

## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to reassess the role of women as significant collectors and patrons of natural history, fine arts and antiquities in the long eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The agency and achievements of early modern female collectors and patrons have been largely eclipsed by histories of gentlemen virtuosi and connoisseurs, which examine patriarchal displays of collecting and patronage while overlooking and undervaluing the contributions made by their female counterparts. These works, in general, have operated within an androcentric framework and dismissed or failed to address the ways in which objects were commissioned, accumulated, or valued by those who do not fit into prevailing male-dominated narratives. Only in the last decade have certain scholars begun to take issue with this historiographical ignorance and investigated the existence and importance of a corresponding culture of collecting and patronage in which women exercised considerable authority. Most of this literature consists of limited, superficial portrayals that do not tell us much about the realities of female collecting and patronage in any given time or place.

This project attempts to fill the historiographical gap through a detailed study of several of the most prominent British female collectors and patrons of the long eighteenth century and an analysis of how their experiences and activities disrupt or complicate our understanding of contemporary collecting and patronage practices. Although a significant intention of this thesis is to reveal the lack of well-focused or sustained scholarship on this topic, its primary objective is to restore women to their central place in the history of

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the eighteenth century has been expanded to embrace related historical movements that occurred in the first two and a half decades of the nineteenth century. Specifically, this project will concentrate on the period between 1715 and 1825.

early modern collecting and patronage by providing evidence of a highly engaged, invested and functional network of enthusiastic and experienced female collectors and patrons. These women, influenced by contemporary intellectual movements and aesthetic trends, forged a culture of collecting and patronage which paralleled that of their male peers while retaining a distinctly feminine character.

To demonstrate that women have been ignored in canonical histories of collecting and patronage is relatively simple—the literature speaks for itself. Yet, the task of incorporating women into value systems and theoretical structures that have conventionally considered man the measure of consequence is more complicated. This difficulty is one that fundamentally affects analyses of gender and deserves attention. Feminist historian Gerda Lerner cautioned against writing the history of “women worthies,” or “compensatory history,” in her 1975 article, “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges.”<sup>2</sup> Lerner argued that when “traditional,” or male-oriented, questions and methodologies are applied to females, histories of “notable women” result and that these accounts, which “fit women’s past into the empty spaces of historical scholarship,” are inadequate and misrepresentative.<sup>3</sup>

Lerner is correct to an extent. There is a real challenge in conceptualizing a women’s history that is not based on exceptional contributions or prodigious accomplishments. Research that privileges “notable” or “worthy” women is likely to feature extraordinary case studies that are atypical of female behavior, effectively disassociating or divorcing those individuals from broader cultural conditions by emphasizing their singularity. While this project’s focus is on the achievements of select

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<sup>2</sup> Gerda Lerner, “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (1975): 5-14, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

female figures that are *worthy* of study, it aims not to separate their work and activities from that of their contemporaries, but rather contextualize the actions and experiences of female collectors and patrons to substantiate their larger import and clearly link them to established cultural and intellectual forces. Thus, their historicization may be understood not as an issue of insertion into “empty spaces,” but one of inclusion to form a whole.

### *Historiography*

As stated above, histories of Enlightenment culture collecting and patronage have favored male-dominated narratives. Phillip Ayres’s *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (1997) is an excellent example of this type of scholarship.<sup>4</sup> This groundbreaking book was the first to investigate how ancient Roman ideals, art, and architecture were adopted into Anglo aristocratic traditions. According to Ayres, the assimilation of antiquarian symbols into the British cultural consciousness was initiated and maintained by the patronage and collecting of men such as Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester, Henry Herbert, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke and 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Montgomery, and Sir Andrew Fountaine who commissioned and exhibited wares modeled after classical designs. Though Ayres validates his thesis, conspicuously absent from his investigation is any indication that women may have played a complementary role in this process.

