MAKING STATUS LEGIBLE: SELF-WRITING IN THE

LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This project analyzes discourses of social legibility in eighteenth-century self-writing to argue that status-based conceptions of identity continued to influence perceptions of the self in society. Studies of the eighteenth century have been dominated by a "rise of the middle class" narrative that tends to underestimate the resilience and continued relevance of conceptions of rank as an essentialized or innate quality. However, social legibility—the idea that status was encoded on the body through clothing, manners, beauty, grace, and countenance—continue to function, particularly in the self-writing of this period. By examining these epistolary novels, fictional memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, and letters, this project clarifies how people imagined social hierarchy operating at the level of the body. The ways people recognize, enact, theorize, and represent status help us better understand how identity was reconceived between the Restoration in 1600 and the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

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For my parents, who raised me to be curious, to continue learning, and to value hard work and a job well done.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing to his illegitimate son and namesake in 1749, Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of

Chesterfield, reproduces comments from a Venetian lady he has commissioned to assess

the younger Philip's genteel demeanor. When the lady disparages young Stanhope for

lacking "that easy, noble carriage, which would be proper for him," Chesterfield takes the

opportunity to educate his son on the importance of appearances:

> The world is taken by the outside of things, and we must take the world as it is;
>
> you nor I cannot set it right. I know, at this time, a man of great quality and
>
> station, who has not the parts of a porter; but raised himself to the station he is in,
>
> singly by having a graceful figure, polite manners, and an engaging address;
>
> which, by the way, he only acquired by habit; for he had not sense enough to get
>
> them by reflection. Parts and habit should conspire to complete you. You will
>
> have the habit of good company, and you have reflection in your power. (185)[1]

Chesterfield worries that appearance is replacing substance, particularly with regard to

status distinctions. Indeed, it is unsurprising, given his own social position, that

Chesterfield opposes the notion that performance alone can make a gentleman. He

advocates instead a fusion of outward comportment and inner quality, cultivating proper

manners by "reflection" rather than mere "habit." In other words, genteel behavior is the

outward manifestation of inward virtue, which a young man such as Philip Stanhope can

develop through introspection rather than practice.

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[1] All primary source quotations in this dissertation retain the author's original
capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and use of italics, unless otherwise noted.

This letter is one of many written over the course of his son's adult life, published in 1774 as *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son*. In these missives Chesterfield instructs his son on the breadth of topics he considers essential to true nobility. Self-presentation— from the care of one's teeth to the nobility of one's carriage, as discussed above—is a key facet of such an identity. Chesterfield's simultaneous emphasis on appearance and denigration of the world of appearances reveal a schism between older and newer iterations of social performance. Although he bemoans a culture "taken by the outside of things," Chesterfield knows that social performance and visual distinctions of status bolster aristocratic legitimacy on both an individual and structural level. His *Letters* provide extensive, detailed, and exacting standards of appearance and behavior to ensure that people recognize young Stanhope as a gentleman. However, for Chesterfield appearances are meant to reflect merit, the inward quality that distinguishes the true gentleman. What Chesterfield objects to in what he sees as a cultural fixation on externals is that such characteristics, rather than being read as an index of an internal virtue indicative of truly noble status, are instead read as valuable in themselves.

Many other eighteenth-century writers share Chesterfield's fear of hypocrisy in a world of appearances, particularly since outward appearance was so strongly tied to hierarchical distinctions of rank. This project studies these disparate views of social performance and display as part of a larger discourse of social legibility. I analyze social legibility, specifically representations of status as embodied or inherent, using first-person texts such as novels, journals, autobiographies, and letters to argue that traditional notions of rank as innate and essential persist, creating a shared visual epistemology that influences individual identity construction as well as social interaction. Early modern

theories of social legibility posit that the body externalizes status, and this concept thus encompasses fashion as well as differences based in the body itself: mannerisms, behaviors, physical appearance, carriage, attractiveness, and so forth. Within this system there is no discrepancy between who one is and how one appears. However, in its eighteenth-century iteration it was almost impossible to maintain perfect correspondence between being and seeming, a fact reflected in the complex attitudes toward performance these texts register. The project of social legibility demanded display, but the act of performing was frequently denigrated as hypocritical or artificial. Despite these complications, the impulse to reconcile bodily surface and innate nature evident in many texts of this period indicates the continued influence of traditional notions of status based in essential difference and expressed on and through the body.

This project uses first-person texts to investigate the representational systems that governed how people imagined and enacted their own identities and how they read other people in social interactions. With the goal of expanding our understanding of the interplay between social hierarchies, identity, representation, and the body in the long eighteenth century, I combine literary and cultural studies to examine these narratives. From a cultural studies perspective, these pieces of self-writing are artifacts that illustrate how people conceptualized social legibility and status during the eighteenth century. They depict the experience of inhabiting a body on which social hierarchies are displayed and enacted. Images and non-literary texts supplement interpretations of the primary texts and illustrate the visual criteria used to place people hierarchically. The primary theoretical approach for this project, however, is literary. Employing theories of the novel, autobiography, and epistolary genres, I examine how the narrative strategies and

generic conventions of these texts mediate identity construction, particularly in terms of social legibility. How did writers make status legible within their texts? What were their assumptions about status and identity? Where is the boundary between nature and art in terms of a person's rank, to use the popular distinction deployed by many eighteenth-century writers?

This dissertation intervenes in eighteenth-century studies in two ways. First, it follows and expands upon current attempts within literary criticism to recognize fully the continued dominance of the aristocracy—socially, politically, and economically—during this period. As Nicholas Hudson points out in a recent article, literary critics have tended to embrace a narrative of social change that has been largely abandoned by historians (565). Literary scholarship has focused on identifying an emerging middle class, following Ian Watt by connecting the rise of the novel with the increasing power and influence of this social group.[2] Many historians now situate middle-class ascendancy much later, in the last two decades of the eighteenth century or after. The "rise of the middle class" narrative can thus be misleading in its representation of eighteenth-century life, conferring shared middle-class interests and values onto a group of people who did not necessarily see themselves as part of the same social group. New work by literary scholars such as Hudson and Scarlet Bowen has attempted to bridge this gap between historical and literary conceptions of social order in the eighteenth century by focusing on the conservatism of eighteenth-century literature, particularly the novel. In its examination of social legibility, a conservative system of status differentiation, this

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[2] Though there have been challenges to, and revisions of, elements of Watt's thesis, it is still commonplace for literary critics to follow his main assertion: that the novel is rooted in middle-class values and experiences.

project will extend these efforts to gain a more accurate understanding of how traditional beliefs about the social hierarchy inflected representations of eighteenth-century social organization.

Analyzing the continued relevance of notions of status as innate or inherent requires a more thorough examination of the body's role in social and individual identity construction, which is the second contribution this dissertation makes to eighteenth-century studies. Although studies of the body have advanced our knowledge of early modern and eighteenth-century ideas of race and sex, class has been largely ignored in terms of its conception at the level of the body, with the notable exception of attire. As Thomas Laqueur and Roxann Wheeler have demonstrated, sex and race shift from being understood as fluid categories based on culture to static, binary divisions based on biology. Dror Wahrman argues that class follows the same trajectory—malleable to fixed—in terms of politics: by the end of the century, one's class determined one's politics (*Making* 145-53). While Wahrman's study makes groundbreaking comparisons between the body and evolving eighteenth-century conceptions of identity categories, his analysis assumes that "class" was understood as almost entirely cultural during this period. Instead, I follow Michael McKeon in seeing class as having an inverse relationship to sex and race: conceived as primarily biological at the beginning of the century, class becomes understood as essentially cultural by the century's end ("Historicizing" 305). This provocative claim—part of McKeon's larger argument about the importance of historicizing concepts like "patriarchy"—deserves more study. Perceptions of status as innate or biological continue to influence textual and social expressions of identity, and theorizing the body vis-à-vis social hierarchies is essential to

a full understanding of how people imagine, enact, legitimize, and represent distinctions of rank.

Social Organization in the Eighteenth Century

A brief overview of the historical and literary contexts of this project will clarify how social legibility as an ideological practice influences identity formation in first-person texts composed in the long eighteenth century. The persistence of a biological or essentialized understanding of status is a vestige of social hierarchy understood as "rank," while conceptions of social difference as cultural indicate a "class" system. Early modern social hierarchies based on rank or degree relied almost exclusively on social position by birth, and they were thought to reflect divine hierarchy, what Penelope Corfield calls the "Great Chain of Being" model ("Class" 103). "Class," on the other hand, designates socio-economic position, and it gains currency toward the end of the eighteenth century as a means of describing changes in wealth distribution (112).[3] However, these relatively straightforward definitions conceal the vast ideological chasm between these two systems, reflected in the differing opinions about social order expressed within eighteenth-century sources and evident in the continued debate within historical and literary scholarship regarding the emergence of the class system.

The idea that class-based systems of social hierarchy arose in the eighteenth-century has attracted much scholarly attention. The most famous literary example is Watt's *The Rise of the English Novel* (1957), which argues for a concurrent emergence of

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[3] See also work by Asa Briggs and Steven Wallech, who use etymological evidence to argue for a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rise of the class system. They assert that "class" is increasingly used during this period as a term to describe social relations, replacing "estate," "degree," "kind," and other terms which had been used to articulate hierarchies (typically determined by ancestry) earlier in the eighteenth century.

the middle class and rise of the novel as a genre during the eighteenth century. Watt's

theory assumes that middle-class readers share distinct interests and values, a view shared

by historian E. P. Thompson. Although he situates the emergence of the middle class

much later, between 1780 and 1832, Thompson in *The Making of the English Working

Class* defines the class system as "largely determined by the productive relations into

which men are born—or enter voluntarily" in which "some men, as the result of common

experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as

between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and

usually opposed to) theirs" (9-10). This quotation indicates the centrality of conflict to

Thompson's formulation of the class system, conflict that was anathema to previous

conceptualizations of social hierarchy based on rank or degree, which assumed near-

universal acceptance of one's social position and reciprocity between social groups

(Corfield "Class" 114). Indeed, Thompson argues that class struggle precedes and creates

class consciousness, and "class" can therefore function as a useful heuristic for

eighteenth-century studies, provided scholars avoid assuming that this term refers to a

modern tripartite class structure ("Eighteenth Century" 146-50).[4] Thompson and Watt's

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[4] McKeon makes a similar point, suggesting that the emergence of "class" terminology in the nineteenth century is the endpoint—not the beginning—of class consciousness (*Origins* 164-7). According to McKeon, status-based power was deformed by capitalist and commercial interests, although it maintained the appearance of unchanging stability (167). Although Thompson emphasizes conflict between social groups while McKeon thinks status and class are interwoven, they both see the fact that "class" emerges as both concept and recognized social structure during the nineteenth century as proof of a rising class society in the eighteenth century.

emphasis on a nascent class society are typical of mid-twentieth century scholarship of the eighteenth century.[5]

However, some historians dispute these narratives of a rising middle class, seeing eighteenth-century society as more traditional and less modern. J.C.D. Clark's revisionist *English Society, 1688-1832* argues that these types of studies subscribe to an inaccurate interpretation of history that reads eighteenth-century politics, culture, and economics in light of later developments, notably the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle class.[6] Such an approach is teleological, focused on providing evidence to support an argument of emerging radicalism and class warfare while ignoring what Clark argues is the most prominent characteristic of the British long eighteenth-century: social and political stability maintained by the hegemony of Anglican aristocracy and monarchy (1).[7] Although he thinks Clark too rigid in his emphasis on the stability of Georgian society, Roy Porter agrees that aristocratic power did not decline over the course of the eighteenth century, as one would expect to see if a middle class were asserting itself against aristocratic interests. Porter traces aristocratic fortunes from the crisis of the

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[5] See also Peter Earle and Christopher Hill (*The Century of Revolution* and *The English Revolution*). Hill situates the rise of the middle class even earlier, in the seventeenth century.

[6] For a more recent example of a historian challenging the existence of a middle class during the eighteenth century, see H. R French. See also Peter Laslett, who argues that pre-industrial England was a one-class society (22-23).

[7] More recently, Wahrman has stated that a history of the middle class such as Thompson's "cannot be written" because such an approach asserts a stability and coherence over the concept of "the middle class" that does not match the historical record (*Imagining* 1). Corfield makes a similar point, arguing that language both describes and creates; in other words, modern scholars produce "class," at least in part, by naming it as a specific phenomenon ("Introduction" 28).

seventeenth century (to borrow Lawrence Stone's term) to dominance in the eighteenth

century, arguing that the strength of this group "explains the phenomenal tenacity of the

English social hierarchy" (*English Society* 57-9, 66).[8] In terms of wealth, political

influence, the health of estates, and social authority, the aristocracy remained powerful,

indicating the continued relevance of status-based social distinctions.[9]

Status-based social hierarchy legitimizes its distinctions of rank by naturalizing

differences. McKeon in his study of the English novel calls this system "aristocratic

ideology" and describes it thus:

> The traditional terms of social distinction in early modern England—'degree,'
>
> 'estate,' 'order,' 'rank'—are variously based on an idea of status derived from the
>
> personal possession, or nonpossession, of honor. And honor is a quality that
>
> points, through the crucial mediation of repute, both outward and inward. On the

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[8] See also G.E. Mingay, who argues for the "political and social hegemony of the owners of landed property," the aristocracy and gentry (5); H.G. Habakkuk, who links social stability to the increased land holdings by conservative elites and the protection of these estates through legal means such as entail, in contrast to the rapid and widespread purchase of land by professionals and merchants which characterized the period between 1600 and 1640; and Jeremy Black (99-101).

[9] As this debate illustrates, "class" is not a neutral term, but rather one invested with considerable ideological weight due to its fundamental role in how we understand and experience modernity and post-modernity (Wahrman, *Imagining* 1-14). To recognize this fact and to use historically accurate terminology, I will avoid using "class" to reference social position when referring to eighteenth-century texts. While eighteenth-century texts do use "class" to describe social groups, for much of the century this term is equivalent to "type" or "sort," broad labels that do not equate to "class" in its modern sense of class conflict or productive role. While acknowledging the point that the development of the tripartite class system has its roots in eighteenth-century culture (if not earlier), using "class" terminology to describe eighteenth-century social and economic relations tends to obscure rather than clarify how individuals viewed their social position. "Rank," "degree," "status," "position," "condition," and descriptions such as "the quality" and "the genteel" are terms that do not carry as many modern ideological connotations, which makes them generally more useful in describing eighteenth-century social hierarchies.

one hand, it is a function of ancestry and lineage; less obligatory, but likely to

confirm the primary facts of ancestry, are other external circumstances like wealth

and political power. In this respect, honor is equivalent to an internal element of

'virtue.' The notion of honor as a unity of outward circumstance and inward

essence is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of

society by status, and it is so fundamental as to be largely tacit. What it asserts is

that social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and

expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order. This assumption lies at the heart

of…aristocratic ideology. (*Origins* 131).[10]

Innate qualities of virtue and honor are part of this system, but so are physical

characteristics. Aristocrats, by virtue of their better diet, environment, and education

appeared healthier and more refined, but people attributed these qualities to natural

differences (131-2; see also Porter, *English Society* 16). This correspondence of internal

and external qualities helps to explain why early modern texts so often equate biological

characteristics such as physical beauty with high social class, and why characters of high

birth demonstrate innate honor or virtue. Aristocratic ideology naturalizes the economic

advantages (resulting in better nutrition and dress, and subsequently an enhanced physical

appearance) and training (resulting in apparently effortless artistry, wit, and manners) of

the upper classes. It aligns quality or high rank with virtues such as honor and morality,

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[10] Clark refers to a similar set of values as the "aristocratic ethic" (44-8).

physical health or attractiveness, and fashionable display. At its most basic level, it positions status as an aspect of nature rather than culture.[11]

Social legibility—the idea that status could and should be visually apparent—is thus inextricable from aristocratic ideology. Studies of both early modern and eighteenth-century social legibility commonly focus on clothing as an aspect of hierarchical differentiation, particularly since such distinctions were legally enforced via sumptuary laws.[12] However, as Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass argue, there is no "surface" and "depth" division of the early modern body, in which clothing is merely adornment (2). Sumptuary legislation did not distinguish between otherwise identical bodies; rather, legal codes of attire were meant to reflect and reinforce what were assumed to be fundamental innate or bodily differences. Alan Hunt argues that they were "representations and re-presentations of the social hierarchy" (118). In other words, sumptuary laws do not create difference; rather, they codify preexisting and essentialized differences.[13] Attire is an extension of the other visual factors that distinguished "the quality" from everyone else. For example, Figures 1 and 2 (next page), taken from François Nivelon's courtesy book, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior* (1737) illustrate how attire is only one component of a genteel demeanor that is also expressed through posture, gracefulness, and gesture.

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[11] Because of this belief, the elite quite literally lived by different rules. The Game Laws made hunting and fishing available only to wealthy landowners, and aristocrats were only rarely incarcerated or executed for crimes other than treason (Black 95).

[12] The first English sumptuary legislation appeared in 1363, and increasingly restrictive laws became common in the sixteenth century under Elizabeth I (Hunt 303, 312-21).

[13] This is not to say that such laws were entirely successful. Indeed, Hunt and McKeon both see sumptuary laws as a response to social instability rather than stasis (Hunt 150; McKeon, "Historicizing" 305).

Figure 1. Bartolomew Dandridge. "To Offer or Receive" illustration. From François Nivelon's *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*. Engraving and etching, 1737. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 2. Bartolomew Dandridge. "Walking" illustration. From François Nivelon's *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*. Engraving and etching, 1737. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Clothing is the most well known but by no means the only medium of visual status distinction. Although the language of rank was complex, it was not abstract but instead based in "specific details of status that were tangible and visible to the eighteenth-century observer" (Wallech 410). The public expression of rank was deeply embedded in English customs and rituals that in some cases stretched back to the medieval period. These visual cues of status—wigs, coats of arms, livery, traveling by carriage, and so forth—reinforced the idea that the social hierarchy reflected essential difference. The details that governed interactions and ceremonies, including where a person sat (such as in church), bowing, and donning and doffing hats perpetually reminded people of their

social position relative to others (see Figure 3). People also mapped social differentiation geographically: a fashionable address in London was as important a sign of status as one's clothing (Porter, *London* 95-6). Verbal cues buttressed visual systems of differentiation, as people publicly acknowledged rank through traditions of address ("my lord"; "her ladyship") and distinguished themselves and others by virtue of polite speech.[14]
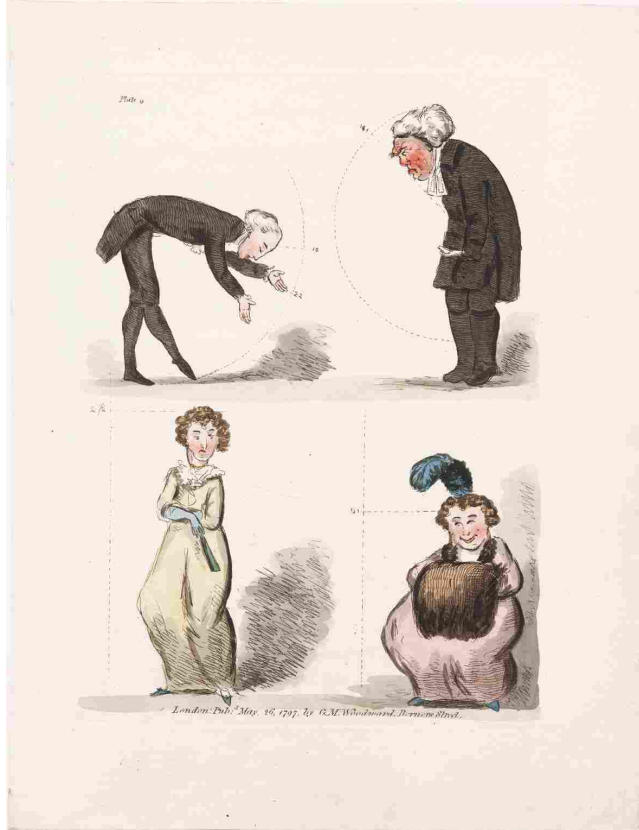
Figure 3. G.M. Woodward,"[Curtesy]." Hand colored etching and engraving, 1797. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

The practice of visually marking social distinctions was not limited to aristocrats: Marcellus Laroon's *The Criers and Hawkers of London* (1687), an illustrated guide to London street vendors, represents a tradition popular since the middle ages of identifying lower-class artisans by a particular costume (Shesgreen 35). Prostitutes, criminals, and beggars were marked by particular clothing, branding, and badges, respectively (Hunt 129-32). While not all of these traditions continue into the eighteenth century, many do,

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[14] Language was just as distinct a marker of rank as clothing; see Susan M. Fitzmaurice and Carey McIntosh. As McIntosh asserts, "people's use of language in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England correlated directly with their position in society" (8).

and they indicate the extent to which English social interactions were rooted in visual (as well as oral and geographical) distinctions of status or identity.

Enacting Identity: The Problem of Performance

Although the theory of social legibility asserted a perfect mimetic relationship between status and its representation via the body, the much messier practice of inhabiting a social position required bodily regulation and performance. Genteel behavior was highly codified and policed on an individual and societal level. This element of self-fashioning—deliberately adopting a particular set of manners, clothing, and habit lifestyle practices—was a practice inherited from the Renaissance, if not earlier, as Stephen Greenblatt and Norbert Elias demonstrate. Greenblatt sees such deliberate self-presentation as evidence of an "increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2). Self-fashioning therefore introduced a schism between interior virtue and outward manners in the behavior of early modern elites (Scholz, *Body Narratives* 41). Examining the courtly ideal of *sprezzatura*, Susanne Scholz addresses how this mode of behavior, in which art masquerades as nature, "blurs the boundaries between the 'real' and the 'affected' in a way that renders this distinction almost obsolete" (43). In terms of status identity, these practices of self-fashioning challenged aristocratic ideology by implying that courtiers were made rather than born and by making it impossible to tell the difference between natural manners and artful performance.

Changes in eighteenth-century culture only intensified the conflict between the competing systems of early modern social legibility and self-fashioning. The fact that the aristocracy possessed a great deal of power and influence does not negate the fact that

people witnessed vast alterations in social, political, and economic structures during this period. As Paul Langford in *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, asserts, commerce was an increasingly important aspect of daily life that altered the social hierarchy.[15] Wealthy merchants and professionals gained social and economic power during this period and frequently allied themselves with the lesser gentry, self-identifying as "the genteel" or "the polite" (Vickery 13-15). One way in which people adjusted to these changes to the social structure was by adopting the dictates of "polite" society According to John Brewer, "politeness" described a standard of behavior and ethics designed to mediate the effects of an increasingly commercial culture.[16] Merchants and professionals consumed conduct books and periodicals such as the *Spectator* and *Tatler* that attempted to refine their conduct and form them into gentlemen, as Lawrence Klein reminds us.[17] But unlike Renaissance self-fashioning, which attempted to align status by birth with behavior (in other words, molding gentlemen-by-birth into polished courtiers), politeness could transform merchants or lawyers into gentlemen. This mode of social intercourse thus inaugurated a more porous division between social groups.

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[15] Langford, disputing Clark, argues that the rise of commercial society leads to a rise of the middle class. In contrast to Thompson, he characterizes the relationship between the middle class and the upper classes as one of emulation rather than conflict (*Polite* 66-67). While I agree with Langford's description of the pressures on the category of gentility that such emulation inaugurates, I disagree that this change should be read as evidence of a rising middle class.

[16] See also Barker-Benfield xxv, Goring 20-5, Klein 362-66, Langlord 1-4, and Pocock 48-9.

[17] Language was an important part of the "polite" reformation of manners, as Fitzmaurice argues, particularly in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Looking at these patterns of social behavior, some critics have theorized that performance was the most important attribute of eighteenth-century identity construction. Wahrman contrasts the "modern self"—concerned with authenticity and truth to interior emotion, motivation, and morality—with the histrionic sense of self that he argues dominated the long eighteenth century until the 1780s (*Making* xviii). This *ancien régime* of identity is best represented by the idea of the world as a stage peopled by actors (*theatrum mundi*), a metaphor used frequently in eighteenth century texts to describe how social interactions were performance-oriented and circumstance-dependent rather than issuing, unmediated, from an interior realm of selfhood. Richard Sennett offers a similar interpretation of eighteenth-century public life (from a sociological rather than cultural studies perspective) as "playacting," or a performance for others (33-4).[18] At least in terms of status, there is tension between the belief in innate status posited by aristocratic ideology and the conception of social position as largely performative and self-fashioned.

The idea that status identity could be performed (rather than merely embodied) was bolstered by what Langford calls the "debasement of gentility," the result of a two-fold development in eighteenth-century society (*Polite* 60). First, as we have seen, merchants and professionals were establishing closer ties with the gentry and gaining social prominence. As they gained wealth and esteem they adopted titles such as "Esquire" and "gentleman," meaning that these titles lost their specificity and exclusivity

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[18] Both Wahrman and Sennett caution modern readers to avoid viewing performance-oriented social roles as "inauthentic." Such a perspective rests on the idea—assumed to be universal but in fact historical—that the self is divided into external appearance (show, display, or performance) and internal selfhood (innate, authentic, and unchanging). Modern readers, reflecting modern values, tend to view external performance as inferior to the "truth" of interior selfhood.

(65-6).[19] Second, the expansion of empire and the rise of commercialization made luxury goods much more widely available, and such consumption was unrestricted, as sumptuary legislation had been almost completely repealed by the eighteenth century[20]. Fashion was an important aspect of social legibility, and it was now possible for a much broader segment of the population to dress in a genteel manner. A booming second-hand clothing trade also facilitated the circulation of elite fashion (Ginsburg 121-22). As Langford notes, one of the main effects of the debasement of gentility was the rise of this status as a matter of performance rather than nature: "common observation that in England the appearance of a gentleman was seemingly sufficient to make him one, at least in the sense of his acceptance as such by others" (*Polite* 66).[21]

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[19] Keith Wrightson argues that by the eighteenth century there was no specific criteria distinguishing a gentleman from a commoner (40); see also Porter for the flexibility of the category of "gentleman" (*English Society* 50).

[20] Sumptuary laws were appealed in England in 1604, but efforts to pass new sumptuary legislation frequently arose in the seventeenth century (Hunt 321-3). Hunt characterizes the failure of these laws as due to indecision rather than opposition (323). He does not see sumptuary laws disappearing during the seventeenth century but rather suggests that the impulse of such legislation gets subsumed into economic protectionism (324, 357-91). What Hunt's analysis suggests is that the logic of sumptuary laws continues to operate in the eighteenth century, although in an altered form that does not restrict purchases by rank. See also Jennie Batchelor 8; Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick 73-5; Langford, *Polite* 65-71; Neil McKendrick, Introduction 1-5; and Jessica Munns and Penny Richards 12.

[21] Porter expresses the caveat that, while English society was not a caste society and upward mobility was possible (and was a point of pride for the English), in practice ascending to the top of the social ladder was difficult (*English Society* 50-1). The realm of the elite remained exclusive and difficult to break into: "the league table of wealth and status, headed by great landowners, was much the same in 1800 as a century earlier" (96). According to Mingay, there were about 23,000 gentry in a population of about ten million in 1800; the number of gentry had grown slightly (from around 18,000) while the population had doubled (3-6). However, English society was characterized by fine gradients of rank (unlike Continental societies, which were essentially divided between the very rich and very poor), and moving slightly upward or downward was common

The perception of gentility as a performance led to fears that visual distinctions of status were collapsing and that people could no longer rely on appearances to gauge a person's social position. There was widespread anxiety over the fact that display—in terms of clothing, emotion, virtue, and status—could be feigned or fashioned. Such social deception haunts eighteenth-century texts. People were particularly concerned about the failure of attire to reliably communicate status. Simply by changing their dress people could adopt a different identity than their status at birth, what Klein refers to as "social transvestitism" and Corfield calls "social mutability (Klein 375, Corfield, "Class" 105). The frequent, almost obsessive, commentary on the failure of clothing to function as an accurate indicator of rank suggests the extent to which people perceived external signs of status as central to a functional social hierarchy. Hypocrisy represented more than just a risk to individuals, who might be tricked into a disadvantageous marriage or business arrangement; rather, it was a threat to social order itself.

Yet the preoccupation with hypocrisy in eighteenth-century texts does not necessarily mean that social legibility was failing as an ideological practice. Rather, how writers stage hypocrisy in literary narratives indicates an underlying belief that appearance should correspond to reality. Writers frequently attempt to enact and maintain opposing binaries of being and seeming, truth and deception, activity and passivity, and nature and art in their texts. While these texts frequently dramatize the breakdown of visual distinctions of status, particularly in terms of attire, they just as often reassert a correspondence between being and seeming, in which impostors are unmasked and social order stabilized. Characters within these texts may be imposed upon, but, particularly in

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(Porter, *English Society* 49; McKendrick, "Consumer Revolution" 20). For example, a wealthy merchant already self-styled as an urban gentleman could purchase property and become a member of the gentry. Conversely, the second son of a member of the lesser gentry might seek a career as a clergyman or naval officer.

novels, authors often drop hints to readers as to a person's true status by describing behaviors or morals that do not correspond to their given social position. For example, the popular literary trope of the deceptive marriage, in which a marriage is contracted based on the apparent wealth and high status of one or both parties and later revealed to be mere show, illustrates people's fear of social imposture. But in most of these tales the writer drops hints that the reader, if not the protagonist, registers, making him or her aware that things are not what they seem. Other texts use self-consciousness to telegraph low status and artlessness to indicate high status. These plot structures reinforce the legitimacy of social legibility. The obsession with hypocrisy indicates that people in eighteenth-century society did not view status as merely a matter of performance. Instead, they repeatedly insist that status is an aspect of nature that can be distinguished, given the correct interpretive tools and perspective.

As distinctions of status via fashion decline, the body assumes a new importance in communicating status in eighteenth-century texts, and, in doing so, countering hypocrisy. Paul Goring in his study of sensibility and performance in the eighteenth century argues that the discourse of politeness was visual and somatic as well as linguistic: "Self-evidently the body functions as one of the primary texts in such visual exchange. With its easy organic potential for impoliteness and its insistent ever-presence in public situations, the body was a key site for the business of constructing politeness, serving as a visible locus for the inscription of legible notions of civic virtue" (24). While Goring (following Brewer, G.J. Barker-Benfield, Klein, Langord, and J.G.A Pocock) sees polite culture as a product of the influx of commercialism, we must also remember that people inherit the notion of visual distinctions of status imprinted upon the body from

rank-based systems of social hierarchy that assume essential difference. Polite culture mediated social relations between the aristocratic and commercial worlds, but it also marked a boundary between polite or genteel social groups and everyone else, and, as Goring argues, that boundary was made legible on the surface of the body.

Eighteenth-century writers frequently evaluate social behavior using the commonplace of nature versus art. Although this framework is often used in aesthetic theory, its most common application during this period is to questions of the body in social interactions: attire, manners, conversation, and so forth. As Greenblatt and Catherine Hall remind us, how a culture delineates these categories provides information about that culture: "Like other crucial distinctions, the nature/culture divide should be read, in the manner of structural linguistics, as a key binary opposition, loaded with information for deciphering the various social codes one encounters in historical studies" (8). The fact that eighteenth-century writers so strenuously attempt to separate nature and art in terms of visual displays of status indicates the extent to which they were attempting to sort out the ideological implications of this distinction. As David Hawkes argues, ideology warps our understanding of how ideas, matter, and representation interact.[22] By examining how writers separate natural from cultural aspects of rank within their texts, we can better understand how the aristocratic social hierarchy affected representation at the level of the body. Writers during this period repeatedly describe social position in

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[22] Although Hawkes is particularly interested in analyzing a postmodern ideological frame, he sees ideology as a dialectical progression of ideas stretching back to the Judeo-Christian concept of idolatry. This analysis indicates that some eighteenth-century writers would have been aware of the distorting power of tradition and social hierarchy upon how people viewed the world.

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terms of embodiment, indicating their allegiance to a system of rank understood as essential, innate, and imprinted upon the body.

Self-Writing and the Eighteenth-Century Literary Landscape

Despite widespread social changes and the decline of codified status distinctions, eighteenth-century writers continued to view social legibility as a fact of life. It formed an important aspect of individual identity construction and social interaction. We can read the descriptive details authors include about their protagonists (in novels) or themselves (in letters, diaries, and autobiographies) as social legibility codified into literary convention. As such, these details illustrate the tropes of visual display to which eighteenth-century viewers, as well as readers, were attuned. But as we have seen, authors frequently express the fear that gentility, a category traditionally aligned with status by birth, depends upon art (performance) rather than nature (the innate qualities of good breeding). The boundary of genteel and non-genteel generates friction within these texts, as writers attempt to reaffirm social legibility as a stable interpretive system for distinguishing these two categories and, more importantly, situate themselves within the genteel ranks. Although gentility lost exclusivity as a category of identity, it was a distinction that still mattered. In fact, the difference between the genteel and commoners is the most fundamental division in social life during this period (Wrightson 38; Stone, "Social Mobility" 17; Laslett 26). Given the primacy of this identity category to eighteenth-century individuals and to systems of social organization, as well as its contested boundaries, the main question this dissertation addresses is this: How does self-writing during this period delineate the social grouping of "the gentry," the behavioral

norms of "gentility," and the identity category of "gentleman" and "gentlewoman" during this period?

In many respects my approach to eighteenth-century texts follows Deidre Shauna Lynch, who argues that early eighteenth-century novels emphasize character legibility, primarily through countenance or physiognomy. Characters in these novels "register[] their culture's investment in the eloquence of the material surface—the face of the page, the outside of the body—and their culture's idealization of what was graphically self-evident" (38). Legibility is a key component of how authors construct literary character. My approach to character legibility differs from Lynch's in its emphasis on the specific dynamics of status legibility and in positioning this legibility as conservative.[23] Although Lynch situates her study as a counterpoint to "rise of the novel" studies that trace the development (meaning improvement) of the novel over the course of the eighteenth century, she aligns herself with such studies in other ways by positioning the novel as a mechanism for people to accommodate themselves to a new market culture. While this may be true for other aspects of character legibility, authors' portrayals of status seem at least as indebted to conservative models of identity as an innate attribute as they are to a progressive market culture.[24]

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[23] Work by Barbara Korte and Julie McMaster also addresses character legibility. Korte examines body language more broadly and focuses on twentieth-century texts. McMaster looks to eighteenth-century novels, but her analysis primarily addresses character as a legible attribute, rather than status.

[24] The "rise of the novel" narrative was popularized by Watt's influential study of the same name; its major tenets are that the novel was a particularly middle-class genre (as discussed above), that its mode was realism, and that authors improved their literary realism as the century progressed. For a refinement of this argument, see McKeon (*Origins*). For alternate theories of the socio-economic, literary, and market forces that produced the novel, see Lennard J. Davis, J. Paul Hunter, John J. Richetti (*The English*

Indeed, recent studies of the novel have questioned the assumption that the novel is a forward-looking genre. Hudson advocates for a total reframing of novel theory that emphasizes alliances between the middling sorts and landowning elites rather than conflict between these social groups (which characterizes many "rise of the novel" theories).[25] Novels work to consolidate power, and as such they are "essentially conservative, anti-capitalist, and, in some cases, even Tory'" (567). Adopting a similar tack, Bowen argues that the novel does not express hostility toward the *ancien régime* but instead deploys "customary culture"—the social ideals of patrician culture based on reciprocity and deference—as a means of navigating eighteenth-century social change. As with Hudson's study, Bowen's analysis suggests that authors of novels attempted to impose conservative models of social order on an evolving society and market system. Even Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, an archetype of the class-struggle model of novel theory, can be read as an essentially conservative text. Daniel P. Gunn sees the novel as "a new myth of the ruling class," one example of the means by which elites maintain control by absorbing capitalist interests within pre-existing social and political structures and traditions (10). As these studies demonstrate, novels often frame social change within traditional models of social organization.

Novel in History and *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*), and William Warner (*Licensing Entertainment*). Feminist approaches have placed more emphasis on early female authors; see Ros Ballaster, Catherine Gallagher, Mary Anne Schofield, and Jane Spencer (*The Rise of the Woman Novelist)*. For arguments about how novels shaped subjectivity rather than reflecting social conditions, see Nancy Armstrong (*Desire*) and John Bender.

[25] Black also asserts that there was not conflict between the nobility and the gentry but rather collusion: they were "a homogenous group that intermarried and socialised together" and who formed a powerful landed elite (100-1).

I will also look beyond this genre to consider textual self-fashioning and social legibility, examining letters and autobiographies alongside novels. The overlap between these types of writing is more extensive than may first appear, and a major contention of this project is that all types of first-person writing—both fiction and nonfiction—reveal how people conceptualized and enacted the process of identity construction.[26] Many eighteenth-century authors not only use first-person narration but also dramatize the very act of self-writing by structuring the novel as a memoir or "history" (Daniel Defoe) or a series of letters (Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney). Indeed, the barrier between these genres is quite permeable: *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* was marketed as an autobiography (although parts of it are almost certainly fabricated) while the novel *Moll Flanders* masquerades as a memoir. (Complicating matters further, *The Case* is a source for *Moll Flanders*.) Even in a text comprising actual correspondence, such as the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the author, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, selected and edited the published epistles. The point is not that these texts are all equally "factual" or "fictional," to use modern terminology (they are certainly not), but rather that they all participate in and describe the process of self-representation, and textual self-representation is to some extent imaginative or at the very least selective. The qualities that make a character legible to a reader are also the qualities that people relied on to navigate the social sphere and to construct their own identity.

Although many critics argue that the emergence of the novel constitutes the most important feature of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace, it would be more

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[26] As Davis reminds us, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is a modern one and did not exist in the eighteenth century.

accurate to characterize this period as witnessing the rise of self-writing, of which novels compose one genre. (Regardless of whether they use first- or third-person narration, novels in the eighteenth-century typically focus on one person's experience.) Self-writing first found expression in diaries, which became increasingly popular in the seventeenth-century as a means of religious self-examination (Hunter 303-9; Nussbaum, *Autobiographical* 24-5). During the eighteenth century, people began to publish their diaries as autobiographies (Hunter 321; Nussbaum, *Autobiographical* 26-9; Spacks, *Imagining* 1-2). J. Paul Hunter argues that diaristic writing influenced the novel in part by creating a community of self-writers who had particular expectations for the texts they consumed based on their own experience as authors (313).[27] Hunter, Michael Mascuch, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Felicity Nussbaum all see autobiography as having a profound influence on eighteenth-century conceptions of identity, placing the individual and the representation of subjective experience at the center of literary practice.[28]

But autobiography is not the only mode of self-writing that parallels novelistic discourse. Letter-writing was an increasingly important mode of communication and self-representation in the eighteenth century. Describing the role of the private letter in the development of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas characterizes these texts as

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[27] See Spacks for more on how these genres shared concerns about the nature of identity (*Imagining*).

[28] These critics, however, differ widely in their description of how autobiography affects individual identity construction. Hunter is primarily interested in how diary-writing influences novelistic narrative strategy, specifically "writing to the moment" and the structure and priorities of what he calls "I was born" first-person novels (312, 327). Mascuch views autobiography in light of the rise of the modern individual. Spacks sees autobiography and the novel as both addressing the philosophical problem of identity (*Imagining*). Nussbaum argues that the practice of autobiography constructs bourgeois subjectivity, particularly for women (*Autobiographical*).

exhibiting "audience-oriented privacy," an externally oriented demonstration of subjectivity (49). Letters were in many ways a performance—they were highly stylized, selective in the information they conveyed, and often meant to be circulated among a social circle—but they possessed a veneer of intimacy and authenticity, as if the reader were privy to a private conversation. Due to its dexterity as a mode of representation, writers used the epistolary form within genres of self-writing such as first-person novels, travel narratives, and conduct literature.[29] Indeed, many examples of self-writing studied here are hybrids: epistolary novels, travel letters, novelistic memoirs, and fictional histories. All of these modes of writing became more widespread in the eighteenth century, in terms of both practice and readership, and they share a particular first-person orientation toward the self in society. Self-writing emphasizes individual experience, but the act of writing—the fact that it is selective, interpretive, and subjective—molds that experience into a recognizable narrative. Both lived and invented experience provide perspectives on how people conceptualized, idealized, and enacted social legibility.

Ideology shapes texts, whether they are the actual letters of a woman traveler such as Montagu or the imagined correspondence of a genteel young woman such as Evelina Belmont. The hegemonic power of particular social formations, such as the aristocracy, provides a frame within which writers interpret action and event. Instead of conceptualizing ideology as purely false consciousness, I will follow Jan Rehmann in focusing on ideology as a largely unconscious individual practice and in examining why aristocratic ideology in particular was so resilient and apparently attractive to people in the eighteenth century as a mode of social organization (6-7). This project is less

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[29] See Percy G. Adams, Elizabeth Bohls ("Age of Peregrination"), and Hunter 351-3 for more on the interrelationship of travel writing and the novel.

concerned with how the social hierarchy actually functioned—what barriers to upward mobility existed, how differences in education perpetuated inequality, what precise laws peers passed to promote their own interest, and so forth—than with how people imagined and represented social distinctions. Montagu's insistence that she is recognized despite wearing a head-to-toe veil is informed by the same notion of social identity that makes Evelina legible to others (including readers) as an aristocrat despite her mysterious origins: the belief that status is an innate and embodied attribute. This ideology of identity circumscribes both the plot and narration of the letters, diaries, and memoirs composed in the eighteenth-century.

Asserting that aristocratic ideology persists in literary representations of selves and self-writing is not to suggest that it was a universally cohesive system of beliefs and practices. Rather, ideology "always contains contradictions, precisely because it 'explains' or 'naturalizes' the discrepancies that inevitably characterize lived experience" (Poovey xiv). I will suggest that literary texts help mediate the conflicts of social legibility. While these texts certainly register challenges to the idea that rank is embodied, particularly early in the century, most of these authors use genres of self-writing to reassert the epistemological stability of social legibility. Authors manipulate plot and memoirists selectively edit their history in order to explain away or conceal gaps between who a person is and how they present themselves. They engineer narrative structure and perspective to present the reader with cohesive and unified characters. They condemn serial identity manipulators and social impostors. Yet the seams often show, indicating that the textual worlds created by these writers are not wholly reconciled with the actual conditions of eighteenth-century social life. But because they are selectively

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presented or altogether imagined, first-person texts can maintain the fiction of a world of visual status distinctions.

Case Study: Aphra Behn's The Rover

A brief analysis of Aphra Behn's play *The Rover* (1677) will provide a starting point in terms of chronology and historical context, and it will also illustrate the types of questions this project addresses. Readers may wonder, why begin a study of first-person texts by analyzing a play? There are contemporaneous examples of self-writing that address similar questions (see, for example, *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton*, published in 1663 and analyzed in Chapter III). Yet starting with Behn's play illustrates an important development in English literary culture. Moving from the theater to self-writing reminds modern readers that late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century conceptions of identity followed the same trajectory: from life-as-theater to life-as-diary. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries people considered theater to be the most apt metaphor for life.[30] In the eighteenth century, however, people began to see themselves as more akin to characters in novels rather than in plays, a shift that reflects the rise in self-writing and novel-reading as practices (Agnew 12-14). Although there was a vibrant theatrical tradition during this period, novels, autobiographies, and letters became the primary means of conceptualizing and expressing oneself and one's place in the world. Beginning with a play enacts this fundamental shift in perspective from stage to page.

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[30] Early modern drama reflects this theory in its numerous meta-theatrical references, such as Macbeth's famous line, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" (5.5.22-4). Shakespeare in particular puns on theatrics within his plays; consider *Hamlet*'s play-within-a-play or *Twelfth Night*'s considerations of various aspects of performance. See Jean-Christophe Agnew for more on early modern theatricality and representation.

Behn herself is an author who illustrates this move from theater to prose, specifically self-writing. Famously described as the first professional woman writer, Behn was a successful playwright and also one of the inventors of the English novel. Her works use many of the genres of writing that alter conceptions of the self as well as the landscape of prose narrative: *Oronooko* (1688) employs elements of travel narrative and *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-1687) uses the epistolary form to create a psychological drama.[31] Early eighteenth-century texts such as Defoe's novels look to Restoration models of narrative (such as criminal biography or rogue's tales) and, as we will see, to theatrical modes of self-representation popular in both plays and written texts. Eliza Haywood, whose work is addressed with Defoe's in Chapter III, writes within a tradition of amatory fiction which Behn helped found.[32] Plays such as *The Rover* and John Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* (1683) anticipate the eighteenth-century preoccupation with masquerade examined in Chapter II. In short, the literary and theatrical traditions established in the Restoration, to which Behn is a prominent contributor, are fundamental to the development of eighteenth-century novels, memoirs, and letters.

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[31] See Spencer for a discussion of Behn's influence in the eighteenth century in both drama and the development of the novel (*Aphra Behn's Afterlife* 62-100). See Judith Kegan Gardiner for an argument for *Love Letters* as the first English novel (a claim also made by Janet Todd [*Sign* 78]). McKeon's *Secret History of Domesticity* examines the shift from first-person epistolary narration to third-person narration in *Love Letters* as central to the development of the domestic novel, in which the privacy of the letter (expressed in first-person narration) is ultimately less interesting to readers than the secret motivations that prompt it (revealed in third-person narration) (538). This shift contextualizes the differing narrative strategies examined in Chapter III as well as Austen's use of free indirect discourse in Chapter VI.

[32] See Ros Ballaster and Janet Todd (*Sign*).

Furthermore, *The Rover* dramatizes the same questions self-writers will ask in the eighteenth century: what is the relationship between individual identity and social hierarchy, and how can literature (in terms of genre, structure, and form) mediate or modify identity construction? An intrigue comedy set during Carnival, Behn's play features disguises, masks, and cases of mistaken identity, presenting a topsy-turvy world in which aristocratic women are mistaken for prostitutes and male heroism devolves into sexual predation. Critics such as Dagny Boebel and Linda R. Payne have examined Behn's use of the carnivalesque as a critique of patriarchal power, specifically predatory aristocratic power. But this carnivalesque inversion of hierarchies is not limited to the play's content. Rather, the hybrid form of the play—its tragicomic and frequently mock-heroic structure—reflects a similar challenge to the standard of decorum, indicating a relationship between hierarchies of form and content.[33] Tragedy is not limited to the purview of aristocrats, and "low" characters are not the only ones lampooned or the targets of base humor. Behn thus pairs generic instability with hierarchical instability within the plot of the play to cast doubt upon the project of social legibility. Through both plot and structure, she demonstrates the tenuousness of status identity as a recognizable characteristic.

The play begins with two Spanish heiresses, Florinda and Hellena, who have only until the end of Carnival to secure their own marriage matches before being forced into a

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[33] Janet Todd and Derek Hughes define tragicomedy more narrowly and exclude *The Rover* in their study of Behn's works in this genre. This project follows a more loose sense of this concept, in which tragic elements (in both plot and form) undermine or complicate an overarching comic structure. Payne notes that the play is also a mix of intrigue comedy and comedy of manners, as well as tragedy and comedy, and she suggests that Behn's refusal to resolve the tensions within the play exposes fault lines in Restoration society, particularly in male aristocratic behavior (40-1).

loveless marriage and convent life, respectively. Behn pits Florinda and Hellena's search for suitable husbands against both a group of English cavaliers' quest for sexual adventure and two prostitutes' attempts to entice customers, a combination made all the more volatile by the Carnival disguises worn by most characters. As these groups interact within the play, it becomes increasingly necessary for characters to read signs of identity (and therefore motivation) correctly and thus navigate the parties' competing interests. Yet *The Rover*'s characters often fail to recognize other characters' individual or status identity, leading to the play's almost constant cases of mistaken identity.

The most egregious cases of mistaken identity involve prostitutes and noblewomen. To facilitate their agency and mobility, Florinda and Hellena conceal their identities and move about unchaperoned (a theme explored further in Chapter II). This identity erasure prompts an almost total breakdown of signs of status, as aristocratic ladies and ladies of the night commingle during Carnival. Disguising herself as "a Person of Quality," the prostitute Lucetta robs the cavalier Blunt (2.1.47). Worse, however, is Florinda's misidentification. As she waits at night for Belvile in her garden and "in an undress" she is accosted by Willmore, Belvile's fellow cavalier and a man with an insatiable sexual appetite (3.5 stage directions). Thinking she is a prostitute, Willmore at first attempts to purchase her services, then he tries to rape her when she refuses. Later, Florinda is again threatened with rape (an act in which even Belvile is complicit) when the cavaliers (and her own brother) again fail to recognize her. While both attacks are prevented, they fit within a larger pattern in which violence accompanies misrecognition and the loss of reliable visual signs of status.

Behn contrasts Florinda's misidentification as a prostitute with the courtesan Angellica Bianca, who presents as uniformly noble. In her interactions with Willmore, she speaks in a lofty iambic pentameter, in contrast to the light prose repartee that characterizes much of the conversation in the play. As befitting the inverted world of Carnival, Behn portrays Angellica Bianca as the most virginal character of the play. She is the most public of public women, posting images of her face and her fee around Naples, but she carefully guards her affections as extremely private. Unable to afford her exorbitant fees, Willmore persuades Angellica with a high-minded speech, claiming, "I'm a gentleman, / And one that scorns this baseness which you practice; / Poor as I am, I would not sell myself" (2.1.320-22). Astoundingly, his logic works: Angellica, who "never loved before" enters into a transaction with Willmore of "thy love for mine" (2.1.380,418). But for Willmore the exchange has been a mere exercise in rhetoric. After convincing Angellica to sleep with him he forgets his vow of love and dallies with Hellena, an economically more enticing prospect.

The way Behn presents Angellica destabilizes both the signs of status identity within the play and the genres structuring the play. Angellica embodies the role of a tragic heroine, as Susan J. Owen and Helen M. Burke argue, and this characterization is a significant component of the hybridity and inversion evident throughout the play (Owen 73, Burke 126). The narrative arc Behn traces for Angellica indicates that Willmore's violation is indeed a rape.[34] In a scene befitting a tragedy, the ruined Angellica confronts

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[34] This distinction is significant, since popular wisdom held that prostitutes could not be raped. In theory prostitutes were protected by rape legislation, but in practice both chastity and high status were necessary attributes for any woman seeking legal recourse against her attacker (Brownmiller 29-30, Gowing 90).

Willmore as the English cavaliers and the Spanish heiresses finalize their marriages. She threatens to shoot Willmore, accusing him of perpetrating a "shameful conquest" (5.1.205). Although Angellica is placated, disarmed, and conveniently paired off (as a mistress rather than a wife), the hasty match undermines the conventionally happy ending. The seriousness with which Behn treats Willmore's betrayal speaks to Angellica's elevation as a character: she alone inhabits the higher plane of tragedy, a literary space reserved for aristocratic women.

The confusion between gentlewomen and prostitutes is thus echoed in the structure and language of the play itself, which features unresolved tension between tragedy and comedy and a refusal to adhere to standards of decorum. Behn inverts high and low forms, as Angellica speaks in a meter that identifies her as aristocratic and finds herself inhabiting a tragic narrative, while the highborn Florinda is subjected to lewd verbal exchanges and physical comedy. (Because they are *attempted* rapes, the assaults perpetrated against Florinda remain just within the realm of the comedic.) Behn's formal hybridization also targets the male characters, specifically the English cavaliers. She uses the mock-heroic to undermine any notion of innate nobility, showing the cavaliers' misdirection of courage and bravado toward indiscriminate sexual conquest and debauchery (Spencer, *Aphra Behn* 193-8; Burke 123-4). (Depictions of aristocratic corruption and sexual appetite will resurface a century later; see Chapter V.) Instead of powerful, brave, aristocratic leaders, Behn's cavaliers are penniless exiles. In terms of both content and form, *The Rover* troubles the distinction between high- and lowborn characters.

The Rover illustrates how literature addressed the issues of identity construction during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The play's inversions of nearly every sign of status reflect the social instability of the period in which it is set. Although performed during the Restoration, *The Rover* takes place during the Interregnum, when royalist cavaliers were banished to the Continent. The monarchial overthrow threatened numerous theories that legitimized social order, most notably the idea that the social hierarchy, headed by the king, was natural, immutable, and ordained by God. Even though Charles II had been restored to the English throne in 1660, people had not forgotten the social and political upheavals of the Civil War. The question of how to recognize people in terms of status remains a central question throughout literature of the long eighteenth century, and the answers to that question vary as the century progresses. For Behn, the answer seems to be that social instability leads to representational instability. In a post-civil war society, the signs of nobility are difficult to decipher and increasingly illegible.[35]

But Behn's play hints at the resurgence of social legibility. When Willmore excuses his attempted rape by asking, "Why, how the devil should I know Florinda?" his question can be read as a genuine query (3.2.197). How can a person distinguish another person? In response to Willmore's question, Belvile—Florinda's fiancé—looks to an

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[35] Recent studies of Restoration identity politics by Will Pritchard and Cynthia Lowenthal (*Performing Identities*) explore identity and performance during this period. Their studies share with this project an interest in the problem of differentiating "being" versus "seeming." However, there are significant differences: Pritchard's approach is historical and focuses on female virtue and status particularly, while Lowenthal studies nationality, status, and gender on the Restoration stage. They are thus broad in terms of identity categories and narrow in terms of their focus on the late seventeenth century, while this project is more narrow in its consideration of identity, focusing on status, but broad in its consideration of late seventeeth- to early nineteenth-century self-writing.

essentialized status identity. Within this system, even if Willmore did not recognize

Florinda individually, he should have been able to distinguish her from other women:

"could'st / not see something about her Face and Person, to strike an awful Reverence

into thy Soul?" (3.2.19-20). Belvile is, on the one hand, espousing a sentimental attitude

towards his beloved, seeing her as more than mortal. But within the hierarchical

inversions of the play, this comment can also gesture towards Florinda's status as an

aristocrat, which should be visually apparent in her "Face and Person." Willmore's

response is telling: "Faith no, I consider'd her as mere a Woman as I could wish"

(3.6.221). He denies that there is anything in Florinda's appearance that sets her apart

from Lucetta or Angellica. As this project will show, Willmore's point of view fades, and

Belvile's rises in eighteenth-century self-writing. The inversion of Carnival is indeed

temporary, as writers following Behn reassert social legibility as a legitimate

epistemology and in doing so bolster traditional and essentialized notions of status.

