encourage behaviour that saps the talents and energies of promising young men. Buckhurst Falconer is a case in point: his intelligence, wit and good humour make him a favourite among London's fashionable set, but love of idleness and pleasure spoil and lure him into debt, eventually forcing him to accept a patronage appointment to an ecclesiastical position. With little aptitude, taste or training for his new calling, he ends by debasing both himself and the church that allows such practices. Mrs. Percy maintains that if women would show through their conduct that they disapprove of debauchery, "it would do essential service" by discouraging libertinism among young men in general. Although Caroline's response to Buckhurst comes too late to save him from the consequences of a faulty upbringing, by dismissing him firmly, she makes a contribution to a political debate that encompasses masculine morality within the governing class and corruption within the established church. The personal values of the Percy women thus play a part in the formation of community norms.

On the second occasion, a discussion concerning a marriage proposal touches on class reorientation in Britain. Rosamond Percy has reservations about accepting an offer from Mr. Gresham, a wealthy, much older City business man. Although she professes concerns about the age gap between them and her lover's fusty habits, it becomes apparent in conversations with her mother and sister that she is most worried about inter-class unions, for, as she states, "A Percy ought not to marry a merchant" (6:217). Rosamond's position is not simply snobbery. She understands that gentry families are strengthened by the financial infusions that accompany mercantile heiresses and that a lower class woman, automatically

raised to her husband's higher status, leaves behind any questionable family roots. However, Rosamond notes, a well born woman who marries beneath her station receives no such offsetting financial or social benefits, and she cannot single-handedly mitigate the vulgarity of the class she enters. Having suspected her of similar sentiments, Rosamond is surprised at her mother's pragmatic defence of alliances between noble and bourgeois families. Mrs. Percy emphasizes improvement within the merchant class and, implicitly, its invigorating effect on both gentry families and the nation as a whole:

> I ought to observe, that merchants are now quite in a different class from what they were at the first rise of commerce in these countries ... Their education, their habits of thinking, knowledge, and manners, are improved, and, consequently, their consideration, their rank in society is raised. In our days, some of the best informed, most liberal, and most respectable men in the British dominions, are merchants. (6: 220)

In the end, Rosamond refuses Gresham for the affective reason that she can esteem but not love him. Nevertheless, she marries out of her class, choosing a young man who must rise in his profession through merit and effort. Through the intimate conversations of the Percy women, Edgeworth demonstrates that, *pace* Commissioner Falconer, love indeed has something to do with the management and business of the world. Decisions relating to courtship and marriage — those mainstay topics of the conjugal realm — resonate in the economic and political sphere, serving as instruments in what Gary Kelly describes as the transformation of "the old hierarchical social and political order" into a "new political nation of professionalized gentry and gentrified professionals."[42]

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[42]Kelly, "Class, Gender, Nation, and Empire," 92.

When she travels to London to care for an ailing relation, Caroline Percy gains first hand experience of this new nation. Through much of *Patronage*, her interest and engagement in political issues are somewhat diffuse and vicarious, based on information gleaned from her brothers' letters from the city and conversations with visitors to the family's estate. However, in the capital she becomes something of a cultural anthropologist as she studies varieties of urban drawing room sociability. Her initial impressions are unfavourable. Through a wealthy connection, Lady Jane Granville, Caroline is introduced to fashionable London society, but the young woman finds such circles intellectually arid and constraining, affording amusement only in observing participants at "their different games of love, interest or ambition" (7:118). She is much more interested in literary society, having learned from her brother Alfred how the witty and wide-ranging discussions held in *conversazioni* presided over by influential hostesses polish the manners and expand the interests of professional men. However, Lady Jane, anxious to find an eligible husband for Caroline, considers it too dangerous for an unattached young woman "to get among the bluestockings," and she is not willing to display her young friend's superior intelligence until she has been safely established in high society (7: 119). Used to the rational, improving environment of her home, Caroline grows restive in London, where she is compelled to endure constant public scrutiny and meaningless conversations. Only when she goes to live with Alfred and his new wife, Sophia, does Caroline learn that "domestic happiness may be naturalized in a capital city" (154).

Central to this felicity is an enlightened urban drawing room that combines the solace of domestic society with the intellectual stimulation of the public sphere. In this site of urban sociability, men and women engage as equals, and both genders benefit from the interaction.