In a similar vein, Jonathan Scott’s *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (2003) also overlooks female collecting and patronage efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Conceived as a survey, *The Pleasures of Antiquity* examines how elite collections of

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<sup>4</sup> Phillip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art and The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2003).

classical art were assembled, provides exhaustive portraits of the chief collectors and their cabinets, and considers the impact of antiquities on early modern taste. Scott concentrates his study on a cluster of elite, professional men including Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, John Bargrave, Thomas Herbert, 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke, Richard Topham, Charles Townley, Thomas Bruce, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin, and Richard Payne Knight. Nowhere, in this otherwise comprehensive history, are women established as principal participants, or even acknowledged as collaborators, in contemporary collecting or patronage endeavors.

Current literature, such as Vicky Coltman's *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800* (2006), continues to perpetuate the neglect of women as contributors to the culture of collecting and patronage in academic discourse.<sup>6</sup> Despite Coltman's masterful account of the accumulation and reinvention of ancient material culture in British country homes and the development of an aristocratic, cosmopolitan intellectual milieu inspired by classical precedent, her research fails to explore patterns or trends in the way women shared in the reimagining of antiquity or factored into the organization and display of collections inspired by the antique.

When women are referenced, they are often discounted as amateurish hobbyists, figuring peripherally as an exception to the practice of orthodox collecting and patronage.<sup>7</sup> For example, in *The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire and the Birth of an Obsession* (2008), Andrea Wulf suggests that women participated in the enjoyable "pastime" of collecting foliage and vegetation because "unlike the collecting of insects it

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<sup>6</sup> Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Wulf, *The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire and the Birth of an Obsession* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

did not involve cruelty” and was thus a “healthy and innocent pursuit for ladies.”<sup>8</sup> Such chronic diminishment of the female collector and patron has relegated her contributions and successes to the margins of historical scholarship and affected a considerable breach in our understanding of women’s history as it relates to collecting and patronage.

In recent years, a limited number of academic enterprises have been carried out with the objective of evaluating women’s historical agency through their participation in collecting and patronage activities. *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, edited by Cynthia Miller Lawrence, is the most important of these works dedicated to the study of “matronage.” This 1997 anthology had the “modest” goal of “moving toward more general theories of patronage by focusing on an expanded universe of patrons.”<sup>9</sup> *Women and Art* reflects on women’s broader participation in aesthetic culture and succeeds in supplanting the gendered rhetoric with which patronage and collecting is ordinarily discussed. It achieves this by reconsidering widespread hypotheses about women’s social space and familial roles and concentrating its analysis entirely on prominent individuals and groups of women that actively engaged in the commissioning and accruing of works of art and architecture between the years 1300-1800.

Works such as *Women and Art* confirm the existence of “matronage” throughout history; however, they only accomplish a general and preliminary survey of the topic.

Specifically, these histories do not trace the development of collecting and patronage as

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Miller Lawrence, ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey’s *Great Women Collectors* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1999) built off of *Women and Art* expanding its scope geographically and chronologically to incorporate women from nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America. This work contains one germane chapter dedicated to eighteenth-century female collectors.

female practice over the long eighteenth century and attempt to convey the complexity of the lived domestic and social experiences of female collectors and patrons through condensed essays, leaving much sustained analysis and interpretation to be completed.

This thesis moves past such inadequacies by advancing original research garnered from a variety of primary sources including personal correspondence, autobiographies, contemporary texts, sale registers, advice literature, satirical art, paintings, and other materials generated between the years 1715 and 1825. Analysis of primary sources resolve how women interacted with their cabinets and fellow collectors, determine the epistemologies which governed the assemblage or commissioning of particular items, reveal the ways in which female collectors and their collections reflected social developments and fashion trends, and verify how male critics, satirists, and colleagues helped shape contemporary conceptions of female collectors and patrons.

Although the above sources provide a solid foundation for this study, they are not without limitations. First, the selection and type of primary material related to the topic is narrow. The voices of eighteenth-century women are typically absent from well preserved, widely available, and thoroughly detailed “public” accounts (corporate, institutional, and civic) that address the large scale, or institutionalized, collection and patronage of natural history, fine arts, and antiquities. The bulk of records composed by or about female collectors and patrons tends to be personal in nature consisting of letters and journal entries. Second, extant sources are often brief, decontextualized, and lack precise explanations about important considerations such as the motivation behind the collection of a specific type of fossil or the commissioning of a particular painting. In response to these limitations, an examination of less private primary sources such as

auction catalogs and published manuscripts uncovers a more material understanding of female collecting and patronage. By determining what an individual owned in her collection (in what quantity or quality), or what types of materials and projects she commissioned, the priorities of the collector becomes clearer. These priorities may then serve as a useful framework with which to situate otherwise casual or obscure remarks made in personal records or hypothesize as to the overarching epistemology behind a collection.