Project Overview

From Behn's portrayal of a world in which social legibility threatens to vanish

altogether, we move to self-writers who increasingly insist that status is innate and

visually apparent. These writers record four different practices in their self-writing, all of

which engage the ideology of social legibility: anonymity, serial subjectivity, sensibility,

and artlessness. These authors ask how people can communicate who they are and

interpret who others are in a world in which such distinctions are of paramount

importance. At the beginning of the century writers document the opportunities for self-

fashioning presented by an unstable social order and the rise of performance as a primary

axis of identity construction. As modes of social interaction, serial subjectivity and

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anonymity allow people to don and doff identities according to their own self-interest and seemingly without regard for status at birth. However, there are significant limits to such self-construction, limits that reflect the continued influence of traditional notions of status. As the century progresses, authors look to sensibility, privileging the supposedly natural signs of the body over deliberate performance. In these texts the physical body and its nonverbal signs can thwart artifice and status imposition. Lastly, the valorization of artlessness in the late eighteenth century illustrates the extent to which writers are increasingly aware that social legibility is a particularly literary quality, as artlessness can only be enacted textually.

In Chapter II, "Going Incognito: Anonymity in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Roxana*," I argue that anonymity is an important social practice in the eighteenth century that can reveal the limits and opportunities of identity construction, particularly for women. Both Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1716-1717) and Roxana in Defoe's *Fortunate Mistress* (1724, commonly referred to as *Roxana*) experience increased autonomy and mobility when they eschew typical English signs of identity. Both characters document a series of instances in which they "go incognito," and this chapter will demonstrate that this particular mode of anonymity is a status privilege, meaning that the erasure of individual identity is a sign of high rank. These texts examine how people conceptualized anonymity in an age in which hierarchical distinctions were typically public and self-evidence. Somewhat paradoxically, both Montagu and Roxana demonstrate that anonymity depends upon the existence of a social hierarchy, even as the erasure of individual identity places the subject outside the visual system that reinforces this hierarchy.

Chapter III, "To 'act like a Gentleman': Serial Subjects, Status, and the Early Novel" examines a popular type of protagonist in the early novel, the serial subject, to illustrate the tension between innate and performance-based conceptions of identity construction in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The serial subject, an identity manipulator who dons and doffs a series of identities to promote his or her own self-interest, is first popularized in Mary Carleton's autobiographical *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* (1663) and reappears in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Colonel Jack* (1722), and Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725) and *Anti-Pamela* (1741). Serial subjects assert that identity is a matter of performance, which directly contradicts the conception of identity as innate that is fundamental to traditional notions of status. However, Defoe and Haywood limit the serial subject in their narratives through characterization, plot, narrative structure, and rhetorical devices, efforts that indicate the social disapprobation for this figure. The upward social mobility achieved (or attempted) by serial subjects appears to be their most objectionable quality, and as such these figures rehearse and respond to the problems that will accompany the rise of the coherent and unified subject (in terms of both her social station within the novel and her literary role in the novel generally) in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).

A major tenet of this study's argument is that the body communicates rank in a social setting. Aristocratic ideology shares with the discourse of sensibility a belief in the unconscious, unpracticed communicative capacity of the body. Chapter IV, "Natural Performances: Status, Display, and the Body in *Clarissa* and *The London Journal*," asserts that people's beliefs about attributes like "gentility" were extremely agile, adapting to changing social and economic conditions by incorporating contemporary

theories and practices, such as the mid-century rise of sensibility. We see in both Samuel

Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and James Boswell's *London Journal* (1763) a mid-century

attempt to reassert traditional aristocratic social hierarchies by combining the dictates of

sensibility with the concept of innate gentility to create socially legible bodies. This

system opposes natural or innate gentility with theatrical, practiced behavior or outright

disguise. However, as both Clarissa and Boswell discover, this system, while

theoretically consistent, cannot accommodate the actual social conditions of eighteenth-

century society, in which people may be upwardly or downwardly mobile. The

breakdown of this system, on which both Clarissa and Boswell rely to structure their

textual self-construction, leads to identity crises for both writers.

Chapter V continues this consideration of anti-theatrical rhetoric in first-person

writing. In "Making an Appearance: Artlessness and Spectacle in *Evelina* and Robinson's

Memoirs" I argue that the sentimental heroine—naive, innocent, and artless—emerges as

a response, at least in part, to the increasing backlash against aristocratic corruption. The

quality of artlessness in particular demonstrates aristocratic ideology (because it relies on

innate attributes) while also critiquing aristocratic excess (by eschewing fashion,

affectation, and deliberate display). Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) takes advantage of

the new social practice of fashionable sociability to position her heroine at the center of

polite society (and implicitly of high rank) while emphasizing her artless anti-

theatricality. The attention directed at *Evelina* is mostly male, and even though this

attention is threatening, it also, paradoxically, testifies to her high status and fitness as a

marriage prospect. Mary Robinson uses Burney's strategy of positioning Evelina as anti-

theatrical yet the center of attention, artless yet legibly noble, in her *Memoirs of the Late*

Mrs. Robinson (1800), in which she portrays her younger self as a sentimental heroine. This structure allows Robinson to disavow her reputation as a manipulative social performer and represent herself as a put-upon young woman. The folklore myth of the "lost princess" deployed by both writers reinforces traditional notions of status, even as the texts both question aristocratic leadership, suggesting that Burney and Robinson view traditional notions of status as legitimate but in need of reform. The chapter concludes by arguing that Burney and especially Robinson gesture toward the paradoxes of artlessness, suggesting that it succeeds as a literary quality precisely because it fails as a standard of behavior. *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* indicate that the project of social legibility was becoming increasingly tenuous, particularly for women.

This dissertation concludes by briefly examining Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Mansfield Park* (1814). Austen extends Burney's and Robinson's skepticism about social legibility by satirizing it. Characters in her novels grow or shrink in attractiveness (even in height) depending on their rising or falling fortunes. She also dramatizes the inaccuracies of the first-person perspective by describing these perceptual vagaries using free indirect discourse. This portrayal undermines the legitimacy of social legibility, suggesting a shift away from traditional narratives of social stratification. However, Austen ultimately recuperates the genteel Bertram family by absorbing Fanny into it, indicating the resilience of the landowning classes as a social and political institution as well as the rise of a more flexible notion of gentility.

People in the eighteenth century were indeed "taken by the outside of things," as Chesterfield remarks, and we, like his son, would do well to "take this world as it is" and understand it better. Eighteenth-century writers and readers imagined their social world in

terms of appearances, and they used visual culture to explore the relationship between people's social performances or displays, their internal and innate attributes, and their hierarchical position in society. In doing so they were able to mediate or dramatize the effect that changing social, economic, and political conditions had on individual identity construction.

CHAPTER II

GOING INCOGNITO: ANONYMITY IN THE *TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS*

AND *ROXANA*

This chapter will consider the implications of anonymity or "going incognito," a

widespread social practice and a trope of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century

literature. This mode of behavior parallels the masquerade entertainments popular during

this period, specifically their assumption that identity could be manipulated or obscured.

However, unlike masquerade generally, the ability to be "incognito" is a privilege of the

elite: only aristocrats would be recognized individually in public, so it is only aristocrats

who can choose to be incognito. Yet the very act of erasing identity subverts one of the

foundational beliefs of the aristocratic social hierarchy: that status is innate, inalienable,

and intelligible. This chapter will contrast the motivation for, and experience of, going

incognito in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's travel narrative, *The Turkish Embassy*

Letters (composed in 1716-1716 and published in1763), and Daniel Defoe's novel *The*

Fortunate Mistress (commonly called *Roxana*) (1724). Montagu travels incognito at

various points in her narrative, most famously when she wears the Turkish veil. Although

Montagu celebrates the veil for its ability to maintain social order while limiting

competitive consumerism, she ultimately denies the veil's ability to provide complete

identity erasure, a move that reasserts her innate English and aristocratic status. For

Roxana, being anonymous—refusing to establish a socially legible identity—allows her

to operate with autonomy and mobility while also taking advantage of the association

between going incognito and high status. Both Montagu and Defoe contrast the freedom

facilitated by anonymity with the rigidity of social categories of identity, particularly for

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women. From opposite perspectives—the self-made heroine and the aristocratic lady—these texts examine the attraction of anonymity in an age that relied on public displays of status and socially constructed identities.[36]

The Turkish Embassy Letters and Roxana share a central similarity: both Montagu and Roxana dress themselves in Turkish attire. These scenes have attracted much critical attention due to their potential to articulate English attitudes towards trade, empire and the East. For example, in her article comparing the two texts, Susanne Scholz argues that these costumes invoke concerns about how English women were expected to establish

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[36] Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* were published after her death in 1763 but written during the ambassadorial envoy itself (1716-1717). Their publication history is complex. Montagu compiled and edited the collection of letters for posthumous publication and the number of alterations she made between the originals and the published manuscript is unclear because her daughter burnt her daily journal (which she used to compose many of the original letters) (Melman 79). Furthermore, there were various versions of the *Letters* themselves: between 1718 and 1763 versions of the letters were passed around fashionable London circles and portions of the text surfaced abroad (79). This chapter references *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,* edited by Robert Halsband, which includes the letters from Turkey. Two exceptions are the letters on pages 66 and 101; these letters, written later in Montagu's life to her daughter, which emerged after the publication of Halsband's edition and were included in Isobel Grundy's *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Selected Letters*.

The full title of *Roxana* is *The Fortunate Mistress: Or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau, Afterwards Called the Countess de Wintselsheim, in Germany, Being the Person known by the Name of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of King Charles II*. A series of recent articles in *Philological Quarterly* by P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens, Ashley Marshall, and R.J. Griffin debates the reliability of the Defoe canon. Marshall notes that the evidence is very slim that Defoe wrote *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. Griffin, along with Furbank and Owens, argues that there is enough evidence to be reasonably confident of Defoe's authorship, but he concedes there isn't hard proof ("Did Defoe Write *Roxana?*"). These studies force us to question the basic premise of how we approach Defoe studies, particularly efforts to find unifying themes across the body of work attributed to him. While they do draw comparisons between what are traditionally considered to be Defoe's texts, this chapter and the following chapter do not depend on definitive Defoe authorship to support their claims. For simplicity, I will refer to Defoe as the author of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* (evidence of Defoe's authorship of *Colonel Jack* is better), but readers should consider this choice more as an observance of scholarly tradition than as a statement of historical fact.

their identity through performance. The discourse of Orientalism mediates such concerns by subordinating the Eastern female subject to the Western male gaze and by allowing English women some freedom to self-fashion through clothing ("English Women" 98). Scholz's article is representative of the main avenues of inquiry into these scenes: Orientalism, masking or disguise, male surveillance, female sexuality, and performance. These are certainly important topics to consider. But what is missing in Scholz's analysis, and in other readings of these texts, both together and separately, is a study of how the Turkish costume erases or complicates typical signifiers of identity. For both women, the Turkish costume is part of a larger practice of identity play in which they question how people can resist the social markers of identity and whether identity can be effaced. The full veil that Montagu dons provides anonymity by obscuring her features, and Roxana uses her Turkish costume (which showcases the body and face rather than obscuring it) to create a mysterious, hybrid, and unknowable persona. Such cross-cultural dress functions as costume, but it also obscures the signs of identity that would otherwise place Montagu and Roxana. These two instances of Turkish disguise can and should be read within the context both of other erasures of identity in these texts and of the widespread practices of anonymity that flourish during this period. Both texts meditate on the practicality and appeal of anonymity as a social mode: the autonomy it provides (particularly for women), its potential subversion of traditional hierarchical structures (both of gender and of rank), and its capacity to interrogate to what extent identity inheres in a person or is a product of performance.

The critical attention paid to disguise as a theme of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Roxana* reflects larger trends in eighteenth-century studies. While there have been

many studies of masquerade and masking in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

centuries, there is little critical analysis of these practices as part of a larger cultural

interest in anonymity as a mode of social interaction or travel. Only one element of

anonymity, anonymous publication, has been received specific study.[37] But authorial

identity erasure is very different from the popular customs of masking, disguise, and

going incognito. The strategic erasure of identity frequently deployed during this period

as people appeared in public as anonymous agents deserves further study in and of itself,

apart from the specific practice of masquerade.

"Anonymity" refers to any social mode or practice in which a person deliberately

manipulates the signs of identity in order to efface his or her identity or to resist

categorization. It can be individual (a masked individual encountering people who are not

masked) or collective (a group of masqueraders who do not know each other). In the first

case, anonymity creates a power differential, because one person is privileged to

information (their own identity) denied to others. Furthermore, as we shall see,

individuals seeking anonymity through going incognito were typically elites, meaning

that people tended to associate high rank with people who concealed their identity.

Collective anonymity tends to level social interactions, although, as Montagu will

discover, underlying (if not visually apparent) hierarchical distinctions still organize such

encounters. The fact that both individual and collective anonymity emerged as

recognizable and even somewhat commonplace practices during the eighteenth century

(as well as popular literary tropes) suggests new intersections among social hierarchies,

representations of rank, urbanization, recognition, gender, fashion, and identity

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[37] For information about literary anonymity see Robert J. Griffin (*Faces*), John Mullan
(*Anonymity)*, and Marcy L. North.

formation. By contextualizing and analyzing how anonymity worked, we can better theorize how strategic erasures of identity authorized autonomy and mobility, particularly for women.

While a central argument of this chapter is that masquerade is one element of a larger interest in anonymity that requires its own discrete theorization, studies of masquerade do provide a starting point for considering identity during this period. As Terry Castle documents in her landmark study, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, the rise of capitalism, trade, and urbanization challenged social hierarchies in the early eighteenth century, and masquerade expressed both the opportunities and anxieties attendant upon such change. Castle's study argues that these entertainments were "in the deepest sense a kind of collective meditation on self and other" in which cross-dressing (in terms of gender, nationality, race, and class) enacted a carnivalesque "logic of symbolic inversion" that undercut the binaries of identification organizing civilized life (4-5). Although this inversion was temporally and spatially limited to the masquerade event itself, it indicates masquerade's unique capacity to address a larger cultural meditation on the distinctions and articulations of class, gender, and racial identity in the eighteenth century (see Figure 4, next page). The appeal of masquerade is easy to imagine, as it offered the type of class mixing, indulgence of appetite, and freedom of conduct denied in most other social settings during this period.

The period of masquerade's popularity overlaps, not coincidentally, with what Dror Wahrman calls the *ancien régime* of identity, during which people considered

personal identity as essentially malleable, socially constructed, and based in performance as opposed to innate and fixed (*Making* 168, see also Introduction 5-6). According to Wahrman, masquerade had "uncanny suitability…to the historically specific understanding of self" as a performance, since it acknowledged that identity could be put on and taken off at will (164). Eighteenth-century masquerade was not a temporary exchange of one's "real" identity for an assumed identity; rather, the appeal of masquerade was expressed as the opportunity to shed a socially constructed identity in favor of a chosen identity (161). Masquerade dramatizes the conception of identity as a social performance and amplifies the degree to which people could truly choose their own identities.
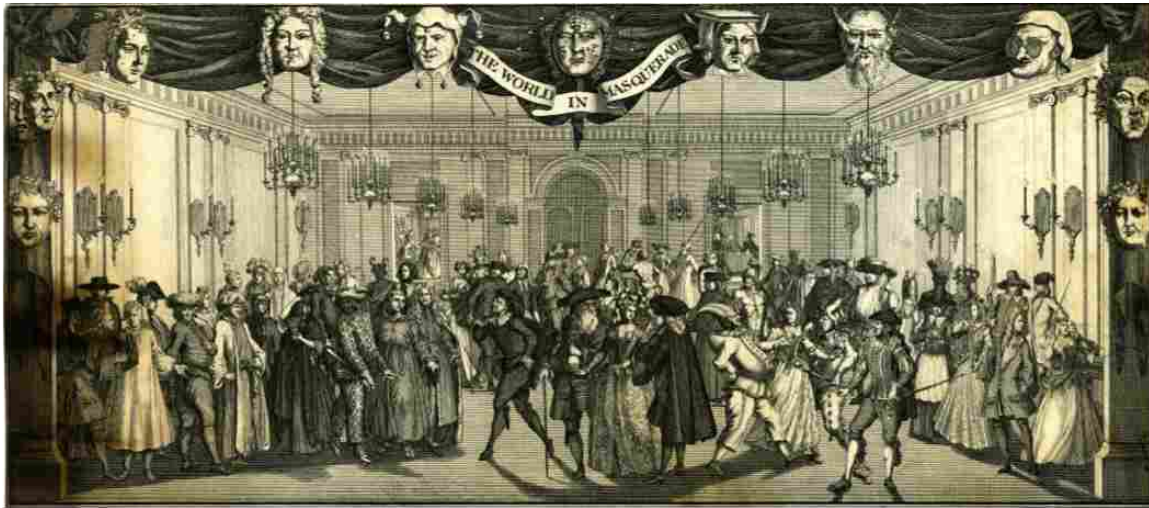
Figure 4. "The World in Masquerade." Anonymous etching. c.1720. © Trustees of the British Museum. Note the variety of costumes represented.

Castle and Wahrman both focus on disguise in their study of masquerade, specifically the significance of taking on an identity other than the one assigned by birth. However, it is unclear whether the main attraction for masquerade was the opportunity to adopt another identity or the chance to escape, at least temporarily, one's established identity. This small difference in perspective has broad ramifications for the study of

masquerade: is the goal to be someone else or simply not to be oneself? We can find a

clue to this question in masquerade attire itself: while masqueraders did don "fancy

dress" (the costume of a particular nation or social class) and "character dress"

(historical, literary, or allegorical figures), they also frequently wore a domino, which

referred to either a nondescript mask or a flowing, often hooded, garment, usually worn together (Figure 5 and Figure 6, next page) (Castle, *Masquerade* 58). The popularity of the domino indicates that anonymity—the erasure of identity—is often as desirable as disguise or impersonation. Perhaps all masquerade disguise is merely the mechanism that allows anonymity, either through taking on another identity or through erasing one's outward signs of identity. It is

Figure 5. Detail of Figure 1 showing masqueraders in masks.

"impersonation," mimicking another person or type, but it is also "im-personation," an

erasure of the signs of a person's socially constructed identity. Even if adopting another

identity through costume was part of what made masquerade popular, we must recognize

that identity erasure is at least as important a component of these entertainments. While

Castle and Wahrman provide vital contextual information and theories of identity and

disguise, they do not analyze the central role anonymity plays within masquerade culture.

Masquerade should be considered as merely one manifestation of a broader

interest in anonymity, which during this period becomes simultaneously more attractive

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and more feasible as a social mode. As various practices that provided total or partial anonymity became more widespread, a broader swath of the popular was able to take part, and as this happened the experience of anonymity—from the point of both participant and observer—became more familiar. In the case of masquerade, such interactions became not only common but also conventionalized and ritualized.

Figure 6. "Miss _____ in the actual dress as she appear'd in ye character of Iphigenia, at ye Jubilee Ball or Masquerade at Ranelagh." Anonymous etching with engraving. c.1749. © Trustees of the British Museum. The figure at left is wearing a domino cloak. the middle figure is in character dress, and the figure at right is in fancy dress.

Besides masquerade, another practice that allows a degree of anonymity is the trend of public masking, which was particularly popular with women. Women often wore masks to the theater, and Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays frequently featured

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masking, disguises, and mistaken identities (Bevis 71; see also the study of Behn's *Rover* in the Introduction, 27-35). "Going incognito" became a recognizable means of navigating public space, a development reflected in specific linguistic shifts: the word "incognito" enters the English language in the mid-seventeenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and by the end of the century its use is so widespread that William Congreve titles his only novel *Incognita* (1692). The trend of masking, the emergence of "going incognito" as a particular mode of travel, and the popularity of masquerade entertainments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries constitute a set of practices that rely upon anonymity to function and which explore the opportunities facilitated by such identity erasure.

A key component of these anonymous social modes was their ability to mitigate the anxiety over clothing practices that surfaced during this period and which prompted questions about status, gender, and empire. Eighteenth-century attire was caught between a traditional model in which social status and attire were inextricably linked and a rapid commercial expansion that made consumer goods available to a broader segment of the population (see Introduction 6-20). While sumptuary laws had been repealed in 1604, politicians made repeated efforts to revive them throughout the seventeenth century and writers advocated for new laws in the early eighteenth century, indicating that hierarchical distinctions via fashion still occupied the public imagination even as the regulations themselves vanished (Hunt 321-3, McKendrick, "Consumer Revolution" 19). The repeal of such laws coupled with increased trade and improved textile manufacturing meant that more people could purchase luxury goods, which were now cheaper, more numerous, and easier to find. Fashion "emerged as a national concern rather than a luxury

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system of expression limited to an elite" (Munns and Richards 11). Ultimately, the idea

of fashion as market-driven rather than rank-driven destabilized one of the most

fundamental components of visual distinctions of status: attire. Fashion, once a medium

of expressing and sustaining aristocratic identity, was at the time of Montagu's letters and

Defoe's novels becoming an increasingly unstable system unrestricted by explicit

legislation or prohibitive expense.[38]

Concerns about fashion were also increasingly gendered. Shawn Lisa Maurer

argues that one response to anxieties over conspicuous consumption was to attribute these

spending patterns to women and to insist more firmly on differentiation between the

sexes. Writers increasingly identified women with fashionable excess, a move that also

placed them at the center of debates about trade and empire. During this period women's

fahions communicate social status (although problematically, as discussed above), but

they also frequently incorporate and display foreign or exotic objects or materials,

signifying Britain's national trade expansion.[39] Laura Brown argues that "the female

figure, through its simultaneous connections with commodification and trade on the one

hand, and violence and difference on the other, plays a central role in the constitution

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[38] While sumptuary laws refer to any regulation of the purchase or display of luxury goods, they were most often used to set standards of attire. English sumptuary laws under Elizabeth I and James I were strict, and similar laws were passed in Spain and France, indicating a broad European engagement with questions of dress in relationship to social class and the consumption of goods in the early modern period (Hunt 118 and 303). See Jennie Batchelor (*Dress*), Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, Beverly Lemire, Neil McKendrick ("Commercialization"), and Aileen Ribeiro for more on clothing and fashion in the eighteenth century.

[39] For example, in *Spectator* No. 69 Addison remarks, "The single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates" (205) and Pope in "The Rape of the Lock" describes how on Belinda's dressing-table, "The various offerings of the world appear" (line 130).

of…mercantile capitalist ideology," a dynamic which she says is often expressed through

anxieties about women's fashion (3, 112). William Hogarth's etching, "A Taste in High

Life" (Figure 7), illustrates the ties between fashion and imperialism. Hogarth parallels

the elaborate attire, wigs, and adornments of the central couple and their décor (which

features outsized hoopskirts and fussy wigs) and he juxtaposes this fashionable excess

with representations of empire such as the black servant wearing a turban.[40] While this

Figure 7. William Hogarth, "A Taste in High Life." Etching. 1746. © Victoria and Albert
Museum, London.

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[40] See Chapter V for more on satires of aristocratic fashions as excessive. Throughout the
early eighteenth century fashionable clothing (particularly female attire) was often treated
satirically, as the Hogarth print illustrates.

image was published thirty years after Montagu's letters were originally composed, it demonstrates how the discourses of fashion, taste, and empire were linked, which Brown and others argue is a feature of eighteenth-century writing and images throughout the century. Both Montagu and Roxana are travellers for much of these texts, suggesting that cosmopolitanism and the nascent beginnings of empire contributed to the new valences of female display in public settings. Given the contentious role of women's fashion in issues as diverse as gender politics, status indeterminacy, and empire-building, it is perhaps unsurprising that women in particular gravitated toward anonymous practices that allowed them to escape the overdetermined assessment of their attire.

The anonymous practices or modes that encompass masquerade as well as "going incognito" and other types of disguise comprised one way of mediating these profound changes in the basic terms of identity and its representation in attire. As public signs of identity lost their exclusivity, forays into collective anonymity such as masquerade allowed people to explore social interactions that (at least superficially) did not depend on social hierarchies. On the other hand, individual anonymity could reimpose visual hierarchical distinctions. Despite fears of social disorder and the collapse of public systems of identification, signs of individual aristocratic identity (livery, heraldic arms, personalized coaches) largely continued to function. Going incognito therefore emerged as a particularly aristocratic practice, because only the elite possessed, and could therefore erase, the signifiers of their publicly known individual identity. The practice of anonymity probed the limits of public signs of identity, providing opportunities for privacy as well as exploring the implications of a world in which outward signs of status were absent.

The last element that contributed to the rise of anonymity as a social mode is the rapid urbanization of London, particularly during the latter half of the seventeenth century. This aspect of English culture has been overlooked in studies of disguise and masquerade which focus on identity and the representation of that identity through clothing and jewelry. However, it is important to recognize that one appealing aspect of these social practices may have been their ability to replicate the relatively new experience of anonymity in everyday life. Masquerade, public masking, or going incognito offered a more controlled version of the identity erasure a typical London resident experienced every day. The rapid urbanization of London in the late seventeenth century led to an environment in which strangers were common and anonymity was the norm.[41] London's expansion was staggering. In 1700 it matched and soon overtook Paris as the largest city in Europe, and it may well have been the largest city in the world. It grew from 575,000 to 900,000 people between 1700 and 1801, and, compared to other European cities, it attracted a greater percentage of the total populace (11% at midcentury).[42] London was also unique in that it dwarfed other English cities and was the center of political, commercial, and cultural activities, unlike European capitals, which competed with other cities (Porter, *London* 131).

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[41] While urbanization is frequently attributed to developments in nineteenth-century England (when London's growth dwarfed the expansion in the eighteenth century), Richard Sennett makes the point that eighteenth-century Londoners were, of course, without this perspective and would have experienced massive population growth and the social changes that accompanied it as unique and novel (50).

[42] Jack Lindsay points out that between 1650 and 1750 "more people died in London than were born there"; the city grew due to an influx of roughly 8,000 people a year, mostly under the age of 25 (8, see also Porter, *London* 132).

Within this new urban setting, dealing with strangers—anonymous persons—

became much more common. Richard Sennett identifies two types of strangers:

"someone different, but placeable," and someone who is "unknown, rather than alien"

(48). Prior to the eighteenth century strangers in England tended to fall into the first

camp, as they could be visually placed by social class or occupation, or identified by their

family name. However, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries

London became a city of strangers as "unknown quantities," a change Sennett attributes

to urbanization as well as a variety of other demographic, economic, and cultural

conditions (48, 57-60).[43] Social ties in London were loose, usually short-lived, and more

superficial, unlike the relationships forged in rural communities (Bucholz and Ward

72).[44] This dynamic, coupled with the fact that most urban commercial exchanges were

impersonal, means that people viewed social interactions and individuals themselves in

terms of exchange value, according to sociologist Georg Simmel (410). In short, people

in London were alienated from the types of personal, individual, long-lasting, and stable

identity referents and relationships that organized life outside the metropolis, meaning

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[43] Lyn Lofland similarly refers to the city as "a world of strangers." She sees a key change between preindustrial and industrial cities as a shift from "appearential ordering" (in which physical appearance, behavior, and language can be used to place a stranger by status, occupation, nationality, etc.) to "masked heterogeneity" (in which people tend to look the same, since there are few restrictions on attire and a fashion industry attempting to sell particular looks) (48-9, 79-82). London in the eighteenth century would be transitioning between these two eras, meaning that, while people could still categorize others by appearance, they experienced strangers in the city as increasingly illegible.

[44] While describing the alienation and anonymity the city could produce, Robert O. Bucholz and Joseph P. Ward do caution that, "London was just as hierarchical and interconnected as the village," just in different ways (73). They support Sennett's assertions about urbanization and anonymity in London, while noting that neighborhoods, guilds, apprenticeships, and parishes could somewhat offset the sense of alienation city dwellers faced.

that they increasingly experienced life as an anonymous agent surrounded by strangers. The practices of anonymity reflected in the literature of the late seventeenth through early eighteenth centuries was, at least in part, a reaction to these changing social conditions.

This chapter will study the practice of anonymity by examining its various manifestations in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Roxana* in order to better understand how identity, specifically class and gender identity, could be expressed or concealed during this period. Analyzing anonymity lends precision to an analysis of identity by dramatizing the extent to which one can shed or conceal an identity. What limits identity erasure? Or, more accurately, what do these self-writers imagine limits their anonymity? What specific opportunities does anonymity provide? How can a person resist the social constraints of identity? The extent to which status identity dictates social interactions can also be explored by considering the erasure of identity as a strategic move. Given the legal, economic, and social constraints on women, anonymity as a mode of social interaction provides autonomy and freedom from surveillance for some women. By examining Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's and Roxana's success or failure at obscuring or abandoning their identities, this chapter will examine how identities can be constructed and deconstructed, the relationship between anonymity and social hierarchy, and why the erasure of identity facilitates mobility and autonomy.

European Fashion and the Turkish Veil in Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters

Customs of attire are a major theme running through Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, a collection of her correspondence during an ambassadorial envoy to Turkey. The most notable custom Montagu addresses is the Turkish veil, which she asserts is a "perpetual Masquerade" that "gives them [Turkish

women] entire Liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of Discovery"
(1.328). There has been much attention paid to Montagu's characterization of these
"Inclinations" as sexual (and therefore potentially Orientalist). Yet focusing on the result
of the veil—sexual freedom—obscures the means by which such liberty is established:
the veil's erasure of outward signs of identity. For Montagu, who frequently described
aristocratic life in terms of public display, the anonymity provided by the veil would have
been at least as novel as the sexual freedom it (supposedly) licensed. As the most extreme
departure from European dress that she encounters, the Turkish veil represents a
completely new response to what Montagu sees as a universal cultural problem: how to
communicate and reinforce social hierarchies through public displays of fashion, a
project that, as we have seen, is increasingly foisted upon women. Throughout her
journey she is concerned with how, by positioning the female body as a site of
conspicuous consumption, European fashion risks destabilizing the role of clothing in
denoting social rank. The customs of feminine display are thus connected to consumer
excess and status instability, a dynamic that the veil counters by rendering all women
anonymous and uniform subjects. Read within this context, Montagu's description of the
Turkish veil represents a radical alternative to European customs in which clothing
signifies social class. However, Montagu narrates a limit to her anonymity, specifically a
moment of recognition, which illustrates her unwillingness to completely abandon her
aristocratic identity.

Reading the Turkish veil as a part of Montagu's overarching concern with fashion
and social order requires reconsidering the dominant critical role Orientalism plays in
critical approaches to *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. Montagu's description of the Turkish

veil is typically considered within a broader debate over whether she participates in or

resists a prevailing Orientalist discourse that essentializes, exoticizes, and romanticizes

Eastern culture.[45] While it is important to consider whether and how Montagu espouses

attitudes and beliefs that license a nascent British imperialism, these approaches can

obscure her cross-cultural interest in fashion, gender, and status. Montagu's experience of

Turkish culture—specifically the veil—can be read within the context of her experiences

in Europe and Africa, through which she also travels and which help contextualize her

experiences in Turkey as part of a sustained journey in which she discovered an array of

cultural similarities and differences.[46] As Sukanya Banerjee points out in a study of how

the *Letters* articulates the political, cultural, and imagined boundaries of Europe,

Montagu "situates Turkey on a plane of continuity with Europe," commenting on

similarities, as well as differences, between Turkish and European culture (49). This

point is particularly relevant in terms of Montagu's contemplation of clothing, which

Roxanne Wheeler identifies (with religion) as one of the primary ways in which the

English categorized difference in the early eighteenth century (17). The fact that Montagu

comments on clothing throughout her journey suggests that the Turkish veil was one

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[45] See Bernadette Andrea, Srinivas Aravamudan, Elizabeth A. Bohls (*Women Travel Writers*)*,* Teresa Heffernan, Suvir Kaul, Mary Jo Kietzman ("Montagu's"), Joseph W. Lew, Lisa Lowe, Cynthia Lowenthal (*Lady Mary*), Billie Melman, Felicity Nussbaum (*Torrid Zones*)*,* Anna Secor, and Meyda Yeğenoğlu for criticism of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* that engages Said's Orientalism.

[46] The impulse to see the Turkish letters as distinct from letters written at other points in her journey is also reflected in the modern title of *Turkish Embassy Letters*. The original title emphasizes the breadth of her travels: *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M___y W____y M_____e: Written during her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, To Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters, &c. in different Parts of Europe. Which Contain, Among other Curious Relations, Accounts of Policy and Manners of the Turks; Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to other Travellers*.

(admittedly notable) example of a range of cultural differences in attire she encountered. The facet of the veil that Montagu focuses on—the uniformity and anonymity it provides for women—can be best understood by situating her consideration of the veil within her ongoing engagement with the theme of female fashion throughout the *Letter*s. Montagu comments on fashion, particularly women's fashion, in almost every country she visits, which shows her interest in the social significance of clothing within and between cultures. Reading the Turkish veil as an extension of Montagu's remarks on European female fashion and within the frame of eighteenth-century customs of attire allows us to more fully contextualize Montagu's enthusiasm for the custom of veiling.

Denys Van Renen has considered the Turkish veil in light of Montagu's description of women's fashions in Europe, drawing comparisons between the semiotic function of European female fashions and the male sphere of geopolitical boundary-making. Van Renen argues that for European aristocratic women fashion is a "semiotic barrier" that separates people by age, race, nationality, gender, and class, and that it echoes the geo-political barriers around and within Europe that are being erected by their husbands (19). In Turkey, Montagu instead finds clothing practices that promote cross-cultural relationships between women. Van Renen comprehensively outlines how the status and gender dynamics of the veil counter European systems of fashion, which enact distinctions of status, nationality, and religion, and lead to antagonism between different groups. My analysis, however, will focus less on how clothing facilitates or prohibits cross-cultural relations than on the relationship between practices of clothing, particularly anonymity, and social order. Concerned about the decline of fashion as a reliable

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indicator of status, Montagu uses descriptions of attire in Europe and Turkey to rehearse and address challenges to the social order specific to England.

Montagu's experience and analysis of the Turkish veil thus fits within a larger discussion of what she sees as a cross-cultural dilemma: how customs of attire maintain social order by clearly and publicly indicating rank, and how, conversely, clothing also has the potential to disrupt social order through emulative and competitive display. A lady by rank, Montagu is deeply invested in aristocratic ideology, particularly the notion that public display and visual distinctions of hierarchy are necessary to social order. She is concerned that the newly appetitive and commercial world of the early eighteenth century threatens to bankrupt both figuratively and literally the traditional aristocratic order. However, she also expresses annoyance at the tedious ceremonies that characterize her life as an aristocratic lady. The collective anonymity offered by the veil offers a novel solution to the problems associated with fashionable display while also facilitating Montagu's own individual escape from the tiresome formalities of aristocratic public appearances.

Prior to her arrival in Turkey, Montagu travels through a number of European countries and draws conclusions about the relationship between these countries' sumptuary laws, their customs of fashion, and their economic health. Writing from Nuremberg, she praises that city's laws regulating consumption, saying, "They have sumptuary Laws in this town, which distinguish their Rank by their dress and prevents that Excess which ruins so many other Citys and has a more agreeable Effect to the Eye of a Stranger than our fashions" (1.255). Her comments on Nuremberg's sumptuary laws directly follow her description of the city as having an "air of Commerce and Plenty" in

which "[t]he streets are well built and full of people, neatly and plainly dress'd, the shops loaded with Merchandize and the commonality clean and cheerfull" (1.254). Montagu uses these descriptions to distinguish the German "free Towns" from those under the rule of "absolute Princes," which are characterized by "a miserable mixture of Vice and poverty" (1.253-4). Sumptuary laws are thus one important aspect of a civil society, keeping most people "neatly and plainly dressed" rather than adorned with expensive and unnecessary decoration.

Montagu's nostalgia for sumptuary laws in this passage reflects the contentious role of fashion in the eighteenth century. The result of the destabilization of fashion as a semiotic system was not merely the lack of publicly discernible status identity through fashion, but also the risk of escalated spending on ornamentation, indicating a worrisome societal obsession with consumption and competition. Reflecting on the order of Nuremberg, Montagu asserts, "I need not be asham'd to own that I wish these Laws were in force in other parts of the World" (1.255). While she doesn't specify exactly what "other parts of the World" she references, the anxiety surrounding fashion in England during this period makes it likely she is thinking of her home country.[47] The picture she paints of a society without sumptuary laws (which is part of her reflection on Nuremberg) can thus be read as expressing her fears for an English society that has recently abandoned them:

> When one considers impartially the Merit of a rich suit of cloaths in most places, the respect and the smiles of favour it procures, not to speak of the Envy and the

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[47] Montagu would not have been alone in this view. Contemporaries such as John Dennis and Jonathan Swift also argued for new sumptuary laws to regulate excessive luxury spending in the first decades of the eighteenth century (McKendrick, "Consumer" 19).

sighs that it occasions (which is very often the principal charm to the Wearer), one is forc'd to confess that there is need of an uncommon understanding to resist the temptation of pleasing freinds and mortifying Rivals, and that it is natural to young people to fall into a Folly, which betrays them to that want of Money which is the Source of a thousand basenessess. What Numbers of Men have begun the world with generous Inclinations that have afterwards been the Instruments of bringing misery on a whole people! led by a vain expense into Debts that they could clear no other way but by the forfeit of their Honnour, and which they would never have contracted if the respect the Many pay to Habits was fix'd by Law, only to a particular colour, or cut of plain cloth! (1.255)

The pressure to affirm status in a culture lacking specific signs of nobility is exacerbated by the ability of moneyed non-nobility to purchase and display fashionable dress, confusing class categories and encouraging wasteful spending. Furthermore, this "forfeit of Honnour" to consumer appetite and debt indicates conflict between emerging capitalist values and aristocratic tastes.

Montagu's attribution of these appetitive consumerist values to women in particular is evident in her descriptions of Vienna and Prague, where she despairs over how the women focus on displays of wealth at the expense of all other considerations. In Vienna, she remarks, "I never in my Life saw so many fine Cloths ill-fancy'd. They embroder the richest gold Stuffs, and provided they can make their cloths expensive enough, that is all the taste they shew in them" (1.276). Everything about the Viennese connotes unnatural and overdone display: the women's hairpieces are "4 times as big, as those rolls our prudent milk-maids make use of to fix their Pails upon" and "Their

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whalebone petticoats out-do ours by several yards Circumference and cover some Acres of Ground" (1.265). Their hair is "prodigiously power'd" and "mix[ed] with a good deal of false," before being affixed to a fabric base "about a yard high" on their heads (1.265). Such conspicuous consumption is not only tasteless, but also, in the context of Montagu's insistence on the connection between social hierarchies and economic health, a sign of a profoundly disordered and unstable economy.

While the Viennese women risk destabilizing the aristocracy through profligate spending, the women Montagu encounters in Prague not only spend indiscriminately to enhance personal display, but they do so to the point that the individual is almost completely obscured. She satirizes this practice in her description of some

> considerable Ladys…dress'd after the Fashions there [Vienna], as people at
> Exeter imitate those of London. That is, their Imitation is more excessive than the
> Original and 'tis not easy to describe what extraordinary figures they make. The
> person is so much lost between Head dress and Petticoat, they have as much
> occasion to write upon their backs, This is a Woman, for the information of
> Travellers, as ever signpost painter had to write, This is a bear. (1.280-1)

In Prague the women's display of wealth and the emphasis on an exaggerated style of fashion not only represents unnecessary spending, but also goes so far as to obfuscate gender identity. Such a practice is doubly objectionable because of Prague's position as a town of "former Splendour" that now caters to "those people of Quality who cannot easily bear the Expense of Vienna" (1.280). Thus the clothing customs of Prague do not merely represent ugly, outdated, or ridiculous fashions, but rather an irresponsible display by aristocrats who already must live within diminished means. Female fashion, then, does

not merely risk destabilizing the signs of social class by encouraging unrestricted displays of luxury, but the extravagance it encourages also has the potential to undermine existing social distinctions by bankrupting families. Montagu's focus on female display in Vienna and Prague reflects the anxiety over female fashion as a site of capitalist excess and appetitive competition in England.

Montagu's letters articulate the paradox of women's attire: it represents capitalist expansion and accumulation as well as economic instability, as costly female adornments proliferate and become available to those outside the nobility. For aristocrats, whose public recognition traditionally demanded a visible difference between their attire and their social inferiors', the escalation in women's adornment requires increasing investment in attire.[48] Montagu's position is complex, as her conservative commitment to aristocratic hierarchy and its encoding in public display is challenged by an emerging mercantilist ideology that also defines itself through display.[49] Montagu's comments on European fashion suggest that this latter type of display—enacted on the female body— disrupts standards of taste, modesty, proportion, and common-sense, and in doing so threatens to destabilize household economies throughout England.

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[48] A notable example is Addison's *Tatler* No.116 essay about putting the hoop skirt on trial. This episode begins when a woman cannot fit through the courtroom door because her hoopskirt is too large, which she wears "for no other Reason, but that she had Mind to look as big and burly as other Persons of her Quality" (483).

[49] To further complicate matters, Montagu's purpose for being in Turkey was as part of an embassy specifically focused on trade relations (Lowe 37).

Montagu's initial solution to this problem, offered in her letter from Nuremberg, is the reinstatement of sumptuary laws. Limiting the purchase of particular styles and types of clothing promised to uphold tasteful visual status distinctions without bankrupting the upper classes. But she soon encounters a radical alternative to such laws: the Turkish practice of veiling. The clothing women wear publicly in Turkey erases all signs of individual identity instead of demarcating status differences, as in Europe. Writing from Adrianople, Montagu notes, "[N]o Woman, *of what rank so ever* [is] permitted to go in the streets without 2 muslins, one that covers her face all but her Eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head and their Shapes are also wholly concealed by a thing they call a Ferigée which no Woman *of any sort appears without*" (1.328, my italics). (See Figure 8 for an illustration of this attire.) To emphasize her point that status identity is obscured completely, Montagu states, "there is no distinguishing the great Lady from her Slave" (1.328). Montagu also testifies to the anonymity offered by the veil through her experience of wearing it. Writing from Constantinople, Montagu asserts, "I ramble every day wrap'd up in my ferigé and asmak…and amuse my selfe with seeing all that is curious" (1.405). Read

Figure 8. "Girl in outdoor clothes." Miniature painting signed Levni. Turkey *c.* 1720-1730. (Topkap1 Saray1 Muzesi, Library H. 2164 fol. 14b). From Jennifer Scarce, *Women's Costume of the Near and Middle East*, 63.

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within the context of Montagu's commentary on the role of fashion in maintaining social hierarchies, the implications of veiling do more than provide Montagu with a novel experience; rather, veiling provides a model of social order that challenges the logic of European sumptuary laws by erasing instead of communicating identity through clothing. Instead of the destabilizing, appetitive, tasteless fashions she sees in Europe (and which she fears represents the future of English fashion), the Turkish veil effaces difference. It renders women anonymous agents and in doing so severs the tie between women's fashion and the maintenance of social order.

Montagu's description of appearing in public in the veil as a "ramble" indicates the informality and spontaneity of this clothing practice, which starkly contrasts with the protocol typically attendant upon an aristocratic public appearance. Aristocrats would not only have been distinguished by attire, but also by mode of transport, liveried servants, and social customs (bowing and curtseying, the use of titles and honorifics, seating and processional order, etc.). These means of enacting hierarchical difference attracted attention. The erasure of outward signs of identity would therefore have had particular resonance for Montagu, who was otherwise subjected to surveillance and ceremony during public appearances. The veil provides Montagu with a collective means of anonymity she had previously experienced in the individual experience of going incognito. In her very first letter Montagu describes how she "walk'd allmost all over the Town [Rotterdam] Yesterday, incognito, in my slippers" (1.249). For Montagu, going incognito does not require a disguise; it merely requires shedding the typical attire, attendants, and conveyances of the nobility. In Adrianople, Montagu attempts to convince the French Ambassadress to adopt a similar mode of public appearance, to no avail:

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I see that Lady very often. She is young and her conversation would be a great

releife to me if I could perswade her to live without those forms and ceremonys

that make Life formal and tiresome, but she is so delighted with her Guards, her

24 footmen, Gentlemen Ushers, etc., that she would rather die than make me a

visit without 'em, not to reckon a Coach full of attending Damsels yclep'd maids

of Honour. What vexes me is that as long as she will visit with this troublesome

Equipage I am oblig'd to do the same. (1.324)

Montagu here details the retinue considered standard for the European aristocrats and

references the "forms and ceremonies" expected at each appearance. She expresses a

desire to escape them, and indeed does so when she can, as when she travels to the baths

"incognito" in a Turkish coach, a conveyance which has a covering that "entirely hides

the persons in them, but may be thrown back at pleasure and the Ladys peep through the

Lattices" (1.312). She again goes "incognito" in a Turkish coach when she visits the

Grand Vizier's Lady, "to avoid any disputes about Ceremony" (1.347). However, going

incognito is a strategy restricted to those who can erase the social signs of their identity:

aristocrats. It is an individual solution, while the veil is a collective practice that provides

a more straightforward means of being anonymous in public. While Montagu emphasizes

that people of all ranks wear the veil, she suggests that the "entire Liberty" it offers has

particular resonance for aristocratic women.

But Montagu is concerned that effacing aristocratic identity also erases the

protections that attend it. She fears she will be accosted without the physical barrier of a

coach and servants and the psychological barrier of an ingrained respect for the

aristocracy. She quickly realizes, however, that the veil offers a clothing practice in

which collective gendered anonymity, not individual identity, governs social encounters and affords protection. Her personal experience wearing the Turkish veil allows her to see how this custom upholds social order—meaning, orderly and civil public interactions—even as it erases the signs of status (for women) that are central to English social hierarchies. In her first foray outside in the Turkish veil Montagu marvels at how the veil structures social interactions: "I had the Curiosity to go to see the Exchange in my Turkish dress which is disguise sufficient, yet I own I was not very easy when I saw it crowded with Janizarys; but they dare not be rude to a Woman and made way for me with as much respect as if I had been in my own figure" (1.354). Montagu's fears that she will be unprotected because she is not identified as an aristocrat are assuaged when she sees that the anonymity of the veil functions to protect her.

To understand how Montagu interpreted the veil as providing much-needed anonymity in social settings without disrupting social order, we must return to her assertion that the custom of veiling creates a "perpetual Masquerade" and situate it within her understanding of English masquerade. For Montagu, collective anonymity—via the Turkish veil or the English masquerade—offers protection only in a society or setting ruled by class hierarchies, because such hierarchies operate even when people cannot be placed visually within the hierarchy. Writing later in life about masquerades, Montagu affirms that the logic of anonymity depends not upon an assumed *equality*, but rather upon an assumed *inequality*: that anyone might be a person of high rank. She writes, "I have always noticed more reserve at these [masquerades], than at other balls. All the Ladies are afraid of being taken for Courtesans, all the Men respect the Ladies they do not know; they fear encountering some Princess clad in a domino, who has an escort with

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her capable of teaching them how they ought to behave" (*Selected Letters* 426). This description helps illuminate Montagu's assertion that the Turkish veil is "perpetual masquerade." The masquerade, like the Turkish veil, structures social interactions through a logic of anonymity in which women who are masked can demand respect because their individual or class identity is unknown. What is important about Montagu's description of both the masquerade and the veil, however, is that social class still undergirds these encounters. When Montagu comments that she is as respected in the veil "as if I had been in my own figure," her comparison articulates the mechanism behind anonymous social encounters: everyone must act "as if" a person might be an aristocrat or face the consequences of offending a person of quality. Montagu's comparison of the Turkish veil to masquerade indicates that the veil does not transgress class boundaries, but rather relies on them to structure interactions with veiled women in public spaces.[50]

Turkey does have an established social hierarchy, but, unlike England and Europe, men's bodies, rather than women's, communicate distinctions of rank. Describing the Grand Signor's ceremonial procession to the mosque in Adrianople,

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[50] Montagu's accuracy in representing the living conditions of Turkish women, particularly their safety and freedom, is questionable. For example, her rhapsody about Turkish women's sexual freedom is undermined by her later report of the murder of a Turkish woman, probably for infidelity, which cannot be prosecuted because no one can recognize the woman (an example of the potential downsides of the anonymity of the veil). Bohls argues that Montagu's descriptions of Turkish women are "thoroughly ambivalent" and "approach outright self-contradiction," suggesting Montagu's own ambiguity about conditions for women in Turkey as well as in England (*Women Travel Writers* 40). Lowenthal sees Montagu as overly influenced by the genre of romance and thus unable to fully register the violence faced by some Turkish women (*Lady Mary* 81-2). Montagu's perception of how the veil functions may well be romanticized, particularly since she recorded wearing the veil on only a handful of occasions. For the purposes of this project her perceptions of the veil are more significant than the historical accuracy of her observations.

Montagu remarks, "It would be too tedious" to describe "the various dresses and Turbants (by which their Rank is distinguish'd) but they were all extremely rich and gay to the number of some thousands" (1.323). Turkish society shares with England a robust social hierarchy, but the gendered distinctions of rank function in almost the opposite manner. Making men's bodies the site of social legibility in public settings avoids the excessive display and emulative spending that characterized European women's fashions. Because women were identified with ostentation, display, and consumer appetite in England, Montagu would likely have interpreted male display as more restrained. The male display of hierarchical difference is also necessary for the collective use of the female veil to function, reminding Turkish citizens that any woman in a veil must be treated with respect, since it is impossible to determine if she is of low or high rank.

Turkish women, however, are not completely barred from participating in fashionable display. Rather, Turkish custom restricts luxurious feminine attire to private social events or the domestic sphere, which functions to curb extravagant spending by eliminating the need to purchase increasingly lavish attire to assert one's social rank. At the marriage of the Grand Signor's eldest daughter, for example, "the Turkish Ladys display all their magnificence" (1.321). Only aristocratic women are included in this expression of wealth and prosperity. The novelty and richness of Turkish fashion is evident in Montagu's catalog of the variety of textiles used to construct Turkish indoor dress ("rose colour damask," "white kid leather," "fine white silk gauze," "white and gold damask," "satin," "rich brocade," "ermine or sables," and "fine velvet") and the ornamentation of precious stones and metals ("gold," "diamond," "pearl," "rubies," and "topazes") (1.326-27). What is apparent is the quality of these materials and the relative

restraint with which they are displayed, contrasted with the gaudy fashions of Vienna and

Prague. Montagu finds them attractive enough to wear in portraits (see Figure 9). Such an

event would have had a relatively homogenous aristocratic guest list, meaning that there

would be less pressure to assert one's rank

through display. A similar dynamic would

have been at play in aristocratic homes, where

women were presumably surrounded by others

of the same status.

In such an environment social rank is

not in question, and fashion can demonstrate

feminine taste rather than ostentation. Writing

of taste in the twentieth century, Pierre

Bourdieu describes taste as is its own marker

of status distinction. It naturalizes difference,

"converting difference in the mode of

acquisition of culture into differences of

nature" (68). Elizabeth A. Bohls sees

eighteenth-century taste, particularly

aesthetics, operating similarly, particularly

since only the landowning elite were thought

to possess the disinterestedness necessary to

Figure 9. Detail from *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu with her son, Edward Wortley Montagu, and attendants*, by Jean Baptiste Vanmour. Oil on canvas. c.1717. © National Portrait Gallery, London. Montagu commissioned a series of portraits in indoor Turkish attire.

make objective judgments (*Women Travel Writers* 8-9).[51] Montagu's inclusion of women

into the realm of taste is atypical (women were usually seen as aesthetic objects rather

than subjects), but it demonstrates the status dynamics of taste during this period. The

Turkish clothing is certainly luxurious, but Montagu's description leaves little doubt that

the result is aesthetically pleasing rather than conspicuous, and that these fashions are

governed by shared aristocratic tastes rather than the competitive display of wealth. Her

description reasserts a hierarchy of taste over female attire that had been lost with the

decline of sumptuary legislation and the rise of emulative spending. When the female

body stops functioning as a site of display in public settings, Montagu implies, then

female attire becomes primarily a concern of the domestic sphere, where exaggerated

forms, excessive ornamentation, and conspicuous consumption cease to govern fashion.

The contrast between indoor and outdoor Turkish attire represents a complete reversal of

the European customs of fashion, providing a potential answer to the problematic

relationship between women and fashionable consumption by situating such concerns

within the household or among equals. Turkish dress eliminates the role of women in

publicly representing hierarchical difference while also reasserting status differences by

naturalizing the superiority of aristocratic taste.

The Turkish veil would thus have been an attractive sartorial practice for Montagu

because it did not subvert the social class hierarchies in which she was personally

invested. She saw these distinctions in status as being challenged by competitive,

consumerist displays that promote ruinous personal expenditure and the subsequent

destabilization of social hierarchies. As a counter-point to the excessive Viennese and

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[51] See John Barrell for more on the objectivity and disinterestedness of the landed
gentleman in eighteenth-century theory (31-5).

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Prague fashions (and their implied representation of emerging instabilities in English clothing practices), the uniform and unadorned veil does away with the notion of female fashion as public display altogether. Read as part of an extensive discourse on clothing and social class within *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, the Turkish veil functions as an alternative method of social ordering. It erases identity instead of affirming it, an idea that fascinated Montagu and allowed her to reflect on the potential for a radical reconceptualization of fashion in England. Perhaps there were other means than sumptuary laws of reinforcing traditional social hierarchies—codes of attire that also offered increased autonomy for women.