Among her brothers' friends, Caroline meets "professional men of the first eminence," who bring into domestic interiors the discourses Habermas associates with public metropolitan institutions like coffee houses. In Alfred and Sophia's drawing room, Caroline finds herself "placed at once *au courant du jour*, as to everything literary and scientific," and she is able to listen to, learn about and discuss "the first news, the first hints of discoveries, inventions, and literary projects" (7:154). Reciprocating such educational opportunities, Caroline and her sister-in-law also perform important functions, providing restorative comforts to men preoccupied and fatigued with business and, even more important, creating an environment that enhances masculine abilities. Attracted by the sensible, well informed yet elegant conversation of the young women, Alfred's male acquaintances willingly desert more fashionable gatherings in favour of the stimulating sociability offered in the Percy home. Here, these talented men

> appeared in a new point of view, and to the best advantage; without those pretensions and rivalships, with which they sometimes are afflicted in public; or those affectations and singularities, which they often are supposed to assume, to obtain notoriety among persons inferior to them in intellect, and superior in fashion. — Instead of playing, as they sometimes did, a false game to amuse the multitude, they were obliged now to exert their real skill, and play fair with one another. (7: 154)

In *Patronage* therefore, Edgeworth represents the enlightened urban drawing room as a training ground where young men and women equip themselves and each other to make useful contributions to national life. In these places, young women like Caroline Percy stay within conventionally feminine roles, but they are neither marginal nor subordinate. Rather, Edgeworth endows her heroine with dual responsibilities: she is expected to have something

to do with politics as an informed participant in a range of political discourses and to nurture professional excellence among those men who take up roles in the public life of the nation. Despite the importance of these tasks, *Patronage* does not encourage direct female exercise of political power. Like the women in *Belinda* who become actively involved in politics, Mrs. Falconer fails miserably when she tries to usurp masculine sway, and Edgeworth's heroine certainly adheres to Count Altenberg's strictures that women should neither interfere in public business nor engage in political intrigue.

Through two peripheral characters in the novel, however, Edgeworth gestures toward a female figure who successfully takes an active part in public business. Mrs. Hungerford, an elderly friend and advisor to Caroline has, through her knowledge, experience, and merit, assumed authoritative roles as mentor to talented individuals and as mediator between distinguished visitors and her country. As the narrator relates, "No new candidate for fame appeared in any line of life, without desiring to be noticed by Mrs. Hungerford; no traveller of distinction or of literature visited England, without providing himself with letters of introduction" (6: 133). Her daughter Mrs. Mortimer has an equally prominent position, presiding over a London salon that displays "the nature of the best English and best French society, judiciously combined" (6: 133). Clíona Ó Gallchoir has argued that in her early works, Edgeworth was intent on maintaining a "cosmopolitan ethos," in part by emphasizing the positive aspects of French sociability and femininity.[43] Characters in all three of her London novels display an easy familiarity with political and cultural developments in France, signified, for instance, by a thick seeding of French idiom and literary references in their conversations. In her salon, Mrs. Mortimer has adopted the continental customs of

[43]Ó Gallchoir, "Gender, Nation and Revolution," 213.

including in her parties guests of different ranks and interests, and "of mingling feminine and masculine subjects of conversation." Yet in her description of this drawing room sociability, Edgeworth makes an insistent contrast between French manners that are superficial (hence easily acquired) and intrinsic English values. Rather than suggesting a hybrid nationality, she promotes a "thoroughly English" identity, steeped in "sincerity, confidence, and safety," tempered with just a little continental polish, and she makes the female overseer of a London drawing room instrumental in creating an environment in which this identity may flourish (6: 133). In these two brief character sketches which are further developed in the figure of Lady Davenant, Edgeworth proposes that a woman's having something to do with politics might extend well beyond discrete drawing room suasion to encompass a public role of defining and interpreting the English national character.

The Influential Drawing Rooms of *Helen*

After a lengthy hiatus, Edgeworth returned to fiction and the topic of women and politics in her final novel. In this instance, the contrast she draws between French and English sociable practices, especially in relation to female engagement in the public sphere, clearly privileges the latter. Against the indiscretion, vehemence and divisiveness that she ascribes to women who are active in Parisian political circles, Edgeworth presents in Lady Davenant a "thoroughly English" version of a female politician who makes a positive contribution to national life. The figure of Lady Davenant marks a significant departure from Edgeworth's portrayal of exemplary women. Unlike Lady Anne Percival and Mrs. Percy who find contentment entirely within their domestic circle and who exercise their influence on public life indirectly, Lady Davenant insists on fully occupying both the public sphere

and conjugal realm. She has something do with politics not simply because of her rank and connections but also because of her need for a forum in which to use productively her considerable abilities. Her exercise of political power gives her a public presence: she is known to be an important influence on her husband's career, and, like Mrs. Hungerford, she serves in her own right as an authoritative source of information and guidance to distinguished English and foreign acquaintances. At the same time, she displays "a sort of deep, high character" that makes her a moral lodestar to the young people in her domestic circle (13). Lady Davenant is particularly intriguing because, although formidable, she is not infallible. As she juggles her political ambitions with her family responsibilities, she occasionally drops one or the other. Yet, she does not abandon her commitment to the public sphere. Rather, she finds ways to apply her political knowledge to her domestic role. In the figure of Lady Davenant, Edgeworth offers a tantalizing glimpse of an early nineteenth-century response to a challenge associated with mid-twentieth century feminism: that is, achieving an acceptable compromise between the competing demands of home and career.