To further assist in the analysis of primary documentation, this project borrows conceptual and theoretical models from histories of consumption. Historians of consumption have long been sensitive to meanings behind consumer behavior, asking how consumption was represented in early modern social thought and how it factored into the articulation of personal identities.<sup>10</sup> The application of such considerations to the study of collection and patronage, as a very specific form of consumption, has great import for this project. It is not enough to know that female collectors and patrons simply existed; their activities and practices must be given meaning. Meaning is derived by realizing the ways in which female collectors related to, or identified with, their collections, what values or symbols they associated with material things, and how their

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<sup>10</sup> See Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, eds., *Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982); John Brewer and Roy Porter, *Consumption and World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994); Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); Sara Pennell, "Consumption and Consumerism in Early Modern England," *Historical Journal* 42, no. 2 (1999), 549-564; Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

collecting and patronage customs conveyed meaning about their public and private selves.

### *Chapter Outline*

Chapter one examines the relationship between feminine domesticity and natural history collection and patronage and presents Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715-1785), as the central figure around whom a circle of informed and inspired male and female naturalists revolved. This chapter draws heavily from the personal correspondence of the Duchess's closest friend and fellow collector, Mary Delany (1700-1788), to elucidate how women interacted with their cabinets and expose the publicness of the female domesticate's relationship with natural history. An analysis of Anna Blackburne's (1726-1793) correspondence with Carl Linnaeus demonstrates the significance of Enlightenment schemes and theoretical rationales to this type of collecting. This chapter argues that the relationship between feminine domesticity and the collection and patronage of natural history encouraged public intellectual networking and fostered professional collegiality via the study, accumulation and exchange of scientific specimens and related objects.

Chapter two begins with an assessment of imagined constructions of the female fine arts collector. A brief survey of eighteenth-century satirical and advice literature demonstrates the perpetuation of period discourse which conflated aesthetic sentience and connoisseurship with masculinity and stressed feminine tendencies to frivolity, ignorance, and conspicuousness. Once established, this chapter complicates these period assumptions by examining the collecting and patronage experiences of Theresa Parker



(1745-1775). Although Parker's engagement with the fine arts was not exercised in a way that blatantly flouted proprieties, her display of intellectual prowess, independent judgment, and artistic sensibility in the collection of old master paintings and the commissioning of contemporary works belied period typecasts and confirmed a sophisticated female intervention in eighteenth-century visual culture.

Chapter three challenges prevailing scholarship which contends that the process of assimilation of the antique into British society, by way of the collection and patronage of antiquity, was initiated and sustained by a handful of aristocratic men. Analysis of the classically inspired patronage of Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1824) verifies that women also participated in the cultural program of classicism through the recovery, restoration and promotion of the antique past. After permanently relocating to Rome in 1815, the Duchess of Devonshire became highly integrated and invested in intellectual and artistic communities which advanced the preservation and reimagination of antiquity. Through her sponsorship of archeological excavations, patronage of neoclassical artists, and the republication and translation of classical texts, the Duchess of Devonshire established herself at the vanguard of female classicism.

## Chapter One

### A Public Engagement:

#### Female Domesticity and the Private Natural History Project

Over the course of the eighteenth century, interest in the study of natural history grew exponentially. Denis Diderot described the science's increasing popularity in Europe in an entry on the subject for the *Encyclopedie* (1751-1777):

In the present century, the science of natural history is more cultivated than it has ever been, not only do most of the people of letters make it an object of study or recreation, but there is also a great taste for this science that is prevalent in the public, and which is daily becoming stronger and more general.<sup>11</sup>

A complex amalgamation of botany, zoology, geology, paleontology, and meteorology, the study of natural history was conducted by an extensive community of practitioners influenced by the Enlightenment desire to observe, describe, classify, categorize, and arrange the world around them. In addition to diversifying and complicating the early modern scientific knowledge base, the program of natural history effected many types of intellectual and social practices, of which collecting and patronage were among the most significant.