However, Montagu seems to retreat from this conclusion almost as soon as she reaches it, indicating that she is unwilling to completely abandon the idea of a legible social identity encoded on the body. While visiting a mosque in Adrianople, she remarks, "I was dressed in my Turkish habit and admitted without Scrupule, though I believe they guess'd who I was by the Extreme Officiousness of the door keeper to show me every part of it" (1.358). This passage suggests that Montagu wants to insist on an essential identity—aristocratic, as well as English—that is intelligible despite the veil. Even though the veil relies upon a rigid social hierarchy to function, it functions through gendered anonymity. The implications of this identity erasure trouble Montagu, who is invested in an aristocratic ideology that equated innate qualities with exterior appearance. Despite her professions of being "in great danger of loseing [her] English" due to learning the Turkish language, Montagu is also attached to her identity as an Englishwoman (1.390). Her insistence that she is recognized despite the veil, even after describing the absolute anonymity it provides for women, indicates a level of discomfort

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with its erasure of identity, even as she acknowledges that current practices in England regarding clothing weaken aristocratic status through excessive spending on attire and contribute to an association of women and consumerism.

Examining English social modes that rely on anonymity, such as the tradition of masking, can help contextualize Montagu's seemingly contradictory attitude toward veiling in Turkey. In his analysis of mask-wearing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Christoph Heyl draws a distinction between "true" anonymity, in which a person's identity was fully concealed, and anonymity as a social practice, which was more common and more ambiguous (127). In this latter mode of interaction, persons who appeared masked were treated as if they were anonymous even if they were recognized (120). For example, people would demur from making eye contact with a masked person, since it was believed that the face and particularly the eyes would reveal the person's intentions or true feelings (120-1). Heyl's study suggests that the anonymity of masking is often undermined by the body itself—eyes, face, gestures—even as the fiction of anonymity is socially observed. It is perhaps this type of anonymity that Montagu wants to enjoy in the Turkish veil as well as in her other incognito adventures: increased privacy and mobility balanced by deference to her individual identity and status.

It is worth remembering, particularly when considering Montagu's dramatic conclusion of being recognized despite the veil, that she shaped the plot and structure of the *Letters*. As the history of this document demonstrates, the process by which she composed the letters—from diary to specific letter, from individual letter to compilation, from informal circulated document to published text—evidences editing and re-arranging at almost every step (Melman 79). Billie Melman argues that Montagu "developed into a

fictional narrator, assuming diverse voices and different masks to convey to her audience different points of view, in accordance with the person (or character) she addressed….The actual letters, then, were transformed into a chronological, linearly evolving narrative of travel, in epistolary form" (79). This is not to suggest that Montagu fictionalized her text for duplicitous ends; rather, it points to the fact that she could have manipulated the original text in response to the changing concerns of her readers. While the relationship between clothing and the social order was certainly a source of interest for people in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, later developments—particularly what seemed to be the limitless emulation and escalation within female fashions—became a cultural preoccupation (as we will see in Chapter V). Robinson's experience wearing the veil may have taken on a new valence within this particular social climate, which she could subtly emphasize or reframe.

Like many of her compatriots, Montagu found the social practice of anonymity exciting: the veil, like the English masquerade, allowed her mobility and autonomy. It is a collective means of "going incognito," a privilege usually afforded only to the upper classes. The veil offers mobility and freedom through collective anonymity while also addressing the problem of the destabilization of social hierarchies and their visual representation in public life in England. Ultimately, Montagu's own attachment to English social hierarchies mutes the radical potential she sees in how the Turkish veil organizes social interactions. The veil's complete erasure of aristocratic identity in public for women counteracts its ability to stabilize social hierarchies by decreasing excessive spending on attire. While such anonymity increases mobility and freedom for women, for Montagu it also has the troubling effect of effacing a central aspect of her individual

identity. As the next section of this chapter will illustrate, Defoe's "fortunate mistress" Roxana also sees the appeal of anonymity as a means of preserving female freedom. For Montagu the anonymity of the veil was a novelty, and while the ability it afforded her to move about easily and safely in public places was certainly important to her, it was not necessary for her own personal or financial security, as she occupied a privileged social position. For Roxana, however, a broader sense of anonymity—not merely identity erasure but also resistance to categorization—becomes central to protecting her self-interest and independence, a necessary move given her lower status. By effectively manipulating, concealing, and obfuscating signs of identity, Roxana distances herself from restrictive social hierarchies and launches herself into the highest circles of society and echelons of wealth.

Roxana's Pursuit of Anonymity

Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Defoe's Roxana uses anonymity in order to gain mobility and social freedom. In *Roxana* we see how refusing to inhabit a specific role imparts social power and autonomy. Roxana cultivates a liminal, hybrid, and mysterious identity, refusing categorization in order to enhance her social and financial power. This, also, is a type of anonymity, and Roxana deploys all the tools at her disposal—disguises, personae, invented backstory, gossip, going incognito, and relocation—to obfuscate and complicate her social identity. By resisting being definitively catalogued, Roxana can avoid the legal and social limitations she faces as a woman. Furthermore, her early experiences going incognito teach her that people associate anonymity with the upper ranks, and she therefore presents herself in London as a mysterious, nameless lady in order to create the appearance of high rank without the

problems of actually impersonating a member of the nobility. But Roxana loses this autonomy and influence when she pursues a specific identity, an aristocratic title, in the novel's conclusion. While Defoe illustrates the power of individual anonymity as a social mode, he also demonstrates its limitations within a world still ruled by archaic social hierarchies.

Many critics describe *Roxana* as a novel that grows increasingly claustrophobic, as the heroine moves from self-definition and anonymity to notoriety and surveillance. Cynthia Wall analyzes this move in spatial terms, arguing that Roxana moves from "invisible occupancy" (making her first home appear abandoned to escape detection and her secret lodgings during her affair with the Prince) to the center of attention in her London rooms, culminating in her appearance in Turkish attire (359). Roxana gains power through her initial strategy of self-negation and concealment, and, Wall argues, she loses agency after she occupies center stage during her performance. Christina L. Healy also sees the novel as documenting Roxana's move from invisible agent to surveilled subject. She suggests that Defoe exposes Roxana to increasing surveillance in order to limit her speculative endeavors and promote a more conservative economic agenda in the wake of the South Sea Bubble collapse. Both Wall and Healy draw comparisons between the spatial world of the novel and Roxana's move from concealment to exposure during and after her Turkish dance. But instead of considering invisibility and surveillance as spatial elements, this analysis of *Roxana* will consider them as features of identity construction. Roxana's "invisible occupancy," to use Wall's term, extends beyond her ability to conceal herself within domestic spaces; rather, it is part of a larger project of invisibility in which Roxana renders her identity illegible to

avoid the social and legal limitations of particular subject positions, such as "wife,"

"lady," or "mistress." The surveillance she faces after her Turkish dance is a matter of

being recognized and named, which threatens to fix her identity and make it impossible

for her to operate as an unfettered anonymous agent.

Roxana's disastrous marriage to the spendthrift brewer, the event that begins the

novel, teaches her to avoid tying her identity to a particular romantic partner. In its

aftermath she learns to avoid particular social and legal labels in order to protect her self-

interest. After this experience Roxana refuses to let herself be categorized as a wife for

almost the entire novel. Her insistence on this point is evident in how she describes her

relationship with the landlord, which occurs after the brewer leaves her. The landlord

considers them spiritually married, if not married by law, but Roxana repeatedly

disavows such a relationship. She says he is her "new Friend, I cannot call him

Husband," and she repeatedly asserts that she "*never call'd him so*" nor thought of herself

as a "Wife" (53, 61; see also 54 and 56). This refusal to consider their arrangement as

legitimate supports Roxana's retrospective assertion that this sham marriage

"transgress[ed] against the Light of my own Conscience" (53). However, her claim that

she is not really married is more likely a practical rather than spiritual matter: a strategy

to avoid the implications of being known as a wife, namely the loss of autonomy and

control of her financial affairs.[52] This interpretation is supported by the fact that, although

Roxana avoids calling herself a wife while she is married, she apparently has no moral

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[52] The extent to which readers can trust Defoe's narrators is explored in depth in Chapter III. *Roxana* is typically viewed as containing less dramatic irony than Defoe's other novels, but it is still possible to read Roxana's moral objections to this marriage as unintentionally ironic, particularly as Roxana's conscience is apparently untroubled by her subsequent affairs.

qualms about adopting the title of widow once her partners have left or died. Roxana lets the landlord call her "Widow" after the brewer abandons her because, as she says, "so indeed I was in the worst Sence that desolate Word cou'd be us'd in" (42). When the landlord himself dies, Roxana begins referring to him as her husband and "made no Scruple of calling myself Madam ---, the Widow of Monsieur --- (61, 64, 65). She rejects the social identity of a wife but adopts the equally fictitious title of widow. Her reasons are logical. While being known as a wife reduced her power and autonomy, being known as a widow allows Roxana not only an inheritance, but also agency to do with it what she will. It is an early lesson in how she can manipulate identity categories and labels strategically to protect herself, particularly by resisting definitive legal and social identification. By adopting and abandoning aspects of identity as she sees fit, Roxana begins the process of strategic identity effacement that will characterize her self-fashioning throughout the novel.

Roxana also hybridizes her identity as part of her attempt to resist definitive social or legal categorization. Originally from France, Roxana claims to speak "Natural *English*, as if I had been born here" (24). Despite her early protestations that she "retain'd nothing of the *French*, but the Speech," Roxana nevertheless describes herself as possessing some innate aspects of French identity: "Being *French* born, I danced, as some say, naturally" and "I spoke *French* naturally" (24, 61). Roxana has both English and French identities which she deploys as circumstances and self-interest demand. (We will see a similar dynamic with nationality in *Colonel Jack* in Chapter III.) Roxana's plural identity gives her greater autonomy and mobility, allowing her to blend in or set herself apart as she sees fit. She is as comfortable in European cities and courts as she is in England, and at

times she even pretends to be a French citizen (61, 142). Roxana's ability to present herself as English or French, depending on the situation, is another example of her strategic resistance to definitive identity labels.

Roxana's cultivation of a hybrid identity, part of her larger practice of disavowing specific identity constructs, extends to her gender identity as well. While conversing with Sir Robert Clayton about money management later in the novel, Roxana rejects marriage as a shortcut to stability and instead vow to appropriate masculine power and freedom: "seeing Liberty seem'd to be the Men's Property, I wou'd be a Man-Woman; for as I was born free, I wou'd die so" (148). Roxana does not mean that she will be androgynous; she means she will not be limited by the legal and social constraints inherent to a female identity. (She has already adopted the masculine prerogative of abandoning her family, as her first husband had done.) Just as she uses both English and French identity for her own purposes, she is able to be more "free" by wedding masculine privilege to female body, creating an identity that resists classification. Roxana's gender, like her nationality and her status, is hybrid, and her hybridity allows her to defy categorization and function outside limiting social and legal codes when necessary.

These instances of identity manipulation early in the novel show Roxana the power of inhabiting a subject position that is not definitively identified. While hybridity differs from anonymity, both modes of social interaction give Roxana the power of self-definition while resisting limiting social identities imposed from without, such as "woman" or "wife." Roxana certainly can (and does) use her femininity to promote her own self-interest (primarily through affairs with wealthy and powerful men), but she resists the legal definitions associated with "wife" and "woman" that would limit her

control over her fortune. Hybridity destabilizes categories of identity, a dynamic Roxana will fully utilize when she embraces anonymity as a social mode.

Her first experience of the potential power of identity erasure occurs during her relationship with the Prince. In order to conceal his affair but still appear publicly with Roxana, the Prince arranges for both of them to go incognito. The Prince "had a mind to give me some diversion, and to take the air with me; but, that he might do it and not be publicly known, he comes to me in a coach of the Count de ——, a great officer of the court, attended by his liveries also; so that, in a word, it was impossible to guess by the equipage who I was or who I belonged to" (82-3). This mode of transport frees the Prince from the surveillance to which he would normally be subjected. Although the coach and livery appears to function as a disguise, Roxana emphasizes that she (and presumably the Prince) were not mistaken for the Count and an acquaintance but rather were not identified at all. The Prince makes similar arrangements when he decides to take Roxana on an extended trip to Italy on the King's business. While they want to travel together, to do so would be "so troublesome, so expensive, and so publick," as to render the journey logistically untenable (94). Ultimately, instead of attempting to hide Roxana, the Prince hides himself by not adhering to the standard ceremonies and protocols attendant upon his rank. He "came to this resolution, viz., that he would travel *Incognito*, and so he should avoid all public Notice either of himself or of who went with him" (94). As in Montagu's *Letters,* going incognito is a specifically aristocratic social practice. Because nobility is advertised via external signs—livery, clothing, heraldic arms, and so forth— the absence of those signs (or the substitution of another person's) effectively erases the person's social identity. Roxana witnesses firsthand how traveling anonymously allows

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the Prince the freedom to pursue his affair without public censure. By extension, Roxana herself experiences greater mobility, since she does not need to be confined to Paris or hidden within private lodgings. Anonymity is thus situated within the novel as a powerful method of public identity construction, both through its ability to increase mobility and autonomy and through its association with the upper ranks.

Seeing the benefits of strategic anonymity, Roxana adopts this practice for herself. She is able to do so at least in part due to the vast wealth she accumulates, which allows her to relocate frequently, finance a household, and pass herself off as an unknown woman of quality. Roxana relies upon the implicit association between being incognito and aristocratic identity to avoid inquiries as to her real identity. For example, when she wants to secretly deliver the Dutch merchant's child, she develops a plan to do so without revealing her identity: "I then resolved to take me a country lodging somewhere near the town, to be incognito, till I was brought to bed; which, appearing in such a figure and having such an equipage, I easily managed without anybody's offering the usual insults of parish inquiries" (142). Although anonymous, Roxana's wealth protects her from the inconvenient questions that would typically accompany an illegitimate birth. And, as Montagu pointed out, anonymity protects women because it is impossible to know a person's real status and their potential political or social power, making it wise to treat an unknown woman (particularly a wealthy one) with respect.

Going incognito allows Roxana to structure her personal and financial affairs to her liking, and she extends this strategic use of anonymity when she reappears in London after giving birth to her son. She establishes herself as a wealthy but mysterious single woman: "I dress'd to the height of every Mode; went extremely rich in Cloaths; and as

for Jewels, I wanted none; I gave a very good Livery, lac'd with Silver, and as rich as any-body below the Nobility, cou'd be seen with: And thus I appear'd, leaving the World to guess who or what I was, without offering to put myself forward" (143). Roxana maintains her public display of wealth without specific markers of identity:

> I walk'd sometimes in the *Mall* with my Woman, *Amy*; but I kept no Company, and made no Acquaintances, only made as gay a Show as I was able to do, and that upon all Occasions: I found however, the World was not altogether so unconcern'd about me, as I seem'd to be about them; and first, I understood that the Neighbors begun to be mighty inquisitive about me; as who I was? and what my Circumstances were? (144)

Here again Roxana deploys her riches not only in order to make her appearance in London more mysterious, but also to make her lack of title or other identifying features more socially acceptable. (Or even more desirable—Roxana knows her mysterious persona fascinates people.) As is the case with Roxana's other forms of identity manipulation—her English and French, and male and female hybrid identities and her ability to go incognito—this mode of self-presentation allows Roxana a level of self-definition and self-authorization while making it impossible for others to categorize her, despite their efforts. She can embrace the freedoms and respect accorded to a wealthy woman (an identity category important to Roxana) while avoiding the constraints imposed upon most women (lower-class women, wives, and even noble ladies, as she argues later). Unlike the Turkish veil, which relies on collective anonymity and uniformity to function, Roxana's version of identity erasure is individual and in fact sets her apart from other women. It is more aligned with Montagu's individual forays into

traveling incognito, which may attract attention (since only the elite travel incognito in coaches, even Turkish coaches) but do not reveal individual identity. Indeed, Roxana relies upon the association between concealed identity and high rank to excite interest and legitimize her reputation.

Roxana's anonymity here also relies upon the fact that late seventeenth-century London is for the first time a world of strangers. Urbanization rendered the city's population larger and increasingly anonymous (with the notable exception of aristocrats, who were still identified by coats of arms, coaches, and livery). Because strangers to the city were increasingly common, Roxana is regarded with interest rather than suspicion. She uses the phenomena of the stranger to her advantage, cultivating a mysterious identity and attracting attention while refusing to identify herself.[53] Roxana's cosmopolitanism, particularly her French traits, no doubt contributes to confusion over her "Circumstances": her rank, national identity, marital status, wealth, connections, and so forth. By deliberately playing up her identity as an unknown stranger, Roxana can also avoid the outright deceit of disguise—taking on a fake title or impersonating someone else—which always contains the threat of discovery.

Roxana's autonomy depends upon her refusal to identify herself, a fact that is illustrated by the immediate limitations to her freedom when she takes on a more specific persona. Her maid, Amy, spreads the rumor that Roxana is "the Widow of a Person of

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[53] Roxana's strategy bears similarity to Mary Carleton's, which will be discussed in Chapter III. Carleton appeared in England and feigned reluctance to reveal her "true" identity as a German princess (really, an assumed identity). The ease with which she convinced her landlord of this tale suggests that the romantic notion of aristocrats or heiresses on the run and in disguise was widespread. Roxana may have tried to capitalize on this trope by presented herself as a woman with a concealed identity but evident wealth.

Quality in *France*" who has inherited a fortune as well as an English estate (144). Almost immediately Roxana realizes the error of this revelation, which she says is "all wrong in *Amy*, and in me too" (144). By identifying herself Roxana exposes herself to "*Fortune-Hunters*" who, as she says, "always besieg'd Ladies…on purpose to take them Prisoners, *as I call'd it*—that is to say, to marry the Women, and have the spending of their Money" (144). Lest we think Roxana herself is a fortune-hunter, she professes disdain for any type of marriage: "*while I had 2000l. a Year of my own I was happier than I cou'd be in being Prisoner of State to a Nobleman*, for I took the Ladies of that Rank to be little better" (144). Roxana's terminology is significant. She uses the word "prisoner" to describe marriage, specifically a wife's loss of agency, and she juxtaposes being imprisoned in a relationship with being free and in control of her own fortune. Roxana's rejection of marriage, even to a nobleman, echoes her earlier disavowal of her "so-called husband" the landlord and her refusal to marry the Dutch merchant. However, while she had earlier accepted the title of "Widow," (because it allowed autonomy), she here realizes that even the status of a widow is limiting, as it subjects her to the ceaseless attentions of male suitors. Her loss of anonymity in this instance teaches her the limitations on freedom and autonomy that accompanies any identity, even one of high status.

The height of Roxana's success in using anonymity to promote her own self-interest occurs in her activities at the court of Charles II, which culminate in her performance as a "*Turkish Princess*" (150). This section of the novel explicitly connects anonymity to autonomy, particularly the freedom to pursue self-interest or appetite. In this respect it parallels Montagu's description of the Turkish veil as granting sexual

liberty. After Roxana gains access to the court, she quickly sees that the king and his

courtiers, who are "as wicked as any-body in reason cou'd desire them," need to indulge

themselves incognito to avoid scandal (148).[54] She therefore offers her apartments as a

private and anonymous site of entertainment outside of the surveillance of the court.

Roxana arranges her rooms for entertaining and "let them [the Gentlemen] see, that I

understood very well what such things meant," leaving no doubt as to the illicit purpose

of the ball (149). But the privacy of Roxana's apartments is apparently insufficient to

ensure the anonymity—and therefore protection—of her guests. To Roxana's surprise, a

cadre of masked courtiers joins the festivities, turning the ball into a masquerade (a

tradition followed in subsequent gatherings) (149, 153). The masquerade amplifies the

sense of privacy by making it even less likely that a person would be identified and

therefore potentially held accountable for their behavior. The customs of masquerade as

well as the masks themselves discourage individual identification. For example, Roxana

is introduced to "one of the masks, a tall, well-shaped person, but who had no name,

being all masked; nor would it have been allowed to ask any person's name on such an

occasion" (150). As Heyl argues, the social rules governing masks and masquerade

emphasized complete anonymity, even when it was possible to recognize participants.

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[54] Behn's *The Rover* is often interpreted as referencing the court of Charles II, with
Willmore read as either Charles himself or as John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester.
Roxana here echoes the themes of Behn's play, particularly the idea that the men's sexual
appetites are so depraved and insatiable that they need to indulge them while masked, to
avoid repercussions. See Introduction 27-35. See David Blewett for more on Defoe's use
of masquerade to link Restoration excess with contemporary immorality ("Roxana and
the Masquerades").

Although Roxana drops hints that she recognizes various important court figures, she is careful to preserve the pretense of anonymity and freedom from surveillance.[55]

Immediately grasping the opportunity that this impromptu masquerade affords, Roxana uses the situation to enhance her own ability to operate anonymously. She performs as a "*Turkish Princess*," emphasizing a mysterious, exotic, and unknowable identity. She makes a grand entrance to emphasize the novelty of her attire: "Immediately the folding-doors were flung open, and he led me into the room. The company were under the greatest surprise imaginable; the very music stopped awhile to gaze, for the dress was indeed exceedingly surprising, perfectly new, very agreeable, and wonderful rich." The choice of Turkish attire is deliberate, evoking an Orientalist exoticism and difference (Brown 148). The accuracy of her Turkish performance is less important than its mystery and spectacle. It matters little that Roxana dances "a figure…learned in France" to "a French tune" or that she has "a Christian's Face" (150-51) because the hybridity of the performance plays into her audience's preconceptions of the East as exotic and different. Roxana assumes that the greater the extravagance and outlandishness of her performance, the greater her distance from any sort of identifiable public character. Her costume and dance are more than a disguise; they are a deliberate manipulation of identity in order for Roxana to promote her own interests, and as such they align with her earlier decisions to refuse a specific identity or categorization. Her

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[55] It is notable that Roxana, like Montagu, suggests that people of high rank can be recognized despite veils or masks. A similar dynamic will occur in Haywood's *Anti-Pamela*, in which the heroine identifies a nobleman at a masquerade by glimpsing the eight-pointed Cross of St. George that signifies the prestigious Order of the Garter (146-7). These scenes indicate tension between recognition and anonymity, particularly with regard to status.

costume reinforces the slipperiness of her identity. She is English, Turkish, and French, she is a spectacle, she is the center of attention, but she is in fact a cipher—which is, of course, part of her sexual appeal and therefore a central element to her autonomy. Roxana is unknowable, and this feature connects her to Montagu, who was also unknowable while wearing the Turkish veil. While they adopt different approaches—standing out versus blending in—both Roxana and Montagu experience the power of shedding a social and legal identity for an unknowable one.

However, problems arise almost immediately as a result of this performance. Despite Roxana's efforts, she cannot maintain her anonymity while also being the focus of court attention. To begin, there is her name. While Roxana had adopted previous titles briefly, it is the name Roxana that she is unable to shed (63, 142). Her performance in Turkish attire is so noteworthy that she becomes immediately and inextricably tied to it. After she completes her first performance, "the Company clapp'd, and almost shouted; and one of the Gentlemen cry'd out, *Roxana! Roxana!* by _____, with an Oath; upon which foolish Accident I had the Name of *Roxana* presently fix'd upon me all over the Court End of Town, as effectually as if I had been Christen'd Roxana" (151).[56] This small aside foreshadows Roxana's eventual discovery by her daughter, who, unbeknownst to Roxana, watches the performance, and who will later insist, like her audience, on linking her to this particular name. But even before her daughter reappears, Roxana is wary of the appellation, calling it a "foolish Accident," alluding either to the fact that this particular nickname stuck (in which "foolish" would refer to name itself) or

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[56] The modern naming conventions for this novel reflect the same dynamic. While Defoe's original title (see page 41) gives the protagonist two specific names (and one title) in addition to Roxana, it is this last appellation that most contemporary readers use.

to the fact that she acquires a name at all (in which she is "foolish" for taking on such a memorable character). In either case, this name fixes Roxana to a particular identity. Her temporary performance transforms her into a collectively recognized and named individual, despite her efforts to remain mysterious, exotic, and unknowable.

Her concern over being named is justified by later developments, which reduce her anonymity even further by making her name a notorious shorthand for licentiousness. When she re-emerges into public life, after a three-year retirement as mistress to the king, she realizes that her activities have not been wholly concealed: "as some People had got at least, a Suspicion of where I had been, and who had had me all the while, it began to be publick, that *Roxana* was, in short, a meer *Roxana*, neither better nor worse; and not that Woman of Honour and Virtue that was at first suppos'd" (156). This passage reveals the utter success of Roxana's anonymous identity, as she is assumed to be a "Woman of Honour" rather than a fortune-hunter, ambitious upstart, or a woman of loose morals. (Certainly our narrator must have used a name while at court, but the fact that it is unspoken within the text suggests that her name was inconsequential, a dead-end in terms of establishing her family, nationality, or rank.) In contrast to the autonomy and good reputation she enjoyed as an essentially anonymous figure, the name Roxana fixes her identity, first as the performer and host of the popular balls, and second as "*cast-off Mistress*" or "meer *Roxana*" (156). Selective self-definition had been central to Roxana's cultivation of anonymous or unknowable identities, allowing her to take on and cast off specific labels as she saw fit and to avoid categorization by others. The name "Roxana" not only fixes her to a specific social position but also ascribes to her both a name and a character over which she has no control. While Roxana orchestrated her original

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performance, once she is named she loses such self-authorization as the name becomes inextricable from licentious acts. The result of her Turkish spectacle represents a shift in Roxana's identity, from an anonymous, self-directed persona cultivated through hybridity and mystery to a particular person, named by others, with an unsavory past.

It is this turn of events that prompts Roxana to change her identity practices and attempt to establish a specific, reputable, genteel identity. She has one last affair with a Lord before she suffers her famous pang of conscience ("What was I a Whore for now?") and begins to consider her future (158-9, 170). By this point she is truly notorious, her name synonymous with depravity: "I began to be known in the Town, not by my Name only, but by my Character too, which was worse" (175). Her fame does not allow her to rehabilitate her reputation, nor does it allow her to retreat back into secrecy or concealment. Reputation, notoriety, and celebrity make private acts public and rely on social recognition, making it impossible for someone to retreat back into obscurity or anonymity. Roxana must establish a new identity, since it is impossible for her to present herself—known publicly as a mistress—as mysterious or unknowable.

Roxana perceives that her scandalous reputation precludes a relationship with her children, a development that she says, "put me upon thinking how to put an End to that wicked Course I was in, that my own Child…shou'd not be asham'd to own me" (172-3). Her wealth has allowed her to raise her children into the genteel ranks: her son is apprenticed to a merchant and is referred to by Sir Robert Clayton as a "young gentleman," while her daughter "was directed to put herself into a good Garb, take Lodgings, and entertain a Maid to wait upon her, and to give herself some Breeding, that is to say, to learn to Dance, and fit herself to appear as a Gentlewoman" (172-3).

Roxana's notoriety threatens her relationship with her children because it is impossible for them, or for any other respectable person, to openly associate with a "common Whore" (175). She thus decides to establish a specific, genteel identity since she can no longer rely on anonymity to advance her self-interest. This new identity practice aligns with her new goals: instead of desiring to be mistress to the king or a lord (a position she chose because she could avoid the limiting role of being a wife and operate incognito), Roxana wants a life that includes a relationship with her children and with other respectable people.

In order to cultivate such an identity Roxana must, for the last time, rely on the city of London to provide anonymity. By this point Roxana is so familiar to a particular segment of the city that Amy thinks the only solution is to "go Abroad again, and live in some other Nation, where no body has known us, or seen us, so that they cannot say they ever saw us before" (175). But Roxana realizes that London is so vast that she can instead operate as a stranger merely by moving across the city: "is it not possible for me to shift my Being, from this Part of the Town, and go and live in another Part of the City, or another Part of the Country, and be as entirely conceal'd as if I had never been known?" she asks Amy (176). By altering "Equipages, and Servants, Coaches, and Horses…Liveries….[her] own Cloaths, and [her] very Face" Roxana can re-invent herself and escape her scandalous reputation (176). This exhaustive list seems daunting, but it in fact presents no great obstacle for Amy and Roxana: within a matter of days Amy tells her mistress she has "found a Scheme how you shall…finish a perfect entire Change of your Figure and Circumstances, in one Day; and shall be as much unknown…in twenty-four Hours, as you wou'd be in so many Years" (176). London is so

vast that moving across town is the equivalent to moving to another country, indicating the interrelatedness of urbanization and anonymity. Roxana takes full advantage of this opportunity in order to shed her reputation as a mistress and take on a more respectable identity. However, it is important to note that here anonymity functions as a means to an end: it is a means of attaining a new, genteel identity rather than a sustained social mode that resists such categorization.

As part of her reinvention, which first requires shedding her scandalous reputation, Roxana takes on the same costume as the woman with whom she lives, disguising herself as a Quaker in order to be able to appear in public without being recognized. The disguise has its intended effect, according to Amy: "it is a perfect Disguise to you; why you look quite another body, I shou'd not have known you myself" (178). Roxana can now "go Abroad," confident she will not be known. The Quaker disguise is less about taking on a different identity than about obscuring a person's known social identity in order to gain freedom and mobility in public. As Roxana notes: "all this was my particular Plot to be the more compleatly conceal'd, and that I might depend upon being now known, and yet need not be confin'd like a Prisoner, and be always in Fear" (179-80). Roxana believes she has shed her scandalous past permanently, which will allow her to create a new, more respectable, character for herself. While she anticipates abandoning anonymity as a practice, she wants to maintain her power of self-determination and self-authorization.

However, Roxana's plans are complicated by her daughter, whose pursuit simultaneously undoes Roxana's anonymity and prevents her from establishing her new identity. The re-emergence of Roxana's daughter into the narrative inaugurates the

typical Defoe plot device in which past relationships threaten the narrator-protagonist's current identity construction. The serial subjects of Chapter III will face the same problem, as the appearance of past wives, husbands, or children threatens to expose the current personae of the protagonists. Roxana's children from her first marriage remind her that she is potentially a bigamist and certainly an adulterer with regard to her first marriage. For Roxana, who has employed anonymity in order to gain freedom, identification by her daughter represents a profound and frightening loss of autonomy. Healy argues that the appearance of Roxana's daughter limits Roxana's mobility, making England itself "a steadily shrinking trap" (495, 505). There is a clear parallel between recognition and entrapment, in part because mobility is so strongly associated with an unknowable, hybrid, and flexible identity. Furthermore, anonymity allows a degree of self-definition, while recognition imposes an identity from without.

With the reappearance of Susan, Roxana faces a double identification: as Susan's mother and the brewer's wife, and as the notorious Roxana.[57] Her daughter first threatens to expose her as the Turkish Princess, the identity that was troublesome to Roxana because it turned her into a public celebrity and destroyed the secrecy, concealment, mystery, and exoticism that contributed to her powerful role in the court. But Susan's potential revelations extend further. As Roxana admits, "she was my own Name,"

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[57] David Marshall also analyzes the importance of naming in *Roxana*, specifically "Roxana" and "Susan." He asserts that Roxana's daughter threatens to uncover "the shame of theatricality," exposing her mother as a consummate actress and refusing to respect the boundaries between audience and performer that Roxana has enforced (149). While I agree with many elements of Marshall's reading, his approach mirrors studies of masquerade which focus on the creation of alternate identities rather than the erasure of a person's identity. Roxana is certainly theatrical in her self-presentation, but the hybrid, mysterious, and malleable identities she creates allow her to defy categorization rather than fulfill a particular role.

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meaning that Susan reveals an aspect of Roxana's identity that has been denied even to the reader: her real name (173). Susan threatens to expose Roxana as not only the Turkish Princess, but also as a woman who abandoned her children with relatives in order to pursue a series of advantageous affairs. Jesse Molesworth describes Susan as a character who intrudes upon the narrative and "forces Roxana to revise her narrative project drastically, as mother and daughter now jostle for control and involvement in what comes next" (497). Susan recognizes Roxana, and she demands recognition herself. She reminds readers of the moral component of Roxana's self-invention and suggests that there is one category of identity that Roxana cannot renounce as suits her self-interest: her role as a mother. Susan's ability to recognize and identify her mother represents a serious threat indeed to Roxana's anonymity and therefore autonomy, a dynamic represented in Susan's increasing control over the narrative.

Susan's pursuit of Roxana and the tragedy that ensues as Roxana desperately tries to avoid identification occupies the conclusion of the novel, which is uncharacteristically nonlinear and ambiguous. It abruptly closes with Amy probably, but not certainly, murdering Susan. As *Roxana* has risen in esteem in the twentieth- and early twenty-first-century scholarship, the success or failure of the novel's conclusion has become one of the enduring debates of Defoe criticism. Is the ending a triumph of modern novelistic realism (Gladfelder 142) or is it "one of the most incisive and troubling critiques of literary realism authored in the eighteenth century"? (Molesworth 494). Is the ending integral to the meaning of the work as a whole, or is it "padding" added much later and without regard for novelistic unity? (Dijkstra 80). Read within the context of Roxana's identity construction and deconstruction, I read the ending as illustrating how rigid and

exclusionary hierarchies continue to occupy a powerful place not only in social arenas, but also in the individual imagination. Despite Roxana's effective use of anonymity and avoidance of social and legal labels, even she is seduced by the lure of a title. This interpretation does not address larger questions about whether Defoe condemns Roxana's actions or the ending's relationship to literary modes such as realism, but it does explore the implications, and limitations, of practices of anonymity in the context of a society still largely committed to an aristocratic social hierarchy.

Roxana's cultivation of her own anonymity allows her greater autonomy, but her anonymity also provides Defoe a chance to illustrate the shifting balance of wealth and status during this period by severing these attributes of identity from each other. Wealth, according to Defoe, is a powerful tool, and unlike status is unencumbered by archaic traditions, idiosyncrasies, and inefficiencies. For example, Roxana keeps her middling origins a secret when she returns to England after her affair with the Prince, but she does not invent a new identity, with a specific rank. Instead, she relies on the fact that her wealth (and the rumors of its source) will gain her entry into the most exclusive social circle in London: the court. Not only does her air of mystery enhance her social standing, it also protects her from charges of aristocratic impersonation, such as those that will surround Mary Carleton. The ability to operate outside the system of minute differentiations that characterizes the social hierarchy gives Roxana much more freedom than other women at court. Her wealth confers legitimacy on her actions, but she is not limited by a particular social role or position within social hierarchy more broadly or court hierarchy in particular.

This reading of anonymity and its relationship to social hierarchy within the novel aligns with Bram Dijkstra's interpretation, which argues that Roxana must be read within the context of Defoe's economic theory, expressed in numerous tracts and pamphlets. As part of his argument, Dijkstra argues, "Defoe's most persistent and emphatic theme consisted of an exposition of the intolerable impediments placed by the remnants of a feudalist world view upon the free and full development of a modern market economy based on unfettered growth" (13). A rigid social hierarchy is one example of how residual feudalist ideology limits economic progress, according to Dijkstra: "Defoe holds special contempt for those aristocrats who still see an inherent or innate value in their position, as opposed to status based on their economic power" (14).[58] Dijkstra focuses on Roxana's redistribution of wealth from her aristocratic partners to her own coffers, but his interpretation also provides a rationale for why Roxana effectually opts out of the social hierarchy by refusing to allow herself to be identified as a wife to a particular man or by an invented status for herself. Instead, Defoe demonstrates how wealth in and of itself establishes Roxana as a "Woman of Honour and Virtue." (The following chapter will explore how Defoe depicts the opposite situation, in which characters believe they are genteel but lack wealth.) For Defoe, whose protagonists delight in amassing enormous fortunes, a social hierarchy based on wealth rather than status would reward the ingenuity

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[58] Maximillian E. Novak also argues that Defoe's economic theory, particularly mercantilism, underlies his novels. He also interprets *Roxana* as depicting an aristocracy ruined by idleness and luxury, but he sees Roxana herself as participating in wasteful and ruinous spending. In a parallel to Montagu, Defoe also argued for sumptuary laws, not to reinforce status distinctions but rather to prevent excessive expenditure, which he thought weakened the mercantilist state (*Economics* 138-9).

and ambition he wants to cultivate in his readers (Dijkstra 15).[59] Roxana's anonymity is

personally empowering, but it also represents a challenge to the ideology of traditional

social hierarchies, in which birth mattered more than wealth. In this respect Roxana's

practices of anonymity differ from Montagu's: while Roxana implicitly reject the value

of a social hierarchy (because she refuses to be classified within one), Montagu's affinity

for the Turkish veil is rooted in a belief in the legitimacy of social hierarchies and their

necessity to a healthy social order.

However, Roxana abandons this principle when she attempts to establish herself

as a member of the nobility, trading her money for a title. Defoe's irony, which is

otherwise muted in this text (as opposed to its prominence in *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel

Jack*) emerges in the conclusion, as Roxana deliberates between her two suitors: the

Prince and the Dutch merchant. After rejecting marriage throughout the novel, even an

aristocratic match, Roxana now professes to be obsessed with "fancy's Sovereignty" of

being a "Princess" (198). She is not assuaged by Amy's assertion that she is "rich enough

to be a Princess to [her]self" or the Dutch merchant's compliment that she is "his

Princess" (198-99). She is only comforted by the Dutch merchant's promise to "make

[her] a Lady, here in England, and a Countess too, if [she] will go out of it" (199). His

solution is to purchase a title:

> He told me, that Money purchas'd Titles of Honour in almost all Parts of the
>
> World; tho' Money cou'd not give Principles of Honour, they must come by Birth
>
> and Blood; that however, Titles sometimes assist to elevate the Soul, and to infuse

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[59] David Wallace Spielman has converted Robinson Crusoe's, Moll Flanders', and
Roxana's wealth into modern figures to argue that the fantastical sums that they
accumulate should cause us to reconsider, or at least qualify, claims about the novels'
literary realism.

generous Principles into the Mind, and especially, where there was a good

Foundation laid in the Persons; that he hop'd we should neither of us misbehave,

if we came to it; and that as we knew how to wear a Title without undue

Elevations, so it might sit as well upon us, as on another. (200)

The Dutch merchant's high-minded rhetoric contrasts starkly with Roxana's single-minded pursuit of the highest title possible as an end in itself. For her, the opportunity to be "Lady in English, and a Countess in Dutch" is merely a substitute for the lost opportunity of being a Princess (201). Although Roxana plays along, this woman who earlier referred to marriage to an aristocrat as similar to being a "Prisoner," certainly does not see the acquisition of a title as a way to "elevate the Soul" or "infuse generous Principles into the Mind." Defoe's irony is apparent in the contrast between the reverence of the Dutch merchant toward titles and Roxana's unsentimental attitude toward them: she wants the power and prestige they afford. Furthermore, the Dutch merchant's confidence that titles can improve their bearers, "especially, where there was a good Foundation laid in the Persons" betrays his self-deusion about his wife's past. In an out-of-character and seemingly illogical reversal, Roxana is willing to trade her hard-earned wealth (which she had always valued and protected) for a title (which she had previously denigrated, and for convincing reasons).[60]

As Peter New argues, "For Defoe, a person is not so much what s/he is, as what s/he does" (317). Anonymity provides the perfect testing ground for this theory of

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[60] Chapter III addresses irony in detail. Although some critics (notably Ian Watt) do not see Defoe as a deliberately ironic writer, most recent analysis identifies instances of dramatic or situational irony in the retrospective narration of Defoe's novels (see
 Ian Bell; David Blewett, *Defoe's Art*; Maximillian Novak, "Conscious Irony"; and Emmett Zimmerman).

identity, allowing protagonists to operate autonomously and without being either limited by or unduly rewarded by a particular identity related to the social hierarchy (although, as we will see in Chapter III, this idea is complicated in *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*). Roxana's fixation on a title at the end of the novel thus illustrates her move away from doing and toward merely being, which represents not merely an abandonment of her anonymity but also a repudiation of the principles that had previously guided her life, namely a disregard for status by birth. It is during her pursuit of a title that Susan appears, although Roxana does not discover this fact until later. Susan's pursuit of Roxana, her refusal to be put off and her increasingly bold assertions that the narrator is in fact both Lady Roxana and her mother, jeopardizes Roxana's new, aristocratic identity. The fact that identification is such a key element of the Susan plot suggests that Defoe is drawing a comparison between the freedom of anonymity and the limitations of a public identity, particularly one that represents an archaic and economically repressive social system. Roxana is not punished because she does not deserve to be Countess, being low born and a woman of ill repute; rather, Roxana's trials illustrate that upward social mobility into the aristocracy merely reproduces the stagnancy and retrogression of a declining system of social and political order. Roxana's fixation on an aristocratic title—or better yet, two titles—illustrates her misplaced belief in an aristocratic social hierarchy and her abandonment of the radical freedom she had experienced by refusing to operate by the codes of the social hierarchy.

Yet Defoe also demonstrates that Roxana's practice of anonymity, though freeing, had very real costs. Roxana's identity practices require abandoning her children, and Susan's reappearance reminds readers that this choice has consequences. Susan reminds

Roxana of her identity as a mother, and her relentless pursuit indicates that this relationship has a permanence that Roxana cannot escape—or can only escape through violence. Roxana's refusal to marry jeopardizes her relationship with the Dutch merchant, who appears to be a good match for her. Her determination to present herself as mysterious and unknowable precludes friendships with women other than Amy. Finally, Roxana's ability to operate as an anonymous agent is portrayed as tenuous and contingent. It requires great wealth (there is no power in being anonymous and poor, as most poor people are already unseen and unacknowledged), it requires constant relocation, and it necessitates a pragmatic and unemotional approach to all social interactions.

Sociologists have extensively studied the alienation experienced by many people who live in cities, arguing that the "world of strangers" weakens relational ties. Simmel sees city life as reducing most social interactions to economic calculations, and Michael P. Smith suggests that while living in cities offers freedom from "socioemotional controls," the "price of this increaseed mobility is lost intimacy, anonymity, and ultimately anomie" (9). Defoe's *Roxana* may well be a more modern narrative than we realize, describing the opportunities but subsequent downsides of urban anonymity. While anonymity in many ways provides a means of avoiding social and legal surveillance (for example, allowing Roxana to give birth to an illegitimate child without bothersome inquiries), it requires strict and constant self-policing. And despite all the opportunity it affords, anonymity can only be a temporary state. In his portrayal of Roxana, Defoe may be critiquing the limitations of the existing social structure, but he might also suggest that no one—and particularly not a woman—can permanently live

outside of it. Roxana's vast wealth cannot protect her from charges of impropriety and feminine misbehavior, her secret role as benefactress to her children does not excuse her from her maternal obligations, and her financial independence does not negate her eventual desire for the legal and social bond of marriage. Even for Defoe, who delights in documenting his protagonists' accumulation of wealth, the means by which Roxana enriches herself may be spiritually untenable and impossible to sustain.

Summary

As the analysis of these two texts illustrates, anonymity could take a number of forms in eighteenth-century social life. Wearing masks, attending masquerades, and going incognito were popular activities or modes of interaction in the early eighteenth century, and, as we have seen, veils and costumes could also be used to interrogate the limits of identity. In a newly urbanized London, hybridity, mystery, and exoticism created the effect of an unknowable person, intensifying the experience of the city as a world of strangers. Perhaps due to the strict legal and social constraints on various identity categories—gender, religion, status, nationality, and so on—people were fascinated by the idea of temporarily abandoning their given identity and operating freely as anonymous agents. Even privilege had its downsides in the form of tedious ceremony and public surveillance. This is the appeal of masquerade, of going incognito, and of wearing masks to the theater. It is also why narratives of perpetual identity shedding and self-invention such as Defoe's were popular.

The various practices of anonymity that emerged during this period interrogated the function and range of the social hierarchy in England. In one sense, anonymity challenges the very tenets of aristocratic ideology, which argued that, by its very nature, a

noble identity would make itself known through the body itself if not by adornment. Montagu reaffirms this conception of aristocratic identity, insisting that she is recognized despite the veil (although admittedly she may also be reclaiming her English identity as well). Montagu also positions the veil as bolstering an aristocratic social hierarchy by eliminating appetitive, emulative spending by non-nobles and therefore keeping aristocratic privilege intact. Although she celebrates the leveling tendencies of collective anonymity, she makes clear that hierarchies are necessary for such anonymity to function.

Roxana's anonymity is more abstract, consisting of her refusal to identify herself in a way that would limit her autonomy. By doing so Roxana can operate outside typical social norms, maintaining control of her money, hosting illicit entertainments, and moving freely through cities and countries as suits her self-interest. But by the novel's conclusion, Roxana has abandoned anonymity in favor of a title—the particular, fixed, public identity she had avoided. Somewhat paradoxically, both Montagu and Roxana demonstrate that anonymity depends upon the existence of a social hierarchy, even as it challenges the idea that rank should be visually communicated. For Roxana, the association between going incognito and aristocratic identity legitimizes her anonymity and places her within elite circles despite—or rather, because of—her lack of a social identity, while the deference the veiled Montagu receives in public depends upon the peculiar logic of anonymity, in which all women are afforded respect in case any one person is of high status. Montagu and Roxana, from opposite perspectives—historical aristocrat, fictional courtesan—explore anonymity and, at least briefly, experience an alternative to the system of visual and hierarchical distinctions that governed a large part of English social life.

Although neither text ultimately suggests that anonymity can transcend or replace the social hierarchy (certainly not Montagu's), pressures on the social hierarchy were increasing, and they were appearing more and more in literature. The mid-century *Pamela* controversy erupted due to Richardson's portrayal of an unequal marriage between a servant and a gentleman, which many saw as a dangerous leveling of status distinctions. After the Turkish embassy but before her letters documenting the journey were published, Montagu would write to her daughter to condemn characters such as Pamela (and her author) for undermining social hierarchies. She writes:

> The counfounding of all Ranks and making a Jest of order has long been growing in England, and I perceive, by those Books you sent me, has made a very considerable progress….It has long been the endeavor of our English Writers to represent people of Quality as the vilest and silliest part of the Nation. Being (generally) very low born themselves, I am not supriz'd at their propagateing this Doctrine, but I am much mistaken if this Levelling Principle does not one day or other break out in fatal consequences to the public, as it has allready done in many private Families…the greatest examples I have known of Honor and Integrity has been amongst those of the highest Birth and Fortunes. There are many reasons why it should be so, which I will not trouble you with. (*Selected Letters* 388-9)

Montagu's equation of wealth and high rank to virtue is an explicit articulation of aristocratic ideology, as is her promise that there are "many reasons why it should be so," reasons which are apparently self-evident. Chapter III will examine this belief in more detail, showing how authors address it in the characterization, narrative strategy, and plot elements of the early novel. As Montagu's letter suggests, *Pamela* ignited a debate about

status and representation, two linked concepts that are also at the root of the eighteenth-century preoccupation with anonymity.

CHAPTER III

TO "ACT LIKE A GENTLEMAN": SERIAL SUBJECTS, STATUS, AND THE

EARLY NOVEL

This chapter will examine identity construction and narration within the early

English novel by focusing on a popular type of protagonist: the serial identity

manipulator, a perpetually self-fashioning subject who initially appears in Mary

Carleton's autobiographical *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* (1663), and reoccurs in

Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Colonel Jack* (1722) and Eliza Haywood's

Fantomina (1725) and *Anti-Pamela* (1741).[61] These protagonists' easy adoption of

different personae suggests that during this period identities were understood as operating

primarily through performance. This idea of the self-as-performer precludes a conception

of identity as innate, interiorized, or authentic, and it functions as an implicit challenge to

aristocratic ideology and the assumption of essential, even biological, signs of status.

Works such as *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* dramatize these contested modes of

identity construction by featuring serial subjects who also assert an innate status identity.

Later eighteenth-century novels such as Haywood's limit or reject serial subjectivity,

indicating that a cultural reconceptualization of identity influenced the novel, particularly

the textual representation of the protagonist. The novelistic portrayal of status identity as

permanent is one of the primary factors in the move away from performance-oriented

serial subjectivity and toward an interiorized subjectivity within the novel genre.

Serial subjectivity is closely related to the practices of anonymity discussed in

Chapter II. Although at first the two modes of self-presentation seem complete opposites,

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[61] See Chapter II for more on the debated authorship of these novels (41n).

they depend upon the same foundational belief in identity as a matter of performance. For a serial subject, identities proliferate, while for an anonymous subject, identity vanishes. But both serial subjectivity and anonymity are strategic practices meant to facilitate autonomy and mobility, and conceptions of social identity as malleable and manipulable undergird both practices. They are also rooted in the material conditions of eighteenth-century life, particularly life in London, which dissolved strong social ties, encouraged economic and self-interested decisions, and, in some cases, allowed social mobility (Bucholz and Ward 100). Chapter II illustrated that Roxana was precisely this sort of subject, and this chapter will explore similar characters who act out of the same principles but do so by creating a series of identities rather than resisting or effacing a particular social identity. As with anonymity, however, writers see status as a limiting factor in the ability to construct different personae at will. Examining how authors imagine these boundaries clarifies the competing versions of identity—as innate or as performed—operating during this period.

Understanding late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century identity construction in England is difficult, in part because these practices challenge our belief that an interiorized identity or "true self" is more authentic than our social enactment or performance of identity. To briefly review and expand upon information presented in the Introduction and Chapter II (5-6 and 44-5), Dror Wahrman contrasts the modern self—concerned with authenticity and truth to interior emotion, motivation, and morality—with the histrionic sense of self that he argues dominated from the Restoration to the 1780s (*Making* xviii). Taking a different approach (via sociology rather than cultural studies), Richard Sennet makes a similar point and goes into more detail as to how performance,

or what he calls "playacting," functioned. He argues that strict codes governing social performance—manners, customs, rituals—are more important than virtuosity or creativity in creating meaningful public interactions (20). The role a person occupies is therefore based on shared codes of belief: "how much and on what terms people take seriously their own behavior, the behavior of others, and the situations in which they are engaged" (33-34). In other words, social interaction depends more upon gauging the believability of a particular performance in a specific context—including conforming to convention—than on authenticity. Both Wahrman and Sennett note that these forms of social identity construction are less concerned with truth than they are with success, meaning the social acceptance of a particular identity performance.[62]

One way this focus on performance and self-fashioning manifests in late-seventeenth and early eighteenth-century culture is the "serial subject," a term coined by Mary Jo Kietzman to describe a person who establishes a series of self-constructed identities. While Wahrman and Sennett see performative identities functioning across social strata, Kietzman argues that this particular mode of identity construction is both gendered and classed. Looking to the late seventeenth century, Kietzman identifies a type of self-fashioning adopted by lower class women in response to material circumstances, specifically gaps in the criminal justice system which allowed the repeated reinvention of

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[62] The main difference between Wahrman and Sennett, besides their theoretical approaches, is their purpose. Wahrman wants to reevaluate the eighteenth-century historically, to recover a more accurate picture of identity construction. Sennett uses early modern (and in some cases, ancient Roman) modes of social interaction to evaluate modern public life, arguing that the contemporary emphasis on personality, emotional fulfillment, and authenticity has undermined the strength of public life in the west. Wahrman tends to focus on individual identity formation while Sennett analyzes social interaction.

individual identity ("Defoe" 678). Kietzman identifies both Mary Carleton and Moll Flanders as serial subjects, arguing that their identity construction, understudied and unappreciated within modern scholarship, "was, in fact, a widely practiced behavioral style at home in an age quite distant from the assumptions we attach to 'autobiography' and the expectations we have about 'selves'" (*Self-Fashioning* 8). Kietzman echoes Wahrman and Sennett in affirming that identities were conceived as malleable and fluid during this period, but she also suggests that acting, performance, and display were particularly associated with women (22). Serial subjects exploit the possibilities of performance-oriented views of identity for self-advancement or self-preservation.[63]

Serial subjectivity in Carleton's *Case* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is central to the development of the novel, according to Kietzman. In *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* (hereafter *The Case*) Carleton draws attention to the importance of narrative in creating an identity, emphasizing the importance of convincing (meaning natural) self-authorship and performance as opposed to truthfulness in creating a public identity. In doing so Carleton (as well as other notorious serial subjects) help establish "fiction" as a literary genre (*Self-Fashioning* 70-5). In terms of the novel, Kietzman argues that Defoe "masters" (by which she means limits) the serial subject in *Moll Flanders* through the formal device of retrospective narration, which renders Moll "a subject who finally represents herself as unified and readable: bourgeois" ("Defoe" 379).[64] Kieztman asserts that the mastery of the serial subject is central to the development of the novel itself

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[63] Kietzman's analysis draws upon other theorists of early modern identity construction, notably Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

[64] John Richetti makes a similar point: that Defoe's novels help create the modern subject, which he describes as "an unimpeachable selfhood" and "perfect self-possession" (*Defoe's Narratives* 17,19).

because it is an expression of individualism. Serial subjectivity is thus closely aligned with both theories of identity as well as the questions of narrative truth or representation that early novels explore.