As much psychological study as courtship novel, *Helen* examines a series of intimate relationships that are complicated by the prospect of public exposure. Lady Davenant's daughter, Lady Cecilia Clarendon, who has "a bad habit of inaccuracy," has married a man for whom love and truth are inseparable (72). When circulation of her personal correspondence and imminent publication in London of a revealing memoir threaten to expose an early indiscretion to her husband, Cecilia convinces her friend Helen Stanley to admit tacitly that she was the woman involved in the affair. As their strategies of evasion become more complex, the women compromise their integrity, risking personal happiness by alienating their respective partners. This domestic crisis plays out amidst public sphere

discourses conducted in the Clarendon Park drawing room. An "aristocracy of birth and talents" comprised from among Lady Davenant's friends, all distinguished members of London's political, financial and cultural circles, lends the place a metropolitan atmosphere despite its rural location (105). Because of the drawing room's liminality, Lady Davenant is able to carry out her dual domestic and public functions simultaneously, keeping a watchful eye on her daughter's fragile marriage and encouraging development of Helen's promising character, even as she forges social alliances that will benefit Lord Davenant's position in the government.

Lady Davenant's initial foray into politics was considerably less disinterested than her later engagement. Her early ambition was stimulated partly by an unhappy love affair, but mostly by wounded female and patriotic pride. Reading Mme de Staël's *Sur la Révolution Française*, she was piqued by the claim that, unlike their French counterparts, English women lacked the skills to wield political influence. In a lengthy confession to Helen, she reveals that "This remark stung me to the quick, for my country and for myself, and raised in me a foolish, vain-glorious emulation, an ambition false in its objects, and unsuited to the manners, domestic habits, and public virtue of our country" (59). Despite her desire to vindicate English womanhood, Lady Davenant adopts as her first political model the heroine of de Staël's *Corinne*, and she soon takes up the practices she later deprecates in female politicians: ignorance, affectation, a lack of principle, and love of power for its own sake. Convinced that she had the right to share with her husband "the honour and pleasures of patronage," she begins to interfere in the business of government appointments (61). Her pride in her reputation for governing her husband causes her to go too far, and she comes close to compromising his honour by seeking a public pension for her mother. Not until

threatened with a marital separation does she recover from "the intoxication of political power" and learn to abhor the corruption with which she has flirted (63).

Though chastened by this experience, Lady Davenant does not vacate the political realm; rather, she determines "if not to be less ambitious, at least to shew it less" (68).To begin her reformation, she studies intensively issues of common concern, replacing the superficial knowledge that "passed very well in London society" with an ability to maintain "close contact with minds of a higher order" (66-7). No longer seeking attention solely for herself, she works to further her husband's interests by forging useful friendships among the illustrious in political and cultural circles. Reviewing a collection of Lady Davenant's books, Helen is impressed by

> the range and variety of the reader's mind. Some of [the books] were presentation copies, as they are called, from several of the first authors of our own, and foreign countries; some with dedications to Lady Davenant; others with inscriptions expressing respect of propitiating favour, or anxious for judgment. (19)

Although she has foresworn intrigue, Lady Davenant treats her engagement with politics as a profession that rightly occupies much of her time and attention. Her mornings are spent in seclusion, reviewing documents and handling correspondence so that, reunited with her friend after a considerable absence, Helen finds the older woman "immersed in papers with a brow of care, deeply intent" (18). At times Lady Davenant's involvement impinges on and seems to crowd out her domestic responsibilities. At one point she breaks off abruptly an intimate discussion with Helen concerning moral courage to catch up on political news from London and abroad, and, at a time when her daughter most needs maternal guidance, Lady Davenant accompanies her husband on his ambassadorial posting to Russia.