In this chapter I build upon and broaden Kietzman's analysis of the serial subject and the early novel. In particular, I will focus on the serial subject as a recognizable literary type, which requires expanding the definition of the serial subject. While Kietzman's meticulous research of late seventeenth-century legal proceedings grounds the serial subject within a particular socio-juridical context, as the serial subject coalesces into literary convention, she (or he) can operate in a variety of circles of eighteenth-century society. Defoe's Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and Roxana, and, I will argue, Haywood's Fantomina and Syrena Tricksy are all characters who function as serial subjects, reinventing themselves for self-preservation as well as self-interest. Within literature, the serial subject is not confined to a particular social class or gender, but is instead a mode of self-fashioning utilized across social strata (although admittedly more popular for female characters). The serial subject-as-protagonist allows us to examine more closely the relationship between practices of identity construction and their representation in early eighteenth century novels. In particular, I see the literary history of the serial subject as demonstrating the resilience of theories of status as an essentialized category of identity in the early eighteenth century. Even as these works celebrate the social mobility and agency of serial identity manipulators, Defoe and Haywood limit their serial subjects through plot elements or strategies of narration, suggesting that the emergence of the novel was tied to a fixed and non-serialized conception of identity. Kietzman identifies this notion of selfhood as the knowable "bourgeois" self, a view that

aligns her with many other theorists of the novel that associate this genre with the rising middle class. However, my analysis of the serial subject will show that this new genre-specific version of identity is in fact influenced by an expansion and reconfiguration of aristocratic ideology.

Michael McKeon's theory of the novel describes the importance of early modern ideas about status to the development of the eighteenth-century novel. He argues, following Ian Watt, that the novel developed in response to changing social conditions. However, McKeon disputes Watt's epochal approach, in which the literary quality of realism and the historical rise of the middle class replaces romance and an aristocratic order (*Origins* 3-4). McKeon's dialectic approach charts the resilience of romance as the novel coheres into a genre, a process which mirrors the continued relevance of aristocratic ideology, even as it is altered from the inside out by commercial or monied interests (19-22, 162-7). The novel addresses the deeply intertwined issues of "questions of truth" (representational strategy) and "questions of virtue" (the relationship between the social hierarchy and individual morality or honor) (20-2). These are the questions Kietzman takes up in her analysis, and these questions also structure my approach to the early novel. But I expand McKeon's framework to include physical as well as moral attributes of status. Characteristics such as beauty or gracefulness have hierarchical connotations in the early novel, and they are particularly important when considering serial subjectivity, a mode of identity construction based in a convincing appearance. These differences of appearance correspond to inner merit, and they form the kernel of the cohesive and coherent novelistic subject so central to the genre's development.

My approach also incorporates study of satire and irony to a greater extent than many theorists of the novel. If questions of truth and questions of virtue are closely intertwined, what do we make of texts characterized by ironic reversal and satiric critique that highlight the protagonist's naiveté and self-delusion? This chapter will show that a dominant strategy in these early novels is the use of irony to dramatize questions about individual identity and the project of self-narration. The Augustan age is of course the age of satire, and irony is one of many modes of expression that contributes to the satiric bent of much writing during this period, including novels.[65] Although irony can be understood in a basic sense as the difference between literal message and intended meaning, it operates as more than just a simple reversal between what is said and what is meant. Rather, as Linda Hutcheon argues, irony "is always different—other than and more than the said" (13; see also Dyson x). Part of this difference between statement and meaning is the "evaluative edge" implicit in irony (Hutcheon 2). The shift between stated meaning and intended meaning always contains a judgment about either the subject of irony or the reader or listener; this judgment, as Wayne C. Booth argues, depends upon a community of readers that possesses a shared framework of language, culture, and literary genre (100). Because it exceeds binary limitations of meaning, irony can be used to express complex evaluations of its target or subject, and it can reveal the collective beliefs of a particular group of people. As this chapter will show, irony abounds in the literature of serial subjectivity. The fact that writers use this tool to express complex,

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[65] Wayne C. Booth describes the relationship of satire to irony thus: "irony is used in some satire, not in all; some irony is satiric, much is not" (30). Ronald Paulson situates satire and the novel at two opposite poles of thought, or as "two discontinuous forms," but he nevertheless sees satire as influencing the novel (3, 8-9).

even unresolvable, attitudes towards identity construction suggests that notions of identity itself were conflicted.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the autobiographical *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton*, an example of Restoration rogue literature, a source for *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, and, according to Kietzman, one of the earliest and most famous examples of the serial subject.[66] Examining Carleton's portrayal of her own identity cultivation and manipulation will clarify how performance was emerging as a central attribute of self-fashioning against traditional and essentialized notions of status. The themes of Carleton's autobiography resonate within Defoe's first-person novels, which modify serial subjects to point to the instability and inconsistency of standards of gentility. Defoe celebrates his serial subjects while also portraying an allegiance to the idea of gentility as innate. This instability in the protagonists' identities permeates his narratives, at the level of plot and character but also at the level of narration, where Defoe frequently deploys a destabilizing irony. The chapter will close with an examination of Eliza Haywood's serial subjects in *Fantomina* and the satirical *Anti-Pamela*. By comparing *Anti-Pamela* to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), we see that Haywood's narrative functions in an entirely different mode from that in Richardson's novel. Haywood's serial subjects require third-person narration for coherence, while

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[66] Defoe's novels are indebted to Carleton's text in terms of his characterization of his serial subjects as well as two specific plot points. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll's marriage to Jemy—each poor but believing the other wealthy—echoes the circumstances of Mary Carleton's marriage to John Carleton, described below. In *Roxana*, the titular protagonist describes the risk of being exposed as a former mistress by saying she "might as well have been the German Princess," a nod to Carleton's most famous alter ego (223). The fact that Defoe does not gloss this reference indicates the continued cultural relevance of Mary Carleton even fifty years after her death in 1673.

Richardson's first-person narrator depends upon the transparency, fixity, and authenticity of her identity to structure the novel. The differences between these texts highlight how the novel modifies its characters and narration to create a particular type of hero or heroine: the modern novelistic protagonist. Social legibility ultimately transcends the realm of the social and becomes necessary to creating legible—cohesive and novelistic— narratives and protagonists.

Carleton, Autobiography, and Genteel Performance

Mary Carleton's late seventeenth-century status impersonation, and the terms with which she defends it, provide a useful case study with which to analyze status identity during this period. Carleton was one of the most notorious Restoration rogues, a bona fide celebrity and the subject of countless pamphlets, ballads, and tracts. One of the most notable is her autobiography, *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton*.[67] Carleton's spirited defense of her guise as a German noblewoman, while self-serving, provides insight as to the terms and limits of identity construction during this period. Through its content and form, Carleton's autobiography makes the case that nobility is a matter of convincing performance rather than status by birth.

Carleton came from relatively humble origins in Canterbury and married twice (without divorcing) before embarking on the series of adventures that would make her famous. She appears in London in 1663, dressed finely, and convinces a tavern keeper

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[67] Many aspects of this text are disputed. Although *The Case* advertises Mary Carleton as the author, it is impossible to determine whether or not she did in fact write all or part of it. Kietzman accepts her authorship, as does McKeon, while Janet Todd and Elizabeth Spearing, conclude that it is probably a hybrid text, perhaps partially written by Carleton (Kietzman, *Self-Fashioning* 5, 11; Todd and Spearing xlvii-xlviii). This study will assume that, regardless of the nature or extent of Carleton's actual literary contributions to *The Case*, the text was released with her knowledge and consent and is therefore an instance of textual self-fashioning.

and his family that she is a disguised German princess fleeing an arranged marriage. Determined to capitalize on the situation, the tavern-owner, Mr. King, convinces the young woman to marry his brother-in-law, John Carleton, by boasting of the family's wealth and high rank (and spending a great deal of money to support his claims). John and Mary marry, and two weeks later they discover that neither of them is rich, both parties having exaggerated their wealth and status to ensnare the other.[68] John Carleton's family prosecutes Mary as a bigamist, and the resulting trial, widely publicized, captivates the London public. The Carleton family publishes their account of the affair, which is countered by *The Case*, marketed as written by Mary Carleton herself.[69]

Although the charges against Mary address her potential bigamy, the discourse surrounding her trial focuses on her role as a "counterfeit lady," as one pamphlet calls her. In *The Case* Carleton stokes the controversy surrounding her identity even as she asserts her high rank by birth (although she admits she is not a princess) (83, 92). To bolster her own claims, Carleton directs her satiric energies toward the Carleton family,

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[68] As this chapter will illustrate, versions of this tale become an extremely popular eighteenth-century literary trope. This narrative is the reverse of most Restoration comedy plots, in which supposedly poor or lowborn characters are revealed to be wealthy and genteel. (For example, Willmore finds Hellena to be a lady of quality rather than a gypsy in *The Rover*.) The popularity of the "deceptive marriage" plot suggests the extent to which people feared social imposition and the illusory effects of money in the eighteenth century, as opposed to the comic marriage plot, which reasserts aristocratic ideology by suggesting that sexual desire between people of the same rank (even if such status is concealed) forecloses the problem of social mobility through marriage (see Chapter V for a more detailed analysis of this theme).

[69] See Todd and Spearing for a detailed account of the 1663 pamphlet war over Mary Carleton's reputation and story (xxxi-xl).

portraying them as greedy and uncouth.[70] For example, at one point during John

Carleton's courtship, Mary asks Mrs. King to explain his sudden affection toward her:

"*How*; said she, *Madam, He loves you. Loves me, for what Mistris King?* I replied. *"She*

said, For your great parts and Endowments. I asked her, How my Lord could tell that I

had either. I said, My Lord must have very good eyes if he could see within me, or else I

must be very transparent" (96-7). Here Mary Carleton uses dramatic irony to make fun of

the Carleton family's attempts to marry her to John Carleton to gain access to her estate,

a plot that they attempt to hide by couching their reasons for a hasty marriage in the

language of romance. For the reader, aware of the subsequent turn of events in this

courtship, the exchange is comical in part due to Mrs. King's unwitting double-entendres,

which reveal the family's baldly self-interested motives.[71] John Carleton's admiration for

her "great parts and Endowments" is meant to flatter Mary, presumably referring to her

physical features, natural talents, and character. But Mrs. King also lets slip the real

reason for her family's interest in the supposed heiress. Carleton's "great parts" could

reference her portion of an estate, and "Endowments" referred to both property and

possessions during this era. Readers of *The Case* would have been attuned to these layers

of meaning, and they would have appreciated the double nature of Mrs. King's

compliments to Mary.

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[70] This strategy is also deployed to great effect in Richardson's portrayal of Mr. Soames in *Clarissa* and in Burney's depiction of the Branghtons in *Evelina* (see Chapters 4 and 5). These literary types play on stereotypes of shopkeepers, merchants, and tradesmen as money-oriented and lacking refinement; they are the eighteenth-century descendants of the Restoration "Cits."

[71] See D.C. Muecke for more on dramatic irony and double entendre (105).

However, a close reading of this passage discloses that Mary Carleton satirizes

not only the Carleton family but also the ideology of social legibility that undergirds the

early modern system of status. The dual interpretations of "parts" and "Endowments,"

referring to wealth and status as well as innate qualities, suggests the extent to which

these two ideas were considered inextricably linked in traditional systems of social

hierarchy. Carleton's witty rejoinder that John Carleton "must have very good eyes" or

she "must be very transparent" to see these qualities mocks the idea that her status is

somehow visibly imprinted on her body. This supposed transparency was at the root of

ideologies that equated a variety of physical features, as well as the qualities of honor and

virtue, with high rank. Having deliberately insinuated her high rank to the Carletons,

Mary is nonplussed when they profess to see signs of her status. This commentary about

bodily transparency continues Carleton's mockery of John Carleton's family, but it also

reminds readers of Carleton's ability to manipulate—and therefore undermine—the

system of social legibility they reference.

Yet a more troubling interpretation of this comment about bodily transparency

emerges if we consider the fact that, although Carleton insists on her high status within

The Case, she was (as her readers would have likely suspected) neither a German

princess nor even a gentlewoman.[72] Therefore Carleton's comment undermines the entire

system of social legibility. If she was indeed "transparent" and if John Carleton did

indeed "have very good eyes," her impersonation could not have succeeded. This reading

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[72] The extent to which Carleton was able to deceive the public is difficult to determine.
On the one hand, Samuel Pepys professed himself convinced, after visiting her in prison,
that she was in fact noble (Todd, *Sign* 52). On the other hand, it seems likely that most
readers were in on the joke, particularly as Carleton narrates episodes within *The Case*,
such as the scene above, that require a knowing reader to create dramatic irony.

is supported by an additional interpretation of "great parts and Endowments," with "part" referring to a theatrical role. Carleton's impersonation of a German princess is a "great part" indeed. Carleton's comments thus contain an ironic reversal that raises troubling questions about the distinction between identity understood as status by birth expressed through social legibility and status as a system of performance. Social legibility promises transparency in terms of status, as Carleton's remark to Mrs. King indicates, but the irony of this comment suggests that this transparency is perhaps only illusory. Dramatic irony exceeds a mere reversal, in this passage, to incorporate an evaluative edge criticizing the Carletons as deluded in their self-regard as sophisticated readers of social display, and suggesting that social legibility itself is a fiction.

Carleton returns to the question of identity versus impersonation at other points in *The Case*, being careful to frame her scenarios as hypothetical so as not to undermine her assertions of high status. In the following passage, she questions why a society should differentiate between impersonation and the supposedly natural display that denoted high rank. In his study of women's social legibility during the Restoration, Will Pritchard points out that one of the mechanisms of this undertaking was a renewed insistence that identity—particularly rank—was both innate and manifest in external display. The response to challenges to traditional social hierarchies was the return to the idea of social legibility, which "is rooted in the fantasy of a completely unselfconscious, authentic self-performance: acting (doing) without acting (faking)" (51). Carleton refuses to distinguish between the two, and in doing so she questions whether there is indeed a difference between "doing" and "faking":

I think I do rather deserve commendation than reproach; if the best *things are to be imitated*; I had a good precept and warrant for my assumption of such a personage as they were willing to beleive me to be; If indeed by any misbecoming act unhandsome and unbefitting such a person, I had prophaned that quality, and betrayed and discovered any inconsistent meanness therewith (as it was very difficult to personate greatness for so long a time without slips or mistakes) I had deserved to be severely punished and abhominated by all Gentlemen; whereas after all these loads of imputations which my enemies have heaped upon me, I do…enjoy, and am happy in many of their loves and good estimation. (92)

Carleton argues that if her impersonation had been unconvincing ("inconsistent" or "unbefitting") then she deserved to be punished, but as it was successful, she is entitled to the respect of "all Gentlemen"—which she already has. Such circular logic turns the logic of status on its head: if rank is innate and embodied, meaning that outward appearance and actions reliably communicate status, then the ability to mimic noble behavior flawlessly must indicate an interiorized high status. While in the preface to the passage above Carleton continues to insist on her high status, her theory about imposition vindicates her as a potentially lower-class woman mimicking nobility: if the impersonation is flawless, then the person deserves the status they have embodied.

Carleton returns to this question throughout *The Case*. Indeed, Todd and Elizabeth Spearing, her modern editors, argue that the text itself functions as a performance of her rank and a response to those who labeled her "an absolute cheat": "The self-reliance, embodied in the writing of *The Case* itself, is a response, as well as a proof of rank. Despite her enemies' attempts to label her self-reliance and her discourse

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as mimicry and so criminal weapons, both argue breeding" (li; see also Todd, *Sign* 54).

Ernest Bernbaum makes a similar point, noting that Carleton took risks with the boldness

of *The Case*: "The effrontery of the performance was so great that it would have been

self-evident and intolerable, had the style of the 'Case' not been astonishingly well

adapted to its ends" (22). And McKeon notes that in *The Case*, as well as in the other

pamphlets, "an unusually insistent connection is made between claims of truthfulness in

narration and claims of status and virtue" (*Origins* 243). As these evaluations of *The

Case* indicate, its success as a narrative, like Carleton's own impersonation, depend upon

its believability, which demanded a bold performance. Carleton was in the unenviable

position of needing to prove her high status while the terms of that status dictated that

such proofs were unnecessary, or even ran counter to true nobility (Pritchard 39). The

boldness and unapologetic tone of *The Case* thus functions as a testimony to Carleton's

gentility even though the publication of such a text was considered highly inappropriate

for a gentlewoman.

Carleton also used visual imagery to support her claims to gentility, as in the

portrait that accompanied *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* (Figure 10, next page).

Carleton's jewelry, hairstyle, and dress all assert her gentility. Yet the caption of the

portrait follows her logic elsewhere in *The Case* by asserting a more fluid approach to

genteel status. It reads, "Behold my innocence after such disgrace / Dares show an honest

and a noble Face / Henceforth there needs no mark of m[e be known] / the right

Counterfeit is herein sh[own]." Like *The Case* itself, Carleton's portrait is a bold

assertion of her nobility that would have been unconventional for a woman of this rank.

Here Carleton again returns to the idea of social legibility, trusting that her "honest

and…noble Face" will prove her claims to high status and "innocence" of charges of deception. Yet the last line of the caption questions the terms of this conception of identity. By calling herself the "right Counterfeit" Carleton might merely be ironically juxtaposing the epithet "Counterfeit" with her genteel portrait to suggest that the tales about her by the Carleton family and other pamphlet writers are untrue. Here is the "right Counterfeit": a lady, not a lowbrow schemer. However, this irony also anticipates Carleton's assertion within the text that successfully mimicking gentility essentially makes it so. If we read "right" as "correct, exact, true," then Carleton is the "right Counterfeit" because her mimicry of nobility is a perfect copy—and therefore, according to her logic, the equivalent of nobility.

Carleton's text thus troubles the boundaries between identity and disguise and in doing so prompts questions about the relationship between true identity and false representation. *The Case* illustrates the fact that there were conflicting definitions of identity, particularly genteel identity, during the late seventeenth century. But study of the text and the scholarship associated with it also reveals

Figure 10. Unknown artist, "Mary Carleton (née Moders)." Line engraving, mid to late seventeenth century. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

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the extent to which questions of identity inform questions of genre, particularly the distinction between fact and fiction. Indeed, the retrospective criticism and classification of this text restages the tension between innate identity and identity as performance and exposes how identity-as-performance undermines modern notions of narration, particularly in autobiography. For example, Todd and Spearing do not consider *The Case* an autobiography because it was written to bolster Carleton's (invented) claims to nobility (li). While they do not characterize her story as entirely fabricated, arguing that *The Case* effectively blends fact and fiction to represent the uncertainty of Carleton's social position, they explicitly exclude it from autobiography as a genre (li). On the other hand, Kietzman refers to the text as autobiographical, arguing that because Carleton asserts within *The Case* that all identities are merely performances, her text functions as autobiographical self-fashioning in accordance with her own beliefs about identity (*Self-Fashioning* 5). In other words, any search for a true or authentic identity in Carleton's narrative ignores her explicit comments on the self-authorizing and performative nature of identity.

As we will see, these questions of identity and narration become central issues during the development of the novel. The question of truth or trustworthiness in first-person narration will emerge as arguably the central issue in the first-person novels of Daniel Defoe, and it is a question closely tied to the identity manipulation of the serial subject. The question of narrative and truth is inextricably linked to the question of how status identity functions: as performance, disguise, innate characteristic, learned behavior, or simple belief. *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* illustrate the interaction between social and narrative instabilities within first-person novels. By examining the modifications to

and limitations of the literary serial subject in the early eighteenth century, we will see

the paradoxes of status identity and its destabilization of narrative within the emerging

novel. Defoe's novels combine serial subjectivity with first-person retrospective narration

in order to dramatize the inconsistencies of early eighteenth-century identity construction.

Irony and Narration in Defoe

Defoe's use of the serial subject-as-protagonist is one of the more distinctive

features of *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders*.[73] In fact, it is the protagonists' serial

subjectivity itself that structures narrative action, conflict, and suspense within these

novels, as these characters repeatedly enter into and then extricate themselves from

particular identities. Defoe's protagonists take on an astonishing series of personae,

manipulating facets of identity such as nationality, religious affiliation, social status,

marital status, and so forth. For example Jack disguises himself as a London gentleman in

France, a French gentleman in London, and a Spaniard (170, 171, 207, 208, 240). He

transforms himself from thief to soldier and from slave to plantation overseer in the

colonies (94, 127). For her part, Moll Flanders establishes herself in a series of identities

as a wealthy widow, a "Woman of Fortune," a man, a maid, another widow, and a beggar

(69, 130, 181, 198, 200, 209). As we saw in Chapter II, Defoe's other serial subject,

Roxana, styles herself as a wealthy widow, a French lady, a Turkish dancer, a Quaker,

and a countess over the course of her narrative. Serial subjectivity is, as Kietzman defines

it, a deliberate response to material circumstances; here, the protagonists' poverty and the

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[73] *Colonel Jack* is also referred to as *Col. Jacque* by scholars. Like *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, the title represents an alias rather than the narrator's given name. The full titles of these works are *The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque* and *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*. See Homer O. Brown (esp. 527) and Mary Butler (377-8) for more on naming in Defoe's novels.

social milieu of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London. Taking advantage of this fact, Defoe's protagonists create identities in order to ascend socially. The freedom to manipulate identity is so absolute that Defoe's characters often inhabit identities that directly conflict with each other: Jack fights in wars both for and against George I and Moll dresses as a gentlewoman in order to facilitate her career as a thief (one of the novel's ironic twists). Part of the appeal of these novels is the utter inventiveness of the protagonists, and their success and ease in abandoning one identity (including the attendant spouses, children, and friends) in favor of an entirely new one as they pursue their own self-interest.

Serial subjectivity thus provides Defoe a tool with which to consider questions of identity, particularly the terms and limits of self-invention.[74] While most critics (notably Michael Shinagel) who study the idea of gentility in Defoe focus on his notion that virtue and merit (rather than birth or blood) constitute true gentility, *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* also incorporate more traditional models of status as inherent or essential. Unlike Mary Carleton, Defoe's protagonists, for all their successful identity manipulation, find themselves limited by their belief in their own gentility. While Defoe goes to great lengths to show that genteel status is largely a matter of performance and education, and

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[74] David Marshall makes a similar point, seeing Moll's series of disguises as dramatizing (but also complicating) the anti-theatrical argument that actors constituted a "disruption and undermining of the concept of a stable self" (*Figure* 110). David Blewett draws a similar conclusion, equating disguise with human depravity (*Defoe's Art* 56). While Marshall's consideration of theatrical discourse and theories of identity is useful (and parallels an approach used in Chapter IV), Sennett and Warhman question the idea that people in the eighteenth century conceived of the self as coherent, fixed, and authentic. However, Marshall's study is valuable in that he is one of the few critics who view Moll's serial personae not as a series of masks obscuring a "real" Moll but rather as "a succession of different people" (120).

that his protagonists are entirely self-made, he also depicts his serial subjects as believing that gentility inheres innately. Despite the novels' retrospective narration, which ostensibly positions the narrator in a stable and cohesive subject position (Kietzman's assertion), the protagonist-narrators defy this categorization.[75] The irony that permeates these narratives contributes to this sense of character instability, particularly in terms of status. Defoe's novels thus dramatize the conflicting modes of identity construction within the novel, with first-person narration functioning to highlight the tension between practices of identity and methods of representation.

Even at its start *Colonel Jack* foreshadows its protagonist's serial identity manipulation by positioning Jack as a person whose identity is malleable. Born out of wedlock to a "Gentlewoman" and "Man of Quality," Jack is unacknowledged by his parents and raised by a nurse (33). Without an identity bestowed by his family, Jack is free to construct his identity as he is able: "My name was John, as she [the nurse] told me, but neither she or I, knew any thing of a Sir-name that belong'd to me; so I was left to call myself Mr. Anything, what I pleas'd, as Fortune and better Circumstances should give occasion" (34). Although the absence of a surname is a potential limitation (one we will see again in Chapter V's discussion of *Evelina*), Defoe instead emphasizes the opportunity for self-fashioning represented by the lack of a family name. Jack is "Mr. Anything," a person whose identity is flexible and responsive to material "Circumstances"—a perfect example of Wahrman's broad theory of eighteenth-century performativity and Kietzman's more specific serial subject. Even Jack's Christian name

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[75] Richetti draws a similar conclusion to Kietzman's about *Colonel Jack*, arguing that Jack's belief in his own genteel status gives him an identity outside of and prior to his narrative (*Defoe's Narratives* 149-62). Jack's story is a series of impersonations that are subsumed under his pre-existing identity as a gentleman (162).

is context-dependent rather than absolute: his given name of "John" becomes "Jack" because that is the custom in the part of town where he is raised, and later "Jack" becomes "Jacque," first when he is in France and later when he poses as a Frenchman in England (34, 171). David Blewett points out that the word "jack" designated a commoner or a "Jack-gentleman" or upstart impersonator of a gentleman (a connotation that will resonate throughout *Colonel Jack*) (*Defoe's Art* 94-5). Jack's very name indicates the extent to which he can don and doff personae, manipulating even the most basic terms of his social identity.

However, Jack does have one stable component of identity: his belief that he is a gentleman. Critics frequently gesture to this belief as the unifying and organizing principle of what is otherwise an artistically problematic novel (a view first proposed by William H. McBurney). It is his single inheritance from his father, whom he never meets but who nevertheless shapes Jack's life through his instructions to his son's nurse:

> [He] charg'd her that if I liv'd to come to any bigness, capable to understand the meaning of it, she should always take care to bid me *remember that I was a Gentleman*, and this he said was all the Education he would desire of her for me, for he did not doubt, he said, but that sometime or other the very hint would inspire me with Thoughts suitable to my Birth, and that I would certainly act like a Gentleman, if I believed myself to be so. (33)

Jack self-identifies as a gentleman with no proof of status by birth, and this unique social position allows *Colonel Jack* to function as a prolonged meditation on gentility. While he is unmoored from the most typical status markers—lineage, estate, title or honorific, and family name—Jack is firmly established, in his own mind, as a gentleman.

Belief in his own gentility governs Jack's life and becomes the measure by which he evaluates his actions. Jack believes he has become a gentleman at various points in the novel: when he has spending money for the first time (through theft), when he anticipates being able to retire from theft, when he becomes a soldier in the English army, when he becomes overseer of a Virginia plantation, when he reforms his behavior and morals, when he becomes a soldier in the Irish army (fighting for the French, no less), and when he reforms his behavior and morals a second time (42, 82, 111, 127, 149-150, 188, 240). At each of these points, Jack explicitly tells the reader that he believes he is now a gentleman. But each of these "arrivals" at gentility, except the last, is followed by the realization that he has been mistaken. Jack's story illustrates the fact that while "acting like a gentleman" seems a fairly straightforward piece of advice, in practice it is an opaque concept. Neither "acting" nor "gentleman" is a stable referent for behavioral guidance, as illustrated by Jack's shifting idea of what these terms might mean.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Jack has such a fluid conception of gentility, considering the internal contradictions in Jack's father's advice. Some readers of *Colonel Jack* classify it as a bildungsroman, with Jack's father's advice functioning as the first step in the protagonist's education (Hindle 3-4; Novak, *Economics* 79-84; McBurney 325-7). But the nature of this education is unclear. Jack's father wishes him to be "put to School," but the most important aspect of his education—"all the Education he would desire of her for me"—is that Jack is reminded of his gentility, which will shape his thoughts and behavior. These instructions never clarify whether gentility is primarily a matter of education or nature. On the one hand, Jack's father characterizes this method of child rearing as cultivating Jack's latent gentility. If Jack's parents are indeed both

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genteel, then his father's comments reveal a belief in innate gentility, a quality that will guide Jack regardless of circumstance. He will "act," in the sense "take action," in an appropriately genteel manner. On the other hand, however, this comment suggests that gentility is pure performance: "I would certainly act like a Gentleman, *if I believed myself to be so*" (my emphasis). If this belief is false, then to "act" means to feign or mimic genteel behavior. The relationship between the clauses refuses an authoritative interpretation. Is genteel lineage required or is mere belief in one's status sufficient to produce the right behavior? Does "acting like a gentleman" mean following the dictates of an innate gentility (in other words, an inward-looking standard of behavior), or does it refer to the performance—even the impersonation—of gentility (an outward-looking or social model of behavior)? If genteel manners are truly an inherent quality, why is it necessary that Jack knows and believes that he is a gentleman?

In *Colonel Jack*, serial subjectivity is thus directed towards enacting gentility, a feature with parallels in *Moll Flanders*. However, as we see in the example above, this pursuit is complicated by instability in the conception of gentility itself and confusion over the particular status of the protagonist. Moll shares with Jack an early estrangement from her parents and rearing by a nurse, and aspirations to gentility (although she does not share his genteel parentage). She also shares his valorization of a category of identity she does not completely understand. We have seen how Jack associates gentility with a variety of occupations, and he also fixates on particular signs of status—clothing, food, money, and polite language—while failing to realize that his understanding of gentlemanly conduct does not align with the cultural conception of who a gentleman is and how he acts (42, 77, 80-1). Jack's mistake functions on two levels: First, his

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comprehension of what constitutes genteel living says more about his utter poverty than it does about the habits of early eighteenth-century gentlemen. For example, when Jack buys a pair of shoes and stockings and purchases "a good Dinner" while living on the streets of London, these are such novelties to him that he considers it beginning "to live like Gentlemen" (42). (The fact that these purchases are made using stolen money also reveals Jack's naïve equation of money to gentility.) Defoe shows us that Jack has no idea what a genteel lifestyle might look like. Second, while Jack is correct that external display is an important part of being a gentleman, he fails to realize that such things are meant to signify ancestry and estate rather than designating rank in themselves. Jack does not perceive that his belief that he is a gentleman is essentially meaningless without the family name to support his claim. Here Defoe employs structural irony—specifically a naive narrator—to reveal the comedic gap between what Jack thinks constitutes gentility and what actually counts as genteel credentials, a reversal made all the more amusing by Jack's supposed position as a gentleman by birth.

Moll similarly mistakes signs of gentility for gentility itself, as in her description of the household where she was raised as a child after being abandoned by her mother. Her guardian

> bred up the Children she took in with a great deal of Art, as well as with a great
> deal of Care….But that which was worth all the rest, she bred them up very
> Religiously, being herself a very sober pious Woman. (2.) Very Housewifly and
> Clean, and, (3.) Very mannerly, and with good Behaviour: So that in a Word,
> excepting a plain Diet, course Lodging, and mean Cloths, we were brought up as
> Mannerly and as Genteely, as if we had been at the Dancing School. (29)

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Moll's upbringing is defined as genteel, but it is a matter of' "Art" rather than nature. Indeed, Moll's education reduces this quality to mere performance or behavior: being appropriately "mannerly." Moll's confusion is also evident in the strange and contradictory catalogue of the school's offerings: for example, the centrality of religion and piety to the curriculum is undermined by her comparison of the institution to the secular "Dancing School." Here again we see structural irony at work, as the apparently naive Moll glosses over the students' "plain Diet, course Lodging, and mean Cloths," failing to realize that good manners matter little towards the establishment of gentility if a person is dressed poorly and resides in an unfashionable part of town. Furthermore, Moll's suggestion that "the Dancing School" was the height of genteel education reveals her limited scope of experience, as dancing schools typically educated the progeny of social upstarts rather than established families (29n). Defoe reveals Moll's education to be a facsimile of gentility, and perhaps a not very convincing one at that. She, like Jack, fails to mention ancestry and property as components of gentility. Moll's misunderstanding of gentility persists in part because her prospects and experience are so limited: "all I understood by being a Gentlewoman, was to be able to Work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear going to Service," she says (31). Moll and Jack's childhood misapprehensions of gentility are comical particularly because they align this rank with what readers might identify as its complete opposite: Jack thinks thieves are gentlemen, while Moll identifies a prostitute as her model of gentility (*Jack* 42, 82; *Moll* 32).

However, these misunderstandings of genteel identity and comportment are not merely comic relief. Rather, they function to destabilize the definition of gentility itself, a

move that reverberates through both of these novels. We might laugh at Moll and Jack's misunderstanding of gentility, but their ironic comments do not point us toward a stable definition of this quality. Readers may mock Jack because he thinks a meal and shoes make him a gentleman, but they ridicule Moll for thinking an education that excludes similar material circumstances can be truly genteel. Jack's pretensions to innate gentility are as comic as Moll's assertions that education alone can make a gentlewoman. The paradox of what it means to act like a gentleman or gentlewoman fails to resolve within these novels, even though achieving gentility is the explicit goal of both protagonists.

In many respects, gentility (or any category of identity, for that matter) in Defoe's novels appears as merely a matter of successful performance. Perhaps the best illustration of this principle is Moll's vacation in Oxford with her second husband (the famous "*Land-water-thing*, call'd, *a Gentleman-Tradesman*"):

Come, my dear, *says he to me one Day*, Shall we go and take a turn in the Country for about a Week? Ay, my Dear, *says I*, Whether would you go? I care not whether, *says he*, but I have a mind to look like Quality for a Week; we'll go to Oxford *says he*: How *says I*, shall we go, I am no Horse Woman, and 'tis to far for a Coach; too far *says he*, no Place is too far for a Coach and Six: If I carry you out, you shall Travel like a Dutchess; hum *says I*, my Dear 'tis a Frolick, but if you have a mind to it I don't care. Well the time was appointed, we had a rich Coach, very good Horses, a Coachman, Postilion, and two Footmen in very good Liveries; a Gentleman on Horse-back, and a Page with a Feather in his Hat upon another Horse; The Servants all call'd him my Lord, and the Inn-Keepers you may be sure did the like, and I was her *Honour*, the Countess; and thus we

Travel'd to OXFORD, and a very pleasant Journey we had; for, give him his due,

not a Beggar alive knew better how to be a Lord than my Husband. (66-67)

As Moll's husband notes, the destination of this holiday is less important than the new

identities they inhabit. It is, essentially, a vacation from their day-to-day selves. While

this is not necessarily an example of serial subjectivity, per se—Moll and her husband do

not intend to pass themselves off as quality permanently—it illustrates the mechanisms of

such identity practices. Moll and her husband acquire the accoutrements of nobility,

instruct their servants to use honorifics, and stay in character. They successfully look and

act the part. All that prevents them from permanently establishing themselves as nobility

is money: they can only sustain the illusion for a week. Similarly, at the height of Jack's

career as a highway robber, he dons a disguise used by his gang in order to visit the

"Gentleman" with whom he has entrusted his money (88). These early instances of short-

term disguise anticipate the full-scale self-reinvention that characterizes the plots of *Moll

Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*.

But as Moll and Jack take on a series of identities as circumstances demand, they

encounter limits to their serial subjectivity, limits that stem from their self-identification

as genteel. Defoe's protagonists repeatedly insist that they possess innate and bodily

signs of gentility. These aspects of gentility are internal and psychological as well as

external and physical. Jack, for example, suffers repeated episodes of conscience, what

Maurice Hindle refers to as his "internal censor" (3). This conscience operates as his

moral compass and Jack explicitly attributes it to his gentility, as in this passage, which

occurs as he surveys his life after arriving in Virginia: "That Original something, I knew

not what, that used formerly to Check me in the first meanness of my Youth, and us'd to

Dictate to me when I was but a Child, that I was to be a Gentleman, continued to Operate upon me Now, in a manner I cannot Describe" (149). Although Jack states that he "cannot Describe" how "That Original something" operates in his life, he goes on to state in the next paragraph that "it was Honesty, and Virtue alone that made Men Rich and Great, and gave them a Fame, as well as a Figure in the World, and that therefore I was to lay my Foundation in these, and expect what might follow in time" (150). In other words, Jack realizes that instead of focusing on money or clothing, he must let the qualities of honesty and virtue dictate his conduct and make him a true gentleman. As we have seen, it is impossible to determine whether Jack's moral principles are established by his father's advice about being a gentleman (an external factor) or his status at birth (an internal factor). But Jack, at least, believes they are "Original" to him, something "that is so by birth or nature."[76] Defoe still does not clarify whether status is actually "Original" to Jack; rather, he emphasizes that Jack believes this "Original something" (his conscience) to be the manifestation of innate genteel principles.

But Jack's gentlemanly attributes are not merely internal. He is also physically different, in a way that suggests that his high rank is socially legible. In particular, others describe Jack as physically attractive and well-spoken, characteristics that often function as literary shorthand for high status. (Montagu, for example, uses female beauty and conversation to identify shared aristocratic qualities across cultures in her *Turkish Embassy Letters*.) While Jack lives on the streets, he is by his own admission "dirty," but he still attracts the attention of passers-by: "I remember, the People would say of me, that Boy has a good Face; if he was wash'd, and well dress'd, he would be a good pretty Boy,

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[76] The first reference for this latter use of "original," according to the *OED*, is Defoe's *Captain Singleton* in 1720: "I..was..an original Thief, and a Pyrate..by Inclination."

do but look what Eyes he has, what a pleasant smiling Countenance, 'tis Pitty" (36). A later conversation between two women about Jack's beauty makes the equation of appearance with rank more explicit: "the Boy is a pretty Boy, I assure you, says she, to another Woman that was by this time come to her, ay, says the t'other, so he is, a very well looking Child, if he was clean and well dress'd, and may be as good a Gentleman's Son for any thing we know, as any of those that are well dress'd" (51). Later in the story Jack showcases his natural gift of conversation by impressing a judge with his articulate self-defense: the Justice "told me it was pitty I had not been better employ'd, for I was certainly better taught; in which however his Worship was mistaken, for I had never been taught any thing, but to be a Thief…But I had a natural Talent of Talking" (36, 92). (This scene is evidently important to Jack's sense of his genteel identity; he refers to it twice.) These anecdotes extricate gentility from education, as Jack proves himself to be eloquent and clever despite being uneducated. There is thus external proof of Jack's rank, both in terms of Jack's appearance and in terms of affirmation by people other than himself.

Jack is not the only character whose external appearance speaks to status differentiation. Jack contrasts himself with the two boys he is brought up with, Captain Jack, his nurse's son, and Major Jack, the illegitimate son of a genteel couple. The nurse invents their titles as a means to distinguish between the three Jacks, and they correspond to the boys' rank by birth. Colonel Jack is at the top of this hierarchy, Major Jack is next (coming to "Preferment by the Merit of his Birth"), and Captain Jack, the nurse's son, occupies the final rung in this domestic scheme of organization (34). This status-based differentiation is also evident in the boys' physical appearance and character. Captain Jack is "a squat, big, strong made Boy" who "had a Hanging look," and a personality to

match his lowborn appearance: he is "sly, sullen, reserv'd, malicious, revengeful…brutish, bloody, and cruel in his Disposition…ignorant and unteachable from a Child" (35, 40). It is "as if he was born a Thief," according to Jack (35). In contrast, Major Jack, like Colonel Jack, demonstrates genteel attributes, having "some thing of a Gentleman in him," including "a true Manly Courage" and "native Principles of Gallantry" (35). While we might attribute the difference between Captain Jack and Colonel Jack to Jack's father's crucial advice about acting like a gentleman, the inclusion of Major Jack, who presumably did not receive such instruction, suggests that there are real physical, psychological, and moral differences between sons of gentlemen and sons of their nurses. According to *Colonel Jack*, nature wins out over nurture, with the effect heightened by Defoe's choice to give the boys the same Christian name and the same upbringing, but different ranks by birth.

Like Jack, Moll also exhibits signs of gentility that extend beyond mere mimicry or education. Her initial misapprehensions of gentility quickly give way to a more socially acceptable understanding of this concept, particularly after she spends a week with the Mayor's family (33-4). Moll is not merely comfortable within this social group; she also exceeds the family's daughters in genteel accomplishments when she takes up residence with them permanently:

> By this Means I had, as I have said above, all the Advantages of Education that I could have had, if I had been as much a Gentlewoman as they were, with whom I liv'd, and in some things I had the Advantage of my Ladies, tho' they were my Superiors; but they were all the Gifts of Nature, and which all their Fortunes could not furnish. First, I was apparently Handsomer than any of them. Secondly,

I was better shap'd, and Thirdly, I Sung better, by which I mean, I had a better

Voice; in all which you will I hope allow me to say; I do not speak my own

Conceit of myself, but the Opinion of all that knew the Family" (35-36).

Moll is also eager to let the reader know that she is better at dancing and music than the

Mayor's daughters, and, as the Mayoress notes, she has "a gentlewoman's hands" (31,

34). Moll exhibits the qualities of female gentility—beauty, carriage, voice, and figure—

seemingly by nature rather than by practice, and she does so more successfully than the

gentlewomen who surround her. As she notes above, Moll receives a gentlewoman's

education alongside the Mayor's daughters, but she is careful to catalogue her "Gifts of

Nature," which "their Fortunes could not furnish." Shinagel argues that Defoe "sees his

heroine as a natural lady who, owing to the misfortune of her birth in Newgate, is

deprived of the eminence nature had fitted her for within society" (147-48).[77] Moll's

faux-humility about these "Gifts," ostensibly intended to minimize these qualities, instead

draws attention to them. Moll is, according to her own account, genteel by nature rather

than by practice.

Like Jack, Moll demonstrates psychological as well as physical manifestations of

gentility. Moll's psychological identification as a gentlewoman occurs later in the novel,

when she has become so notorious as a thief that she uses different disguises in order to

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[77] Shinagel is one of the few scholars to take seriously Moll's claims to natural gentility.
He argues, "The only consistent way to understand the workings of Moll's mind is to see
her as she came early in life to see herself, and as her creator came to regard her: a
gentlewoman" (136). He sees Moll, as well as Jack, as "seeking and in the end finally
realizing the bourgeois dream of gentility," meaning security and a "settled family life"
(159-160, 177). I see Defoe as instead engaging a more traditional notion of status, and in
doing so complicating the idea of the self-made man or woman.

protect herself and travel more freely. Despite her skill in adopting various disguises, demonstrated throughout the text, Moll finds herself stymied by a particular role:

> I dress'd myself like a Beggar Woman, in the coursest and most despicable Rags I could get, and I walk'd about peering, and peeping into every Door and Window I came hear; and indeed I was in such a Plight now, that I knew as ill how to behave as ever I did in any; I naturally abhorr'd Dirt and Rags; I had been bred up Tite and Cleanly, and could be no other, whatever Condition I was in; so that this was the most uneasy Disguise to me that ever I put on. (209)

Moll ultimately dismisses this disguise based on the suspicion it draws to her—it is "a Dress that every body was shy, and afraid of"—but this passage quite clearly shows that her first concern is that she simply cannot embody this identity as she can other social roles (209). She is "uneasy" and knows "ill how to behave." Moll gestures towards the filth of the costume to explain her discomfort, but even this description has hierarchical valences, as Moll references both education (being "bred up Tite and Cleanly") as well as innate qualities (she "naturally abhorr'd Dirt and Rags") to explain her revulsion.

This instance of failed identity manipulation can be better understood if it is read alongside a parallel event: her inability to cross-dress. Moll's motivation for cross-dressing is the same as her motivation for dressing as a beggar-woman: to deflect suspicion while allowing her to travel freely. As with dressing as a beggar woman, however, Moll finds this costume impossible to sustain. When she cross-dresses, Moll's male attire and mannerisms are convincing enough that at least one fellow thief is unaware that she is a woman, but Moll herself finds a male identity an impediment to her art: "it was impossible to be so Nimble, so Ready, so Dexterous at these things, in a Dress

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so contrary to Nature" (181). Moll at first couches her objection to this disguise as a

matter of practicality, as she did with the beggar-woman disguise: she is less "Dexterous"

as a man, and people "were afraid" of her as a beggar (209). However, in both situations

Moll finds herself attempting to inhabit an identity that is "contrary to Nature." The

comparison between these two instances is telling. Defoe includes them as the only

examples of an identity that Moll could not easily inhabit, suggesting that both gender

and status were special categories of identity for Moll. The limits of Moll's serial

subjectivity indicate that she sees status, as much as sex, as an innate part of her

identity.[78] Moll's comments indicate a self-awareness and a sense of interiorized identity

that exceeds her sense of identity as a performance. Serial subjectivity can still function

(as we see throughout the novel in Moll's perpetual identity construction), but unlike

Mary Carleton, there are limits that are apparently intrinsic to the subject.

This exploration of status speaks to an often-overlooked aspect of both *Colonel

Jack* and *Moll Flanders*: the attention these protagonists repeatedly call to natural or

bodily signs of status. The inclusion of genteel characteristics suggests that Moll and Jack

continue to view social status as at least in part a matter of essential difference, a

conception aligned with aristocratic ideology rather than a nascent class system. This

element of the texts is perhaps under-studied because it opposes the dominant critical

view of Defoe as the forward-looking father of the novel and a champion of the middle

class, labels which are inextricably linked in many theories of the novel, most notably

Watt's. According to Watt, Defoe espoused a theory of economic individualism that

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[78] Moll's sense that her gender is an innate rather than histrionic attribute is by no means
universal in the eighteenth century, as Dianne Dugaw reminds us (*Warrior Women* 4-5,
122, 162*)*.

stressed independence and self-interest, qualities associated with middle-class

Protestantism and capitalism (60-2). In a similar vein, Bram Dijkstra argues that Defoe's

protagonists, particularly Roxana, illustrate the social and economic limits imposed by a

rigid and outdated social hierarchy (13). His non-noble protagonists successfully redirect

money from the stagnant aristocracy to the thriving capitalist market, suggesting a

critique of aristocratic values and support of the acquisitive, upwardly mobile merchant

and professional classes (12).[79]

We certainly see these elements in *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, as the titular

protagonists reinvent themselves to gain wealth and high status. However, Defoe's

protagonists also insist on key physical and psychological differences between

themselves and other people that suggest their belief in rank as an essentialized quality.

Furthermore, Moll and Jack do not originate within the middling ranks but instead begin

at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Jack's supposed gentility does not insulate him

from childhood poverty and homelessness). Putting aside the assumption that we can

identify a cohesive group that might be called the middle class during this period (which

is very problematic in itself; see Introduction 6-9), aligning Defoe's characters with an

emerging middle class obscures the extent to which Moll and Jack self-identify with an

older model of social hierarchy and individual identity.

Moll Flanders and *Colonel Jack* dramatize the interplay between competing

modes of identity construction during the early eighteenth century. They are obviously

influenced by serial subjectivity and the idea that identity depends on effective social

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[79] See Dijkstra (1-50), McKeon (*Origins* 315-48), Maximillian E. Novak (*Economics*), Richetti (*Defoe's Narratives* 17), Donald A. Stauffer (81), and Watt (60-93) for more on Defoe and the middle class.

performance rather than an interiorized sense of self. With only a few exceptions, Moll

and Jack are able to take on identities at will without experiencing dissonance between

their "real" selves and their disguises—suggesting that they did not make this

distinction.[80] In doing so they follow the "right Counterfeit," Mary Carleton, in their

conception of identity. However, the exceptions to the protagonists' ability to self-fashion

indicates the resilience of an understanding of status as fixed rather than fluid. Jack,

whose identity is so malleable that he is able to present himself as English, French, and

Spanish at various points in the novel, is recognized as genteel even when he is a filthy

thief living on the streets. Moll, who occupies nearly all the rungs on the social ladder at

one point or another in the narrative, cannot bring herself to dress as a beggar-woman.

These examples, along with Jack's conscience (attributed to his status as a gentleman)

and Moll's "Gifts of Nature" (beauty, grace, voice), indicate that there are still elements

of aristocratic ideology at work in social and personal self-identification. The serial

subjectivity Moll and Jack exhibit suggests that for them identity is a matter of

performance, while their insistence on innate aspects of identity indicates that identity is,

at least in terms of social status, a fixed and internal attribute.

These novels appear to conflict with Defoe's views of gentility expressed

elsewhere. As his pamphlet *The Compleat English Gentleman* (*c.*1728-1729) makes

clear, Defoe considered the "complete" gentleman to have both education and breeding

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[80] Unfortunately, their ease with serial subjectivity is not shared by their modern critics
and readers, who often try to identify a "true" self among the various identity "masks."
Watt states that Moll appears unreliable in part because "Defoe gives us few clues as to
her 'real' self" (112), while Frederick R. Karl's analysis of Moll as a "protean" character
is marred by its assumption that Moll's disguises conceal an authentic self (87-8).

(23).[81] Because education and merit were so central to his idea of gentility, Defoe viewed

the boundary between the genteel and the non-genteel as somewhat porous, noting that

many high-ranking families came from trading backgrounds (32-3). He repeats this view

in *The Complete English Tradesman* (287-92) and *Roxana* (171). But Defoe is no leveler.

He himself identifies as a gentleman and wants to keep this distinction operative: "I have

the Honour to be rank'd by the Direction of Providence, in the same Class [of

gentlemen], and I would be so far from lessening the Dignity Heaven has given us, that I

would add Lustre, if that was possible, to the constelled Body, and make them still

more illustrious than they are" (*Compleat* 37). He sees the true gentleman as a "Person of

Merit and Worth; a Man of Honour, Virtue, Sense, Integrity, Honesty, and Religion"

(37). But while Defoe satirizes the notion of "Globules in the Blood" that set the genteel

apart, his characterizations of Moll and Jack suggest that there is a sort of inborn gentility

that can distinguish a person(35).[82] In *The Compleat English Gentleman* Defoe severs the

tie between noble lineage and innate virtue or merit, but he suggests in his fiction that

these qualities are still innate—or imagined to be innate—signifying essential difference.

While Defoe challenges the traditional rhetoric in which merit corresponds to high status,

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[81] Defoe sent this manuscript to his publisher shortly before his death, but it remained
unpublished until 1890 (Owens 1-2).

[82] Erin Mackie interprets *Colonel Jack* in light of the *The Compleat English Gentleman*,
seeing it as Defoe's attempt to replace an "authenticating status" by an "authenticating
virtue," severing the relationship between manners and virtue and inherited honor (14).
Mackie is correct that part of Jack's growth and development depends upon
differentiating self-interest from virtue, but Jack does not ultimately repudiate status for
virtue; rather, he attempts to realign status and virtue by molding himself into the proper
version of what he always thought he was: a gentleman.

he nevertheless implies that inherent distinctions between people exist and should be recognized via the social hierarchy.

We must differentiate between Defoe's views (which in his pamphlets may themselves constitute a particular persona) and his narrators'. Because the narratives are told as first-person memoirs, all of the reader's impressions are filtered through the protagonist-narrators' viewpoints (a situation shared by all of the self-writing analyzed in this project). This structure adds a layer of complexity to these practices of identity construction, since the narratives themselves are part of that very process, as was the case with Carleton's autobiography. Defoe's first-person novels are often called "double-voiced" due to the fact that each narrative expresses both the protagonist's feelings at the time of a particular episode and as he or she looks back on the incident in retrospect. This strategy allows Defoe to illustrate his protagonists' Christian redemption (evident in the retrospective narration) while also allowing him to record the shocking details of their lives. Keitzman argues that the structure of Defoe's narration allows him to "master" the serial subject because Moll "finds her place and becomes master of circumstance by first controlling and managing an ultimately coherent self through the medium of retrospective narration" (680). The same could presumably be said for Jack, who shapes his narrative and finds meaning in his pursuit of gentility. Indeed, Defoe's narrative structure is one of the primary factors identified by critics that differentiates his texts from other early eighteenth-century prose works and positions him as the father of the novel.[83]

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[83] Paul Backscheider (*Daniel Defoe Ambition and Innovation*), Ian Bell, Marie-Paule Laden (9-12)*,* Peter New, Malinda Snow ("Arguments to the Self" and "The Origins of Defoe's First-Person Narrative Technique"), and Watt (94-131) all make claims about the

But this retrospective narrative structure also creates instances of potential irony,

places where the narrators' lack of self-awareness suggests a covert reading in opposition

to their overt message. Everett Zimmerman reminds us that Defoe wrote at the height of

the satiric age, and he used weapons of satire, such as irony, to explore issues of identity

and narrative through autobiography.[84] This structural irony challenges a characterization

of Moll and Jack as wholly self-dramatizing and in total command of their narratives, as

we have seen in examples above. Although some critics, notably Watt, deny that Defoe

was deliberately ironic in his narrative strategy, the prevailing view is that Defoe used

irony deliberately to create particular literary effects.[85] For example, Ian Bell points to

Moll's childhood misunderstanding of gentility as a case of unambiguous and deliberate

narrative irony by Defoe. The disconnect between Moll's conception of gentility and the

reader's is ironic, but this irony extends to Moll-as-narrator as well, since she does not

acknowledge its irony (159-60). (As Bell notes, one of the great ironies of this passage, of

which the retrospective Moll should be aware, is that her desire to be a gentlewoman, by

which she means a woman of ill repute, comes true later in the novel) (160; see also

Blewett 37, 62; and Shinagel 146-7). Zimmerman sees Jack as so engrossed in the "self-

deluding metaphor" of his genteel status that he utterly fails to appreciate the irony of the

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significance of Defoe's narrative structure in capturing the experience of the self, a key
element in the development of the novel.

[84] Zimmerman's approach has obvious parallels to my own. However, he is primarily
interested in how questions of morality and the soul are expressed in Defoe's fiction
rather than the issues of identity, performance, and status on which this chapter focuses.

[85] See Novak "Conscious Irony in Moll Flanders: Facts and Problems" for an early
overview of this debate.

idea that mere belief can make a gentleman" (143). Irony upsets the stability of the novel in terms of both plot and narration.

As is evident in the example above and in the previous discussion of Moll's and Jack's aspirations to genteel status, instances of irony frequently accompany the characters' expression of genteel ideals. For example, like Moll, Jack misunderstands gentility in ways that readers would clearly recognize and find comedic, even as neither the young Jack nor the narrator Jack register that these conceptions are incorrect. For irony to function, the reader must possess a clear sense of gentility with which to compare to Moll and Jack's definition. However, these early episodes in the novel destabilize the concept of gentility, even as they ostensibly rely on, and therefore reinforce, shared cultural ideas of this designation. Defoe's structural irony exceeds a mere reversal of meaning, causing readers to question what exactly gentility means. Readers may know that Jack and Moll are incorrect in their definitions, but Defoe challenges the readers' beliefs as well by undermining both the belief that status is innate and that it is inculcated through education (or lack thereof). Jack's sense of gentility is treated ironically, but the novel never clarifies what is meant by the advice to "act like a Gentleman." Instead, the novels pose a series of questions: If status is innate, how can Moll naturally possess so many genteel qualities? If it is an aspect of education, why do the three Jacks turn out so differently when their education is identical?

The instances of Moll and Jack's psychological and physical identification with gentility must be read within this context of irony and instability in the narration of their stories. Given the earlier instances of irony, readers may be predisposed to read these episodes ironically, perhaps as self-delusion on the part of the narrator. Given his belief

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in his own gentility, Jack may be reading too much into, or simply misrepresenting, instances in which his physical attractiveness or articulate conversation prompt comparisons to gentility. Although he claims to be led by his conscience, "that Original notion" attributed to his status as a gentleman, a look at his narrative shows that his conscience (conveniently) only seems to function in retrospect. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll's flattering comparison of herself with the Mayor's daughters may have less of an impact on readers than she anticipates. The family, while genteel, is not titled or propertied, which undermines Moll's sense of exceptionalism within their household. Moll's inability to take on the identity of a beggar-woman may function as an ironic judgment of her profession: while she objects to the disguise, particularly the "Dirt and Rags," she has no qualms about stealing from people. Her objections, presented as internal and inalterable (she "naturally abhorr'd" the filthy disguise) are not moral in nature. The butt of Defoe's satire would thus be the oblivious misunderstanding of gentility by two social upstarts.[86]

However, Defoe is not uniformly ironic or satiric in his treatment of Moll and Jack. While certain episodes in their narratives are obviously intended as ironic, other episodes are more opaque. After all, Moll and Jack, despite their misapprehensions about gentility, are upwardly mobile and achieve New World gentility by the end of their narratives. This happy ending may suggest that their aspirations to gentility are well

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[86] This reading would suggest that Defoe, himself an upwardly mobile member of the London merchant class who eventually purchased a coat of arms, occupied a gatekeeper role, attempting to retain the exclusivity of his newly achieved status by reinforcing barriers to its acquisition. This reading fits with his claims to gentility in *The Compleat English Gentleman*. See Backscheider's biography for Defoe's social ascension and attitudes toward gentility (*Daniel Defoe: His Life,* 27, 127-8, and 527).

founded, or at least useful as a motivating factor in their adventures. John Tinkler, in an article about gentility and Defoe's rogues, argues that these characters co-opt genteel language as part of their move toward self-awareness, since the language of the lower classes offered no such mode to express or legitimize that goal (289-94). This use of such language to describe decidedly non-genteel subjects is parodic, according to Tinkler (287). But while there are specific instances when Defoe parodies the language of gentility—such as Jack's belief that he is a rich gentleman when he first picks someone's pocket—the overall tone and narrative arc of the novels suggest that Defoe saw Moll's and Jack's sense of identity as more than just an opportunity to parody gentility.

To give one example, both narrators may be more knowing and deliberately ironic than it appears at first glance, especially in the case of Moll. Her comment, "not a Beggar alive knew better how to be a Lord than my Husband," seems too consciously satiric to be naive, especially given Moll and her husband's successful impersonation of nobility. The same could be said for her description of her supposedly genteel school, which could point to the disconnect between the school's aspirations to genteel education and the poverty of the students. Moll's understatement could be read as drily and deliberately comedic: except for adequate food, clothing, and shelter, the school provided everything a young lady would need. Jack may not in his retrospective narration overtly register the humor of a penniless street urchin considering himself a gentleman because the comedy is so patently obvious to the reader. Certainly Moll and Jack are self-deluded or misinformed at various points in their narratives, but it is not clear at all whether their self-narration continues this delusion (creating structural and dramatic irony) or self-consciously and ironically reflects upon it.

Although retrospective, the narrative voice in these novels is not cohesive or stable. The narrators never resolve the central question of whether their protagonist's aspirations to gentility are legitimate or comically inappropriate. The novels thus fail to resolve basic questions about the way identity functions. This very lack of resolution is perhaps the point of Defoe's narrative strategy. After all, serial subjectivity is adopted in part for self-interested motives. The narrators pose just one identity in a series of identities, and the text they create performs that identity. Furthermore, this narratorial instability undermines any attempt to fix status as either an innate quality or one whose tenets are inculcated and naturalized through education. Because, as Hutcheon argues, irony exceeds a mere reversal, Defoe can use it to dramatize the fraught question of rank. *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* are in many ways narratives about self-delusion—but whose delusion? Certainly the younger Moll and Jack, but the mature narrators as well? The reader, for believing Moll and Jack that they are actually innately genteel—for believing anything an admittedly untrustworthy narrator might say?

By using, but also limiting, serial subjectivity in his novels, Defoe calls attention to the possibilities and limits of identity construction during this period. Perhaps the most important feature of this self-fashioning is the protagonists' identification with gentility, which is never firmly established as either purely aspirational (and self-delusional) or based in innate characteristics or qualities. The ironic treatment of gentility destabilizes each narrative as a whole because it questions the extent to which identity itself, and its expression in narration, memoir, or autobiography, is truthful, coherent, and unified. The serial subject as protagonist is able to dramatize these questions, particularly through Defoe's use of retrospective narration, which imposes unity by ending the protagonist's

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serial subjectivity through the narrator's supposedly fixed identity. It also undermines

that unity through the element of irony and the unresolved question of how knowing and

self-aware Defoe's narrators are. We look to the narrator for textual unity and for a fixed

subject position. However, the questions about identity, particularly genteel identity,

which pervade these novels undermine this narrative coherence and in doing so dramatize

the tenuous and conflicting elements of identity construction during this period. The

narrative itself is part of the narrator's self-construction, meaning that both narrative and

narrator are created via the limits and opportunities of self-fashioning.

Haywood, Richardson, and Narrative Truth

The serial subject does not vanish after Defoe's novels, a fact that is easy to forget

in patriarchal theories of the novel that focus on Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding and

move from *Moll Flanders* to *Pamela*. Studying later texts featuring serial subjects allows

us to analyze how, when, and why the serial subject is replaced by the fixed, unified, and

"authentic" subject, and how authors such as Haywood contributed to the new novel

genre.[87] The section above argues that this subject does not appear fully formed in *Moll*

Flanders, in contrast to Kietzman's reading, but rather emerges out of the *Pamela*

controversy, specifically Haywood's use of the serial subject to intervene in questions of

perspective, character, status, and representational truth. This section will examine the

serial subjects in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* and *Anti-Pamela*, who are mostly

presented in a third-person narrative. The structure of this mode of narration offers an

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[87] Backscheider makes a convincing case for Haywood's importance as an early novel innovator: "The number of topics, plot structures, and narrative voices that Haywood brought into literature is perhaps unmatched by any other eighteenth-century writer, and she is a major force in constituting the English novel as the form whose subjects are immediate reality, contemporary issues, and the politics of the personal ("The Story" 42).

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objective viewpoint with which to evaluate the serial subject, and as such it suggests a shift within novels toward a more coherent and less fluid representation of identity.

The uproar over *Pamela* in the 1740s illustrates that readers were increasingly uncomfortable with instabilities in both narration and identity within the novel. The literary and cultural debate over this novel allows us to examine narration and identity within texts that address the same issue: the challenges to traditional notions of social hierarchy represented by "marrying up." Indeed, the upward mobility of the serial subject is frequently achieved through an advantageous match, as in Mary Carleton's marriage to the supposedly noble John Carleton and Moll's marriage to the Mayor's younger son.[88] Although these marriages were certainly problematic, they did not produce the debate that accompanied Pamela's marriage to Mr. B. In examining the objections to Richardson's novel and Haywood's satiric reformulation of this story we see how each of these authors attempted to stabilize the intertwined questions of truth and questions of virtue. Authors temper instabilities in identity (such as serial subjectivity) by objective third-person narration, while they balance subjective narration (the epistolary novel) by a portrayal of the narrator's identity as fixed, stable, and transparent. It is this last attribute, with its suggestions of social legibility, which becomes particularly important in defusing the challenges to traditional social hierarchies implicit in the plots of these novels.

Haywood therefore intervenes in the development of the novel in important ways, despite her near total absence from histories of the novel until the last decade of the twentieth century. Studies by Ros Ballaster, Catherine Craft-Fairchild, Mary Anne

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[88] However, it is important to note that such mobility is frequently "corrected" by later plot events. John Carleton turns out not to be wealthy and Moll's marriage—significantly, to the younger and non-inheriting son—is relatively short-lived.

Schofield, Jane Spencer (*The Rise of the Woman Novelist*), Janet Todd (*The Sign of Angellica*), and John Richetti (*Popular Fiction Before Richardson*) have argued for her place as a literary innovator in early eighteenth-century fiction. Paula Backscheider sees Haywood as making "the English novel political in a new way, laying the foundation for the incisive revelations of social change and class upheaval" in later novels ("The Story" 40). Haywood was interested in gender and status distinctions, and she was also acutely aware, as a result of composing texts in an array of genres and modes, of the relationship between these power dynamics and the narratives that represent them. *Fantomina* and *Anti-Pamela* showcase the limits of the serial subject and the concomitant boundaries of women's self-authorization and self-assertion.[89]

Haywood's *Fantomina,* published just a few years after *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack,* demonstrates how the serial subject persists in literature, but also how authors modified and limited this mode of identity construction. The name Fantomina, like Mary Carleton, Moll Flanders, and Colonel Jack, is an alias, suggesting that disguise and identity construction are as central to this narrative as they are to those texts. But Fantomina's serial subjectivity is of a shorter duration, and, more importantly, Haywood presents a "real" (though unnamed) identity with which the text begins and ends, a stark contrast to Defoe's serial subjects. Fantomina is high ranking, and her serial subjectivity is therefore "a little Whim" rather than a necessity for self-preservation or social

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[89] Examining these texts together is a somewhat novel approach in itself. Until the late twentieth century the dominant narrative of Haywood's career was that she abandoned her early, sexually charged amatory fiction for moralistic tales, either through a change of heart or for pecuniary reasons. Backscheider disputes this narrative in favor of examining Haywood's agency, experimentation, and sophisticated understanding of the novel's hegemony ("The Story" 19-20). The similarities between *Fantomina* (1725) and *Anti-Pamela* (1741) , and their debt to the serial subject, are a specific means of finding similarities between early and later Haywood works.

advancement, as it was for Mary Carleton and Defoe's protagonists (41). This is a broad reading of Kietzman's idea of the serial subject, which is based in the procedures of early modern criminal prosecution and is thus identified with female rogues. However, the popularity of narratives such as Mary Carleton's and Moll Flanders' launched the serial subject into the realm of literary trope, and I see Haywood—ever adept at adopting and manipulating literary convention—as using the serial subject for political ends in her novels.

Like Mary Carleton and Moll Flanders before her, Fantomina uses serial identity manipulation for self-interested ends. Her disguise as a prostitute allows her to successfully conceal her identity while engaging in a sexual affair with the handsome Beauplaisir. However, Fantomina soon discovers that additional disguises are necessary to keep Beauplaisir's interest and to protect her own reputation:

> And if he should be false, grow satiated, like other Men, I shall but, at the worst, have the private Vexation of knowing I have lost him;—the Intreague being a Secret, my Disgrace will be so too;—I shall hear no Whispers as I pass,—She is Forsaken:—The odious Word *Forsaken* will never wound my Ears; nor will my Wrongs excited either the Mirth or Pity of the talking World:—It will not be even in the Power of my Undoer himself to triumph over me; and while he laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, the yeilding *Fantomina*, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserv'd Lady. (49)

As this passage illustrates, in *Fantomina* serial subjectivity is a weapon in the battle of the sexes: Fantomina uses serial subjectivity to trick an inconstant man into monogamy by making him think he is enjoying new partners. She therefore dresses herself as a

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country maid, then a Widow, then the mysterious Incognita (in a nod to the anonymous social practices discussed in Chapter II) as Beauplaisir tires of each character. Haywood uses serial subjectivity to both empower her female protagonist and satirize the fickle nature of male sexual attraction.

Fantomina, like Mary Carleton, Moll Flanders, and Colonel Jack, is able to almost effortlessly inhabit these different roles, to the extent that Beauplaisir is completely deceived. Deflecting potential criticism over the implausibility of Fantomina's disguises working so well, the narrator responds by describing the protagonist's skill at social performance:

> besides the Alteration which the Change of Dress made in her, she was so
> admirably skill'd in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on
> almost what Face she pleas'd, and knew so exactly how to form her Behaviour to
> the Character she represented, that all the Comedians at both Playhouses are
> infinitely short of her Performances: She could vary her very Glances, tune her
> Voice to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke
> when she appear'd herself.—These Aids from Nature, join'd to the Wiles of Art,
> and the Distance between the Places where the imagin'd Fantomina and Celia
> were, might very well prevent his having any Thought that they were the same, or
> that the fair *Widow* was either of them. (57)

As with Mary Carleton and Defoe's protagonists, Fantomina is able to don and doff identities at will and as the situation requires. Haywood's heroine is skilled in the "Art of feigning," allowing her to "put[] on almost what Face she pleas'd"—including, presumably, her identity as a gentlewoman. Indeed, Haywood's description of her

mannerisms when she "appear'd herself" suggests that there is an aspect of performance even in her established social identity. Fantomina's identity is thus presented as fluid, malleable, and context-dependent, indicating her affinity with other serial subjects.

But there is also a satiric edge to this passage that emerges in the novel's third-person narration and which evaluates the literary trope of serial subjectivity. Although the passage above explains away Fantomina's success at adopting different personae, it begins by acknowledging the outlandish elements of the tale: "It may, perhaps, seem strange that Beauplaisir should in such near Intimacies continue still deceiv'd: I know there are Men who will swear it is an Impossibility, and that no Disguise could hinder them from knowing a Woman they had once enjoy'd" (57). Here we again see the satiric target of male lust (can we really trust men—who apparently require constant sexual novelty—to remember each partner with whom they have been intimate?). However, there is also a subtle satire of serial subjectivity itself. By pointing out the implausibility of serial subjectivity, particularly when it occurs within the small circle of the London élite, Haywood's narrator indicates skepticism toward this mode of identity construction, a stance only intensified by the exhaustive list of talents Fantomina must possess in order for her to become a serial subject.

The third-person narration works in tandem with particular plot elements to stabilize the narrative in the face of Fantomina's identity manipulations. Third-person narration conveys objectivity: we do not question whether what is being narrated is "true," in the sense of being an accurate retelling of an episode or story, as opposed to the potentially unreliable narration of *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*. This narrative strategy aligns with Haywood's decision to make Fantomina an upper-class woman.

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Unlike Moll Flanders and Jack, who inhabit liminal status positions (Moll as a lowborn woman with noble qualities; Jack as a gentleman disconnected from culturally recognized markers of his gentility), Fantomina is firmly situated within the nobility. Haywood is careful to end her tale by reasserting Fantomina's original identity: the young woman's escapades are discovered when she becomes pregnant. Thus in *Fantomina* we see that serial subjectivity continues to function as a means of identity construction in response to particular circumstances, but that it is limited. The narrative voice satirizes the plausibility of serial subjectivity, the third-person narration does not allow Fantomina to enact self-serialization via narrative control, and the circular plot of the novel, which begins and ends with Fantomina's "real" identity, suggests that serial subjectivity does not allow total self-reinvention.[90]

Haywood's other notable serial subject is Syrena Tricksy, the protagonist of *Anti-Pamela*. The characterization of Syrena and the narrative structure of this novel illustrate the increasing limits on serial subjectivity within the genre of the novel. Because *Anti-Pamela* was written in response to Richardson's *Pamela*, it directly addresses Pamela's claims to narrative truth and the cohesive identity of its protagonist. By juxtaposing Syrena, the serial subject (ambitious, self-interested, performance-oriented, and perpetually self-constructing) with Pamela, the unified subject (possessing an authentic and interiorized identity communicated via a transparent and mimetic narrative mode), Haywood can address the problems associated with both conceptions of identity and

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[90] Mary Case Croskery reads the ending as more ambiguous, noting that Fantomina's mother sends her to a monastery upon learning of her pregnancy, which may indicate further adventures (many Haywood narratives feature women's escapes from convents) (91). Haywood may well be only provisionally foreclosing the possibility of further adventures by Fantomina, mediating the instability of serial subjectivity while not terminating Fantomina's agency altogether.

identity construction. While the serial subject is no longer a completely viable means of self-fashioning in literature, the unified subject also presents problems in terms of self-representation and the possibility of narrative deceit.

To contextualize this analysis it is necessary to examine the controversy surrounding the publication of *Pamela*. William Warner refers to the appearance of Pamela as a "media event" because it compelled widespread reading of the novel as an object of critically commentary and interpretation (*Licensing* 176). Richardson's contemporaries immediately fixated on what remains today a focus of critical attention: the Pamela paradox. For Richardson's novel to function, Pamela must cling to her virtue as its own reward, an action which leads to her social ascension via marriage to Mr. B---. In other words, Pamela disavows any ulterior motive for her behavior but nevertheless takes the exact course of action that benefits her own self-interest. The Pamela paradox requires Pamela to be coherent, truthful, and transparent in her self-representation, lest readers think she used her virtue strategically to manipulate Mr. B---.[91] Richardson accomplishes this feat through the epistolary narration of the novel, which purports to offer readers an unmediated first-person view of Pamela's experiences as they happen. The narrative strategy of *Pamela* relies on the assumption that the epistolary form is perfectly mimetic: there is no distance between the letter-writer's motivations, feelings, and character and their representation in the letters themselves.

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[91] Ruth Bernard Yeazell points out that Richardson opened himself up to this particular critique in his subtitle, *Virtue Rewarded*, which suggested a self-interested motivation for Pamela's demonstration of virtue (86-7). Paulson also offers an incisive analysis of the controversial aspects of *Pamela* and how Fielding responded to them (100-13).

Richardson's critics immediately grasped the importance of Pamela's character to the integrity of the story within this form of narration (because the epistolary form depends upon self-validation), and they responded by exploiting the limitations of the first-person epistolary perspective in their own retellings of the story. The main thrust of this anti-*Pamela* discourse is that the epistolary form, when limited to a single writer, is one-sided, meaning that readers have no way of evaluating the trustworthiness of the letter-writer. Pamela could be entirely false in her version of events, bartering her virtue for social ascension rather than clinging to virtue as a matter of principle.[92] The most famous example of this perspective, Henry Fielding's *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), purports to offer the reader the real correspondence from Pamela (real name Shamela), revealing her true nature (lascivious, scheming, selfish) and her plot to seduce her master by pretending virtue. Shamela offers an alternative perspective of Pamela's actions while also satirizing the limits of epistolary narration.[93] However, while in Fielding's account Pamela's actions toward Mr. B are deceptive, her letters are an accurate representation of her true character. In other words, Richardson and Fielding present two different Pamelas, but each character is coherent, unified, and

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[92] One way of thinking about the *Pamela* controversy is as a reiteration of the problem of female social legibility, here configured as virtue: "acting…without acting," in Pritchard's words. Theresa Michals argues that the competing characterizations of Pamela are typical of the novel's anti-theatricality, positioning the protagonist as "virtuous novelist" or "vile actress" (199).

[93] Fielding's parody points out the silliness of the the idea that the epistolary form can capture things as they happen, having Shamela writing in her bed as she is groped by Squire Booby, for example. He also linguistically situates Shamela within the lower classes, having her mother make the telling slip of writing "Poluteness" instead of politeness, and having Shamela go on about her "Vartue" (250, 255; see also Davidson 132-3).

transparent in her motivations, as illustrated by her letters (although, as Ronald Paulson points out, Fielding supplements the dramatic irony of Shamela's letters with letters from Parsons Oliver and Tickletext that make Shamela's intentions impossible to misconstrue) (103).[94] Despite their different attitudes toward Pamela's character, both of these novels indicate how inextricably intertwined first-person narration is with the unified subject by the 1740s. While Defoe introduces the element of identity instability in his novels' double-voiced narration (which by definition assumes the narrator's ability to occupy two different subject positions), both *Pamela* and *Shamela* demand a coherent and unified perspective on the part of the protagonist-narrator.

Haywood takes a different approach to the problems of *Pamela*, using the figure of the serial subject to interrogate Pamela's character and to explore the debates over narrative truth that the novel ignited. *Anti-Pamela* is not as direct a satire as *Shamela*, which retells Richardson's tale from the point of view of a licentious rather than virtuous woman (and makes the point that it may well be impossible to tell honesty from manipulation—virtue from "Vartue"). Rather, Haywood's anti-Pamela is Syrena Tricksy, a woman whose story functions as a parallel to the Pamela story as opposed to a parody of it. It characterizes lower-class women such as Pamela as calculated performers intent on attaining upward social mobility. As part of this characterization Haywood reimagines Pamela as a serial subject, the opposite of the cohesive, stable characters of Fielding's and

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[94] Jenny Davidson sees both Richardson and Fielding as using the problem of hypocrisy to investigate narration and virtue in the novel (112). She sees both authors, but particularly Richardson, as complicating the supposedly clear-cut distinction between sincerity and hypocrisy. The idea that there is a "real" Pamela and a hypocritical Pamela, which is the problem the *Pamela* media event attempts to work out, indicates the one-to-one correlation between writing and identity taking hold during this period, and it supports this chapter's contention that this is a shift from serial subjectivity.

Richardson's novels. Although Syrena adopts the same basic pattern of behavior throughout the novel—a virtuous woman seduced against her will—she takes on a variety of personae in order to attract a target's attention. Syrena trolls London, taking on the role of a young unmarried gentlewoman, a masquerader, an impoverished married gentlewoman, a libertine, a kept mistress, an impoverished widowed gentlewoman, a rich widow, and another poor widow (122, 146, 153, 156, 166, 169, 182, 220). Syrena's serial subjectivity is integral to her attempts at upward social mobility, and like Mary Carleton, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and Fantomina, she is able to construct identities at will.

Haywood establishes Syrena's manipulation of serial identity early on, as her mother trains her in artifice and deception, with the explicit goal of ensnaring a rich husband. Before Syrena is thirteen she

> excelled the most experienc'd Actresses on the Stage, in a lively assuming all the
> different Passions that find Entrance in a Female Mind. Her young Heart affected
> with imaginary Accidents (such as her Mother, from time to time, suggested to
> her might possibly happen) gave her whole Frame Agitations adapted to the
> Occasion, her Colour would come and go, her Eyes sparkle, grow Languid, or
> overflow with Tears, her Bosom heave, her Limbs tremble; she would fall into
> Faintings, or appear transported, and as it were out of herself; and all this so
> natural that had the whole College of Physicians been present, they could not have
> imagin'd it otherwise than real. (54)

Syrena is encouraged in this endeavor by "hopes of living grand, either by Marriage, or a Settlement"—in other words, by trading sexual favors for financial security (56). (The lack of distinction between "Marriage" or "Settlement" underscores her single-minded

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pursuit of money.) The novel details a string of affairs in which the basic plot is the same: Syrena uses a variety of stratagems to attract wealthy suitors, convince them of her modesty and chastity, "succumb" to their advances (pretending reluctance while deliberately spurring them on), and then try any and all means to get them to marry her.

But Syrena, despite her skill in deception, is an undisciplined and unlucky serial subject. By portraying her protagonist as convincing but ultimately ineffective, Haywood organizes her plot to highlight the danger of Syrena and women like her while preventing their success. Because Syrena directs her serial subjectivity toward marrying up, it is threatening to social order. Unlike Defoe's characters, who ultimately ascend the social hierarchy, or even Fantomina, who succeeds for a period of time in deceiving Beauplasir, Syrena's plots always fail due to a variety of unfortunate coincidences or through her own carelessness. Instead of "Virtue Rewarded," Haywood's twin subtitles are "Feign'd Innocence detected" and "Mock-Modesty Display's and Punish'd." In a nod toward Richardson's epistolary form, Haywood frequently uses Syrena's letters to her mother as expressions of her true (and self-interested) motivations; the misdirection or discovery of these letters exposes her plotting (Davidson 135). Syrena herself undermines her own efforts, as her sexual double-dealings undo a number of advantageous matches (in one notorious episode, her marriage to a rich old gentleman fails when his son visits and discovers that he and his father share the same paramour) (194-7). Haywood departs from the literary tradition in which serial subjects ascend the social ladder to instead track Syrena's downward mobility, as she seduces men of lesser and lesser fortune. It is the reverse story of *Pamela*, which documents Pamela's social ascension through marriage, but it condemns the same dynamic of a lower-class woman using her sexuality to entrap a

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gentleman. As a person who "believed in the concept of a natural elite, a ruling class whose innately higher moral and aesthetic values would lead England onward," according to Kirsten T. Saxton, Haywood likely objected to the leveling tendencies of *Pamela* and punished them accordingly in *Anti-Pamela* by repeatedly frustrating Syrena's upward mobility (3). *Anti-Pamela* therefore limits its serial subject protagonist through its narrative arc, illustrating her social descent.

Haywood also uses narration to counteract the destabilizing effects of serial subjectivity. Like *Fantomina*, *Anti-Pamela* uses third-person narration to impose objectivity on the text and distinguish artifice from truth. This style of narration offers an ostensibly objective viewpoint with which to examine Syrena's exploits, which offsets the episodic structure and limits of perspective that first-person narratives of serial subjectivity tend to produce. Furthermore, while readers might admire Syrena's ingenuity and ambition, the third-person narrative voice does not allow Syrena to defend or justify her own actions, as Moll and Jack were able to do in Defoe's novels. Catherine Ingrassia suggests that *Anti-Pamela* presents a world in which "uncalculated behavior may not exist," and she sees Haywood as "caution[ing] her readers from relying too heavily on their immediate interpretation, urging, instead, that they never take anything at face value" (36). Within her narration, however, Haywood makes clear how such deceptions function by delineating appearance from reality. The narrator marks the distinction between Syrena's pretended affections and her actual feelings, using descriptions such as "seeming Reluctance," "counterfeit…Indisposition," "feigned Innocence," "well-acted childish Fondness," and "artfully assumed Wildness in her Countenance," among many other similar examples (65, 83, 85, 114, 136). Haywood's narrator is overtly moralistic;

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for example, calling Syrena's mother "the first Seducer of the Girl's Virtue" (because she lured her with promises of wealth) and providing commentary throughout as to Syrena's deplorable actions (57).

These judgments of the two women align with McKeon's theory that third-person narration articulates character motivation more accurately than epistolary narration by revealing the impulses the letter-writer may not be aware of or may conceal (*Secret History* 531-2). When Syrena or her mother use the epistolary mode, it is framed by third-person narration, which prevents them from deceiving the reader. Furthermore, both characters are completely honest about their plotting in these letters, leaving little doubt as to their motivation. Haywood suggests in *Anti-Pamela* that women such as Syrena (and Pamela) exist, and that their ability to feign virtue is seductive. Indeed, one critique of Richardson's text is its prurient portrayal of Pamela's near-rape, which threatens to seduce even the reader. Haywood responds by combining third- and first-person narration to prevent such duplicity by clearly separating fact from fiction.

Haywood aligns serial subjectivity with deception and immorality, and she suggests that this mode of identity construction destabilizes representational and interpretive systems within texts and in social interactions. The third-person narration and structure of *Anti-Pamela* describes Syrena in such a way that readers are never taken in by her "little Stratagems"—largely because they are described as such (120). As we have seen, the novel seems to punish Syrena for her duplicity by constantly undermining her plots at the point where she has almost succeeds, a strategy reinforced by the narrator's moralistic commentary condemning her actions. The narrator continues to insist upon a distinction between hypocrisy and sincerity. Earlier in the novel the narrator interprets

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Mrs. Tricksy's and Syrena's disappointment—rather than shame—over a failed plot as "Dreadful Proof that their Hearts were totally void of all Distinction between Vice and Virtue!" (121-22). But as the novel has taken great pains to illustrate, this "Distinction" is almost impossible to read correctly in the social (as opposed to the textual) world. Certainly, the narrator here refers to an interiorized differentiation, but the point of *Anti-Pamela* (and the central issue of the *Pamela* debate) is the impossibility of distinguishing "Vice" from "Virtue." Without the plot and narratorial apparatus, the reader would be at the mercy of Syrena's textual and physical self-presentation and would likely be taken in by her performance (as, Haywood implies, readers of *Pamela* were).

Haywood's plot and third-person narration condemns and encloses serial subjectivity, and her political position suggests that she considered the upward mobility of Pamela and Syrena destabilizing to social order. However, it is not clear that Haywood viewed Syrena or, for that matter, Fantomina, with total disapprobation. Ingrassia views *Anti-Pamela* as an "anti-conduct book" offering "an alternative didacticism that teaches cunning, duplicity and, ultimately, self-sufficiency within the treacherous financial and sexual economies women confront" (36-7). While Haywood held conservative views of the social hierarchy, she wrote extensively to critique women's circumscribed roles within eighteenth-century society. *Anti-Pamela* stymies Syrena's social ascension, but it also makes the point that, for women, marriage is essentially the only path to security, especially for someone like Syrena, whose mother was a "Woman of Intrigue" and whose father is dead (53). Both Syrena and Fantomina capitalize on their ability to incite male desire via serial subjectivity, but it is a desire which can easily transform into predation, if the protagonists do not manage it well. Fantomina's first encounter with Beauplaisir

can be read as a rape, and he is just as duplicitous to her as she is towards him (Croskery 73-4). While *Anti-Pamela* portrays men as victims of Syrena's stratagems, they are also untrustworthy and self-interested. The father-son duo of her first affair both take advantage of Syrena's presumed sexual availability as a servant; Mr. D— abandons his fiancee for Syrena; and her first paramour, Vardine, impregnates and abandons her (88-9, 92, 76, 129). Haywood may be suggesting that serial subjectivity (and the risk of upward social mobility by undeserving women) results from a culture in which women are excluded from employment and forced to look to marriage as the only avenue where they can direct their energy and ambition.

Haywood's approach to serial identity manipulation in *Anti-Pamela* suggests that people associated this mode of self-fashioning with duplicity, artfulness, and deception during this period. While to a certain extent the problem of the "counterfeit lady" is evident in most earlier narratives of serial subjectivity (both Mary Carleton and Moll Flanders defend themselves against this charge in their narratives), Haywood's novel is the first to equate clearly the ability to serially manipulate one's identity with questionable moral character. Mary Carleton, Moll Flanders, and Colonel Jack certainly pursue their own self-interest by using serial subjectivity, but this identity practice is not itself characterized as corrupt or corrupting. The attitude toward serial subjectivity in *Anti-Pamela (*a stance that may or may not represent Haywood's) suggests that the emergence of a conception of identity as unified, cohesive, and transparent—demonstrated in *Pamela*—results in the characterization of serial subjectivity as artificial, inauthentic, and therefore morally wrong.

Summary

Serial subjectivity is closely aligned with questions of status, which is why many of these texts—*The Case*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Anti-Pamela*—address the issue of a woman marrying a man of higher rank. Indeed, *Moll Flanders* can in some respects be read as a precursor to Richardson's *Pamela*: a woman whose innate attributes suggest that she naturally belongs to a higher rank, a mistake rectified by marrying into a genteel family (Shinagel 149). McKeon calls this dynamic "status inconsistency," referring to Pamela's apparently misplaced aristocratic virtue, which demands resolution by raising her through marriage (*Origins* 367). Although Moll does not share Pamela's strict sense of virtue (she becomes the mistress to the older brother before marrying the younger) the dynamics of their marriages are similar: Moll, like Pamela, distinguishes herself by demonstrating stereotypically genteel qualities despite her low rank. But in the progression from Moll to Pamela we lose the element of serial subjectivity, or, rather, the inherent attributes of status become totalizing in terms of character. Pamela not only possesses innately genteel qualities, but these characteristics are one element of a coherent and fixed identity. When serial subjectivity does function within this plot, as in *Anti-Pamela*, it is divorced from innate qualities. Syrena, like Mary Carleton, may successfully mimic gentility, but Haywood's novel indicates that mere impersonation— no matter how convincing—is not enough to prompt upward social mobility through marriage.

What is remarkable about these three very different novels—*The Case, Moll Flanders*, and *Pamela*—is that they pose essentially the same question Mary Carleton poses about gentility, and they do so through a similar plot device. Carleton questions the

limits of social performance and essentially finds none. If a performance of gentility is without breaks in character, then it deserves to be recognized as gentility. Moll Flanders, along with Jack, presents a serial subject who is able to use the performance-based aspects of rank to his or her own advantage. However, the protagonists also insist on an innate gentility that underpins such performance. Moll's beauty, easy adoption of genteel accomplishments, voice, and carriage suggest that her serial subjectivity, specifically her embodiment of gentility, is perhaps successful only because she is genteel by nature, if not by birth. The same central question is evident in *Pamela*, which also questions whether innate gentility warrants upward mobility through marriage. Lastly, Syrena's impersonations again assert the primacy of performance and the possibility of serial subjectivity, but the fact that her performances are repeatedly thwarted suggests that serial subjectivity cannot function to gain upward mobility if the subject is not genteel by nature.

Even if we do not take Mary Carleton at her word that identities were entirely self-fashioned in the late seventeenth century, the popularity of serial identity manipulation in both literature and, as Kietzman documents, within the criminal justice system itself, suggests that the possibility to self-invent perpetually was a key facet of identity construction during this period. However, as we see in Defoe, there is also an impulse towards identifying innate qualities typically identified with gentility. While Moll Flanders briefly dramatizes the leveling tendencies inherent in this characterization when she marries the Mayor's younger son, the *Pamela* paradox fully exposes the implications of this dynamic. In order for Pamela's marriage to be considered viable (rather than a trick), Pamela's character and motivations must be absolutely transparent

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for the reader. Rather than the double-voiced narration of Defoe's novels (which dramatizes the instabilities of identity itself), Richardson uses epistolary narration to convey a sense of immediacy to the reader. Pamela does not—cannot—"act" or perform as a gentlewoman; rather, she must simply demonstrate that she is one through her writing. When the serial subject approaches the same scenario, in Haywood's *Anti-Pamela*, we see the alternative to Richardson's characterization and narrative structure. Syrena's identity and motivation are fluid and circumstance-dependent, but Haywood counters this instability by using third-person narration, which confers objectivity onto the narrative. Further, Syrena's repeated failures suggest that serial subjectivity itself is objectionable and subject to moral judgment, represented by her downward mobility within the plot of the novel. While Syrena, like Fantomina before her, is still able to fashion a series of convincing identities, the structure and plotting of the novel indicate a moral rejection of this self-fashioning, if not by Haywood herself, by the readers for whom she writes.

There is a complex and revealing relationship, then, among serial subjectivity, conceptions of gentility, and narration in the early eighteenth-century novel. Defoe's first-person novels feature protagonists whose innate gentility limits their ability to construct identities. These attributes, whether real or imagined, undermine the project of serial subjectivity, which relies upon the subject's internally unconstrained self-fashioning. (External factors, such as access to money, geographic location, and so forth also restrict serial self-construction.) The novels' structure, specifically the strategy of retrospective and ironic narration, creates multiple versions of gentility that fail to resolve into a coherent definition. Defoe's irony exceeds a mere reversal of meaning. Instead,

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versions of gentility proliferate and contradict each other, undermining both the protagonists' and the readers' supposedly stable and shared understanding of status. Defoe's novels thus dramatize the identity politics of his time, with the desire for absolute serial subjectivity modified by attempts to fix subject positions by innate status, which aligns with the supposedly fixed subject position of the retrospective narrator. *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* therefore also illustrate how the emerging genre of the novel, in both its narration and plot, address questions of identity and its representation.

Defoe's novels ultimately show us that aristocratic ideology contributed to the emergence of the unified subject within the novel, meaning a version of selfhood characterized as interiorized, innate, and authentic. What Defoe's novels demonstrate is that one thread of this modern sense of subjectivity depended upon a latent notion of aristocratic ideology. In other words, the germ of the unified subject is the idea of an unalterable, inborn, essentialized notion of status. Aristocratic ideology and its sense of biological difference transforms into a character's self-awareness of an innate status identity. The problem is that this identity may not correspond to a person's social identity (as with Moll Flanders and subsequently Pamela) or it may be merely self-delusion. *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* never resolve this question, and the ironical stance toward status in these novels indicates that Defoe was well aware that the regimes of serial subjectivity and aristocratic ideology—not to mention the debasement of gentility and the increasingly commercial nature of London culture—could not be reconciled.

As the novel developed and responded to social change, it began to give voice to the idea of an interiorized and innate identity beyond status identity. This shift is illustrated by the replacement of the serial subject by a different type of protagonist, one

whose identity is characterized as cohesive and unified. Richardson's great technical triumph in *Pamela*, according to Watt, was to offer a first-person perspective that promised transparency and truth: the epistolary narrative (176). However, that narrative, with its emphasis on social climbing, demanded a protagonist with a stable, trustworthy identity and perspective—someone who deserves social ascension without seeking it. When the serial subject does appear, in novels like Haywood's, plot elements and narration counter the instability of his or her identity, imposing order on the narrative and indicating that serial subjectivity was considered suspect by readers. The satirical responses of writers like Fielding and Haywood attempt to reassert rigid hierarchical boundaries against the leveling tendencies of *Pamela*. Haywood's approach is to re-create Pamela as a serial subject and in doing so characterize such subjects as deceptive and manipulative. Pamela's social ascension is thus characterized as the result of trickery rather than as the result of her inalienable and demonstrable gentility, as Richardson's text had implied.

The figure of the serial subject offers a chance to examine how identity was both enacted and imagined at the turn of the eighteenth century and beyond. The serial subject is often considered as a precursor to the novel, as both Kietzman and Bernbaum argue is the case with the various texts concerning Mary Carleton. However, the serial subject does not vanish with the appearance of the novel; rather, it functions within the emerging novel genre. By studying the serial subject within the early novel we can better see how social forms of identity construction interacted with textual forms of identity construction through narration. The fact that serial subjectivity structured many early novels, such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* and Haywood's *Fantomina* and *Anti-Pamela*,

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indicates its continued—though maligned—role as a mode of identity construction. If, as John Richetti argues, "The very nature of identity is a recurring philosophical dilemma" which the novel expresses, then serial subjectivity represents not an anomaly or an unsophisticated precursor to the novelistic protagonist but rather one opportunity for self-construction and self-representation (*The English Novel* 3).

One of the primary dilemmas of identity construction was social legibility, which is both central to the success of serial subjects (their ability to take on different identities requires identifiable roles to inhabit) while also being undermined by serial subjectivity (which asserted that identity was merely disguise or performance). These themes will also emerge in subsequent chapters of this project. Chapter IV will explore the emergence of a discourse almost completely opposed to serial subjectivity, sensibility, which also has for its foundation the idea of the socially legible body. We see the beginnings of this development in the *Pamela* debates of the 1740s. The popularity of *Pamela* and the decline of serial subjectivity within the same period suggest that writers increasingly defined identity in terms of innate qualities rather than performance. This development realigns the novel, at least in terms of characterization and narrative structure, with aristocratic ideology and the notion of absolute social legibility.

CHAPTER IV

NATURAL PERFORMANCES: STATUS, DISPLAY, AND THE BODY IN *CLARISSA*

AND THE *LONDON JOURNAL*

In the middle of his *London Journal, 1762-63*, James Boswell attempts to clarify

his views of genteel comportment, a perpetual concern in his diary. He begins with

women, defining "Politeness" as "knowledge of how much they ought to show and how

much to conceal." Such "nice art," however, risks devolving into all-encompassing

artifice, a problem for both sexes. "There is indeed a kind of character perfectly

disguised, a perfect made dish, which is often found, both male and female, in London,"

he notes. Boswell rejects such superficiality as "most disgusting," asserting that, "plain

nature is infinitely better. What I admire is nature improved by art, for art certainly may

and does improve nature." Although he names the eighteenth-century commonplace of

"nature improved by art" as a sociable ideal, Boswell's earlier remarks undermine this

description. Indeed, Boswell writes himself into a tautology: "plain nature is infinitely

better" than the artfulness of "a perfect made dish," but "nature improved by art" exceeds

"plain nature" (which he earlier denigrates as "raw"). Boswell's logic relies upon

distinguishing subtle art from total artificiality—"nature improved by art" from a

"character perfectly disguised"—but he is unable to sustain this distinction. "I wish I may

make myself understood on this subject," Boswell writes, acknowledging the unresolved

tension between his valorization of both naturalness and refinement (176-77).

Boswell's attempts to describe genteel behavior illustrates the contradictory

practices and beliefs that constrained mid-century self-fashioning, particularly in terms of

status. Changes in eighteenth-century social structure, particularly the swelling ranks of

the genteel classes, prompted the belief that polite behavior, manners, and dress could be emulated as a means of attaining or solidifying upward social mobility. However, traditional notions of status as innate were still powerful cultural philosophies. Despite the widely studied destabilization and disappearance of visual representations of rank, the body continued to be conceptualized as a site of ultimate truth about status identity.[95] The mid-century rise of sensibility, a discourse that located truth in bodily display, bolstered social legibility, which also looked to the body to communicate status. Boswell's repeated return to the standard of "nature" in the passage above demonstrates the continued relevance of conceptions of social hierarchy based in fundamental and inherent difference. Ideally, a person's behavior is naturally refined, indicating innate gentility. The tension he experiences between nature and art reveals a gap between the theory of social legibility and the actual practice of presenting oneself as genteel.

Boswell's *London Journal* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) provide examples of how writers continued to reassert the legitimacy of visual distinctions of status. At first sight these texts seem to have little in common. Clarissa is a paragon of virtue, "a young lady of great delicacy, mistress of all the accomplishments, natural and acquired, that adorn the sex, having the strictest notions of filial duty" according to Richardson's list of the "Principal Characters."[96] Boswell, on the other hand, drinks too

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[95] See G. J. Barker-Benfield, Jennie Batchelor, Lawrence E. Klein, Paul Langford (*A Polite and Commercial People*), and Jessica Munns and Penny Richards for more on fashion in the eighteenth century. As these studies demonstrate, critical attention has been focused on attire as opposed to the broader consideration of the body (manners, behavior, beauty, carriage, and expression) addressed in this project.

[96] References to *Clarissa* are based on the complete text of the first edition, republished by Penguin Books in 2004. Richardson made many changes to the novel between the first and third editions; most critics prefer the first edition (see the Introduction to the above

much, chases women, and struggles to live within his means. Despite this contrast, the

London Journal and *Clarissa* share similarities of narrative (both protagonists leave

home for London after a family rift) and of narration (the first-person writing of both

Clarissa's correspondence and Boswell's diary). In an unfamiliar urban environment,

both of these self-writers must navigate the social sphere, projecting their own status and

correctly interpreting others'. Divorced from the familiar contexts of the domestic and

communal, Clarissa and Boswell both look to nature—the body—to determine the truth

about identity. *Clarissa* and the *Journal* identify self-consciousness as the marker of

artifice or status imposition. Their reliance on this particular quality to separate feigned

from real gentility illustrates how theories of sensibility and status influenced mid-

century conceptions of identity. [97]

As this project's analysis of anonymity and serial subjectivity demonstrates,

performance is an important aspect of early eighteenth-century identity construction. But

as we have seen, status and rank are exceptions to this pattern of identity-as-performance,

at least within literary texts. This pattern continues into the mid-eighteenth century,

especially as sensibility begins to dominate literary narratives. Just as novels in the 1740s

equated serial subjectivity with duplicitous performance, the discourse of sensibility in

this chapter's first-person texts marks a moral boundary between nature (transparent and

edition and William Warner's *Reading Clarissa* for more about the novel's various
editions). This chapter references page numbers rather than letter numbers.

[97] See the "Literary Approaches" section of the Introduction (20-7) for more on the
methodology of this project, specifically the rationale for analyzing novel and
autobiography side-by-side. These texts illustrate the point that eighteenth-century prose
was not differentiated by the labels of fiction or non-fiction. Richardson's subtitle is "The
History of a Young Lady" ("history" being a popular label for a first-person narrative, as
Defoe and Burney's novels also illustrate) while Boswell calls journals, letters, and
essays "works of the imagination" (202).

unpracticed display) and art (self-interested deception). But unlike Haywood's depiction of social performance in which it is impossible to determine real from feigned virtue, theories of sensibility promise that the body communicates real feeling, and that the careful observer can therefore detect hypocrisy. As this chapter will demonstrate, writers recruit this element of sensibility to detect status imposition. In doing so, they suggest that a person's social position is embodied, an innate aspect of identity rather than a performance.

The emerging discourse of sensibility therefore reinforces traditional conceptions of rank by positioning the body as the site of truthful display. Although critics typically define sensibility as the quality of being receptive to and influenced by the emotional state of another person, John Mullan reminds us that sensibility is "the capacity to feel *and display* sentiments" (*Sentiment* 61, my emphasis). A foundational element of this system is a belief in the body's ability to convey emotions. Through involuntary sighs, tears, blushes, uplifted hands, fits and starts, and inarticulate exclamations, the body reveals authentic feelings, betraying any attempts at concealment. The body's communicative capacity exceeds that of language, which might conceal genuine feeling or mimic emotion (Mullan, *Sentiment* 61, Todd, *Sensibility* 86). Spacks argues that this conception of the body "encouraged fantasies of accessibility," making emotion inescapably public by assuming a direct and mimetic correlation between inward qualities and outward display (*Privacy* 56). Sensibility is thus based in a belief that the body's communication is unpracticed, that is, unmediated by language, and unconscious, meaning it functions outside the control of the subject. People considered the sensible body to be a legible body.

Writers overlaid the tropes associated with sensibility, particularly the idea of unselfconscious (therefore natural) behavior, onto traditions of social organization based in visual display and an understanding of difference as essential. Sensibility was particularly suited to this application considering that it was from its inception a tool of aristocratic hegemony.[98] The visual representation of rank was a foundational component of early modern aristocratic social hierarchy. This system of social organization assumed a correlation between innate qualities and exterior attributes or conditions, a view which naturalized environmental or social differences as innate status distinctions (McKeon, *Origins* 131-2). Sensibility not only parallels this aristocratic ideology by looking to the body as a locus of truth; it was also a quality initially defined as being an innately noble attribute in itself.

The fact that sensibility and social display shared ideologies of bodily display meant that they also shared its major challenge: hypocrisy, or a schism between being and seeming. The paradox of sensibility—that people valorized natural gestures although these gestures were highly codified (and thus could be simulated)—was also true of social performance generally. Jennie Batchelor and Patricia Meyer Spacks have investigated the performance of sensibility within this context. Batchelor argues that dress was used to interpret the character and class of the person wearing it, but fashion, like displays of sensibility, could be manipulated. Spacks asserts that writers of this period condemned social performance, despite the fact that the "intricate rules of propriety…mandate hypocrisy, prescribing obsessive attention to appearances" (*Privacy*

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[98] The concept of sensibility originated with Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who viewed sensibility (with sentiment) as an innate and exclusively noble quality. See Robert Markley (212-6) and Mullan (*Sentiment,* 28-9).

97-8). The discourses of sensibility and status locate truth in a person's natural bodily display. But despite their denigration of art, these discourses also depend upon highly codified, socially legible behaviors. The sighs, tears, and fits of the sensible man or woman could be feigned, just as the manners, clothing, and speech of the gentleman or gentlewoman could be imitated.

However, the fact that people expressed a fear of hypocrisy in eighteenth-century social interactions does not mean that visual distinctions of status ceased to operate. Rather, the preoccupation with duplicity suggests an overriding belief that appearance and reality should align. Textual constructions of status provide one avenue for reaffirming this correspondence. While eighteenth-century writers frequently portray deceptive performances of status, they also consistently demonstrate the belief that impostors can be detected. Theories of sensibility, particularly the idea that the body speaks despite the person's intentions or efforts, provide a means of reasserting the legitimacy of social legibility. The body betrays the artificiality of status impostors who dress and act above their rank. Because their actions are only a performance—not an identity—they can never be perfect. In *Clarissa* and the *London Journal* self-consciousness is the key to thwarting hypocrisy. These texts thus demonstrate how people adapted theories to changing economic and social conditions in England at mid-century, and how they marshaled other discourses—here, sensibility—to bolster the legitimacy of conceptions of status as innate and visually apparent. By further investigating the link between theories of sensibility and assumptions about status, we can better understand the resilience of traditional rank-based systems of social hierarchy

and how this conception of status operated in social practices and individual identity construction.

The reassertion of aristocratic ideology within these texts and against performance-oriented theories of status implies that both Clarissa and Boswell are invested in more traditional standards of social hierarchy. It is an interpretation at odds with the dominant criticism of both texts, which situates these texts' protagonists within the bourgeoisie.[99] This classification persists despite the fact that the primary way Clarissa and Boswell identify themselves is as a gentlewoman and a gentleman. While these terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive, to label these writers "bourgeois" misrepresents the orientation toward status rather than class evident in both Clarissa and Boswell's writing. Both legitimize their own status by insisting that rank is innate, and both demarcate their associates on the basis of status. Certainly what will later be called bourgeois values are evident in both characters—Clarissa's chastity, religious faith, and domestic management and Boswell's pursuit of thrift and sexual propriety—but these qualities should not lead us to conclude that Clarissa and Boswell identified themselves as part of an emerging bourgeois or middle class that defined itself in opposition to upper-class values.[100] Rather, Clarissa and Boswell both look to social legibility to make sense of their world, indicating a conservative view of social position.

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[99] For *Clarissa*, see Nancy Armstrong ("Reclassifying *Clarissa*"), R.F. Brissenden, Terry Eagleton (*The Rape of Clarissa*), Christopher Hill ("Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times"), Dorothy Van Ghent, and Ian Watt. For the *London Journal* the most comprehensive work is Felicity A Nussbaum's *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*.

[100] See the Introduction for more on status versus class in the eighteenth century (6-9).

In *Clarissa* and the *London Journal* the body communicates via unpracticed, unconscious signs to reveal status, an interpretive system borrowed from discourses of sensibility. Clarissa and Boswell view the body's natural display as truthful—it cannot be concealed or manipulated. Self-consciousness, practiced manners, and other signs of artificiality are therefore signs of imposed status or feigned gentility. Both protagonists are familiar with the interpretive scaffolding of sensibility, especially the emphasis on reading the body, and they are therefore able to apply this perspective to the problem of status display. Signs of deliberate performance—evidence of art—reveal social posturing, while a seamless display of manners affirms the true nature of the genteel subject. By locating the truth of identity in the body, Clarissa and Boswell both attempt to establish a stable system with which to interpret social performances. The earnestness of their efforts, even in the face of the paradoxes they encounter when applying this system in social contexts, illustrates the continued relevance of aristocratic conceptions of status in the face of an emerging capitalist and increasingly class-oriented society.

Clarissa and Status Interpretation

The question of how to distinguish a person's social position is a key issue in *Clarissa*, as her suitor and persecutor, Lovelace, recruits an array of status impostors to perform as people of higher social station: Mrs. Sinclair, Dorcas, Captain Tomlinson, and the stand-ins for Lady Betty Lawrence and his cousin, Elizabeth Montague.[101] The characters' discussions of how such impostors are concealed or revealed illustrates how people can distinguish artful performances from natural displays. In London, separated

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[101] See Margaret Anne Doody for an extensive study of the various disguises used in *Clarissa* ("Disguise and Personality" 18-25). Most of these disguises involve either "dressing up" or "dressing down" in terms of social position.

from the familiar and stable hierarchy of Harlowe Place, Clarissa realizes that her

security depends upon correctly reading the status (and therefore motivation) of the

people surrounding her, just as Lovelace recognizes that his plans are contingent upon

their impersonations. Despite their opposing goals, both characters look to the body as

able to communicate the truth about status, specifically the idea that self-conscious

behavior reveals deception. This system is based on an essentialized notion of social

hierarchy in which status is legible on the body. *Clarissa* demonstrates the theoretical

validity of such a system while also demonstrating its practical failures. Within the novel,

downward social mobility undercuts a fundamental premise of social legibility: that

status is permanent. The body successfully communicates rank-by-birth, but the

increasing instability of the social hierarchy makes social legibility an unreliable means

of navigating an unfamiliar social landscape.[102]

Within *Clarissa* the body functions as a powerful interpretive index, particularly

for the main character. The novel is filled with bodily signs that testify to characters'

motivations or sincerity. Richardson positions Clarissa as a particularly adept reader of

the body's expressions. She looks to gesture rather than language, justifying her lengthy

descriptions of conversations by noting, "air and manner often express more than the

accompanying words" (42). She repeats this sentiment later to explain her suspicion of

Lovelace during his courtship:

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[102] This argument depends upon breaking with the tradition of reading Clarissa as a novel
that explicitly supports bourgeois ascendency or values. I follow Donald P. Gunn in
reading Clarissa as a text which is not radically, anti-aristocratically bourgeois, but
instead as a text that "helps to formulate and disseminate a powerful ideological program
which maintains the position of the privileged," a ruling elite made up of both the nobility
and gentry (14).

I have not the better opinion of Mr. Lovelace for his extravagant volubility. He is

too full of professions: he says too many fine things of me, and to me: True

respect, true value, I think, lies not in words: words cannot express it. The silent

awe, the humble, the doubting eye, and even the hesitating voice, better show it

by much, than, as Shakespeare says, '---The ratling tongue / Of saucy and

audacious eloquence.' (397)

Clarissa evaluates the sincerity of Lovelace's declarations based on a series of bodily

signals: "silent awe," a "humble…doubting eye" and "hesitating voice." She contrasts

these reliable signs with the relative emptiness of words, even "extravagant volubility."

True affection is beyond the purview of language: "words cannot express it." For

Clarissa, the body's expression cannot be concealed or mediated, while language can

obfuscate, exaggerate, or manipulate.

Clarissa extends her consideration of the body to encompass status distinctions as

well as emotion or trustworthiness. In Clarissa we see the body constantly referenced,

indicating true nobility to both readers of the novel and characters in the novel. In one

scene Clarissa remarks of Lovelace that his status will be revealed, "no disguise able to

conceal his being of condition" (285). Later she says, "it is impossible that any disguise

can hide the gracefulness of his figure," an implicitly status-based compliment (352).