Edgeworth emphasizes, however, that such intense involvement in the political realm is made both acceptable and distinctively English by Lady Davenant's deportment and her field of involvement. Responding to a Parisian visitor's description of how political women in his country "qui heurlent comme des demons" contribute to violent partisanship, Lady Davenant points out that women can exercise their power in politics only if they retain their characteristic charm and dignity (210). For her part, she inspires awe and allegiance in the young people around her. Helen finds that, even with familiarity, Lady Davenant's character and abilities "instead of sinking and diminishing, appeared to rise and enlarge, to expand and be ennobled" (19). What further distinguishes Lady Davenant from her French counterparts is that she is able to discern and respect the difference between influencing and interfering in political business. "Female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others," she advises Helen "But this influence should always be domestic, not public — the customs of society have so ruled it" (214). What Edgeworth means by domestic use of political influence is evident in the preoccupations and activities of Lady Davenant. Much like the young Percy women in *Patronage*, her first concern is to bring to light and nurture her husband's talents for public service. As her daughter explains, Lady Davenant "is always thinking of papa's glory and the good of the public" (189). She is also concerned, much like Mr. and Mrs. Percy, that the young woman in her charge has the moral character and intellectual capacity that will fit her for partnership in an enlightened domesticity with a man who will himself assume a public sphere leadership role. If Helen is to marry "a man of superior abilities, and of superior character," Lady Davenant insists, an interest in politics is necessary to elevate her mind "to sympathy with all his pursuits, with all the subjects which claim his attention" (214). Lady Davenant reveals her early political folly to Helen, even at

the risk of losing the young woman's esteem, precisely to underscore the importance of a young woman's proper engagement with the public sphere.

The third, and somewhat unconventional, domestic application of her political skills rests in the formation for public life of a young man, Helen's suitor Granville Beauclerc. In their educational treatises, Edgeworth and her father assigned responsibilities for the various stages of the learning process by gender. *Practical Education* stresses, for instance, that "the female sex are from their situation, their manners, and talents, peculiarly suited to the superintendence of the early years of childhood," and the Edgeworths adapted their manual particularly to suit women readers (2: 713). However, in *Essays on Professional Education*, they indicate that fathers (or their masculine surrogates) must take charge of shaping their sons for careers.[44] As his guardian, General Clarendon is the logical mentor to help direct Beauclerc's considerable intellectual abilities. Yet the men are "too unlike in their habits of mind" for the relationship to succeed (91). Clarendon is highly principled, impatient with dissent, fixed in his opinions and opposed to innovation; defensive in the face of criticism, Granville prefers ideas over values, theory over practice, and anything new. Although he worries about his charge's moral welfare, Clarendon is relieved to yield his formative responsibilities to Lady Davenant. Because of her extensive knowledge of and experience in the public sphere, Granville finds in the older woman "the very friend he wanted and wished for most ardently — one whose mind would not blench at any moral danger, would never shrink from truth in any shape" (92). Under Lady Davenant's patient guidance, Granville learns to develop and defend his political positions based on rational principles, not love of

[44]The Edgeworths are particularly critical of mothers who spoil their sons and then send them away to schools "when the bad habits, moral and intellectual, which [the boys] have by that time acquired, begin to be troublesome at home" (*Essays on Professional Education*, 1:37-8).

novelty. The benefit of her involvement encompasses more than resolution of a long-standing tension within the Clarendon household. In effect, Lady Davenant salvages Granville for a political role, ensuring that his youthful exuberance is safely tamed and redirected within the privacy of the conjugal realm so that he is not branded publicly with dangerously unstable opinions. How the young man will eventually fulfill his ambitions remains unresolved by the novel's end. However, his union with Helen, who is well-schooled by Lady Davenant on the importance of political engagement, suggests he will eventually assume his rightful place as a leader within an enlightened gentry class.

Despite emphasizing Lady Davenant's positive influence on the young people within her domestic circle, Edgeworth does not minimize the risks for women who take part in the public sphere. Because of her high profile, Lady Davenant is vulnerable to attack, and — as Mary Robinson earlier argued in *A Letter to the Women of England* — she discovers that women are at a disadvantage because they "cannot, like men, make their characters known by public actions."[45] Moreover, she is painfully aware that her preoccupation with politics and consequent early neglect of her daughter are the root causes of Cecilia's chronic untruthfulness. Yet Edgeworth does not portray these risks as reasons for women to retreat to a secluded, single minded domesticity. Cecilia and Helen, despite their different upbringing, reveal the same character flaw, a tendency to act on "the mere wish to please" rather than on "some higher and more stable principle" (29). As Caroline Gonda notes, in illustrating the consequences of such weakness, Edgeworth calls into question "the supposedly feminine

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[45]*Helen*, 219. In one of the novel's many sub-plots, her enemies cause Lady Davenant to be suspected of revealing confidential state business entrusted to her by her husband.

and filial" habit of self-sacrifice.[46] In the contrasts she establishes among her principal women characters in the novel, Edgeworth suggests that the domestic woman's selfless service within the conjugal realm, unless also delivered with an eye to the general good, may actually be of less benefit to society than that of a somewhat self-centred female politician like Lady Davenant, who insists on developing and devoting to the fullest degree the abilities that enable her to participate in the public sphere.