These examples suggest that for Clarissa visual distinctions of status are inscribed on the

body itself rather than represented through clothing. Clarissa's reliance on bodily signs of

status reflects a larger interpretive schema in which the reader also participates. For

example, Richardson communicates Clarissa's nature to readers by having other

characters describe her inalienable and visually apparent status as a gentlewoman. "She

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had, as the people took notice to one another, something so uncommonly noble in her air, and in her person and behaviour, that they were sure she was of quality," Lovelace recounts in one of many similar instances (763; see also 605, 821, and 450). Although the qualities that indicate gentility are ephemeral—"gracefulness of figure" and "something so uncommonly noble in her air"—they are legible to a society attuned to interpret them.

Because the novel situates the body as the passive conduit of display or communication, any attempt to perform reveals itself as self-consciousness. An observer should therefore be able to distinguish between real and feigned gentility by being alert to these signs. For example, Clarissa notices that Mrs. Sinclair's "tokens of respect" are "greater…than should be," considering "she was the wife of a gentleman; and…the appearance of everything about her, as well house as dress, carries the mark of such good circumstances as require not abasement" (529). Because Mrs. Sinclair is not a gentlewoman, she is self-conscious about acting appropriately. Her body telegraphs her discomfort to Clarissa. Although Clarissa does not act on her suspicions, she records them, which indicates that Richardson assumed his audience shared this interpretive framework and would correctly read these clues to Mrs. Sinclair's real identity. The contrast between natural (unpracticed and unconscious) displays of status and artificial (self-conscious and overdone) performances of high rank suggest that both readers and characters could distinguish persons of high rank from impostors by virtue of how practiced or deliberate their behavior seems.

Aware of this potential fissure in the social world he constructs for Clarissa, Lovelace therefore instructs the women he has hired to impersonate his female relations to act without seeming to act: "Devil take you!—Less arrogance. You are got into airs of

young quality. Be less sensible of your new condition. People born to dignity command respect without needing to require it" (876). He commands them to adopt "[a]irs of superiority, as if born to rank—but no overdo! doubting nothing…Easy and unaffected!" (876). Lovelace's comments reveal the seemingly intractable problem of such disguises: demonstrating true nobility requires a complete lack of self-consciousness about one's status or bearing, but genteel behavior is highly codified and must be practiced. From a modern perspective, the problem is that the rigid standard of behaviors governing gentlemen and gentlewomen is almost impossible for someone not of these ranks to inhabit unselfconsciously. However, from an eighteenth-century perspective this conduct, although developed by education, travel, and training, was a natural attribute of the nobility and genteel ranks, and attempting to feign it would therefore never fully succeed. Either way, self-consciousness is a key element in the interpretive component of social legibility, offering a way to distinguish the truly genteel from an impostor, as Lovelace himself realizes.

Characters distinguish new money (assumed gentility) from noble heritage (true gentility), using the same logic: that true nobility is unselfconscious. Lovelace's inability to completely conceal his rank (his oft-remarked unconscious "grace") is paralleled by heavy-handed attempts by new money to embody their new rank. He writes contemptuously of the Harlowe family's "touchy" honor and the Howe's "ostentatious sealings," which attest to their recent upward social mobility (584, 706). Although it is easy to attribute Lovelace's comments to snobbery, Clarissa herself echoes his remarks. She points to Lovelace's pride as a fault, considering his pedigree: "Distinction or quality may be prided in by those to whom distinction or quality is a new thing….Such a man to

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be haughty, to be imperious!" (141). She critiques Lovelace for haughty behavior, using the logic that his impeccable ancestry makes conscious pride inappropriate. As a nobleman, Lovelace should be less concerned with deliberately demonstrating his gentility. Clarissa repeats this sentiment when she uses Lovelace's own words to judge his conduct, telling Anna:

> As to the advantage of birth, that is of his side, above any man who has been found out for me: if we may judge by that expression of his, which you was pleased with at the time: 'That upon true quality, and hereditary distinction, if good sense were not wanting, honour sat as easy as his glove': that, with as familiar an air, was his familiar expression; 'while none but the prosperous upstart, MUSHROOMED into rank (another of his peculiars), was arrogantly proud of it.' If, I say, we may judge of him by this, we shall conclude in his favour, that he knows what sort of behaviour is to be expected from persons of birth, whether he act up to it or not. (182)

Here again Clarissa expresses a distinction between "true quality, and hereditary distinction" on which "honour sat as easy as [a] glove," and the "upstart," distinguished by being "proud." The difference depends upon consciousness of rank. Clarissa and Lovelace both emphasize that true nobility is evident not only through the presence of natural grace or a noble air but also through the absence of self-consciousness or overt pride.[103] (This will be a definition of genteel comportment that proves problematic for Boswell.)

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[103] In this respect Richardson is more conservative than Defoe, who did not draw distinctions between the newly genteel trading families and families of ancient lineage.

In *Clarissa*, then, the natural is aligned with the transparent, unselfconscious

behavior of the genteel, while art is equated with the fraudulent performances of social

impostors. Juliet McMaster asserts that "this personal legibility, and the degree to which

the body is a clear and lucid text, is itself a shining virtue" that Clarissa possesses (110).

It is a virtue, however, aligned specifically with status: Richardson positions art as the

antithesis to gentility. Clarissa, for example, accuses Lovelace of having a "low mind"

because his "VANITY" craves flattery (artful compliment) rather than truth (544-5).

Clarissa proclaims, "I am not capable of arts so low," meaning duplicity and deception

(347). Even Lovelace acknowledges a connection between artifice and baseness, saying,

"So far, indeed, was my proceeding low and artful: and when I was challenged with it as

such, in so high and noble a manner, I could not avoid taking shame to myself upon it"

(953). Just as Lovelace is "meanly artful," an implicit equation of artifice to low rank, so

is the opposite true: that sincerity or transparency is an attribute of nobility (236). For

example, people compliment Clarissa on being "nobly sincere" (1033, 1467). Anna

makes a similar association between status and truth when she reassures Clarissa, "You

are the same noble creature you ever were. Above disguise, above art, above extenuating

a failing" (403).[104] These equations of artifice to lowness or meanness, and sincerity to

nobility, resonate throughout the novel. They repudiate social imposition by asserting that

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[104] Although sincerity is a quality frequently attributed to Clarissa, Doody notes that she
in fact uses disguises and is duplicitous ("Disguise and Personality" 25-26). However,
Clarissa takes great pains to explain and justify her occasional deceptions, indicating that
she wants to maintain the link between honesty or sincerity and her identity as a
gentlewoman.

performance does not make a gentleman or gentlewoman but is rather the quality that reveals a lack of gentility.[105]

Richardson plays up the parallels between Clarissa's legible body and her letter-writing, suggesting that her social transparency—her lack of artifice, deception, or show—is also a feature of her writing. As with Pamela's letters, Clarissa's letters are meant to mimetically reproduce her virtue, merit, and innate gentility. Ian Watt considered the particular epistolary form of *Clarissa* a technical achievement that balanced the interiority of the private letter with the more trustworthy narration offered by multiple perspectives (209).[106] Richardson makes repeated comparison between Clarissa's text and Clarissa herself. For example, when Lovelace begins forging letters between Clarissa and Anna Howe, he equates Anna's irregular handwriting with her "natural impatience," while Clarissa's "delicate hand and even mind is seen in the very cut of her letters" (811). (Clarissa's hand is so regular, in fact, that Lovelace must explain away his inexpert forgery by blaming illness [752].) Richardson equates the uniformity of the characters Clarissa writes to the steadiness of her character. The relationship between Clarissa's body and her written words highlights the fantasy of representational transparency that the novel presents in its views of social legibility: body-as-text.

Based on the values of this system, Clarissa characterizes Lovelace's perpetual deceptions as impugning his status as a gentleman. She asserts that she finds him

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[105] This association between transparency and gentility is also evident in Clarissa's attempts to define politeness as sincerity as opposed to practiced or artificial manners (421, 1076).

[106] Although, as was the case with *Pamela*, many readers and critics see these characters, or narration itself, as unreliable; see Terry Castle (*Clarissa's Ciphers*) and Warner (*Reading* Clarissa). See also Tom Keymer, Christina Marsden Gillis, and Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook for more on the epistolary form in *Clarissa.*

"wanting in *every* instance to that veracity, which is an indispensable in the character of a gentleman" (982). He is therefore only "pretending to be a gentleman" (985). Here Clarissa again returns to the idea that high status results in transparent and sincere behavior, to which deception is anathema. However, Clarissa is not suggesting that Lovelace is not nobly born. As her previous comments about his "grace" and his easiness attest, Lovelace presents as a nobleman. Instead, she asserts that Lovelace corrupts his natural gentility—a feature of his noble ancestry—by his lack of "veracity." Lovelace's "nature" is irreconcilable with the "art" to which he continually resorts in order to manipulate Clarissa. Furthermore, Clarissa asserts that, when Lovelace is dishonest, his behavior reveals his true motives: in these instances he is merely "pretending to be a gentleman," while for a true gentleman, in Lovelace's own words, "honour sat as easy as a glove." It is only when Lovelace debases himself that he must act his status, and Clarissa affirms that she can tell the difference.

Clarissa thus presents a social world in which self-consciousness reveals disguise or imposture. However, this system ultimately falls short: while it provides a means of identifying status by birth, it cannot accommodate the rapid and widespread social mobility documented within the novel. Although critics of *Clarissa* frequently refer to the attempted upward mobility of the Harlowe family and Mr. Soames, the novel is at least equally populated with characters who are downwardly mobile. Typically the downwardly mobile are fallen gentlewomen who enter the narrative as part of Lovelace's plotting. These characters disrupt Clarissa's ability to gauge the status (and therefore trustworthiness) of those around her. For example, Clarissa cannot reconcile Dorcas' evident gentility with other contradictory aspects of her presentation. She tells Anna,

"She is very likely and genteel; too genteel indeed, I think, for a servant. But what I like least of all in her, she has a strange sly eye. I never saw such an eye—half-confident, I think. But indeed Mrs. Sinclair herself…has an odd winking eye: and her respectfulness seems too much studied, methinks, for the London ease and freedom" (525). Dorcas, we find out from Lovelace, is a fallen gentlewoman, which explains her genteel manners yet knowing gaze. Clarissa's confusion is evident in this passage. The fact that Dorcas and Mrs. Sinclair share a "sly eye" means that both their morality and social status are suspect. But Dorcas' body communicates a contradictory message: that she is "likely and genteel" (only the lowborn Mrs. Sinclair has manners that are self-conscious and "too much studied"). Born into the gentry, Dorcas possesses the innate attributes of a gentlewoman, qualities that obscure other signs of her fallen status. Her natural genteel behavior allows her to subvert other bodily signs (the "sly eye") that reveal her character.

Clarissa's failure to correctly peg Dorcas recurs later, when Lovelace convinces her that two impostors are his aunt, Lady Betty, and his cousin Elizabeth Montague. As with Dorcas, Lovelace succeeds by finding fallen gentlewoman to fulfill their roles— otherwise Clarissa would find them out. Lovelace explains that the women can pass as gentlewomen because they were born into those ranks: "Both are accustomed to ape quality. Both are genteelly descended. Mistresses of themselves; and well educated—yet past pity" (875). As "genteelly descended" women they demonstrate qualities of their rank by birth—they have "naturally a genteel air and turn"—even as their actions have ejected them from the ranks of gentlewomen (875). Lovelace can thus manipulate the novel's system of social legibility by relying on the genteel birth and education of these women to conceal their current depravity. The ironically named "Lady Barbara" is so

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skilled at demonstrating a noble demeanor that, as Lovelace remarks, "She has always been admired for a grandeur in her air that few women of quality can come up to: and never was supposed to be other than what she passed for; though often and often a paramour for lords" (875). Of genteel birth, Lady Barbara shows no signs of practiced behavior or self-consciousness that would reveal her imposition. On the contrary, her self-presentation is so natural that she outdoes legitimately noble women in the "grandeur in her air," a description of social legibility analogous to Lovelace's grace or Clarissa's noble bearing.

Class mobility renders visual signs of status misleading not because this system fails, but rather because it succeeds: the body continues to communicate status-by-birth even as people ascend or descend the social ladder. Lovelace must still instruct the women as to proper behavior—they may be gentlewomen, but they are not noble ladies, as his aunt and cousin are. Nonetheless, the characteristics associated with their genteel status are apparent. Clarissa is taken in by their impersonation—she has "not the least suspicion that they were not the ladies they personated"—although she apprehends that things are not quite right, telling Anna that Lovelace's relatives "fell short of what I expected *them* to be" (998, 1001). She experiences the same unease around the fallen gentlewomen Sally and Polly. Clarissa can sense that the women in front of her are not quite who they seem to be, but her confidence in their genteel presentation (and a corresponding confidence that gentlewomen are virtuous) leads her to believe that they are who they say they are. Despite the interpretive framework that the novel establishes, social mobility, particularly downward mobility, thwarts Clarissa's attempts to distinguish social impostors.

In the chaotic social world of the mid-eighteenth century, destabilized by social mobility and the debasement of gentility, status representation and interpretation take on new importance. Clarissa seeks to reimpose social legibility by looking to innate characteristics that cannot be feigned and that will be communicated by the body, a view of status shared by other characters in the text, notably Lovelace and Anna Howe. By using unselfconscious behavior as a means of measuring gentility Clarissa is not imposing a new social order but rather reinvigorating the central tenet of traditional notions of status: that the body "speaks" the truth about rank, not only through clothing but also through natural physical attributes or mannerisms. However, social mobility undermines this project by making "natural" gentility a fundamental component of the success of social imposition. The social mobility of the novel troubles the central distinction Clarissa must establish: between the genteel and the non-genteel.

Clarissa's discovery of these impositions occurs simultaneously with her rape, the central narrative event of the novel. The critical focus on the rape tends to obscure the fact that this scene is also the moment when Clarissa realizes that she has misinterpreted the people with whom Lovelace has surrounded her.[107] Her failure to perceive the array of social impostors around her represents not just a personal failure of Clarissa's interpretation and judgment. This failure also challenges the assumptions undergirding theories of visual status distinctions. We should not underestimate the centrality of this system of social legibility to how Clarissa understands the world. It encompasses her trust

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[107] Terry Castle also views the rape as the culmination of the novel's interpretive instability, which leads to the fragmentation of Clarissa's self (*Clarissa's Ciphers* 95). However, Castle's deconstructionist approach looks at transhistorical power structures of representation and interpretation, while this essay looks to particular historical circumstances, such as social mobility, to explain the instability of status representation.

in an epistemology based on the body as the site of truth, her alignment of genteel status with virtue, and her confidence in her own sensible discernment. Her realization that she has profoundly misinterpreted the people surrounding her undermines all of these beliefs.

This revelation is reflected in her textual self-fashioning, the relationship between body and text that Richardson establishes. Thus far Clarissa's self-writing has been a source of stability in an upended world. Lovelace annoys, angers, and frightens Clarissa for most of the novel, and he and her family attempt to manipulate, isolate, and prevent her free movement, but these threats seldom cause her to doubt her own judgment. Clarissa's letters instead show her resolve to abide by the dictates of her own moral compass and sense of her own self-worth. (Indeed, *Clarissa*'s narrative tension largely derives from the fact that Clarissa's individual morality conflicts with familial directives.) However, the rape and the exposure of Lovelace's impositions break Clarissa's confidence, leading to her identity crisis. Richardson expresses this event textually, using vertical and uneven typesetting to represent her fragmented, nonsensical papers, which are described as "Torn" and "Scrunched" (890-93). The metaphor is clear: Clarissa's identity is itself fragmented and disordered. The textual confusion reflects Clarissa's sexual violation—a major component of her identity—but it also suggests a complete loss of the logic and structure Clarissa relied upon to construct her own identity and to interpret correctly others'. Faced with impositions of every kind, Clarissa must re-narrate her story to reclaim its legibility. She reasserts representational stability through a retrospective retelling of her story in which her coffin and her correspondence (assembled and circulated among her friends and family) fix both her story and its interpretation. Through these texts Clarissa reasserts social order by revealing Lovelace's machinations,

allowing readers to identify the signs of imposition that Clarissa herself could not discern as events unfolded.

Boswell and Status Representation

Writing approximately fifteen years after *Clarissa*'s publication, Boswell in the *London Journal* engages similar questions about nature, status, and display as he describes his attempts to establish himself within genteel London circles. The *Journal* shares *Clarissa*'s emphasis on unselfconscious behavior as indicative of high rank. Unfortunately for Boswell, this conception of social roles leads to a perpetual conflict between the attributes associated with gentility and the qualities he possesses. In this he differs from Clarissa. She experiences the failures of visual signs of status as problems of *interpretation*: they interfere with her ability to judge the status of those around her. For Boswell, the dictates of social legibility lead to a problem of *representation*: he cannot seamlessly embody the character of a gentleman.

Boswell expresses the central problem he faces in a compliment he gives himself after a successful evening out: "It was incredible with what seeming good humour I behaved. I declared that I must either be a man of the finest temper or the nicest art" (151). Boswell, like Clarissa, operates within a social milieu in which status is a slippery category, poised between nature and art. Is Boswell a gentleman with "the finest temper" (a natural attribute) or does he possess "the nicest art" (the ability to feign "good humour")? This comment exemplifies Boswell's struggle throughout the *Journal* to establish himself as a gentleman, a project that reveals how he and his circle conceptualized social distinctions. He, like Clarissa, relies on an understanding of status in which there is no gap between who one is and how one appears. However, for Boswell

status by birth and personality do not align. Felicity Nussbaum argues that the *Journal* itself mediates this split between public (performed) and private (interiorized or innate) identities (*Autobiographila Subject* 103).[108] However, the Journal's discussion of performance, both theatrical and social, complicates the assumption of a distinction between public and private or performed and innate identities. Boswell is thus torn between the necessity of performing his role as a gentleman and his belief that unconscious bodily signs reveal status.

At first glance it appears that Boswell would reject the traditional definition of genteel manners, bearing, and appearance as natural, unpracticed attributes. He often describes his ideals of gentility in terms of theatrical performance, equating the character of the gentleman to a role he must fulfill.[109] For example, he describes changes in his behavior as the result of effort and repetition: "Since I came up, I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I was now happy to find myself cool, easy, and serene" (47). He is also preoccupied with appearances, making frequent remarks in the *Journal* about obtaining clothing and lodging appropriate to his condition. He seems to consider these trappings of gentility

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[108] Nussbaum conceives of the public and private versions of Boswell's character in light of her larger argument that the genre of autobiography helps inaugurate the emergence of the bourgeois subject. I instead focus on how Boswell grapples with older models of status identity in his self-construction. For more the conflict between Boswell's unfixed and irregular character and his idealization of the urban English gentleman, see Richard De Ritter, Susan Manning, and Kenneth Simpson (118-43).

[109] For more on Boswell's extensive interest in theater and theatrical influences, see Dianne Dugaw ("Theorizing Orality"), Michael D. Friedman, Donald Kay, and Rufus Reiberg.

something of a façade, commenting, "[M]y business was to make as much *show* as I could with my small allowance" (58, my emphasis). The genteel identity Boswell wishes to establish in London seems staged or performed, and it appears to contradict the interpretive system of *Clarissa* in which theatricality is aligned with status imposition.

The *Journal* itself appears to be directed toward theatrical or performance-oriented self-construction, specifically the cultivation of a genteel character. Dianne Dugaw characterizes Boswell's self-writing as "personal reflection and self-scrutiny," and the *Journal* and accompanying documents suggest that Boswell himself saw these texts as both diary and directive ("Theorizing Orality"). The memoranda that accompany the *Journal*, written in second-person narration, read as commands Boswell makes to himself as to how to spend his time, how to act, and how to spend his money (45n). They are a record of the minute details Boswell considered important for his self construction as a gentleman, from what to read (The *Auditor*, *Monitor*, and *Briton*) and where (Child's) to general maxims about his conduct ("Be comfortable, yet genteel…Be always in bed before twelve. Never sup out") (67). Boswell's aspirations in terms of a genteel character are also indicated by a "Scheme of Living," essentially a budget, which illustrates his attempt to reconcile limited financial means with what he considered non-negotiable elements of being a gentleman. Among many other entries, he notes that, "A genteel lodging in a good part of town is absolutely necessary" and "To be well-dressed is another essential article" (335-6). Through his writing, Boswell cultivates and practices the social and authorial personae he wants to embody, identifying the correct manners and attitudes of a gentleman and evaluating his own behavior accordingly.

However, Boswell's idea of theatricality needs to be separated from the modern assumption that performance is by nature an inauthentic simulation. Rather, for Boswell and his contemporaries, successful performance depends on sincerity, which aligns it with *Clarissa*'s portrayal of social legibility. Understanding eighteenth-century views of theatrical performance is crucial to understanding attitudes toward social performance, as Paul Goring argues.[110] Goring shows that the mid-century rise of sensibility inaugurates a new theory of acting in which emotion is valued over imitation as a more natural vehicle of expression (118-20). This conception of performance is evident in the debates about acting that occur throughout the Journal. In one instance, Thomas Sheridan accuses fellow thespian David Garrick of only mimicking emotion and lacking genuine feeling. The "nicety of his art might please the fancy and make us cry, 'That's fine,'" Sheridan argues. "But as it was art, it could never touch the heart" (57). Boswell disagrees with Sheridan's conclusion about Garrick's effectiveness, but he agrees with his premise: that successful performance demands sincerely felt emotions, not the semblance of them. The theatricality advocated in the *Journal* is thus based on truly embodying a character (including that character's emotional state), as opposed to feigning feeling. These discussions are part of a widespread movement, influenced by the ideas of sensibility, which judges the success of a performance based on standards of embodiment rather than mere imitation. The *Journal*'s discussion of acting emphasizes being rather than seeming, nature rather than art.

Within this sense of performance as within the realm of "nature," however, there are subtle incursions of "art." Reasserting his earlier point, Sheridan states, "[A]n actor

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[110] Dror Wahrman also argues that there is a correlation between theories of theatrical and social performance (*Making*, 171-6).

ought to forget himself and the audience entirely, and be quite the real character; and for his part, he was so much so that he remembered nothing at all but the character" (109). Boswell feels Sheridan goes too far, agreeing with his companion, Mr. Maud, that an actor "would not be enough master of himself" in such a situation (109). This short exchange restates the tension between nature and art that begins this chapter: Boswell advocates for a naturalistic theory of acting that stresses real emotion, yet he cannot brook an actor's complete abandonment to the role. As we shall see, Boswell's emphasis on self-mastery here aligns with his need to govern his own behavior as he attempts to embody the role of a gentleman, in which he otherwise stresses his natural status. But despite the caveat that a person must demonstrate propriety in his performance, the *Journal* suggests that, for the role to be effective, there must be something sincere or real at its root. Boswell's consideration of the role of a gentleman as theatrical therefore does not necessarily denote artifice or social imposition; rather, it suggests that the success of his performance will reveal whether he is or is not truly genteel by birth.

Due to this belief, Boswell attempts to demonstrate his effectiveness as a performer by staging scenes in which he is recognized as a gentleman. These scenes bolster Boswell's genteel credentials because they offer external proof of his status as a gentleman. Were he not genteel, his performance would be only unconvincing mimicry. In the first of two scenes of this nature, he goes to a sword shop, "determined to make a trial of the civility of my fellow-creatures, and what effect my external appearance and address would have" (60). This encounter is a deliberate attempt to gauge his social legibility, the crucial test being whether the proprietor will let him take the sword on credit, a privilege afforded to gentlemen. Initially the man refuses to sell to "a stranger"

on credit. Boswell bows "genteelly," and agrees that the request "is not right," but he does not leave until the owner agrees to trust him. The proprietor eventually intuits Boswell's true motive (recognition of his status) and offers credit, saying, "Sir…we know our men" (60). Here he compliments Boswell: to "know our men" implies that status is visually apparent and that a certain class of men deserves special treatment. Boswell is gratified, considering the remark "much to my honour" (60). The offer of credit showcases the effectiveness—and therefore the sincerity—of Boswell's performance as a gentleman.

The second of these demonstrations occurs later in the *Journal* and involves a deliberate attempt by Boswell to obscure his status identity. Boswell disguises himself as a "blackguard" in order "to see all that was to be seen," a euphemism for indulging his sexual appetite (272). He picks up a series of prostitutes, telling the last of them he is a "highwayman" with no money, "and begged she would trust me" (273).[111] Yet (to Boswell's delight), despite his disguise the woman refuses to believe that he has no money. Although Boswell here denies, rather than asserts, his social rank, the end result is the same. The woman discovers Boswell's real identity, which he attributes to his genteel nature. He remarks, "My vanity was somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman in disguise" (273). Just

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[111] Both "blackguard" and "highwayman" denote low status. For an examination of the blackguard in eighteenth-century culture, see Philip Carter (135-7). For more on Boswell's interest in Macheath and the figure of the highwayman in eighteenth-century culture, see Friedman and Mackie 84-96.

as Lovelace cannot conceal his natural "grace," Boswell is not able to shed his identity as a gentleman, even with the help of a costume.[112]

These successful tests of Boswell's performance as a gentleman are, unfortunately for Boswell, atypical. Except for these scenes and a few others, the *Journal* primarily records the distance between who Boswell is and who he wants to be. The theory of performance on which he bases his identity demands perfect correspondence between actor and role. As Boswell is acutely aware, however, his personality—impulsive, voluble, sexually voracious, and self-doubting—does not align with the restrained, mannered, temperate, and dignified behavior of a gentleman. Genteel behavior demands behavioral reform, but his success will be measured by the degree of ease with which he can conduct himself. He, like Clarissa, sees unselfconscious behavior as evidence of innate character and breeding. For instance, he holds up the Northumberland family as a model of dignified, yet unpracticed, behavior, commenting, "This is indeed a noble family in every respect. They live in a most princely manner, perfectly suitable to their high rank. Yet they are easy and affable. They keep up the true figure of English nobility" (71). Boswell holds himself to this standard of "easy" comportment coupled with "princely manner," finding it difficult to achieve. He succeeds (only temporarily) in one social interaction: "I behaved with ease and propriety, and did not attempt at all to show away; but gently assisted conversation by those little arts which serve to make people throw out their sentiments with ease and freedom" (292). The words "ease" and

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[112] Mackie suggests that the importance of illicit figures of masculinity, such as the highwayman, to the construction of gentlemanly identity complicate this scene: "everything reported in this episode suggests that the conventional expression of criminal masculinity, on some level, is common to both identities and that ultimately it compromises neither. Sure, Boswell's actions on this night are anti-authoritarian and antisocial, but, his conclusion implies, they are not in any way corrosive to his manliness, even his socially elite gentlemanliness" (95-6).

"propriety" capture the conflicts evident in Boswell's conception of genteel behaviors. "Propriety" is correct behavior, and it should result naturally from one's rank. In Boswell's case it does not, meaning that "ease," or unselfconsciousness, is difficult to achieve.

The same problem is evident in the quality of reserved behavior or *retenue* that Boswell identifies as part of a gentleman's natural demeanor (48). Boswell states, "I was now upon a plan of studying polite reserved behavior, which is the only way to keep up dignity of character. And as I have a good share of pride, which I think is very proper and even noble, I am hurt with the taunts of ridicule and am unsatisfied if I do not feel myself something of a superior animal" (61). Boswell references his status in his descriptions of his natural "pride" and sense that he is "a superior animal." He attempts to balance the fact that he is "studying polite reserved behavior" (which suggests that his own behavior falls short of the genteel ideal) with the idea that he must "keep up dignity of character" (asserting a preexisting "dignity"). The topic of reserve surfaces again later, in a conversation with James Macpherson and Hugh Blair. While Macpherson and Blair think reserve "unnatural," Boswell instead suggests that it is appropriate and natural, saying, "[I]t is a noble quality. It is sure to beget respect and to keep impertinence at a distance" (266). Reserve has a double role as both an interiorized "noble quality" and a socially oriented pattern of behavior that demands recognition from others.

Such polite reserve appears to be part of Clarissa's nature, as demonstrated by her rejection of overtures of friendship from Sally, Polly, and Dorcas; her distance toward Lovelace's dissolute friends; and her utter refusal to entertain any idea or conversation addressing "low" ideas. But such *retenue* runs counter to Boswell's natural sociability.

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He faces a paradox: his definition of a gentleman includes innate reserve and dignity, but this behavior does not come naturally to him. Since reserve communicates nobility, Boswell believes that his unrestrained behavior renders him a low character. Speaking of his first, wild visit to London some years earlier (Boswell fled there from the University of Glasgow against his father's wishes and after considering converting to Catholicism), Boswell connects his unchecked behavior then to a drop in social status. He was "a very inferior being; and I found many people presuming to treat me as such…. I was, in short, a character very different from what God intended me and I myself chose" (62). Boswell is troubled by his lack of reserve not merely because it is not sufficiently genteel. Instead, his inability to adopt a uniformly dignified character suggests that he lacks the innate gentility that would effortlessly produce such behavior.

Boswell's struggle to embody the character of a gentleman can be reduced to the same dilemma that Clarissa faces in her interpretation of Lovelace's impostors. Social legibility is best expressed through unselfconscious actions, but gentility also depends upon a very specific code of behaviors. As both Clarissa's and Boswell's self-writing illustrates, these two facets of gentility should align, so that this code of behaviors is not restrictive but instead represents natural and unpracticed behavior. However, as Clarissa finds with the people she encounters in London, and as Boswell discovers within his own experience, this is not always the case. For all his attempts to embody the ideal gentleman, Boswell can never reconcile these two demands. The passage below, excerpts of which introduced this essay, expresses his position:

> As an instance of this, my agreeable family of Kellie from their plain *hameliness*
> (to use Lord Elibank's expression with respect to the ladies of Scotland) does not

inspire that awe that women with less parts and good looks than they have would

do, provided they have studied address and learned the nice art of neither being

too free nor too reserved; who know exactly and who practice their knowledge of

how much they ought to show and how much to conceal. Politeness is just what

gives that. All its merit consists in that. There is indeed a kind of character

perfectly disguised, a perfect made dish, which is often found, both male and

female, in London. This is most disgusting: plain nature is infinitely better. What I

admire is nature improved by art, for art certainly may and does improve nature.

(176-7).

This reflection, with its confusing, paradoxical generalizations about genteel behavior,

indicates the contradictory demands Boswell felt as he attempted to establish his

character as a gentleman. The ideal is "plain nature," but sometimes this nature must be

improved. There is a clear standard of behavior to follow, but at the same time one must

avoid too scrupulous or studious an adherence to such a standard, which is itself an

objectionable deception. Aware that his natural character is unsuited to the ideal of the

gentleman, Boswell defends the use of art to modify nature, even as he asserts an

allegiance to "plain nature" and traditional conceptions of innate and visually apparent

distinctions of status.[113]

Despite Boswell's confident assertion at the beginning of the *Journal* "that we

may be in some degree whatever character we choose," his conception of genteel

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[113] The passage also indicates Boswell's evaluation of Scottish heritage as "low," a sentiment he repeats elsewhere (see 177). Boswell rejection of his Scottish identity illustrates how much his conception of gentility was based on an idealization of the English gentleman. For more on Boswell and Scottish identity see De Ritter, David M. Weed, and Evan Gottlieb (99-133).

behavior is in fact rooted in an ideology that affirms that behavior is determined by nature (meaning status). Boswell is painfully aware that the need to reform his behavior and cultivate restraint indicates that he is not truly genteel. Ultimately, however, Boswell's failure to construct a uniformly genteel identity is not merely due to his inability to control his impulsiveness and volubility. Even if he could regulate his conduct to conform to ideals of gentility, such practiced behavior would continue to undermine his own sense of his status. For Boswell, however, social legibility does not merely function interpretively; rather, it is a system he must navigate to represent his own status. Social legibility thus demands behavioral reform (in order to be correctly "read" by others as genteel) while such reform or regulation simultaneously contradicts the requirement that the body's communication must be unselfconscious. Any attempt to introduce artifice undermines the basis of sensible communication and interpretation.

Subjected to these contradictory demands, Boswell never succeeds in his professed purpose of establishing a cohesive identity as an urban gentleman. The *Journal* instead documents Boswell's repeated failure to adhere to his own standards of genteel behavior. Boswell's recognition of his own failure is affecting, and his repeated efforts to govern his own behavior speak to the power that the ideologies of an aristocratic social hierarchy exercised over individuals. The *Journal* continues to look to nature as the root of gentility, even as Boswell realizes the extent to which he must resort to art (practiced, mannered, controlled behavior) if he wants to sustain a cohesive identity. Boswell never documents a reconciliation of nature and art. Instead, he abandons his scheme of a commission in the Guards and opts to study law in the Netherlands, followed by the gentleman's Grand Tour of Europe. Looking toward this journey, he closes the London

segment of his autobiographical writings with the following remarks: "I am now upon a less pleasurable but a more rational and lasting plan. Let me pursue it with steadiness and I may be a man of dignity" (333). These sentences echo his sentiments upon arriving in London, framing his story and positioning the Journal as a recursive narrative in which Boswell never achieves his goal of being "what God intended me and I myself chose": a gentleman.

Summary

Although the idea of status as an innate and visually distinguishable trait was waning in mid-eighteenth-century England, it surfaces repeatedly in these two texts, indicating its continued resonance in literary representations. *Clarissa* and the *London Journal* articulate clear distinctions between genteel display and imposture, being and seeming, and nature and art, but such divisions are shown to be impossible to maintain when they are enacted socially. Visual interpretive methods, shared by the discourse of sensibility and the ideology of status, relied on the assumption that innate gentility and its representation are inextricable, but these texts illustrate that the reality was much more complex. The system of social legibility on which Clarissa relies cannot accommodate downwardly mobile figures such as fallen gentlewomen. Boswell's *Journal* reveals that the demands of genteel performance were essentially contradictory, requiring unselfconscious but highly codified behavior. As *Clarissa* and the *Journal* demonstrate, views of status as innate and imprinted upon the body persisted even as the vast social and economic changes taking place in eighteenth-century England rendered its central tenets increasingly tenuous.

The expressive body appears to offer a solution to the various sorts of hypocrisy that concerned eighteenth-century writers and theorists: false virtue, feigned emotion, concealed motives, mimicry of high status, and so on. However, the supposedly natural signs of the body quickly devolve into mere tropes. Emotion can be feigned, clothing emulated, manners learned. Theories of theatrical performance, which looked to sensibility to clarify the distinction between art (feigned emotion or practiced gesture) and nature (emotion expressed via the body), also fail to maintain this division. Although Boswell and his contemporaries valorize a sincere form of acting, which issues from an emotional response, Goring notes that mid-century theatrical practices ultimately regulated and aestheticized such "natural" emotions in order to fit rules of decorum (136-39). In short, although people considered the body central to the expression of one's identity, the nature of this display was increasingly contested. As both Richardson dramatizes and Boswell experiences, social legibility still provided the theoretical underpinning to the social hierarchy, although it increasingly failed as a means of navigating eighteenth-century social life.

CHAPTER V

MAKING AN APPEARANCE: ARTLESSNESS AND SPECTACLE IN

BURNEY'S *EVELINA* AND ROBINSON'S *MEMOIRS*

As Gillian Russell notes, the fictional Evelina Anville of Frances Burney's

Evelina (1778) and the actress and writer Mary Darby Robinson in her *Memoirs of the*

Late Mrs. Robinson (1801) both depict visiting the Pantheon, one of the famous late-

eighteenth-century London attractions.[114] While there, the women find that they, rather

than the site itself, are the focus of attention. Evelina's companion Captain Mirvan, with

characteristic bluntness, describes it as a place for "face-hunting," while Mary Robinson

finds herself subject to "the gaze of impertinent high breeding" (Burney 109; Robinson

110). Russell uses these paired descriptions to illustrate her larger point, that the

Pantheon was a place of fashionable intrigue, spectatorship, and publicity (101-3).

However, the similarity between these texts extends beyond the shared visit to the

Pantheon: more broadly, *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* document a young woman's début into

fashionable society in London in the 1770s. During this period, women's social activities,

ranging from appearances at public entertainments to visits or events within homes,

constituted an increasingly important contribution to the public sphere, a phenomenon

that Russell terms "fashionable sociability" (10).[115] Evelina's and Mary Robinson's

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[114] This and following citations reference the Oxford World Classics edition of *Evelina*,
which is based on the January 1778 first edition, and the Pickering and Chatto
reproduction of the first two (of four) volumes of *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson*.
(The final two volumes are pieces written by others on the occasion of Robinson's death.)
Page references cite the Picking and Chatto volume rather than the original pagination.

[115] Robinson's Pantheon visit occurred in 1774, when she was around seventeen (see
Paula Byrne 399-400 for more on the mystery of Robinson's birth date). *Evelina* was
composed in the 1770s.

experiences at the Pantheon are more than merely anecdotal evidence of the rise of fashionable sociability, which is the extent of Russell's analysis. Rather, these scenes strategically situate these two young women at the center of attention and thus in positions associated with high status, showing that Burney and Robinson were keenly aware of the particular social dynamics of "making an appearance" in London during this period.[116]

This chapter will show that Burney and Robinson capitalized on the importance attached to women's social appearances in *Evelina* and *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson* (hereafter *Memoirs*) by figuring their heroines as artless public spectacles.[117] Outsiders to aristocratic circles, Evelina and Mary Robinson indirectly assert their genteel status through their social reception. In particular, attention from male aristocrats, although unsought, often unwanted, and frequently predatory, nevertheless testifies to Evelina's and Robinson's successful presentation as upper-class women. The texts' first-person narration allows Evelina and Robinson to naturalize their public behavior, affirming their "artlessness"—their individual anti-theatricality—within narratives that locate high rank in social performance. The quality of artlessness also functions as a direct critique of late-century aristocratic affectation and excess. Through these narrative and plot structures Robinson and Burney exploit the rising criticism of the aristocracy

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[116] Where it is important to differentiate Robinson the author from Robinson the autobiographical character, I will refer to the former as "Robinson" and the latter as "Mary Robinson," as demonstrated in the preceding paragraph.

[117] A note on terminology: when referring to Evelina and the younger Robinson presented in the *Memoirs*, I will occasionally refer to them as heroines, protagonists, or characters. Although these terms are not typically used when analyzing autobiography, they reflect the literary quality of the *Memoirs*, specifically the fact that Robinson presents herself as a sentimental heroine.

while legitimizing their protagonists' social ascendancy. However, the trope of the artless female public spectacle indicates the continuing relevance of conservative ideologies of social hierarchy, particularly visual status distinctions, within late eighteenth-century culture. At the same time, the quality of "artlessness" renders those distinctions increasingly opaque and ill-defined. The careful balance in these narratives between spectacle and shyness clarifies how and why displays of artlessness become so central to idealizations of female identity (particularly of women of the upper ranks) in the nineteenth century, even as Burney and Robinson document the inherent difficulties and dangers of enacting this characteristic.

Making an appearance in fashionable society had specific gender and status connotations in the late eighteenth century. Fashionable sociability was, according to Russell, "a highly theatricalized and thoroughly feminized arena of social interaction, identified with, though not the sole preserve of, the female aristocracy and upper gentry" (10). Russell argues that sociability constitutes a legitimate contribution to the eighteenth-century public sphere, and she asserts that the political and social power attached to women's social appearances is unique to the 1760s and 1770s (5-6). A major tenet of Russell's argument is that previous applications of Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere overlook sociable activities—entertainments, events, gatherings—as elements of that sphere. Furthermore, she asserts that there is no meaningful divide between these public sociable activities and so-called private sociability: events within the home such as visits, dinners, and balls constitute just as much of an arena of influence as public events (8, 11).[118] As the Pantheon descriptions attest, within this mode of social behavior women

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[118] See also Amanda Vickery (1-12). This point is particularly important when examining *Evelina* and the *Memoirs*, in which dinners and visits are just as significant as balls, operas, or ridottos in positioning the heroine hierarchically.

are subjected to the male gaze, but the power dynamics are more complex than mere sexualization or objectification. Because women could use their public appearances as a means of contributing to political discourse, they wielded considerable power. A woman at the center of attention in fashionable society could claim social parity with or superiority to the women around her. She could exercise her political and social influence through alliances both formal (marriage, patronage) and informal (friendship, association, connection), and by gaining and using knowledge about the people around her. Because status and spectacle were closely intertwined, being the center of attention functioned as an implicit marker of high rank.

Russell's description of fashionable sociability as "highly theatricalized" at first appears to contradict Burney and Robinson's characterization of their protagonists. *Evelina* takes pains to disavow strategic social performance on the part of its heroine, a dynamic shared by the *Memoirs* (despite Robinson's career as an actress, which will be discussed below). These texts instead emphasize the social inexperience and powerlessness of the two young women as they enter fashionable urban society. Burney and Robinson (the writer) strategically position their protagonists within fashionable circles, while Evelina and Mary Robinson (the character) remain ignorant of the fact that they are participating in a codified, political, and strategic arena of social activity. Indeed, the very structure of the texts reinforces this innocence, using first-person narration to capture the protagonist's embarrassment at being the center of attention. By figuring their heroines as spectacles in public places, Burney and Robinson imply that the young women belong (or should belong) to the upper echelons of society. As spectacles, Evelina

and Mary Robinson move to the center of elite circles, an indirect assertion of their genteel status, even as both women claim to be discomfited by their social fame.

This balance between embarrassment and social exposure is central to the narrative structure of both texts, with Evelina and Mary Robinson appearing as public spectacles while simultaneously asserting their anti-theatricality. This strategy is a canny response by Burney and Robinson to the problematics of late-century identity construction for upper class women. Although fashionable sociability offered elite women power, influence, and social stature, the highest circles of British society were also under attack during this period, lampooned by writers and caricaturists as corrupt, affected in manner, and overly indulgent of their consumerist appetites. Linda Colley argues that print attacks on the aristocracy erupted in the 1780s, critiques that "treated the landed interest as a separate class parasitic on the nation, rather than as part of the nation and as its natural leaders" (152-53).[119] Presumably these sentiments would have been on the rise in the 1770s. Dror Wahrman asserts that during this period radicals portrayed aristocratic corruption as essentialized, "inherent if not congenital" (*Making* 151) (See Figure 11, next page).[120] Aristocratic fashions in particular were pilloried as outrageous and overdone, fulfilling the fears Montagu expressed in her *Turkish Embassy Letters* of a fashion arms race divorced from the natural taste meant to distinguish the aristocrat and ruinous to domestic (and potentially national) economies. Although Burney and Robinson want to legitimize their heroines as genteel, to be too familiar with fashionable

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[119] Colley charts how the English aristocracy reestablished its political and social clout in response to these attacks through strategic marital alliances with Celtic nobility and a re-branding of its male members as masculine and patriotic and rather than effeminate and Frenchified (158-86).

[120] See also Paul Langford (*Public Life* 540-8).

society opens their protagonists to charges of vice, excess, and self-interest. Furthermore, if, as Russell suggests, fashionable sociability accorded women a voice within public sphere discourse, Burney's and Robinson's critiques of fashionable circles allows them to harness this specifically feminine and upper-class agency while simultaneously distancing themselves from it as the backlash against elite women's influence grew. (See Figure 12, next page)

Burney and Robinson therefore portray their heroines as offering an alternative standard of genteel behavior, accomplished through artlessness. Artlessness is the late-eighteenth-century incarnation of the unselfconscious display that characterized mid-century systems of social legibility. Unselfconscious display becomes increasingly important in distinguishing the truly genteel from status impostors as Britain experiences social and economic change, as we saw with Clarissa Harlowe and James Boswell in Chapter IV. By the late eighteenth century, literature and popular texts continue to emphasize unselfconscious display, but this mode of behavior shifts from

Figure 11. Unknown artist, "The Origin of the Gout." 1785. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. Caricatures of gout during this period were common; this disease was often portrayed as symptomatic of aristocratic excess and luxury.

being used as a strategy to combat social imposition (distinguishing real from feigned gentility) to being used as a response to anti-aristocratic sentiment (refuting charges of luxury, excess, and affectation and even satirizing aristocratic corruption). As the new standard of truly aristocratic behavior, artlessness challenges stereotypes about the aristocracy while preserving aristocratic ideology, the idea that status is innate and essentialized. Simplicity in fashion and manners functions

CHLOE'S CUSHION OR THE CORK RUMP.

Figure 12. Matthew Darly, "Chloe's Cushion or the Cork Rump." Engraving, 1777. © Trusees of the British Museum. Illustrations caricaturing outlandish and overdone fashions were common (portrayals of aristocratic women's hair are numerous enough to form their own sub-genre of this type of image).

to critique aristocratic affectation, while the fact that such behavior is natural and unpracticed supports the idea that status naturally manifests itself via the body. Against charges that the aristocracy was inherently corrupt, the valorization of artlessness purports to demonstrate the nobility's natural morality, temperance, benevolence, and manners.
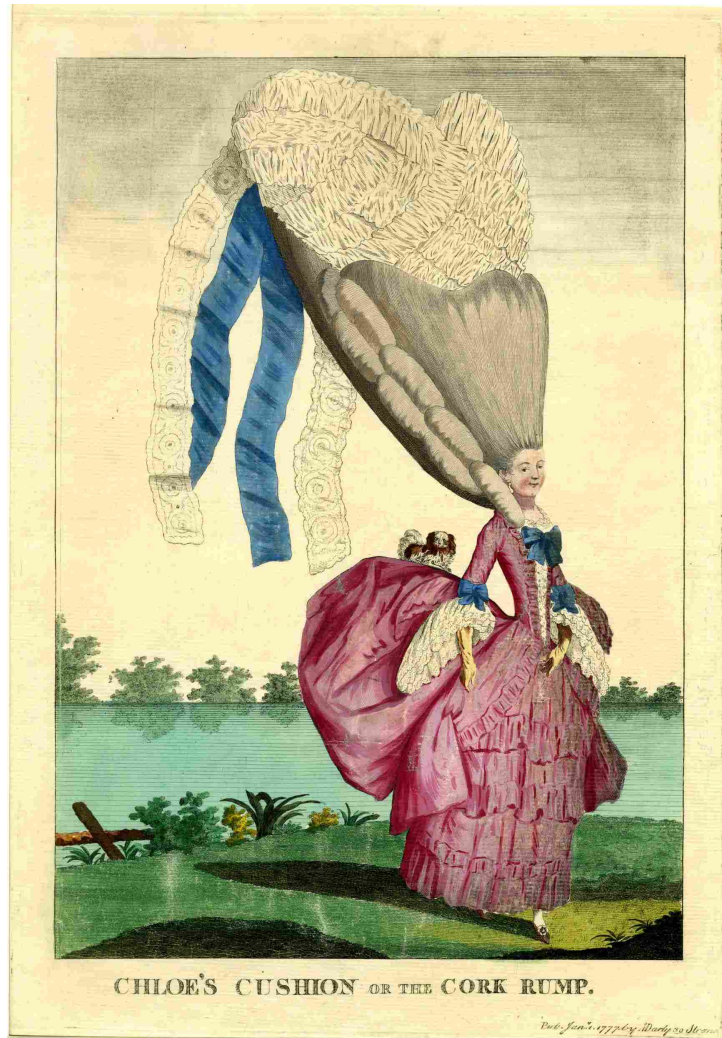
Because eighteenth-century writers and artists increasingly associate fashion and affectation with women, artlessness is portrayed as a particularly feminine quality.[121] The male version is "easiness," and it denotes a perfect assimilation of proper conduct without affectation or apparent effort. (This is precisely the behavior Boswell wishes to cultivate in Chapter IV.) For women, artlessness encompasses easiness but also requires "delicacy," sexual naiveté, and social inexperience, precursors to the ideals of domestic femininity that will dominate nineteenth-century literature. By combining the status connotations of fashionable sociability with the ideology of artlessness, *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* ostensibly provide a model for how women could navigate the cultural position of genteel women as balanced between theatricality and "natural" behavior. *Evelina* in particular appears to offer its heroine as an exemplar of reserved manner and genuine feeling against an aristocratic femininity characterized by showy affectation.

Evelina and the *Memoirs* intervene in these questions of display and status differentiation by presenting the experience of navigating late-century London social life from the perspective of a marginalized but secretly aristocratic woman. The protagonists of these texts depend upon successful social appearances to legitimize their claims to high status because they cannot assert these directly. As the legitimate but unacknowledged daughter of a baronet, Evelina's claims to noble status are valid but shrouded in secrecy and thus not socially recognized. Her connections provide her access to "the circle of high life," but her mysterious heritage bars her from full integration into that society via courtship and marriage (20). In the *Memoirs*, Robinson presents her status identity as similarly problematic. Raised in a wealthy household and possessing a genteel

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[121] See Chapter II for more on women, fashion, and consumerism.

lineage, Robinson's prospects are nearly destroyed by her father's abandonment of the family and her ill-advised early marriage. Her later fame as a trendsetter, actress, demirep, and royal mistress plunge her into the center of London social circles, but her celebrity does not legitimize her as a gentlewoman.[122] However, Robinson's counternarrative of her lineage—that she is the secret illegitimate daughter of a lord— hews even closer to Evelina's origin story. Burney and Robinson thus both use the traditional romance narrative in which a supposedly lower-class man or woman is discovered to be noble by birth to emphasize their heroines' position as outsiders to fashionable society despite their rightful place among the elite.

To interpellate their protagonists within the social hierarchy, Burney and Robinson must therefore poise them between social display and artless innocence. They do so by focusing on Evelina and Robinson's social reception, particularly the response of aristocratic men. While the dynamics of female display and the male gaze are typically configured in terms of women's vulnerability and men's sexual aggression, in *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* the plot device of male attention also affirms that these men recognize Evelina and Robinson as gentlewomen, even if they do not do so consciously. The folklore motif of the "lost princess" reframes the men's desire from the conventional aristocratic predation of the underclass to affirm instead Evelina's and Mary Robinson's true status. Readers, in this case, can interpret the men's desires better than they

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[122] "Demirep" was a relatively new concept at the time (it first appeared in 1749). It is short for "demi-reputation" and refers quite literally to a woman who is "only half-reputable," according to the *OED*. Russell defines this sort of character more expansively, as a "fashionable courtesan…a class of woman whose sexual reputation was compromised but who was able to maintain a position in fashionable circles, either through her own resources or most often by means of the financial support of her lover" (95).

themselves can. Indeed, previous aristocratic rakes such as Willmore and Lovelace, while

preying on lower-class women, ultimately direct their attention toward their equals,

Hellena and Clarissa.[123] Burney and Robinson portray the men's interest as a

demonstration of aristocratic taste, though they also use these scenes to criticize

aristocratic licentiousness. By portraying the women's social legibility in terms of male

desire, Burney and Robinson direct attention away from the female body in public space

(where it is subject to charges of theatricality in terms of both sexuality and status) while

still taking advantage of the messages encoded in such appearances. Male attention

creates spectacle, and spectacle connotes high status within venues of fashionable

sociability.

A central component of how Burney and Robinson situate their protagonists as

artless objects of spectacle is through narration. *Evelina* is an epistolary novel, which

allows a doubling—even tripling—of perspective. Within the novel there is an Evelina

who experiences the events (naïve, innocent, artless), an Evelina who records them

(introducing an element of distance, satire, and judgment), and the author, Burney, who

manipulates this narration for particular ends (for example, to create dramatic irony).

Burney can thus shift between the immediacy of Evelina-as-subject (particularly in

scenes where Evelina is embarrassed or frightened) and the retrospective censure or

approbation of Evelina-as-letter-writer, who judges her own actions and those of others

(Cutting-Gray 48). As an example, after Evelina describes fleeing in embarrassment and

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[123] Erin Mackie suggests that nostalgia for pre-1689 England explains part of the reason for the popularity of the rake throughout the eighteenth century, but she notes that the rake's sexual energies are explicitly heterosexual (as opposed to the bisexuality of Restoration rakes) as part of the construction of genteel masculinity during this period (9).

fear from her dance partner, Lord Orville, she says, "I was quite ashamed of being so troublesome, and so much above myself as these seeming airs made me appear; but indeed I was too much confused to think or act with consistency" (33). This movement from immediacy to reflection is typical of the novel. It allows Evelina to judge her own actions while also vindicating herself: she realizes she is in error, but she is so flustered she cannot do anything else. The epistolary form creates the impression that the reader is eavesdropping on a private conversation, which reinforces Evelina's characterization as anti-theatrical and artless, while her retrospection allows her to emphasize these qualities and also express approbation or censure of her conduct or that of others.

Robinson situates her younger self within her autobiography similarly, using first-person narration to demonstrate her truthfulness and artlessness. Robinson's task is even more fraught, considering her career as an actress (a professional performer adept at feigning emotion) and an author (a person who composes fictions). As a woman who spent her adult life in the public eye, Robinson had to work against a narrative of herself as a woman who was all performance. In response, Robinson positions her younger self as a sentimental (and therefore anti-theatrical) young woman. Robinson, like Burney, combines immediacy and retrospection in her narration: the text presents events as they unfold from the perspective of the younger Robinson, with the mature Robinson occasionally interjecting retrospective judgment and confirming her character's pure motivations. For example, after a particular calamity has passed, Robinson describes her improving spirits, saying, "I felt by this change of situation as though a weighty load were taken from my heart, and solaced my mind in the idea that the worst had happened which could befall us" (144). This description of her feelings in that moment is followed

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by her judgment of that moment with the benefit of hindsight: "Gracious Heaven! How should I have shuddered, had I then contemplated the dark perspective of my destiny!" (144). The narrative perspective of the younger Robinson, which dominates the text, is naïve, inexperienced, and well intentioned. When the mature authorial voice of Robinson intervenes it is mainly to underscore these qualities in her younger self. The text's narrative structure attempts to reposition Robinson not as strategic performer but as authentic memoirist. By focusing on the perspective of her younger self, who experiences and responds to events as they happen rather than retrospectively, Robinson attempts to repudiate charges of self-promotion, a facet of theatrical self-presentation.[124]

Artlessness in these texts is thus a particularly literary quality, developed through plot devices and narrative strategy. In *Evelina* and the *Memoirs*, it is largely constituted indirectly. In terms of narrative structure, readers experience the protagonist's confusion, embarrassment, and innocence through the immediacy of the first-person narration. Such an approach can obscure to some extent the fact that both works were planned, plotted, and revised. Furthermore, Evelina's and Robinson's total naiveté within these texts—part of their construction as artless and sentimental heroines—creates dramatic irony, as readers perceive danger (particularly sexual assault) well in advance of either protagonist. Burney and Robinson also create the impression of artlessness by situating their hapless protagonists as constant spectacles. Their social reception, particularly the male desire they incite, tells readers that Evelina and Mary Robinson attract attention without clearly indicating what behaviors or attributes prompt their social success. As these texts

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[124] Burney's use of the epistolary form thus alternates between the reflective retrospection of Defoe's novels and the immediacy of Richardson's. Robinson's text bears similarity to Defoe's fictional memoirs, but her tone is more immediate and less retrospective than these novels. See Chapter III for more on retrospective and epistolary narration.

demonstrate, social legibility persists as a means of legitimizing aristocratic rule, but it grows increasingly diffuse, particularly in the literary standard of female artlessness. Because we share Evelina's and Robinson's perspective as readers, we see the reactions they incite more than the specific physical features or mannerisms that identify them as genteel. Although fashionable sociability endows women with power in the public sphere, Burney and Robinson show that the standards of female behavior, particularly artlessness, situate women as passive objects and men as active agents.

Burney and Robinson (particularly the latter) ultimately complicate these portrayals of well-bred femininity by emphasizing the fictionality of such "natural" performances. In doing so, these texts suggest a growing schism between how people imagined status distinctions operating (in literary texts, for example) and how they were or could be enacted socially in the late eighteenth century. As *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* demonstrate, while artlessness is valorized, it also imperils the protagonist by making her a target of sexually rapacious men. Furthermore, Burney and Robinson draw attention to the various paradoxes of artlessness: it is a vague but somehow overdetermined standard of behavior; it is anti-theatrical but requires an audience; it is contrived though it is portrayed as rooted in the natural. Other sections of this project have addressed how self-writers deploy anonymity, serial subjectivity, and sensibility as they navigate a culture still invested in social legibility. Burney and Robinson are unique in their portrayal of the paradoxes inherent in the project of social legibility. Robinson in particular draws attention to the literary—and therefore implicitly fictional—nature of qualities such as artlessness. As *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* show, artlessness protects genteel privilege by reinforcing status as an inherent quality, but the innocence, inexperience, and naiveté

prized as evidence of artlessness make women more likely to be targets of ruinous sexual aggression. Artlessness is portrayed as a universal and natural quality but it is decidedly temporal (and indeed is best sustained in a self-enclosed text). By examining how Burney and Robinson grapple with questions of status, sociability, manners, and violence, we can see how social legibility becomes increasingly and problematically gendered. While Burney and Robinson both rely on social legibility to legitimize their heroines, they also portray the impossible standards such visual distinctions of status impose as well as the danger women face when they embody qualities like artlessness.

This chapter will first analyze *Evelina*, taking particular notice of the dynamic of male aristocratic pursuit that turns nearly all of Evelina's public appearances into spectacle. The attention and aggression directed at Evelina do not illustrate her social marginality but rather her desirability, particularly as readers are aware of her true social status. As a paragon of artlessness, Burney positions Evelina as the type of aristocrat who will invigorate this class from within. Robinson uses literary models, particularly *Evelina*, to construct her autobiography and rehabilitate her reputation from scandalous woman to sentimental heroine. If Robinson does not possess Evelina's legitimate aristocratic credentials (although she hints at "illegitimate" credentials), she bolsters her claim to genteel status by modeling her entrance into London society after Evelina's, particularly with regard to aristocratic male sexual attention. This strategy allows Robinson to portray her affair with the Prince of Wales as the culmination of these encounters and a sign of her innate nobility. The chapter concludes by examining how "artlessness" functions as a response to anti-aristocratic sentiment. This characteristic implicitly critiques aristocratic excess and affectation, but it also reasserts the conservative position that aristocrats

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possess innate nobility that is expressed via the body. However, the abstract nature of artlessness or simplicity means that visual distinctions of status are without specific referent, becoming increasingly tenuous and ephemeral. Both Burney and Robinson address the potential limitations and opportunities of artlessness as a standard of female behavior and a mechanism of aristocratic refinement.

Evelina as Artless Spectacle

Evelina repeatedly attempts to draw a distinction between internal and external qualities, contrasting the heroine's virtue and merit with her lack of fortune and title. This situation creates the main narrative tension of the novel. The mystery of Evelina's parentage is the result of a clandestine marriage between Evelina's mother and Sir John Belmont, which he subsequently refuses to acknowledge. His decision, followed by her mother's death, leaves Evelina without noble status and, worse, without an identified lineage or rank at all. She does not even possess a name: "Anville" is merely an anagram of "Villars," her guardian's name. She is, as her acquaintance Mr. Lovel says, "a person who is nobody" (37). Burney contrasts his assessment (representative of many in London high society) with that of those who know Evelina well and commend her intrinsic value. Reverend Villars dreams of "bestowing her on one who may be sensible of her worth," despite her lack of fortune (17). He differentiates between worth as wealth and worth in terms of inner qualities such as virtue, morality, sensibility, delicacy, and so forth. David Oakleaf argues that this valorization of the private self is Burney's main achievement in *Evelina*, given the primacy of social identity (name and rank) during this period. Lord Orville's proposal of marriage—offered before he knows her real identity as the heiress Evelina Belmont—therefore recognizes Evelina's inner value despite her supposedly

inferior social position. According to this reading, the premise of Evelina, specifically

Evelina's lack of identifiable social position, allows Burney to consider an idealized

femininity defined by interior qualities rather than externals such as wealth, rank, or

title.[125]

However, the novel does not maintain this distinction between internal qualities

and external signs of identity. Rather, the attributes Evelina possesses correspond to her

real position as the daughter of a baronet, functioning as evidence of her nobility rather

than evidence of her value as a person, independent of rank. Through this romance tale of

the lost daughter, the novel aligns itself with older, more conservative notions of status as

innate. Given the novel's conclusion, Villars' remark can be read as an instance of

dramatic irony: to be "sensible of her worth" means to correctly interpret Evelina's true

rank (and gain a handsome fortune by doing so) rather than seeing Evelina as having

worth in her internal attributes on their own. Evelina's marriage to Lord Orville is

therefore more than a tidy conclusion. It reframes the attention directed at Evelina,

particularly male attention, as a testament to her unacknowledged nobility. By portraying

Evelina as an unwitting spectacle and object of male attention, Burney affirms Evelina's

innate status while also positioning her as artless and natural, qualities that emerge as a

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[125] Deirdre Lynch makes a similar point, arguing that *Evelina* dramatizes how the world of "fashionable consumption" equates women with their exteriors, presenting "an experience of excessive embodiment, of being misrepresented as someone who is all body" (166). Lynch sees Burney's heroines resisting this identification and in doing so asserting their subjectivity. The world of commodification and exchange thus prompts individual subjective expression (167). While I agree with Lynch's broad characterization of the novel, particularly her notion of "excessive embodiment," I see this embodiment as extending beyond Evelina's dress and adornments to encompass her social legibility as an aristocrat.

reassertion of the conservative ideology of social legibility and a reaction to critiques of aristocratic affectation and excess.

The attention Evelina receives must be interpreted within the particular contexts of the 1770s, in which social appearances, particularly those by women, were explicitly classed. For all the emphasis that Evelina places on the aesthetic and artistic merits of the entertainments she attends, the purpose of these excursions is to be seen rather than to see. Mr. Lovel's snobbish distinction between touring a place and seeing it illustrates this perspective: "*we* should never call it *seeing Bath*, without going at the right season" (395). He makes a similar point in regard to London, when Captain Mirvan claims that, as his daughter has seen all the attractions of London, she has no reason to return. "Is London then…only to be regarded as a *sight*?" he asks, adding that, "gentlemen of the ocean have a set of ideas, as well as a dialect, so opposite to *ours*, that it is by no means surprising *they* should regard London as a mere *shew*, that may be seen by being *looked at*" (397). While Burney treats Mr. Lovel's notions of sight-seeing satirically, his notion that touring London and Bath is a social activity rather than an aesthetic one reflects the urban social environment of this period.[126] Furthermore, Mr. Lovel's emphatic distinction between "*we*" and "*they*" pointedly excludes Captain Mirvan and articulates the status distinctions of watching versus being watched. Making an appearance—being seen—is an activity connected to those of high rank.[127]

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[126] Burney's satire here is, as usual, two-sided. Both the Captain and Mr. Lovel take their positions to the extreme. The Captain is too literal in his notion of "seeing London," while Mr. Lovel is too affected in his utter disregard for the entertainments themselves in favor of making an appearance (82).

[127] Patricia Hamilton makes a similar point, arguing that polite behavior required social interaction, so people could showcase their refinement (420). Her reading focuses on

This difference in the scopic orientation of public appearances is gendered as well as classed. As Russell notes, fashionable sociability is the domain of elite women. Men are certainly part of these sociable excursions, but women are the objects of attention in a way that grants them power, specifically the ability to make advantageous alliances via marriage. However, this power is precarious, as it also positions the women as sexualized objects on the marriage market and subjects them to predatory male attention. For example, at the Pantheon the conversation quickly devolves from an appreciation of art, to a debate about feminine beauty, to the Captain's crude remark that they are merely "face-hunting"—looking at women (109). The party greets this remark with silence, likely because it strikes uncomfortably close to the truth: that the Mirvans are visiting fashionable venues as part of an attempt to marry off their daughter.[128] Face-hunting is precisely the point. Although Burney often situates the young women as powerless objects of observation—here as well as when Evelina notes at her first ball that the men "passed and repassed" the seated women "as if they thought we were quite at their disposal"—Mr. Lovel's earlier comments indicate the social desirability and status associated with being seen in the visual economy of London in the 1770s (30). Although Miss Mirvan and Evelina are often passive participants in fashionable sociability, they

politeness (which has a leveling tendency, since polite behavior could be learned) while I address innate status distinctions. Both discourses operated in the eighteenth century.

[128] The Mirvans are ostensibly in London to meet the Captain, who has been at sea for seven years. However, this is the second trip planned to the metropolis; the original plan was to have Miss Mirvan make her first trip to London, accompanying her mother for the spring season (19, 24). This would mark Miss Mirvan's entrance into fashionable society, almost certainly for marriage. Furthermore, the Mirvan family's busy social calendar suggests that a family reunion was not the sole purpose of traveling to London.

nevertheless benefit from the association between public appearance and social importance.

Because female social performance is linked to high rank, the fact that Evelina frequently finds herself the center of attention implicitly supports her claim to aristocratic status. However, Burney is careful to distinguish between theatricality and spectacle to maintain her heroine's characterization as innocent and naïve. Emily Allen diagnoses Evelina with "scopophobia," a fear that "to be looked at means to be made known, to become a site for the sight-seeing gaze of the London male, the erotic tourist" (437-8). Allen, like Teresa Michals, argues that *Evelina* is characterized by an anti-theatrical rhetoric. These assessments are persuasive, but they focus on Evelina's experience of being looked at (expressed as embarrassment and shyness) rather than the effect of her appearance on others (who are intrigued, perplexed, and ultimately impressed). Indeed, Evelina's personal anti-theatricality is in some respects at odds with the novel's attitude toward social fame. While Burney depicts deliberate theatricality as a negative quality, she suggests that finding oneself the center of attention has its merits. In other words, just because Evelina does not like to be the center of attention does not mean she does not benefit from this position. Aware of the gender and class implications of social appearances, Burney situates Evelina as a spectacle in order to bolster her claims to aristocratic status. This strategy allows Burney to demonstrate Evelina's "natural" nobility while characterizing Evelina as completely artless and reticent to perform socially. By making Evelina an unintentional spectacle (as opposed to a manipulative and histrionic social actor) Burney can position her as part of an upper-class social scene while disavowing any strategic action on Evelina's part.

The structure of the novel, with an epistolary form dominated by Evelina's perspective, can make it difficult to distinguish between Evelina's impression of being a spectacle and the attention she does attract. Given her frequent expressions of embarrassment, it is possible that Evelina is so shy that any social distinction makes her feel like the center of attention. But Burney provides clues to her reception within high society in the periodic narrative intrusions of other points of view in letters from others or overheard conversations reported to Evelina. These breaks in perspective provide external affirmation that Evelina is indeed making an impression in fashionable circles.[129] During her first ball we learn that she is the topic of male discussion, in a conversation overheard by Miss Mirvan between Mr. Lovel, Sir Clement, and Lord Orville in which the latter makes the mortifying assessment of Evelina as "a poor, weak girl" (37). The fact that these men discuss rather than merely dismiss Evelina communicates their interest, even as it also affirms that Evelina's first foray into society is disastrous in terms of her presentation as a gentlewoman. (Sir Clement alone defends her, a questionable endorsement.) Burney again breaks from Evelina's perspective to assert that this initial impression is short-lived. By the end of her time in London, as Lady Howard reports to Reverend Villars, Evelina "is greatly admired" (132) and "would have had the most

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[129] This is an important narrative strategy in that it prevents *Evelina* from becoming *Pamela* (a single-perspective epistolary novel that is consequently viewed as having unreliable narration). As Ian Watt points out, multiple narrative viewpoints (as in *Clarissa*) help legitimize the primary narrator's representation of events (209). This approach allows Burney to focus on Evelina's experience while providing validation from others that her narration is trustworthy. A counterpoint to this reading is provided by Julia Epstein, who sees Evelina as artful in her self-presentation in letters to Reverend Villars, an interpretation that supports her larger argument that Burney's heroine provides a model for how a woman can gain agency within the fashionable world while still being seen as decorous in her conduct (*Iron Pen* 95-102). My interpretation of Evelina's letters assumes that they, like any act of self-writing, prompt self-construction, but I do not see evidence for a reading of Evelina as consistently or deliberately deceptive.

splendid offers, had there not seemed to be some mystery in regard to her birth, which, she was well informed was assiduously, though vainly, endeavoured to be discovered" (125). Evelina's appearance in London prompts interest into her circumstances and makes her a topic of conversation in elite circles, a situation only heightened by her mysterious origins and unconventional manners.

Evelina again finds herself the unintentional object of attention when she is forced to attend the opera with the Branghtons and Madame Duval. Planning to sit with the Mirvans in the pit, Evelina is dressed much too formally for the less exclusive gallery, where the Branghtons can afford tickets. She stands out as a visual spectacle. Evelina says she is "not a little uneasy at finding that my dress, so different from that of the company, attracted general notice and observation" (90). Even when she tries to take on the role of observer, focusing on the aesthetic appeal of the opera, Evelina finds herself watched. Her evident entrancement by the opera is "the object of general diversion to the whole party" (94). She is also, to her embarrassment, recognized by Lord Orville, "high and distant though I was from him" (94). This scene proves Mr. Lovel right about the purpose of such entertainments: attending the opera is an exercise in self-display rather than art appreciation. Burney uses this scene to emphasize that the spectacle Evelina creates distinguishes her from her party in explicitly class terms: she does not belong in the gallery. Her attire, her response to the music, and her ability to assimilate the rules of conduct all mark her as a gentlewoman.[130]

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[130] Evelina's naiveté and knowledge are frequently at odds as Burney portrays her heroine as both socially inexperienced and naturally genteel. For example, Evelina is embarrassed and amused to see the Branghton family's "ignorance of whatever belongs to an opera" despite the fact that she herself had first attended the opera only eleven days earlier (90; see also Jones, Introduction xix-xxi for more on taste, class, and the opera).

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Late in the novel, Evelina again finds herself the center of attention and speculation through no fault or effort of her own. At Bristol, Evelina becomes a local celebrity when she is named the "Venus" of "a copy of verses…dropped in the pump-room and read there aloud" (328). Entering the pump room, Evelina notes, "It was full of company; and the moment we entered, I heard a murmuring of, "*That's she!*" and, to my great confusion, I saw every eye turned towards me. I pulled my hat over my face, and… endeavoured to screen myself from observation, nevertheless, I found I was so much the object of general attention, that I entreated her to hasten away" (326). Upon leaving, she and her companion, Mrs. Selwyn, are accosted by "a party of young men, who took every possible opportunity of looking at us" and repeating parts of the poem (326). Mrs. Selwyn, on discovering the cause of this attention, tells Evelina, "all the ladies are at open war with you, – the whole pump-room is in confusion; and you, innocent as you pretend to look, are the cause" (328). To her chagrin, Evelina finds herself a celebrity, the subject of "the voice of fame" (327) and "the general loadstone of attention" (334), according to Sir Clement. This is Burney's most explicit indication that social fame reflects high social standing, within the right circles, particularly when it is framed as sexual desirability. As Mrs. Selwyn points out, the problem with the poetry is that it has made Evelina the focus of speculation and admiration, and she is seen as usurping the place of other aristocratic women as the center of attention and public discourse.

As these scenes attest, the spectacular elements of Evelina's public appearances are inextricable from the male attention she attracts. The pump-house scene in particular illustrates how male desire instigates female spectacle. Even though the author of the

Evelina's quick adaptation to the rules of polite conduct in fashionable venues sets her apart from her lowly cousins, who are totally oblivious to such matters.

poems, Mr. MacCartney, is her half brother, his verses position Evelina as the object of sexualized attention. They transform Evelina's essentially anonymous excursion into a public display. If Burney largely portrays the spectacle of Evelina's public appearance through her social reception (by Mr. Lovel, Sir Clement, Lord Orville, and the men of the Bristol pumphouse) then the novel illustrates that the primary response she incites is male desire. Indeed, an ongoing challenge of Evelina's sociable activity is the repeated and persistent pursuits of men. Despite her social blunders at her first ball, she dances with Lord Orville and catches the eye of Sir Clement. Their attentions in London, Bristol, and even Howard's End (where Sir Clement finagles an invitation) indicate their continued interest and eventual rivalry. Lord Merton is overt to the point of rudeness in his public signs of attraction to her, despite being engaged to another woman. During her stay with Madame Duval, Evelina must fend off advances from both Monsieur DuBois and Mr. Smith, the Branghton's lodger. She discourages invitations from multiple men at the ball she is forced to attend with Mr. Smith and she faces similar unwanted attention from the groups of men in the pleasure gardens of Marybone (Marylebone) and Vauxhall. Young Branghton states it best when he explains Mr. Smith's preference for Evelina over his sister, saying, "Mr. Smith likes Miss best, – so does every body else" (222).

This male attention repeatedly escalates into aggression. The extent of this male assault or threatened assault is worth cataloguing, to demonstrate how it permeates the novel. Sir Clement pressures Evelina into taking his carriage after the opera and refuses to take her to her lodging in a scene that is usually interpreted as an attempted abduction and rape. In Vauxhall, a party of "riotous" gentlemen encircles Evelina and the Miss Branghtons and will not let them leave (197). Evelina faces similar sexual threats from

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strange men when she is separated from her companions in Marylebone Gardens (234).

But by far the most common signal of sexual aggression is for Evelina to be seized by the

hand. These encounters range from the merely annoying to the truly threatening, but they

share the same dynamic: Evelina is unable to physically extricate herself and is subjected

to unwanted male attention that is explicitly sexual in nature (48, 98, 113, 195, 198, 200,

234, 310, 313, 344, 357).[131] She twice describes the "violence" with which these men

take hold of her hand, a description that indicates the emotional and physical tenor of

these encounters (200, 234).[132]

These scenes of violence dramatize the gender dynamics of late eighteenth-

century culture, in which a woman's identity (and the protection it afforded) depended

upon her status as a daughter or wife. Many critics argue that Evelina's mysterious

history licenses attacks against her by denying her a recognizable social position

(Fraiman 51 and Zonitch 39). Furthermore, Evelina's presumed low status (because she is

without an acknowledged social identity) also opens her to male assault. Violence against

lowborn women was a trope associated with aristocrats since Restoration comedy, as we

saw in the introduction with Behn's *Rover* (see also Epstein, *Iron Pen* 6). Susan Staves

notes that Evelina's unprotected position highlights the physical and psychological

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[131] Susan Fraiman argues that these scenes represent a "logic of impediment" that dramatizes the social limitations on women's emotional development (37).

[132] Despite the frequent instances of male aggression, it is a female character, Madame Duval, who is most often described in terms of her "violence" of disposition (87, 89, 123, 128, 143, 149, 162, 165, 253). Madame Duval is the only character who actually perpetrates physical violence against Evelina, slapping her after the faked robbery (149). As Margaret Doody argues, Burney's contemporaries would have recognized Madame Duval as the literary version of the theatrical "stage dame," a cross-dressed role (*Frances Burney* 50). Her characterization thus underlines the link between masculinity and violence in the novel.

hazards all women faced during this period (376). These interpretations assume a hierarchical structure to these attacks: they occur because Evelina is of an undetermined (and therefore presumably low) rank and because she is a woman (and therefore in a position of inferiority to men). Burney's depiction of the threatened violence Evelina experiences is part of the novel's broader critique of aristocratic culture; for example, the cruel footrace between two poor and old women.

However, these attacks can also, paradoxically, be read as testaments to Evelina's desirability and her social superiority. The depiction of sexual violence relies upon dramatic irony: while the aristocrats see Evelina as a target due to her lack of status, readers see Evelina's desirability as evidence of her real social position. Because of her concealed status, the persistent male attention to which Evelina is subjected—especially since it is primarily associated with aristocratic men—does not demonstrate her social marginality but rather makes an implicit claim for Evelina's natural gentility and true status. The aristocratic men believe their behavior toward Evelina is permitted due to her lack of protection (in terms of male relations or high rank), but Evelina's ability to incite male desire—which far outstrips that of any other woman in the novel—speaks to her natural good breeding. In this portrayal Burney cannily situates herself between aristocratic critique and aristocratic ideology. Her portrayals of aristocratic sexual predation impugn this class of men, but she suggests through her depiction of Evelina that their attention is properly focused toward a gentlewoman—although they of course are not aware of this fact. The narrative works on both registers: aristocratic sexual advances towards unprotected women are a well-known literary convention (and a social reality), while sexual desirability is also one facet of female social legibility.

Burney hints at this interpretation of male aristocratic attention in her novel's play on the idea of taking a woman's hand. As illustrated above, the most frequent way men assert power over Evelina is by seizing her hand, preventing her from leaving, forcing physical intimacy, and expressing their sexual desire. The most egregious examples of such behavior are by Lord Merton and Sir Clement, both in Bristol (313, 344, 357). However, Lord Orville is also guilty of taking Evelina's hand against her will. Seeing her "tottering along," obviously ill, in Mrs. Beaumont's garden, Lord Orville insists she lean on him for support, "quite forcibly" taking her hand (303). The second instance occurs when Lord Orville professes his romantic feelings for Evelina, prompting Evelina to react by attempting to physically remove herself: "'My Lord,' cried I, endeavouring to disengage my hand, 'pray let me go!'" (351). Although Burney distinguishes Lord Orville's attentions as based in genuine affection rather than sexual aggression, she describes these encounters in terms of force and detainment, paralleling the other instances in which Evelina's hand is taken against her will. Lord Orville's attentions to Evelina are thus part of a continuum of male attention that frequently devolves into aggression. The fact that she associates such behavior not only with rakes such as Sir Clement, but also with Lord Orville, an exemplar of politeness, suggests that the attention directed at Evelina serves multiple narrative purposes, one of which is to affirm her attractiveness. The other purpose may be to critique the unbridled power of aristocratic men—even those like Lord Orville who do not indulge their privilege to attack young women.

Evelina's indictment of aristocratic aggression is balanced by the capacity of this aggression to speak to the protagonist's true rank. For example, the novel's focus on

Evelina's hand as the site of male attention and aggression unexpectedly affirms her desirability as a marriage partner. Being detained by having her hand forcibly seized is the aggressive and overtly sexualized counterpart to the polite customs respecting the hand depicted elsewhere in the novel. The ongoing question of whom Evelina will dance with, or, in the parlance of the novel, who will have "the honour of [her] hand," is a more conventional means of expressing male interest (34, 329, 332).[133] A woman's hand is an integral part of social encounters: an invitation to dance is expressed by asking for her hand, handing her into a carriage signifies romantic attachment, kissing her hand suggests courtly subservience, and taking a woman's hand against her will expresses dominance. Most importantly, taking someone's hand is a euphemism for marriage, which is the sole objective of the courtship novel. Burney's play on the word "hand" reminds readers that the question of who will take Evelina's hand is the central question of the novel. The fact that so many men, particularly aristocratic men, attempt to quite literally take her hand by force is a testament to their desire and to her value, particularly since readers are aware of Evelina's lineage.

It is of course problematic to position sexual assault on a continuum with other expressions of male romantic interest, and in doing so I do not mean to suggest that in *Evelina* marriage is akin to rape or that sexual aggression is as innocuous as requesting a dance. Sexual assault was a genuine threat for women, and Burney surely meant to dramatize the precarious position of unprotected women in the face of sexually predatory men in positions of power. The novel's treatment of sexual aggression also suggests that the excesses of fashionable society breed a corruption that is barely kept in check by rules

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[133] Epstein also draws comparisons between the grip of a hand during a dance and the physical imprisonment Evelina experiences elsewhere in the novel (*Iron Pen* 110).

of polite conduct. Burney's vivid portrayals of violence and attempted violence articulate the perils young women faced in even the most basic of social interactions.

But these scenes of violence operate in multiple registers, functioning as social critique, plot device, and a means of characterization. Attacks by aristocratic men in particular can be read as the expression of frustrated male desire. They indicate Evelina's "worth"—her true nobility—while her lack of a title precludes the expression of this desire in culturally sanctioned ways, such as through courtship and marriage. Sir Clement admits as much, saying that though he will not deign to marry "a girl of obscure birth, whose only dowry is her beauty, and who is evidently in a state of dependency," he sees Evelina's value: "I think Miss Anville the loveliest of her sex; and, were I a *marrying* man, she, of all the women I have seen, I would fix upon for a wife" (347). Sir Clement attempts to enact the *Pamela* story in reverse: he cannot marry Evelina, so he tries to make her his mistress, by manipulation and by force. This reversal of Richardson's story is in itself evidence of Evelina's status by birth. Evelina, unlike Pamela, is not an anomaly (genteel but lowborn); she is instead the unacknowledged noblewoman of folklore myth. Readers know this, which is why they can interpret aristocratic attentions toward her as proof of her innate nature. The readers' privileged information about Evelina's status is therefore central to how Burney portrays aristocratic sexual aggression. Although it threatens Evelina's marriage prospects, it also realigns the social hierarchy of the novel by suggesting that Evelina is an exemplar of femininity and as such attracts the attentions of aristocratic men. Sir Clement's perspective is not true for all of Evelina's pursuers (some of them certainly do not have marriage in mind), but their

attraction—sometimes conveyed via aggressive acts—nevertheless testifies to her genteel character and deportment.

Of course, Evelina is a beautiful young woman, which provides an alternate explanation for the attention directed at her. But Burney takes pains to show that Evelina's attractions are more than merely aesthetic. Evelina's foil in the novel is her own grandmother, a beautiful but poor "waiting-girl at a tavern," who ensnares Evelina's grandfather and in doing so precipitates a chain of events that leads to Evelina's own estrangement from her father (13). This disastrous match haunts the characters of the novel and illustrates the fear that female attractiveness in the wrong sort of woman could destabilize social hierarchies (this is the main fear of the *Pamela* controversy; see Chapter III). Reverend Villars notes, fearfully, that Evelina has "too much beauty to escape notice," and certainly it is Evelina's good looks that initially attract men, despite her lack of recognized social position (20). But Burney's characterization of Madame Duval leaves no doubt that she does not truly belong to the class into which she has been elevated. Evelina's grandmother is presented as a burlesque of a gentlewoman: her overdone and self-conscious performance of gentility (in terms of clothing, manners, and makeup) only renders her more obviously an impostor. Madame Duval made a conquest of Mr. Evelyn, but, even after living for decades as an established gentlewoman, she cannot truly pass as one, as even the brutish Captain Mirvan can see. She is also French and Catholic, two categories of identity that Colley argues the English defined themselves against (3-5). By making her ridiculous, and by situating her as a non-English outsider to fashionable circles, Burney defuses her threat to the established social hierarchy.

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Unlike Madame Duval, Evelina's attractions extend beyond mere physical beauty to encompass characteristics that position her hierarchically. According to Lady Howard, "Her face and person answer my most refined ideas of complete beauty," and, "She has the same gentleness in her manners, the same natural graces in her motions, that I formerly so much admired in her mother. Her character seems truly ingenuous and simple; and at the same time that nature has blessed her with an excellent understanding and great quickness of parts, she has a certain air of inexperience and innocency that is extremely interesting" (22-3). Part of Evelina's allure is evidently these other qualities, her "air" and "character." Evelina's beauty is merely the aesthetic component of her appearance, which comprehends her body and bearing as well as her face. This sense of her attractiveness is evident even in male descriptions of her beauty. Lord Orville combines aesthetic and moral approbation in his assessment of her as a "pretty, modest-looking girl" and Sir Clement praises her as "all intelligence and expression" (36). Without having ever interacted with Evelina, Sir Clement objects to Mr. Lovel's characterization of her manners as evidence of low status, commenting that "Ill-breeding" is incompatible with her "elegant face" (37). Evelina is beautiful, certainly, but she fulfills a conception of elite feminine beauty that also comprehends qualities such as modesty, intelligence, expressiveness, gentleness, and grace. Her status as a genuine, if unacknowledged, lady also neutralizes any concern that Lord Orville's proposal is based on mere sexual desire (as was the case in Mr. Evelyn's proposal to Madame Duval).

The Reverend Villars cautions Evelina, "this is not an age in which we may trust to appearances" (309). But Evelina can indeed trust to appearances, as can Reverend Villars, despite his claims to the contrary. His advice directly contradicts the fact that he

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relies almost exclusively on "appearances"—specifically Evelina's face—to prove her identity to her father. Preparing to send Evelina to meet Sir John Belmont, Villars assures her that her resemblance to her mother should be enough to convince him: "But, without any other certificate of your birth, that which you carry in your countenance, as it could not be affected by artifice, so it cannot admit of a doubt" (337). Sir John makes the same point when he sees Evelina, noting, according to Evelina, that he was convinced by "the certainty I carried in my countenance of my real birth" (374). Evelina's countenance is a testament to her maternal heritage and, once Sir John legitimizes his marriage with her mother, her membership in the Belmont clan. In the world of Evelina, appearances not only can be trusted, they are, in some cases, the most convincing evidence of all.

But Evelina's physical resemblance to her mother also suggests the broader legitimacy of trusting to appearances. Evelina looks like her mother, but she also looks like a gentlewoman, part of the reason she finds herself the center of attention within elite circles. Evelina's noble "countenance" functions as shorthand for the array of qualities and characteristics that situate her as part of the upper classes. Early in the novel, detailing Evelina's successful appearance within fashionable society, Lady Howard mentions that there were men interested in marrying Evelina. She characterizes their interest as "merely the effect of her external attractions," pursuits which are dampened when the circumstances of her birth cannot be determined (125). But Lady Howard's "merely" is misleading. Evelina's "external attractions" encompass her value as a marital prospect because they testify to the correspondence between her appearance and her status. Lady Howard's dismissal of the male interest in Evelina is similarly undermined by the book's conclusion, which suggests that "external attractions" are exactly what

mark her as aristocratic and as an attractive marriage match. Burney herself describes her heroine in the Preface as a "young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty" (9). This statement in one sense connotes conflict—Evelina's beauty will attract male attention while her origins will preclude honorable offers of marriage—but it can also be read as an indication of her legitimacy as a gentlewoman. It does so because her "conspicuous" beauty (noticeable, striking, remarkable) attracts attention, and in doing so it counters the secrecy surrounding her origins, testifying to her high status. Evelina is legally unrecognized as a gentlewoman—she has no official status or name—but, as the novel demonstrates, she is certainly recognized socially in the sense of being distinguished. Attention, interest, desire—the emotions Evelina incites in other—describe a fundamental sympathetic response from people of the same rank. By focusing on Evelina's social reception, Burney positions Evelina's "external attractions" as evidence of her real status. The spectacle Evelina creates during her public appearances suggests that, within the world of the novel, fashionable London society recognized Evelina as a person to whom attention should be paid. Evelina's social legibility, although expressed indirectly, reasserts the ideology that status at birth dictates one's nature, and that this nature is visible on the body.

Robinson as Sentimental Heroine

Describing her life as a young married woman in London in the *Memoirs*, Robinson recounts an alarming episode that echoes the scenes of male aggression in *Evelina*. On a visit to Vauxhall, she is separated from her party during a disturbance. She finds a member of the group, George Robert Fitzgerald, who offers to escort her to the entrance door, where he says her husband is waiting (136). Robinson grows "alarmed and

bewildered" when Mr. Robinson is not at the door and she cannot find either him or her carriage (136). Fitzgerald assures her they will find him, then attempts to force Robinson into a carriage. She "resisted and inquired what he meant by such conduct," and Fitzgerald replies that her husband "can but fight me" (137). Freeing herself, Robinson runs toward the entrance, where she finds her husband at last. Fitzgerald, "with an easy *nonchalance*," claims to have "found the wrong carriage," and Robinson is persuaded by both the threat of a duel and the "plausible" explanation that he had merely mistaken the carriage to conceal the encounter (137-8).

This episode mirrors two key scenes in *Evelina*. The first is her experience at Vauxhall, where she is separated from the Branghtons and rescued by Sir Clement, who then takes advantage of their isolation to make his own sexual advances. The second part of the incident parallels Evelina's experience at the opera, where she is unable to locate her party and accepts Sir Clement's offers to help, only to find herself nearly abducted and sexually assaulted in his carriage. In both episodes the male aggressors are gentlemen who insinuate themselves into the social circle of the heroine, manipulate social protocol to their advantage, opportunistically prey upon the heroine when she is alone, and rely on her embarrassment and delicacy to keep the incident a secret. While Robinson is married, she describes herself prior to this event as neglected by her husband, a characterization that plays out here when her husband first abandons her and is then oblivious to Fitzgerald's threats. As an unprotected woman, Robinson is subjected to the same threats of male aggression Evelina faced, threats that unfold in similar ways.

Robinson's characterization of her attack is more than coincidence. Whatever the actual circumstances of Fitzgerald's attempted abduction (if it occurred at all), it appears

that Robinson modeled her description of this incident on the Vauxhall and opera scenes

in *Evelina*.[134] This strategy provides a legitimate rationale for how a young woman would

find herself in the company of a man to whom she is not married, and in doing so it

exonerates Robinson from wrongdoing. More broadly, Robinson's approach figures both

her younger self and Fitzgerald as literary types, ascribing to them a set of familiar and

pre-defined attributes. It functions as literary shorthand, situating Mary Robinson as the

naïve ingénue and Fitzgerald as a rake, easy in both manners and morals.[135]

      This similarity between *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* is not unique to this scene.

Rather, Robinson's *Memoirs* draws on multiple literary influences, particularly Burney's

novel, in order to situate the protagonist as a sentimental and genteel heroine.[136] In

particular, Robinson adopted Burney's strategy of portraying Evelina as an unintentional

spectacle and object of male aristocratic attention to convey Evelina's social legibility as

a lady. Both writers reframe the sexual aggression of aristocratic men to suggest that their

desire (although enacted as predation) also indicates the elite status of their protagonists.

As in *Evelina*, the focus on social reception allows Robinson to disavow deliberate

theatricality while situating herself as the center of attention within elite circles. The

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[134] Byrne notes that this incident cannot be independently verified and may be influenced
by contemporary literature. She argues that these sorts of scenes are common to romantic
novels of the period (48). While Byrne is correct, the similarities between the Vauxhall
and opera scenes in *Evelina* and this incident suggest that Robinson looked to Burney's
novel in particular as a model for elements of her autobiography.

[135] Fitzgerald and Sir Clement are character types in the tradition of the rake, an
archetype seen with Willmore in *The Rover* and Lovelace in *Clarissa*. See Mackie for
more on rakes and gentlemen.

[136] Robinson's main influences are the gothic novel, romantic autobiography, and the
sentimental novel. See Anne Close, Linda H. Peterson, and Sharon M. Setzer, "The
Gothic Structure" and the Introduction to *Women's Theatrical Memoirs*.

expression of her desirability via male sexual aggression lets her critique the aristocracy while also suggesting that aristocratic interest is a testament to her natural gentility. Adopting the structure of Burney's novel—specifically the idea that the heroine unintentionally attracts male attention—also allows Robinson to reframe her affair with the Prince of Wales as evidence of her innate high status rather than the conventional narrative of a royal selecting a favorite among the lowborn actresses. Robinson emphasizes this reading by capitalizing on a rumored origin story that echoes Evelina's, in which she is the unacknowledged daughter of an Earl. If such attention signifies innate gentility, then the Prince's pursuit suggests that Robinson is naturally genteel. Although Robinson concludes with a more radical solution for reforming the aristocracy, she, like Burney, adheres to a conservative ideology of natural gentility made legible to readers through the plot device of male sexual attention.

By modeling her autobiography on *Evelina*, Robinson adopts the specific element of female spectacle and aristocratic male sexual attention in order to situate herself as the sentimental upper-class heroine. This is likely one reason why the *Memoirs* focuses so extensively on the interval between Robinson's marriage and her affair with the Prince of Wales, the period when she, in her words, "made my *début*" in London society (106). This structure parallels Burney's focus on "a Young Woman's Entrance into the World" (*Evelina*'s subtitle). There are numerous other similarities. Abandoned by her father and neglected by her husband, Robinson is without male protection, as is Evelina. Both narratives position their heroines as both innocent and critical; inept at navigating high society while still judgmental about its follies. They both satirize trading families (*Evelina*'s Branghtons and the *Memoirs*' Harris clan) as vulgar and obsessed with money.

Like Burney, Robinson portrays aristocratic men as possessing the veneer of politeness without true integrity of character, in the vein of Sir Clement and Lord Merton. Robinson and Evelina also share unconventional female mentors. Evelina's Mrs. Selwyn and Robinson's childhood tutor Meribah Lorrington are both described as "masculine" in their manners and education (Burney 269; Robinson 44). Robinson molds her story to resemble Burney's novel, and in doing so she implicitly positions herself as, like Evelina, innocent, naive, and blameless.

Most importantly, Robinson adopts Burney's strategy of situating her protagonist as an unintentionally spectacular figure within elite circles by portraying her as the target of aristocratic male sexual aggression. Robinson uses this plot device to legitimize her celebrity, implying that it is the result of her natural superiority rather than her notorious sexual affairs. She does this by depicting herself as an unacknowledged gentlewoman who, like Evelina, is the recipient of unwanted sexual advances. By focusing on her social reception Robinson can allay charges that she is deliberately theatrical (meaning manipulative and self-interested) and instead situate herself as a member of fashionable society by virtue of her own merits as an innately genteel woman. The people with whom she consorts and their reactions to her bolster her credentials as a woman who belongs in fashionable society. For example, early in her married life Robinson finds herself popular with her social superiors, circulating among people of much higher rank than she might expect given her husband's status and her own. She attributes this development to her own attractiveness as a companion.

Robinson's tenuous social position provides a clue as to why she deploys literary tropes and conventions in the *Memoirs*, and why *Evelina* in particular offers a model for

her to position herself within polite society. Her father, a wealthy Bristol merchant, is "from a respectable family in Ireland," and her mother possesses aristocratic connections, which Robinson minutely documents (16-8). Indulged as a child and educated as a gentlewoman, Robinson's expectations are drastically altered when her father suffers financial ruin and abandons the family. Her marriage at the age of fifteen does not elevate her socially or financially as she and her mother had anticipated. Her choice is Thomas Robinson, whom she and her mother believe to be a promising young law clerk in the final months of his apprenticeship and heir to his uncle's estate. Instead, Mr. Robinson is many months away from being a lawyer and is the illegitimate—and non-inheriting—son of the man he referred to as his uncle (87-88). Robinson's characterization of her marriage bears similarity to matches in *The Case of Madame Mary Carleton* and *Moll Flanders* (see Chapter III). While Robinson's portrayal of her marriage is likely accurate (she had no obvious incentive to make such a poor match so young), it also aligns with the literary trope of marrying under the false assumption of a partner's wealth (itself an indication of the widespread and century-long fear of social deception). Attempting to marry up, Robinson finds herself in an even more tenuous social position. Although she and Mr. Robinson move in fashionable circles in London, they cannot afford the expense, and when Mr. Robinson is incarcerated for debt, their friends abandon them.

Robinson's later work as an actress followed by her position as a publicly recognized royal mistress also places her on the margins of fashionable society. Taking the stage to earn money, she is caught between "conceptions of the actress as lofty 'arbiter of taste' and lowly drudge" (Setzer, Introduction xvi). Her fame as an actress and as a royal mistress in the late 1770s and early 1780s situates her at the center of high society, court intrigue, and the popular imagination while concomitantly positioning her as decidedly different from aristocratic ladies. There is no category in terms of gendered

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roles or rank that fully defines Robinson. The *Memoirs* are her effort to position herself

as a legitimate member of high society, a member of fashionable circles not through

sexual partnerships but rather through a natural claim to genteel status.

Robinson's decision to situate herself as a sentimental heroine is also a response

to her notorious public image. It is important to recognize the scale of the challenge

Robinson faced: although her reputation had improved in the 1790s as she began to

publish her poems and novels, Robinson was still primarily known as mistress to a series

of powerful men, including the Prince of Wales, the Florizel to her Perdita (Ty 24). She

was a celebrity, and her self-promotion throughout the 1780s and 1790s competed with

popular texts and images that caricatured or attacked her.[137] Written at the end of her life

with the help of her daughter and published posthumously, the *Memoirs* attempts to

reframe her personal history by portraying Robinson as a victim of nature and

circumstance rather than an opportunistic and immoral woman of pleasure, as she was

frequently depicted (Figures 13 and 14). Like Clarissa's history (the personal letters that

she orders circulated after her death), the *Memoirs* attempts to offer a definitive (and

vindicating) narrative of female victimization. Like all autobiographies, Robinson's

Memoirs is strategic, and it accomplishes its goal by being "selective rather than

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[137] As was the case with another infamous public figure and memoirist, Mary Carleton,
numerous fictionalized biographies or purported letters from and to Robinson circulated
in London. Examples are *Poetical Epistle from Florizel to Perdita: with Perdiat's
Answer* (1781); *The Vis-à-vis of Berkley-Square. Or, A Wheel off Mrs. W*t**n's
Carriage. Inscribed to Florizel* (1783); *The Effusions of Love: being the Amorous
Correspondence between the Amiable Florizel and the Enchanting Perdita* (1784); *The
Memoirs of Perdita* (1784); *The Budget of Love; or, Letters Between Florizel and Perdita*
(1801); and *The Mistress of Royalty; Or, The Loves of Florizel and Perdita* (1814).
Robinson was the target of numerous caricatures, and she also sat for a number of
portraits by artists as renowned as Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough.

comprehensive" (Ty 25). In this text Robinson attempts to rehabilitate her public image

by characterizing her younger self as both sexually innocent and sexually imperiled, the

stereotypical sentimental heroine.[138]

Figure 13. Unknown artist, "Florizel and Perdita." Etching, 1783. © Trustees of the British Museum. This caricature depicts the Prince of Wales and Robinson. The image sexualizes Robinson, portraying her bare breast, labeling her husband the "King of Cuckolds," (lower right), and including images of her other lovers, (Charles Fox and Col. Banastre Tarleton).

Figure 14. Unknown artist," Mrs. Robinson Dancing with Fox." Etching, 1783. © Trustees of the British Museum. According to the British Museum, this print portrays Robinson as a bacchante and Charles Fox as Bacchus (or Falstaff).

This approach is not without its limitations, however, of which Robinson is well

aware. While *Evelina* is fictional and temporally bound, taking place over the course of a

matter of months and featuring a wholly malleable protagonist, Robinson's *Memoirs* is

constantly inflected by the reader's knowledge that the sentimental ingenue that

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[138] Because this chapter examines Robinson's characterization of events rather than their factuality, apparent fabrications, exaggerations, or exclusions will only be addressed as they relate to her attempts to use literary devices and conventions to mold her autobiography.

Robinson presents as her younger self becomes the notorious "Perdita." The *Memoirs* presents the sometimes jarring juxtaposition of an innocent, wholesome, naive younger Robinson with the experienced, notorious, and knowingly mature Robinson. This contrast emphasizes the literariness—and therefore potential fictionality—of her portrayal of her younger self. Robinson's task of presenting herself as anti-theatrical and artless is thus much more difficult than Burney's.

Critics have argued that Robinson's literary self-fashioning reflects the limited roles available to women during this period. Remarking on the contradictions and competing narrative threads of the *Memoirs*, Eleanor Rose Ty suggests that we read "Robinson's tendency to tell partial truths, sentimentalize events, and suppress facts as manifestations of her struggle with her subjectivity," a subjectivity that is problematic because it is female (31). Gender delimits and defines how Robinson can present herself. The roles available for women during the late eighteenth century help Robinson locate herself within this society, but they also restrict her (Ty 31-32). While Ty focuses on Robinson's self-representation, Anne K. Mellor expands this avenue of analysis to include representations *of* Robinson by others. She argues that there are four "scripts" of female sexuality that circumscribe portrayals of Robinson: whore, unprotected wife, star-crossed lover, and performer or artist. In the *Memoirs*, the dominant narratives are the unprotected wife (promoted by her daughter Maria's contributions to the *Memoirs*) and the star-crossed lover and talented artist (emphasized by Robinson herself) (282, 287). Both Ty and Mellor situate Robinson as a canny manipulator of the roles available to

women at the turn of the eighteenth century.[139] They see the *Memoirs* as the culmination

of the series of performances—theatrical, textual, and pictorial—that constituted

Robinson's public life.[140]

While Ty and Mellor usefully analyze the constraints and opportunities Robinson

faced as a sexualized female celebrity in the late eighteenth century, their work does not

explicitly address how Robinson manipulated her public image via the *Memoirs* to

construct her status as well as her gender. The "scripts" (to use Mellor's term) of status

roles are as restrictive as those of female sexuality (which is not to suggest that these

categories can or should be considered separately). As a response to those who would

portray her as a social-climbing actress who trades sexual favors for money and access to

elite circles, Robinson portrays herself using the script of the sentimental heroine and the

impoverished gentlewoman. She is forced to work on the stage to earn money for her

family, and her merits unintentionally attract the notice of a series of aristocratic men and

finally the Prince of Wales. The script Robinson relies on is specifically literary,

illustrating how narrative conventions and character types influenced how people

imagined and enacted status distinctions at the end of the eighteenth century. For

Robinson to claim the rank of gentlewoman, she must reframe her acting and adultery

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[139] Ty and Mellor diverge in their characterization of how successful Robinson is in this deliberate self-construction. While Ty concludes that Robinson is ultimately "manipulated by her implied readers and public," Mellor sees Robinson's use of these scripts as a successful evasion of the emerging Romantic notion of a knowable and coherent self (Ty 25; Mellor 298).

[140] It is important to differentiate between the Mary Robinson of the *Memoirs* and other versions of Robinson constructed by her or others. Mellor argues that we cannot recover the historical or "real" Robinson; she is instead "a set of visual and verbal public texts" (300). See Claire Brock, Mellor, Judith Pascoe ("Mary Robinson"), and Ty for analysis of the array of personae constructed by Robinson or about Robinson.

within a larger sentimental literary narrative. Only by embracing passivity, naiveté, and artlessness can Robinson—a woman who is by all other signs none of these things—construct a genteel textual identity recognizable to readers.

The charge of theatricality or deliberate performance is of particular concern to Robinson, given her history as an actress. As we have seen in *Evelina* (not to mention *Clarissa* and Boswell's *London Journal*) anti-theatricality is central to social legibility. In the *Memoirs* Robinson is therefore careful to distinguish between social performance (which she disavows) and stage performance (which she enjoys). Unlike Evelina, Robinson professes to like being looked at, but only in her capacity as an actress. She admits that she is attracted to the theater at least in part because of the chance to be famous. It is her primary motivation when she first considers acting, and when she returns to it later, her daughter notes that she "looked forward with delight both to celebrity and to fortune" (62, 213-4). But the majority of the *Memoirs* repudiates or at least qualifies Robinson's affinity for performance, a move that mitigates the element of sexual marketing inherent in her performances as an actress (see, for example, Angellica Bianca in the Introduction). Robinson instead portrays her career as an actress as a respectable and responsible endeavor. Like her poetry, acting is both an artistic and a pecuniary endeavor, and she returns to it to support her family (196). Furthermore, Robinson's theatricality is limited to her profession as an actress. While on stage she enjoys publicity and performance. In social situations, by contrast, Robinson portrays herself as inexperienced and unintentionally attracting attention, following Burney's model in *Evelina*. Robinson is able to position herself as anti-theatrical, even in a narrative in which her theatrical career forms a central component.

This strategy is particularly effective in explaining Robinson's fame as a fashion icon, a role to which her readers would be attuned. Claire Brock argues that Robinson was aggressive and strategic in manipulating her public image, particularly through her attire (see also Byrne 165). However, in the *Memoirs* Robinson frames her fashion choices passively: as the result of inexperience and youth. For example, Robinson describes her début in London thus: "The first time I went to Ranelegh my habit was so singularly plain and quaker-like, that all eyes were fixed upon me. I wore a gown of light brown lustring with close round cuffs: (it was then the fashion to wear long ruffles); my hair was without powder, and my head adorned with a plain round cap and a white chip hat, without any ornaments whatever" (107). Lest readers attribute the attention she attracts to a deliberate attempt to distinguish herself, Robinson precedes the description of her attire by noting she was "scarcely emerged beyond the boundaries of childhood" at this time (106). This comment emphasizes her naiveté and suggests that her unique costume is the effect of ignorance rather than a deliberate scheme to attract attention. Robinson portrays herself as attracting attention in the same manner as Evelina: without any conscious effort to do so. She asserts that she creates a spectacle—"all eyes were fixed upon me"—while also denigrating such attention as issuing from "the broad hemisphere of fashionable folly" (107). Robinson also downplays her own distinction, arguing, "A new face, a young person dressed with peculiar but simple elegance, was sure to attract attention at places of public entertainment" (107). She acknowledges that she is the center of attention but professes to have arrived there with no forethought or strategy.

Robinson constructs her description of visiting the Pantheon in the same way, emphasizing her unfamiliarity with the social scene and couching the attention she attracts in terms of social reception rather than her own deliberate performance. As such, she is a passive participant rather than an active agent. At the Pantheon, "then the most fashionable assemblage of the gay and the distinguished," Robinson first operates in the role of viewer, admiring the aristocratic ladies in attendance (107-9). Here the narrative shifts as attention moves from these women to Robinson, and she notices "two persons, evidently men of fashion, speaking to her [the Marchioness Townshend]; till one of them, looking towards me, with an audible voice inquired of the other, 'Who is she?'" (109). Robinson soon finds herself the center of attention:

> Their fixed stare disconcerted me. I rose, and, leaning on my husband's arm, again mingled in the brilliant circle. The inquirers followed us; stopping several friends, as we walked round the circle, and repeatedly demanding of them, "Who is that young lady in the pink dress trimmed with sable?—My manner and confusion plainly evinced that I was not accustomed to the gaze of impertinent high breeding. I felt uneasy, and proposed returning home. (109-10)

Like Evelina's first ball, Robinson's appearance at the Pantheon situates her as a spectacle and an object of male desire. Indeed, she is a spectacle in part because she attracts male attention. She attempts to blend in by moving or by mingling, but she finds herself the object of inquiry and attention in "the brilliant circle." This passage, together with the description of Ranelegh, positions Robinson as, unintentionally but successfully, the center of attention. In doing so it suggests that Robinson belongs within this social milieu of elites because fashionable sociability equates high status to public appearances.

Following the pattern of *Evelina*, as the *Memoirs* progresses male attention increases in both frequency and intensity despite the fact that Robinson is married. Lord Lyttelton, one of Robinson's admirers at the Pantheon, becomes her most persistent suitor. She paints him almost identically to the way Burney characterizes Sir Clement Willoughby, particularly in his familiarity, his ability to manipulate the rules of polite society to accomplish his own ends, and his ability to charm a young woman's guardians so as to gain access to her (in *Evelina*, Captain Mirvan; here, Mr. Robinson himself):

> Lord Lyttelton, who was perhaps the most accomplished libertine that any age has produced, with considerable artifice inquired after Mr. Robinson, professed his earnest desire to cultivate his acquaintance, and, on the following day, sent him a card of invitation. Lyttelton was an adept in the artifices of fashionable intrigue: he plainly perceived that both Mr. Robinson and myself were uninitiated in its mysteries: he knew that to undermine a wife's honour, he must become master of the husband's confidence; and Mr. Robinson was too much pleased with the society of a man whose wit was only equaled by his profligacy, to shrink from such an association. (113)

Although Robinson is vulnerable to manipulation due to her inexperience, she is in no danger of falling for the lord: "Fortunately for me, Lord Lyttelton was uniformly my aversion. His manners were overbearingly insolent, his language licentious, and his person slovenly even to a degree that was disgusting" (114). Like Sir Clement, Lyttelton is threatening but not particularly successful in his seduction. In her description of Lyttelton's attentions Robinson positions herself as the object of aristocratic desire and the society ingénue but also the faithful wife.