Much as she did with *Belinda*, Edgeworth concludes *Helen* with a scene set in a liminal London drawing room. Here, before a diverse audience, Lady Davenant uses the acumen and authority she has gained through her involvement in political life to rehabilitate the reputations of Cecilia and Helen and to rescue the Clarendon marriage. Edgeworth's narrative resolution, bringing the political into contact with the conjugal, illustrates Anne Mellor's argument that women writers of the Romantic period used the novel to promote a new ideology that located "the salvation of the nation in the reform of the British family."[47] Central to this doctrine is a woman, not unlike Edgeworth herself, who has been practically and rationally educated to take responsibility for herself and her household, and whose influence infiltrates and influences society as a whole. Where Edgeworth makes a distinctive contribution to this model is in her suggestion that the flow of influence between the conjugal and political realms is bi-directional. If a character like Lady Davenant points to the reshaping of political life for female involvement, she also demonstrates that a woman's having something to do with politics is equally important in achieving the enlightened domesticity that will serve as the basis of national reform.

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[46]Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters' Fictions, 1790-1834* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996), 236.
[47]Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, 104.

EPILOGUE

In a recent article in the "The Talk of the Town" section of *The New Yorker* (itself a direct descendent of early nineteenth century *feuilletons*), Nick Paumgarten describes watching an employee count, by gender, people using New York City's Bryant Park in order to determine the civic health of this public space. Once notorious as the unsavoury and unsafe haunt of drug pushers, prostitutes and vagrants, the park has been reclaimed over the past two decades for use by those who live and work in the surrounding streets. In addition to providing cafes, rest rooms, benches, green lawn and flower beds in the summer, and a winter skating rink, a key strategy of the Bryant Park Corporation is to situate this space in what Jürgen Habermas terms "the Town" (or market of cultural products) component of the public sphere. Abutting the New York Public Library, the park attracts mid-day crowds with plays, opera performances and book fairs, and each September during Fashion Week, it is transformed into a showcase for American clothing designers. Park officials know these reclamation efforts are succeeding when women visitors to the site outnumber men, thus the need for regular counting of lunchtime patrons. Corporation President Dan Biederman explains that "Women pick up on visual cues of disorder better than men do ... They're your purest customers."[1]

This reliance on feminine assessments of urban spatial quality reflects the influence of urbanist William H. Whyte (1917-1999), one of the original architects of a 1980 renewal project for the park. Perhaps best known for his study of the stultifying effects of corporate

[1]Nick Paumgarten, "Field Studies: Girl-Counter," *The New Yorker* September 3 and 10 (2007), 42.

culture and suburban life, *The Organization Man* (1956), in 1969 Whyte also initiated the Street Life Project, a sixteen year long study that used innovative survey, observation and recording techniques to quantify how New Yorkers use the streets and other public spaces of their city. Whyte was particularly interested in why some open plazas connected to office buildings were more successful than others in promoting vibrant, mixed uses. He noticed that certain design features tended to promote sociability: flexible seating arrangements, provision of cafes and food carts, the visual interest of surrounding retail shop windows and walkways that encourage "schmoozing," as well as spontaneous, idiosyncratic movement. An infallible indication that such measures are working, he argued, is the presence of women: "The male-female ratio is one to watch. If a plaza has a markedly low proportion of women, something is wrong. Conversely, if it has a high proportion, the plaza is probably a good and well-managed one and has been chosen as such."[2] He suggests that what makes women particularly astute consumers of urban space is not necessarily their fear of vulnerability in suspect areas of the city, but rather their discrimination. According to Whyte, women are "more sensitive to annoyances," and they will object to uncollected trash, uninteresting surroundings and a lack of amenities. On the other hand, they are more likely than men to notice and respond positively to any pleasant features an urban site offers, such as a water feature, greenery or art installations. Whyte's work leads to the deduction that the greater the number of women in a city, the more attractive and stimulating it is likely to be.

Although scarcely setting themselves up as urban planners, the women writers whose novels I discuss in this dissertation seem to have intuitively reached a similar conclusion: namely, cities are better places when women are included in urban life. In their fiction, they

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[2]William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1990), 106.

represent their heroines as "purest customers" of the metropolis, acutely aware of the problems arising from urbanization, yet determined to seize the opportunities the city offers to improve themselves and the places and institutions they inhabit.

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