The alliance with Lord Lyttelton thrusts the Robinsons into circles of high society where she finds herself an object of admiration and interest. Although characterizing herself as neglected and left to while away long hours at home alone, Robinson nevertheless assures her readers that "Dress, parties, adulation, occupied all my hours," and "I was now known, by name, at every public place in and near the metropolis" (119, 140). Robinson wants to show her readers that she has arrived in high society and was recognized as a gentlewoman prior to her celebrity as an actress or affair with the Prince of Wales. However, she also needs to distance herself from the excesses of fashionable life. Here the seams between Robinson's various personae show as she portrays herself as at the center of fashionable society while sheltered from its excesses and corruption. The contradictory demands Robinson juggles illustrate the problematics of the script of the "artless sentimental spectacle" she wants to replicate in her autobiography.

Robinson's narrative only briefly gestures to her public fame during this period, focusing instead on the persistent and increasingly overt advances from Lord Lyttelton and other men in his circle. Like *Evelina*, the *Memoirs* describes the main protagonist's social reception primarily through her ability to incite male desire. The pattern established at Ranelegh and the Pantheon repeats itself in the Robinson's home, with Mr. Robinson totally incapable of or unwilling to protect his wife from sexual advances by other men. Attention issues mainly from Lord Lyttelton and George Fitzgerald, a member of the Irish landed gentry and an "accomplished person" whom Robinson also describes as "the most dangerous of my husband's associates" (foreshadowing his subsequent attempted abduction) (120). Both Lord Lyttelton and Fitzgerald pursue Robinson relentlessly. Robinson mirrors Burney, describing how these aristocratic men use their

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social position and the rules of decorum to insinuate themselves into the heroine's daily life. Like Evelina in Howard's End and Mrs. Beaumont's home in Bristol, Robinson finds herself subjected to unwanted male attention even within her domicile. Unable to politely refuse their visits, Robinson is forced to entertain Lyttelton and Fitzgerald when they call, which they conspire to do when Mr. Robinson is absent (112, 122). Their sexual interest in Robinson is undisguised. The *Memoirs* gives the impression that these men pursue Robinson without her conscious provocation, and their perpetual solicitations for her affection situate her as singular within the fashionable social groups to which both she and her suitors belong.[141]

However, Robinson's self-portrayal as a sentimental heroine is complicated by the fact that her text is autobiographical rather than epistolary, leaving her exposed to charges of self-promotion, particularly in these descriptions of male interest. While Burney couched Evelina's descriptions of her social reception in terms of reports to her guardian—creating the effect of private communication—Robinson's autobiography is public, self-motivated, and explicitly self-vindicating. After all, despite the sentimental mode of her autobiography, readers would be more likely to attribute prurience, narcissism, or arrogance to Robinson, given her willingness to cultivate celebrity in other aspects of her life. The mature Robinson addresses her audience directly to combat these potential interpretations:

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[141] Robinson's portrayals of George Fitzgerald and Lord Lyttelton, while informed by the recognizable trope of the predatory male aristocratic rake, would have also corresponded to these men's reputation. In a well-publicized episode in 1773, Fitzgerald and Lyttelton had harassed the actress Elizabeth Hartley at Vauxhall, instigating a fight with her companion, as Miles Ogborn reports (116-8). Fitzgerald was a notorious dueler and nicknamed "Fighting Fitzgerald" (Byrne 44).

I do not recount these events, these plans for my enthralment, with a view to convey any thing like personal vanity; for I can with truth affirm that I never thought myself entitled to admiration that could endanger my security, or tempt the libertine to undermine my husband's honour. But I attribute the snares that were laid for me to three causes. The first, my youth and inexperience, my girlish appearance and simplicity of manners. Secondly, the expensive style in which Mr. Robinson lived, though he was not known as a man of independent fortune; and, thirdly, the evident neglect which I experienced from my husband, whom Lord Lyttelton's society had marked as a man of universal gallantry. (139-40)

Anticipating the charge that she has incited or encouraged male attention, Robinson deflects blame onto the male aristocrats and her husband and asserts her own innocence. She describes how Lord Lyttelton isolates Robinson by befriending her husband and contributing to his domestic conflict and financial collapse (117, 119). Robinson emphasizes her husband's neglect rather than his infidelity. She does so to position the male attention directed her way as a feature of this neglect rather than a result of her own flirtation—indeed, she emphasizes her "girlish appearance and simplicity of manners" and notes that Lord Lyttelton's nickname for her is "The child" (118, see also 117). By negating her own sexuality—portraying herself as sexually immature—Robinson depicts herself as entirely innocent and at the mercy of a rapacious male sexuality. Indeed, she argues that, far from detailing all of the attention directed her way, she has exercised discretion. "Were I to mention the names of those who held forth the temptations of fortune at this moment of public peril, I might create some reproaches in many families of the fashionable world," she writes, referring to her time as an actress (222). Robinson

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must explicitly defend and explain her inclusion of these episodes of attempted seduction. They are essential to the her self-construction as an imperiled sentimental heroine, but they also threaten to reinforce her scandalous reputation. Robinson could be seen as profiting from the literary representation of these potential affairs in the same way she was figured as profiting from actual affairs later in her life. She defuses this criticism by emphasizing her unprotected state and her passivity, suggesting that she incited male attention unwittingly and unintentionally.

As in *Evelina*, aristocratic attention, while threatening, also serves to highlight the superiority of the protagonist to the women surrounding her. Robinson is explicit on this point. Her husband's neglect is not merely a failure of his marital duty but rather a failure of taste. In plain terms, she is better than he is, and he utterly fails to appreciate this fact. Others, however, recognize and articulate his failure. Robinson portrays Fitzgerald and Lyttelton's efforts to seduce her as a response to this unequal match. Fitzgerald, according to Robinson, "lamented the destiny which had befallen me, in being wedded to a man incapable of estimating my value, and at last confessed *himself* my most ardent and devoted admirer" (120). When Lyttelton exposes Mr. Robinson's infidelity, he admits that he both encouraged Mr. Robinson in the affair and exposed it in order to end the marriage: "How little does that husband deserve the solicitude of such a wife!...I fear that I have in some degree aided in alienating his conjugal affections. I could not bear to see such youth, such merit, so sacrificed—" (122). Fitzgerald and Lyttelton both speak in terms of Robinson's "value" and "merit." These descriptions echo the Reverend Villars' praise of Evelina's "worth," a term meant to indicate inner qualities but which instead

refs to her unacknowledged social superiority. Robinson deploys terms like "value" and "merit" similarly, suggesting that only her social equals recognize her true worth.

Robinson highlights her husband's inferiority in her description of the disparity between the elite men who pursue her and the women her husband seeks. Mr. Robinson is not merely guilty of sexual impropriety; he is guilty of ignoring a genteel and virtuous wife for lower ranking and wanton women. Echoing Fitzgerald and Lyttleton, George Brereton, "a man of fortune," praises Robinson while criticizing her husband, saying, "How little does such a husband deserve such a wife!…how tasteless must be be, to leave such a woman for the very lowest and most degraded of the sex!" (225, 232-3). Even Mr. Robinson's mistress acknowledges his wife's superiority, saying when Robinson confronts her that, "Had I known that Mr. Robinson was the husband of such a woman —," she would never see the "unworthy man" again (127-8). Robinson repeatedly emphasizes the "low" nature of these affairs, in terms of their depravity but also in terms of the women's status. Robinson notes the "dirty servant girl" who lets her in when she confronts Mr. Robinson's first mistress. Later, when he is in debtor's prison, she discovers that he is "known to admit the most abandoned of their sex; women whose low licentious lives were such as to render them the shame and outcasts of society" (125, 186). These affairs are "both frequent and disgraceful" (187). As Robinson attracts (unintentionally, of course) her most elite suitor, the Prince of Wales, her husband sinks still lower, "pass[ing] his leisure hours with the most abandoned women" (257). "Even my own servants complained of his illicit advances," Robinson notes, describing a totally undiscriminating Mr. Robinson pursuing a "short, ill-made, squalid, and dirty" serving girl (257). Robinson portrays her husband not merely as sexually unfaithful but also as a

man with low tastes and the complete inability to appreciate female merit. There is a hierarchical element to Robinson's condemnation of her husband as well as a moral one.

Robinson's strategy is impressive. She uses her role in fashionable society as the object of male sexual attention to assert her sexual innocence and her unprotected state. Furthermore, she emphasizes her social superiority to her husband by having her aristocratic would-be paramours proclaim her innate worth and deplore the inequality of the match. Their sexual desire for her validates her role at the center of high society. Her final move is to depict the opposite side of this proposition, showing Mr. Robinson's social inferiority by detailing his attraction to common women. Read this way, the sexual escapades of the Robinsons reflect their innate differences in social position. Mary Robinson, raised as a lady and with familial aristocratic connections, is recognized as an appropriate consort for lords and members of the landed gentry. Mr. Robinson, the illegitimate son of a recently landed squire who "had acquired a considerable fortune in trade" but had neglected "the finer pursuits of mental powers," is drawn to illicit relationships with the lowest of women (150). His inferiority is emphasized by his depravity: like Lyttelton, he has a sexual appetite, but he indulges it in the basest possible way while ignoring the "merit" and "value" of his wife.

The culmination of Robinson's position as high-society spectacle and object of male attention occurs when she performs as Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and attracts the Prince of Wales' attention.[142] Perhaps to defend herself from charges of fame mongering, she emphasizes that they established a lengthy "confidential

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[142] The specific production was David Garrick's adaptation, which uses only the last two acts (Byrne 97).

correspondence" before meeting privately (253). Still, the Prince's attention to Robinson in public is pronounced, making her a spectacle even before they consummate their affair (according to Robinson). The Prince singles her out and distinguishes her, intensifying her role as the object of aristocratic male attention. When Robinson first performs for the royal family, she is flustered and says she "hurried through the first scene, owing to the fixed attention with which the Prince of Wales honoured me" (244). Robinson is not alone in noticing his regard as "The Prince's particular attention was observed by every one" (244). This pattern is repeated at a later public entertainment, when the Prince makes various signs to Robinson (who attends with her husband): "So marked was his Royal Highness's conduct that many of the audience observed it; several persons in the Pit directed their gaze at the place where I sat." The following day a coded reference to the event is made in a newspaper (251).[143] As the affair progresses, it grows more public, as, according to Robinson, the Prince "avowedly distinguished me at all public places of entertainment, at the King's hunt, near Windsor, at the reviews, and at the theatres" (283). Robinson finds herself a celebrity, not merely the center of attention in fashionable society but a universally known public figure: "Whenever I appeared in public, I was overwhelmed by the gazing of the multitude" (274). Because spectacle and male attention are so closely intertwined, Robinson's affair with the Prince places her at the center of London society and gossip.

It is in her portrayal of the affair with the Prince that the appeal of *Evelina* as a literary model becomes most apparent. It allows Robinson to portray herself as a

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[143] Robinson's portrayal of the Prince's interest may be self-serving. The *Morning Post* reported that Mary directed her attention toward the Prince, rather than vice versa. Regardless, their flirtation was public (Byrne 106).

spectacle and an object of male desire while also asserting her innocence and innate gentility. The scripts of female identity available to Robinson were limited. Instead of presenting herself as a modern Nell Gwynn, Robinson instead chooses the sentimental Evelina. She is no mere royal plaything, a lower-class woman passed around fashionable circles. Rather, the attention she attracts functions to legitimize her high status. The Prince in this narrative is akin to Lord Orville: a man who is able to recognize her worth—to see her innate gentility—despite her ostensible low social position. To counter the narrative that she slept her way to the top, Robinson uses the strategies in Burney's novel to reframe male sexual interest as indicative of her own inherent value. Men recognize in her something singular, and this recognition finds expression via sexual desire.

What initially appears to be a throwaway line in the *Memoirs* provides a final parallel to *Evelina* and a key to how both texts link male sexual aggression to a woman's high status. Both Burney and Robinson depend upon the reader's possession of privileged information as they attempt to reinterpret sexual desire as indicative of social status. In *Evelina*, the protagonist's desirability takes on a different valence for readers than for the men she encounters. Readers suspect that her attractiveness—in terms of beauty, manner, and virtue—stems from her rank by birth. By offering them this information, Burney can use male sexual aggression to critique aristocrats (who assume they are preying on a lowborn and unprotected woman) while also suggesting that Evelina's social legibility as a gentlewoman sets her apart and incites male desire. Robinson cultivates the same dynamic.

The line is this: Robinson in the *Memoirs* reports that one of her acquaintances in London, Lord Northington, "frequently rallied me on what he thought my striking likeness to his family" (116). This comment refers tp the widespread rumors that Robinson was in fact the late Lord Northington's illegitimate daughter—rumors which Robinson "did not deny" (Byrne 15). In other words, Lord Northington would be Robinson's half-brother, and there would likely indeed be a family resemblance. The story is not totally implausible as the late Lord was Robinson's godfather and their families were acquainted. Robinson again emphasizes this connection in her description of the Pantheon. When she makes her début at the Pantheon and people speculate as to who she is, the only one who recognizes her is Lord Northington, who remarks, "I think I know her" (110). Like Evelina, Robinson carries the truth of her heritage in her countenance. Although she is not formally recognized as the Lord's daughter, she is recognized as looking like the Lord's family. Furthermore, this revelation helps explain why people in fashionable society recognize Robinson as possessing characteristics that are superior to her social position. As an illegitimate daughter, Robinson cannot hope to be acknowledged as Evelina eventually is, but her lineage does explain how she naturally attracts attention within the highest social circles. There is little evidence to either prove or disprove the theory that Robinson was Lord Northington's daughter, and we do not know whether she herself believed this idea or merely cultivated the rumors to promote her own public image. Either way, the fact that Robinson includes this reference in her *Memoirs* suggests that it is a key to her identity, specifically her unintentional ability to attract male attention.

Robinson's nickname of "Perdita," after the role in which she attracted the

Prince's attention, proves apt. The *Memoirs*, like *Evelina*, invokes the "lost princess"

folklore motif to explain the singularity of a supposedly lowborn character. In *The

Winter's Tale*, Perdita is of noble blood but hidden from her father and raised by

shepherds. She attracts the attention of Prince Florizel, whose father refuses to let his son

marry a mere shepherdess. At the end of the play Perdita's true identity is revealed,

allaying fears of cross-class desire. The play follows a classic romance plot in which

Florizel's attraction to Perdita is its own testament to her nobility. The match threatens to

disrupt social hierarchies but ultimately reinforces them, proving that people who share

the same rank unconsciously recognize each other through the mechanism of sexual

attraction. Of course, Robinson's nickname is partly coincidental—it is unlikely she

could have anticipated the Prince's attendance at this particular play, let alone his

attraction to her. However, it is possible that Robinson encouraged the "Perdita"

nickname once the affair had started and it had appeared in the press. Regardless, it is a

fitting appellation for the Mary Robinson portrayed in the *Memoirs*: a woman who uses

the most potent ammunition against her—a series of affairs with notable men—to instead

argue for her status as a gentlewoman.

Summary

Burney and Robinson both triangulate the social positions of their protagonists

through the reactions of those around them. Their social reception—the fact that they are

the center of attention within fashionable circles, and the fact that this attention is often

figured as male desire—indicates their "real" rank, even as their socially assigned status

identity is understood as mysterious or marginal. Their social legibility is intact,

demonstrated by the attention they attract in high society and more specifically by their ability to engage the affections of model aristocrats like Lord Orville and the Prince of Wales. Although the texts gesture toward inner qualities, referencing Evelina's "worth" and Mary Robinson's "merit" and "value," there is no clear distinction between surface and depth, inner versus external attributes. While the reader has access to the protagonists' motivations and feelings through the first-person narration in each text (demonstrating their genteel refinement), the members of fashionable society who encounter these young women can only judge them by appearances: their beauty, how they behave, their dress, their comportment, their modesty, etc. The fact that Evelina and Mary Robinson distinguish themselves—even find themselves spectacles—within these circles indicates that they do present as gentlewomen. There is thus a perfect correspondence between the virtues the reader sees and the young women's evident external attractions. Moreover, this correspondence validates the idea that the social hierarchy is based on essential differences which are communicated via the body. This interpretation is validated by the "Perdita" folklore myth at work in both narratives, which affirms the true but hidden nobility of Evelina and Mary Robinson.

However, while this strategy of indirectly asserting status identity works within literary texts, it has limitations as a cultural practice. As a standard of behavior, the social legibility presented in these two texts is too abstract to provide guidance. Since Evelina's and Robinson's status is indicated via their social reception (for example, their ability to incite male sexual desire), the texts largely focus on others' responses rather than the protagonists' manners or behavior. Proper behavior is largely defined by what it is not, positioned against, on the one hand, aristocratic excess and affectation, and on the other,

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middling vulgarity. What these texts illustrate is the increasingly abstract nature of social legibility, a development that, particularly for women, makes it more difficult to articulate genteel behavior in a way that does not merely focus on absences: of sexual knowledge, of affectation, of art or artifice, and so forth. The portrayals of standards of behavior in *Evelina* and the *Memoirs* indicate the increasingly problematic nature of visual distinctions of status in the late eighteenth century. Both Burney and Robinson depict their heroines as achieving distinction within fashionable circles, but they do not describe the particular behaviors or manners—other than their beauty—that set them part. Furthermore, these authors tie the problems associated with social legibility to those of the aristocracy itself, as their critiques of aristocrats illustrate. While they differ in their responses to the question of aristocratic rule—Burney is more conservative and Robinson more progressive—both authors use literary works to intervene in questions of aristocratic legitimacy, particularly the notion of innate nobility.

In the Preface to *Evelina* Burney describes her protagonist as "y*oung, artless, and inexperienced,*" not faultless, but "*the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire*" (10). In other words, Evelina is defined by what she does *not* possess: maturity, experience, and art. Burney returns to the familiar art and nature binary to situate Evelina firmly on the side of the latter: not merely "*Nature*" but "*Nature in her simplest attire.*" But this description again fails to clarify what attributes Evelina should demonstrate. Even "delicacy," a term of approbation for Evelina's behavior, usually refers to pretending ignorance about a topic or leaving something unpleasant unsaid—absence rather than presence. Lord Orville and Sir Clement's approbation of Evelina's appearance of "modesty" and "intelligence" does not clarify what those attributes look like. Lady

Howard's praise of her "gentleness," "natural graces," and "certain air of inexperience and innocency" is similarly vague.

The attribute most commonly assigned to Evelina is artlessness, a concept that gained currency as genteel behavior and fashion became increasingly seen as overdone and affected. But artlessness is no more precise a mode of social behavior than the other characteristics Burney uses to describe idealized feminine manners. Indeed, it is even more ephemeral. When Reverend Villars calls his protégé "artless as purity itself," he expresses the opacity of artlessness as a characteristic (21). Indeed, the idea of artlessness as acting without art suggests that attempting it would negate the attribute at its most basic level. Artlessness cannot be actively attempted or cultivated; it can only be passively embodied. To define Evelina's artlessness as a pattern of recognizable behaviors would be to admit that this quality could be mimicked, which would undermine the function of artlessness as a critique of conventionalized and artificial manners.

While readers can interpret Evelina's "artlessness" as a new feminine ideal of innocence and passivity, Burney's consideration of the social hierarchy, particularly the failed leadership of the aristocracy, suggests that this standard of behavior is classed as well as gendered. By positioning Evelina as an unacknowledged member of the elite, Burney suggests that the fashionable trappings of nobility warp genteel manners, which should manifest without effort. In other words, if status does indeed endow members of upper ranks with naturally superior morals, virtues, and talents, then attempts to consciously manipulate behavior (for example, through affectation) prevent these attributes from shaping conduct. Thus, Evelina's isolation in the country perfects her artlessness, allowing her inherently noble qualities to manifest unimpeded. This is a

solution that appears specific to women. Lord Orville escapes the worst effects of urban high society through mechanisms we are not privy to as readers. But Lord Orville cannot be defined by artlessness. Worldly experience is necessary for aristocratic men, future leaders of the nation. For women, the solution to aristocratic excess and affectation appears to be withdrawal. While Burney takes advantage of the phenomenon of fashionable sociability to position Evelina as a lady, the knowledge, power, and agency her heroine would gain with sustained contact with such society would destroy her artlessness. Evelina shines briefly within fashionable circles, but she does not explore the political implications or opportunities of spectacle. At the beginning of the novel Lady Howard states that Evelina "seems born for an ornament to the world," and it is this role that Evelina accepts: decorative rather than active (124). Characters like Evelina and Lord Orville will reinvigorate the aristocracy from within, combatting its useless and damaging luxury, fashion, and manners. However, for women, the solution to aristocratic failings is to withdraw from the world in order to cultivate—rather than corrupt—innately superior attributes and manners.

This is not to suggest that Burney presents this feminine ideal uncritically. Burney's oft-studied "doubleness" in her writing, not to mention her frequent and biting satire, suggest that she is by no means a mouthpiece for patriarchal ideology.[144] As Julia Epstein argues, Burney was a "closet feminist" who deployed "ironic manipulations of

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[144] See Epstein (*Iron Pen* and "Fanny Burney's Epistolary Voices"), Judith Lowder Newton, and Kristina Straub for feminist readings of Burney.

narrative voice" in her use of the epistolary form ("Epistolary Voices" 165).[145] We see

this strategy in *Evelina*. The frequent eruptions of violence in the text indicate that,

though artlessness is an ideal, it is also manifestly dangerous. Evelina incites male desire

but she cannot control it or in most scenarios extricate herself from threatening situations.

Furthermore, she cannot even register sexual advances as such, as both Mary Poovey and

Ruth Bernard Yeazell argue, since recognition of sexual desire would destroy her

innocence (Epstein, *Iron Pen* 111-2; Poovey 24-6; Yeazell 130). (During Sir Clement's

attempted rape, for example, she is unable to articulate her fears that he will rape her and

instead claims to be afraid he will "murder" her [100].) Although Burney's conclusion

supports an idealized version of the aristocracy in which artlessness purifies (because it

does not impede) the exemplary behaviors and values of this group, the rest of her novel

suggests that this quality is incompatible with modern society. With aristocratic power

waning, Evelina's artlessness leaves her wholly unprepared for the predatory, self-

interested, appetitive world she inhabits.

Robinson also addresses the problem of artlessness, but she demonstrates that this

quality could be used strategically, particularly by those not fully accepted into

aristocratic circles. One of Robinson's numerous claims to fame was a particularly artless

form of attire. As Brock argues, it was Robinson who introduced to England the "*chemise*

de la reine" (or "Perdita chemise"), a simple white shift popularized by Marie Antoinette

(114, see Figure 15, next page). Brock posits that she used it to upend the hierarchical

configurations of fashion, positioning herself (a tradesman's daughter) as a fashion

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[145] In *The Iron Pen* Epstein argues that Burney's prose, typically characterized as
demonstrating decorum and self-effacement, only partially conceals the violence and
turmoil expressive of a changing social world and women's constrained role within it.

leader, a position identified with aristocratic women (113-4; see also Diego Saglia, 189-

95). The chemise is part of her self-promotion and publicity, situating her as more truly

aristocratic than the nobility. However, Robinson's choice to wear the chemise can be

further contextualized by the *Memoirs*, even though it does not describe the chemise

directly. Robinson's attire, including the

chemise, demonstrates her artlessness and

positions her as leading the aristocracy away

from affectation and indulgence (See Figure 16,

next page).

    Robinson's frequent descriptions of her

attire, especially the simple, unadorned frock

she wears at Ranelegh, suggest that she did not

indulge in the excesses of high society. Brock

notes that Robinson first wore the chemise de la

reine to the opera in October 1782, years after

Figure 15. Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun. "Marie Antoinette en Chemise." 1783.

her first appearance at Ranelegh. But given Robinson's association with this fashion

trend in the public imagination, it seems likely that Robinson meant her simple attire at

Ranelegh to be read as a precursor to the notorious chemise. This description (and a later

account of a different dress as "more calculated to display maternal assiduity than elegant

and tasteful dishabille") implies that her adoption of the *chemise de la reine* was

symptomatic of her youthful artlessness and domestic duties, rather than her desire to

revolutionize and eroticize aristocratic fashions (174). Robinson's emphasis on simplicity

here and later in her adoption of the *chemise de la reine* is likely also a response to the

fact that she was portrayed in caricatures as participating in the worst excesses of aristocratic dress. As Figures 17 and 18 illustrate (next page), Robinson's image fits into the pattern of aristocratic luxury increasingly lampooned in the popular press. Robinson thus reframes her sartorial choices as those of an artless ingénue. Robinson's descriptions of her attire in the Memoirs attempt to refute criticism that the *chemise de la*

Figure 16. William Ridley, detail from "Mrs Robinson." Portrait after a drawing by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Paper with stipple, 1799. © Trustees of the British Museum.

reine was explicitly sexual and designed to attract attention. Instead, it fits into a pattern of simple and practical dress that Robinson wore throughout her life, and it demonstrates the artlessness or lack of theatricality in social contexts that she affirms throughout the *Memoirs*.[146] Robinson's display of artlessness positions her as reforming the aristocracy, particularly its indulgence and luxury. But her descriptions of attire in the *Memoirs* also

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[146] Robinson was likely also responding to the anxiety regarding actresses and aristocratic women. As Byrne notes, because actresses were so adept at feigning nobility, and because they were often costumed in second-hand clothing from aristocratic ladies, people feared a loss of distinction between the two (81). Robinson thus labors to position herself as naturally (rather than artfully) aristocratic.

assign moral values to this costume: it is simple, practical, and aligned with domestic duties.[147]
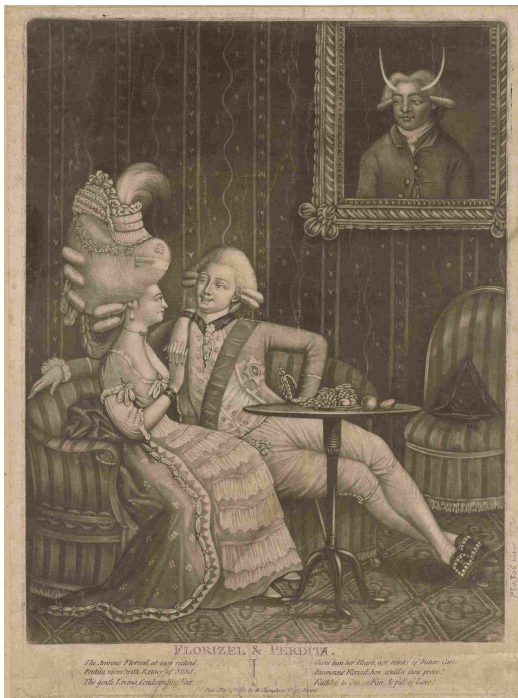

Figure 17. Unknown artist, "Florizel and Perdita." Mezzotint with some etching, 1781. © Trustees of the British Museum. Note Robinson's elaborate headdress.

Figure 18. Unknown artist, detail from "Florizel and Perdita." Etching and engraving, 1780. © Trustees of the British Museum. Note the similarities in dress and hair between Robinson and the woman in Figure 12.

While Burney presents the aristocratic and modern worlds on a collision course, Robinson instead presents a more hybridized social scene in which the aristocracy is not regenerated from within but from without. Although she insists on her innate high status by invoking the "Perdita" folklore myth, she also suggests that she has benefited from the

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[147] The way Robinson describes her fashion sense also aligns with her larger project of presenting herself as a sentimental heroine. As Barker-Benfield notes, "simplicity and naturalness" were standards of female taste, and these attributes were aligned with sensibility and the sentimental novel. In these works, "Taste was identical with morality" (206-7).

range of social positions she has occupied or been forced to occupy: member of the merchant class, working woman (onstage and in print), wife and mother, celebrity, and fashion icon. Indeed, these descriptions of work are departures in a text which otherwise characterizes Robinson as a conventional sentimental heroine. Moreover, they are the only hints that she held more radical views later in life, moving in the same circles as William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft and writing the feminist *Letter to the Women of England* (1799), which advocated female education. Adriana Craciun asserts that Robinson looked to Marie Antoinette as a model of "feminist meritocracy" as she attempted to navigate the competing versions of bourgeois and aristocratic femininity (91, 83). Robinson challenges the portrayal of the French queen as a symbol of aristocratic excess by emphasizing her role as wife, mother, and artist—a similar strategy to that she uses to portray herself in the *Memoirs* (89). Robinson's identification with both bourgeois and aristocratic notions of identity in the *Memoirs* can help clarify how her view of status as innate was tempered by her belief that the aristocracy needed to incorporate specific values from other social groups in order to retain its legitimacy and leadership.[148]

Contrary to the longstanding view that gentility and labor were incompatible, Robinson suggests that work, particularly artistry, prevents the moral decay that came to characterize the nobility in the 1780s. Robinson's upbringing as a merchant's daughter means that she does not shy away from work when her financial circumstances require it.

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[148] Craciun studies Robinson's poetry about Marie Antoinette as opposed to the *Memoirs*. As her analysis indicates, Robinson expressed more radical views in her other writing, particularly her novels. The interpretation of Robinson's schema of status in the *Memoirs* presented here should not be taken as her final view on the matter; rather, her self-construction as a sentimental heroine indicates her awareness of the particular ideologies and assumptions inherent in this subject position.

The fact that she engages in artistic labors—acting, writing, and fashion—elevates her efforts. Robinson still adheres to the standard of artlessness (here figured as a Romantic idea of natural and unpracticed genius), but she implies that a productive use of one's time and talents demonstrates true merit. In the *Memoirs* Robinson still supports the implicit superiority of the aristocracy, and she sees social legibility as a fundamental aspect of aristocratic legitimacy. However, she reacts to anti-aristocratic sentiment by carefully aligning herself against luxury and excess via the trope of artlessness. Robinson, like Evelina, is young and socially inexperienced, and she presents her behavior as unaffected. But she also links artlessness to attire (explicitly forgoing ornate dresses, jewelry, and hairpieces) and to labor (illustrating how natural taste and genius could be used productively). Portraying herself as both insider and outsider, Robinson regenerates the aristocracy from without while reaffirming her own innate nobility.

Although Robinson provides more concrete examples of what artlessness might entail, the *Memoirs* follows *Evelina* in its silence about what exactly artlessness looks like. Even Robinson's *chemise de la reine*, the most specific example of artlessness, is problematic, because it was seen as a deliberate attempt for Robinson to attract attention and elevate her status as a celebrity. The valorization of artlessness responds to anti-aristocratic sentiment by reasserting the natural leadership and superiority of aristocrats. It reforms aristocratic manners and dress, and in doing so helps the ruling classes retain their power. But it also weakens social legibility as a means of upholding social distinction in public places. After the repeal of sumptuary laws, the terms of social legibility had become much more ephemeral (gait, beauty, manners, lodging and carriage,

livery, etc.). With the rise of artlessness they threaten to become so vague as to be practically meaningless.

Perhaps this is why artlessness is more a literary than a cultural phenomenon. As we see in these two texts, it is easier to call someone "artless" and "natural" or to proclaim a character's innocence than it is to actually see these qualities encoded on the body. Furthermore, literary constructions of artlessness are easier to sustain than a real life persona or identity. *Evelina* takes place over the course of only six months and ends before the heroine's innocence would have begun to seem contrived (after her marriage, for example). The explicitly literary characteristics of Robinson's autobiography suggest that the achievement of feminine artlessness can only be sustained through omission or concealment. Indeed, Robinson may well be drawing a satiric comparison between her licentious reputation and her self-portrayal as innocent to point out the utter artifice of contemporary ideals of femininity, particularly as expressed in literature. Robinson implies that sentimental posturing is fine for a literary portrayal (and does much to vindicate the heroine, as she and other "scandalous memoirists" realized), but her actual survival depended upon knowledge, self-interest, and a canny understanding of human nature. The reader registers this tension between Robinson-as-writer and Robinson-as-character. While they might prefer the sentimental, younger Robinson, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the corrupting world has little use for innocence, artlessness, and sentimentality. The artless sentimental heroine is of course a fiction and is a product of fiction. However, in these texts we begin to see fissures between the literary representation of status through social legibility and the reality of social circumstances in the late eighteenth century.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: AUSTEN AND THE FICTION OF SOCIAL LEGIBILITY

Scholars often regard Austen as a bridge to the nineteenth-century realist novel in terms of both content and form. Her novels extend the concerns of eighteenth-century novels while inaugurating practices that become common within the genre. For example, Austen's use of free indirect discourse continues the eighteenth-century engagement with questions of narrative truth by combining subjective first-person narration with more objective third-person narration. Like Burney and Robinson, she focuses on protagonists who are marginalized in some way—by gender, by lack of wealth, by status—while moving away from the romance narratives that legitimized the protagonists of *Evelina* and the *Memoirs*.[149] At their core, Austen's novels explore how people define and perceive gentility. Is it a matter of internal quality or external attributes such as wealth or appearance? What is the social role of gentlemen and gentlewomen? How can a person distinguish the genteel classes? In her narration and plot Austen explores the relationship between gentility, representation, and the body, and her novels therefore help us recognize the changing relationship between self-presentation and status in the early nineteenth century.

Austen shares with the other writers examined in this project an interest in how people define and enact gentility, specifically, how people recognize gentility on a visual

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[149] Austen's protagonists are marginalized in relative terms, of course. They are members of the lesser gentry and they frequently face the threat of downward mobility or impoverished gentility should they not marry well. The lesser gentry or pseudo-gentry, to use Alan Everitt's term, refers to non-landowning gentlemen (members of the clergy, professionals, rentiers, etc.) and their relations. David Spring argues that there were strong social and political ties between the gentry and the pseudo-gentry (60-8).

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level. As critics such as C. Knatchbull Bevan, Juliet McMaster, Douglas Murray, Nora Nachumi, Elena Pallarés-García, and Karen Valihora (among others) have observed, Austen's novels, particularly *Mansfield Park* (1814), are concerned with the visual field: the dynamics of looking, picturesque framing, spectatorship, theatricality, and so forth. In terms of social legibility, Austen's focus on perception departs from the eighteenth-century focus on representation. *Clarissa,* for example, posits that the body communicates status unconsciously, a pattern followed by *Evelina* and Robinson's *Memoirs*, in which elite women, although unacknowledged as such, find themselves spectacles within fashionable circles. The eighteenth-century self-writing studied in this project shares the basic assumption that the success or failure of social legibility depends upon whether the persons being observed are convincing in their self-presentations. As the century progresses, writers increasingly demonstrate their belief that observers can distinguish between real and feigned gentility. While Mary Carleton considered imitation indistinguishable from true high status, Richardson and Burney demonstrate that unselfconscious and artless manners distinguish real ladies. Austen, on the other hand, relocates social legibility with the observer, and suggests that, regardless of how people present themselves, observers see what they want to see. She portrays human perception as profoundly subjective, influenced by self-interest and self-delusion (something Defoe hinted at in his double-voiced narrations). In Austen's novels it is impossible to separate appearance from the perception of it. Austen satirizes the notion of social legibility by portraying a world in which self-interest colors even ostensibly objective measures such as height. In doing so she denaturalizes the genteel body and exposes the fiction of social legibility.

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Within eighteenth-century self-writing, questions of perception are closely

aligned with questions of perspective, particularly narrative viewpoint. Austen is not

strictly a self-writer according to the definition of this project, but her use of free indirect

discourse responds to many of the concerns about perspective staged in first-person texts.

Austen's use of free indirect discourse, which combines first- and third-person narration,

allows her to give readers the sense of accessing the more intimate and immediate

sensations captured in first-person narration, while using the omniscient third-person

narrator to provide objective judgment. Many critics see Austen's use of free indirect

discourse as a response to the particular narrative perspectives that dominated eighteenth-

century literature.[150] Free indirect discourse can address some of the limitations of

epistolary narration by imposing an objective viewpoint, as we saw in Chapter III's

discussion of first- and third-person narration. But free indirect discourse also muddies

the distinction between these two perspectives because it "allows fragments of a

character's speech to blend indiscriminately with the narrator's 'authoritative' voice"

(Dussinger 98). Characters' perceptual limitations or biases can infect even the narrator's

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[150] Ian Watt sees free indirect discourse as combining Richardson's subjective "realism of presentation" with Fielding's objective "realism of assessment" (297). He sees this style as the culmination of eighteenth-century efforts at realism. Joe Bray is not interested in evaluating free indirect discourse as a narrative strategy but rather tracking its genesis. He looks to Richardson as a forerunner of Austen, noting that her ironic juxtaposition of narrator and character in free indirect discourse parallels Richardson's combination of temporally distinct perspectives from the same narrator in his epistolary novels. Michael McKeon examines narration as a feature of the distinction between public and private that arises in the eighteenth century. He sees *Evelina* as an influence on the domestic novel, particularly Austen, in that it creates a "third-person effect" in which we witness the private acts of characters interpreting other characters, often as they read letters. Free indirect discourse extends this strategy. McKeon's larger point is that third-person narration, usually considered "public" compared to the epistolary form's "privacy," in fact expresses the private and often unacknowledged motivations of letter-writers (*Secret History* 532-8, 700-5).

objective assessment, or at least render that assessment difficult to distinguish. Free indirect discourse registers Austen's skepticism of human perception, showing that, even for the reader, subjective and objective judgment cannot be extricated from each other.

This engagement with perception via narrative style reflects the content of Austen's novels, which frequently address misperception or misapprehension. Austen's heroines often mistake other peoples' character, such as Elizabeth Bennett's faith in Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) or Catherine Morland's initial naiveté about the Thorpe family in *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Less attention has been paid to how Austen's characters perceive (or misperceive) physical appearance, particularly her suggestion that the way characters evaluate attractiveness often correlates to the status or prospects of the person being judged. For example Darcy's initial denigration of Elizabeth's looks ("She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*") derives no doubt from his scorn for country society generally ("a collection of people in whom there is little beauty and no fashion") and her status as a member of the lesser gentry (9, 12). The fact that his opinion changes, while her attractiveness presumably does not, illustrates the imprecision and subjectivity of such judgments. By focusing on the vagaries of people's perception and assessment of others, Austen shows that social legibility is an illusion created by the prejudice and self-interest of the viewer.

Austen highlights the problems of perception by featuring visual media such as portraits or drawings, which dramatize how prejudice shapes judgment and representation. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen intertwines Elizabeth's increasingly positive opinion of Darcy with a new respect for his status. His estate, Pemberley, models the feudal ideal of a reciprocal landowner-tenant relationship, and during her visit

Elizabeth begins to rethink her impression of its owner. Austen represents her changing perceptions in an explicitly visual manner: "She stood several minutes before the picture [of Darcy] in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery" (162). The effect of the entire encounter creates "a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance" (162). Although Elizabeth had been aware of Darcy's status from the start, seeing him as an effective landlord—a true gentleman—quite literally changes her perception of him.

A similar example occurs in *Emma* (1815)*, in which the titular protagonist, believing her new acquaintance, Harriet Smith, to be the secret daughter of a gentleman, ascribes to her a variety of flattering characteristics. Emma draws a portrait of Harriet that reveals her misperceptions of her sitter: "Miss Smith has not those eyebrows and eyelashes," according to Mrs. Weston, and Mr. Knightley thinks Emma has "made her too tall" (43). Although Emma admits to deliberately "throw[ing] in a little improvement to the figure," the portrait reflects her broader delusions about Harriet, whom she (wrongly) believes genteel (42). Austen concretizes Elizabeth's and Emma's character assessments of Darcy and Harriet through artistic renderings. By showing how faces and bodies appear to change, Austen emphasizes the unstable nature of perception. In particular, Austen demonstrates how beliefs about a person's status inflect how we view them on even the most basic level of physical appearance.

The novel in which Austen most consistently dramatizes the interplay between self-interest, perspective, and judgment is *Mansfield Park*. The narrative follows the wealthy Bertram family as they take in a poor niece, Fanny Price, in order to provide her with better education and prospects. The shy and physically frail Fanny lives at the

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margins of the family, half servant and half family member. An observer rather than participant for much of the novel, Fanny witnesses the relationships and rivalries that develop between the Bertram siblings, Tom, Edmund, Maria, and Julia, and their neighbors, siblings Henry and Mary Crawford. Fanny's position in the household, along with the theatricality that pervades the novel, has prompted scholarly analyses of spectatorship and visual perception in the novel.[151] Critics such as Karen Valihora and Douglas Murray use the selective perspectives offered by the picturesque or looking glasses to describe how Austen's characters regard their world: narrowly, and with a view toward immediate gratification. I will suggest that Austen sees such limited perspective as an inescapable part of human nature, and she depicts misperception to illustrate how self-interest and stereotype generate social legibility.

Throughout *Mansfield Park* Austen blurs the boundaries between whom people find attractive and whom they *should* be attracted to, in terms of economic security or social ascension. Mary Crawford tries to direct her brother toward the unattached Julia, which Henry teasingly acknowledges, noting that Maria "has the advantage in every feature, and I prefer her countenance—but I like Julia best. Miss Bertram is certainly the handsomest, and I have found her the most agreeable, but I shall always like Julia best, because you order me" (73). Mary Crawford faces the same dilemma in her evaluation of Tom and Edmund. Tom "had been very much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred; and, indeed, his being the eldest was another strong claim" (75). In typical Austen fashion, Mary provides a list of

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[151] See Rose Mucignat, Nachumi, Valihora, and Nicholas M. Williams. Many approaches to spectatorship address theatricality, a major theme of the novel. See Paula Byrne ("We Must Descend"), Susan C. Greenfield, and David Marshall ("True Acting").

Tom's superior attributes before, almost as an afterthought, remarking on his status as the inheriting son—which is of course her primary consideration. Mary's "early presentiment of liking the eldest best" acknowledges her own crass self-interest (75). These scenes portray a slightly different dynamic than in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, in which misperception is unintentional or presented as benign. Instead, Henry and Mary register the fact that they are actively trying to shape their own perceptions and in doing so reveal their motivations for financially and socially advantageous marriages.

It is in how other characters perceive Henry Crawford, however, where Austen most explicitly satirizes social legibility, specifically the equation of gentility to an attractive physical appearance. The Bertram sisters find Henry at first "absolutely plain, black and plain." However, by a second meeting he is "not so very plain; he was plain to be sure, but then he had so much countenance, and his teeth were so good, and he was so well made, that one soon forgot he was plain" (72). A third meeting proves him not plain at all but "the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known" (72). But Henry's rise in attractiveness in Julia's and Maria's perspective parallels a quite literal decrease in stature in Mr. Rushworth's view. Frustrated by his fiancé's evident preference for Henry, Rushworth denigrates both his attractiveness and his height: "Handsome! Nobody can call such an undersized man handsome. He is not five foot nine. I should not wonder if he is not more than five foot eight. I think he is an ill-looking fellow" (125). Shunned by Maria, he later evaluates Henry as "not gentleman-like" and "not above five feet eight" (202-3). As Mary M. Chan notes, Austen uses height to dramatize power struggles, as is the case here where Rushworth underestimates Henry's height as a means of articulating his disapprobation of Henry's actions. Throughout the novel Henry's description varies

depending on the attitude of the person describing him. Even Fanny finds her judgment influenced by circumstance. She finds him "decidedly improved" when he visits her in Portsmouth, and it is impossible to tell if Henry's manners are actually improved or whether they merely seem so when compared to her family's vulgarity (407). According to Jane Stabler, in these scenes Austen "explores the way that relativity shapes perception" (x). More specifically, Austen satirizes the notion of the body as visual index of character by pointing out that, even if this were true, people's perception is so hopelessly tied to their own self-interest as to make legibility an impossible project.

But Austen drops hints that she wants to explore gentility specifically rather than character generally in her portrayal of Henry Crawford. Each time Rushworth subtracts inches from Henry's height, he accompanies this comment with a remark about being a gentleman. Henry ceases to be a gentleman when he stoops to "low" behavior: flirting with the engaged Maria, pitting Julia and Maria against each other, or hijacking the visit to Rushworth's home to gain unsupervised conversation with the sisters. Maria, Julia, and even Fanny find Henry more attractive, on the other hand, when he fulfills their idea of gentlemanly courtesy. These opposing views of Henry introduce instability into the concept of "gentility" itself. (Henry is a perfect gentleman to Maria and Julia but no gentleman at all to Rushworth.) In addition, they pose the vagaries of perception prompted by each character's self-interest.

Fanny's physical appearance also forms part of Austen's meditation on perception, appearance, and hierarchy. Mary Crawford, for example, notes the "wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks within the last six weeks" (242). The reader knows, however, that "Fanny's consequence increased on the departure

of her cousins," meaning that her attractiveness and the taste for her company increases only out of necessity—she is the only young woman at Mansfield Park (220). Indeed, until this point in the novel the reader receives the impression that characters rarely register Fanny's appearance at all, let alone misperceive her. Jenny Davidson argues that the fact that Fanny is beneath notice and that her modesty conceals many of her true feelings create a power differential in which her patrons' motives are much more legible to her than hers are to them (262). For Davidson, this opacity is gendered as well as classed, indicating that "virtue must often be a matter of negotiating dependency" rather than a value cultivated for its own sake (264). In other words, Fanny's resistance to the visual economy of the novel, a strategy often construed as illustrating her merit, may merely be a means by which she navigates her subservient position in the household.

Although Austen expresses skepticism of social legibility and the ideology that high status equates to moral and physical superiority, she does not abandon the idea of a landowning elite as national and community leaders. Marilyn Butler argues that, because Austen's satire is so sharp, some readers see her as critical of the gentry and possibly progressive. But according to Butler, "That would be to get her emphasis quite wrong. From the beginning, when she takes up a typically conservative plot, she is writing defensively—fearing subversion, advocating the values which in times past justified the rule of the gentry. She never allows us to contemplate any other ideology" (108).[152] In

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[152] As Butler's comment indicates, the question of whether Austen's novels express essentially conservative or progressive views is debated. Michael Karounos, Malcolm Miles Kelsall, Martin, Lionel Trilling, Mucignat and Mary Poovey see *Mansfield Park* as essentially conservative. Naomi Nachumi and Margaret Kirkham see Austen as progressive in terms of her feminism, if not her views of social hierarchy. Claudia Johnson interprets *Mansfield Park* as attempting to subvert the old order.

Mansfield Park Austen extends Burney's and Robinson's suggestions of reform to this class. The Bertrams, although only possessing a baronetcy (a rank that places them above the knighthood but below the peerage), exhibit many of the signs of aristocratic degeneracy displayed in *Evelina* and the *Memoirs*. Maria and Julia are self-indulgent and affected in manner, Tom leads a dissipated life, and Lady Bertram is useless. They leech value from the estate rather than contributing to it. While *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* gesture toward the role of landowner as pillar of the community in their descriptions of Knightley and Darcy, in *Mansfield Park* Sir Thomas leaves the estate to tend to his plantation in Antigua.[153] As Butler suggests, however, Austen depicts the failures of the Bertrams in order to highlight the proper role of the gentry rather than to dramatize its downfall.

In one reading of the novel, Austen situates Fanny Price as the figure who regenerates the Bertram clan and re-establishes them as community leaders. By elevating Fanny into the Bertram family through her marriage to Edmund, Austen implies that the degeneracy of the landowning class can be stemmed by incorporating a more flexible view of gentility that values virtue and morality over high birth. Fanny proves more suited to responsibilities of the genteel lady than either Maria or Julia, spoiled women ill-equipped to serve the estate's community. Fanny's unwavering morality and propriety, her self-sacrifice, her sense of duty, and her appreciation of Mansfield—illustrated most fully during her exile in Portsmouth—are qualities that ultimately prove superior to Lady

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[153] This feature of the novel has attracted much critical attention. Edward Said's assertion that British literature espoused a worldview that implicitly legitimized or rationalized imperialism sparked this debate (he uses *Mansfield Park* as a case study) (151). See Donna Landry, Moira Ferguson, Vivien Jones ("Reading for England"), Ruth Perry, and Clara Tuite for more on *Mansfield Park* and colonialism.

Bertram's beauty (the only attribute which elevated her) or her daughters' empty "elegance and accomplishments" (35, 459). She is far more suited to be mistress of the estate than Mary Crawford, whose insistence on living in London would have further weakened the Bertram family's community leadership. Austen defends the tradition of the landowning gentility while acknowledging that genteel attributes may not be natural and innate features of this social group. In this sense Fanny functions as a modern-day Pamela, a woman whose innate qualities ennoble her and whose gentility is legitimized via marriage.

However, Austen complicates this interpretation. To begin, Fanny does not become mistress of Mansfield Park but rather of Thornton Lacey, where Edmund is curate. Ironically, Fanny is more established at Mansfield than she ever was when she resided there. She becoms "the daughter that [Sir Thomas] wanted," but the estate is still directed by Sir Thomas, with Tom inheriting (467). Austen describes Sir Thomas as chastened, conscious of his failures as a parent. Yet it is unclear what impact his change of heart will have on the estate. The future of Mansfield is uncertain. Edmund and Fanny may succeed in providing spiritual leadership for the community, but whether the tenants and gentry of Mansfield Park will share a reciprocal relationship is unclear. The survival of the estate itself is questionable, dependent, as it is, on the increasingly unpopular slave trade.

Furthermore, as many critics have pointed out, Fanny herself is a problematic heroine.[154] While most critics would not go so far Nina Auerbach in calling her vampiric

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[154] Kirkham thinks that Austen "mocks" Fanny (231). Murray asserts that Fanny "is a part of Austen that she herself did not like" (25). Trilling sees Fanny as unlikeable because she follows an older model of long-suffering virtue (186).

(212), they point out that Fanny's frailty, meekness, and reserve frustrate readers. She is rarely an active agent and is instead frequently at the mercy of other characters' plots and plans. Indeed, Austen hints that the Bertrams create Fanny rather than receive her influence. As Sir Thomas notes, Fanny becomes the ideal gentlewoman through "the advantage of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (468). This statement suggests that the Bertram family's mistreatment of Fanny achieved the desired result. The Bertrams mold Fanny into the perfect daughter and spouse, and her respect and affection for Mansfield Park may be more the effect of fearful awe and perpetual consciousness of her own inferiority than natural regard. Fanny's education is an example of Michel Foucault's panopticon writ small, in which the household's surveillance and discipline create a docile subject. What does it say about the genteel landowning class, particularly women within this class, if the ideal gentlewoman is the product of deprivation, alienation, and mistreatment?

Just as Austen's portrayal of social legibility satirizes the idea of a clear correspondence between outward appearance on the one hand, and inward character and status on the other, Fanny's portrayal satirizes sentimental ideals of feminine behavior. Julia Pawl reads Fanny as exemplifying the characteristics of the eighteenth-century sentimental heroine, particularly embodying the quality of filial duty so central to conservative ideology. Fanny's sentimental qualities seem more problematic. Austen takes these ideals to their extreme conclusion, to the point where they nearly erase the woman enacting them. Fanny is often described as natural in her actions compared to the theatrical Mary Crawford. This artlessness allies her with Evelina and Mary Robinson. Fanny is the opposite of calculating; instead, she is constantly overwhelmed by

uncontrollable emotions. She eschews attention to the point that she nearly disappears. Characters forget about her or do not see her. Austen stresses Fanny's personal anti-theatricality in the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows* at Mansfield Park, when she thrice repeats that she "could not" and "cannot act" (166). This refusal to "act" can be read two ways: as an unwillingness to feign or perform socially, but also as an inability of taking any action to promote her own self-interest. Fanny's passivity may not warrant charges that Austen made her deliberately unlikeable, but it may well show that Austen believed the sentimental ideals associated with genteel femininity produce characters who, far from being legible, almost disappear.

Austen's conclusion to *Mansfield Park* presents both theatricality and artlessness as problematic modes of female behavior. Maria's and Julia's affectation and show are useless and damaging, but Fanny's deprivation and invisibility are little better. In these portrayals and in her consideration of Mansfield Park as an institution, Austen anticipates a larger questioning of the category of "gentleman" and "gentlewoman" in the nineteenth century. Novels such as *Mansfield Park* upset the notion that external attributes bear any relation to social status. Indeed, Austen makes clear that systems of social legibility merely reinforce the stereotypes associated with high rank and cater to the self-interest of people who believe in both inherent difference between the genteel and the non-genteel and their ability to discern such distinctions. While ultimately Austen espouses an essentially conservative social and political view, advocating to preserve the landowning gentry as leaders of the community, she takes members of this group to task for squandering their social and economic capital. The distinction between the genteel and the non-genteel had been a central concern throughout the eighteenth century, with good

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character becoming increasingly important to how people identified a "true" gentleman and gentlewoman. But traditional ideologies of status continued to function, particularly in literary representations, in which aspects of appearance frequently communicate rank.

Nineteenth-century literature will move inward, and character will continue to gain importance on its own terms. Indeed, Austen's insistence that her heroines are plain (Anne Elliot of *Persuasion* [1817]and Catherine Morland) or less attractive than their siblings (Elizabeth Bennett and Elinor Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* [1811]) highlights the increasing importance of character while also dismantling social legibility. Because it is such a commonplace now, it is easy to forget that Austen's ordinary-looking heroines were relatively unique. Moll Flanders, Roxana, Pamela (as well as Shamela and Syrena), Clarissa, Evelina, and Mary Robinson are all depicted as uncommonly attractive women. For Clarissa and Evelina, beauty is a component of social legibility and therefore linked inextricably to their high status. For Moll Flanders and Pamela, beauty is a component of the innate gentility that aids and legitimizes their upward social mobility through marriage. Austen divorces beauty from elite status to emphasize her characters' other admirable qualities—qualities that will, over the course of the nineteenth century, become increasingly important in distinguishing true gentility from mere heredity. Ideologies of status continued to influence nineteenth-century literature. One could argue they continue to inflect perceptions of class difference today. Austen's work represents an important denaturalization of the social hierarchy that reflects its changing representation in literature.

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