Although both British men and women contributed to the advancement of natural history as a systematic discipline through collecting and patronage enterprises, men tended to pursue their activities in public venues such as academies, societies, and other institutions, while women concentrated their efforts in the home. Within the domestic

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<sup>11</sup> Denis Diderot, "Histoire Naturelle," in *Encyclopedie*, vol. 17, ed. Jean le Rond D'Alembert and Denis Diderot (Geneve: J.L. Pellet, 1778-1779), 589-90. "Dans le siecle present la science de l'*histoire naturelle* est plus cultivée qu'elle ne l'a jamais été; non-seulement la plupart des gens de letters en font un objet d'étude ou de délassement, mais il y a de plus un gout pour cette science qui est repandu dans le public, & qui devient chaque jour plus vis & plus general."

milieu there was a serious engagement with the world of natural history. The relationship between female domesticity and natural history encouraged intellectual networking between male and female naturalists and fostered professional collegiality via the study, accumulation and exchange of natural history specimens and related objects.

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The historiography of domesticity is closely linked with that of the “separate spheres” thesis. “Separate spheres” was an historic construction of binary classification which held that men dominated a family’s relationship to the public, or outside, world, while women assumed responsibility of the private, domestic household.<sup>12</sup> According to this formula, spheres were divided along gender lines and justified on the grounds that such a separation suited the natural instincts and inclinations of each of the sexes. The real life application of this ideology during the early modern period was articulated as a culture of domesticity in which women concerned themselves with the management of the home and family unit, issuing household directives and overseeing the intellectual and moral education of their children.

Scholarly investigation of domesticity validated study of the private sphere as a site of historical analysis equal in importance to that of the public sphere. Such scholarship used the theory of gendered spaces to reconstruct the unique environment that women fashioned for themselves from within the confines of the home. Here, the literature focuses on women’s roles in supporting familial structures and the interiority of feminine solidarity, leisure, sexuality, and the domestic economy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (1998) for a comprehensive explanation of the “separate spheres” thesis.

<sup>13</sup> See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and*

While many scholars adopted domesticity and separate spheres as appropriate metaphors for interpreting women's past during the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist historians questioned the universality of the public/private distinction and confronted the limitations of the ideology when applied to different social classes and races.<sup>14</sup> Over the past twenty years historical discourse has almost entirely rejected the tenability of the public/private model and suggests that scholars have overestimated its utility in defining early modern cultural contexts. Current research shows that the domestic realm was more permeable and less static than it is represented to be and that the household was not the limit of a woman's experience, influence, or ambition.<sup>15</sup>

While it is true that the philosophy of separate spheres is rejected as an inadequate characterization of women's lives, it is undeniable that during the eighteenth century there was an increased privatization of the family which obliged ladies to primarily associate themselves with domestic affairs. This chapter will show that despite this privatization female domesticity incorporated very public elements and that women engaged with the outside world in practical terms through the patronage and collection of natural history. The evidence presented here further complicates our understanding of

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*Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> See Eleanor Leacock's introduction to *On the Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, by Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers Co., 1972); Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood," *Feminist Studies* 9 (Spring, 1983): 131-150.

<sup>15</sup> See Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31 (1992): 1-20; Lawrence Klein, "Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in Early Eighteenth-Century England," in *Textuality and Sexuality, Reading Theories and Practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton, 100-116 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Feminist Revision History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal*, 36, no. 2 (1993): 383-414; and *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

female domesticity by expanding our view of women's agency in creating and modifying the social and intellectual framework within which they lived.

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Bulstrode House, the country seat of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck (1715-1785), Duchess of Portland, in Buckinghamshire, was the site of an elaborate natural history program. An aristocrat and domesticator, the Duchess of Portland “went deeply into natural history” transforming her home into a repository overflowing with biological and organic specimens.<sup>16</sup> Her cache of plants, animals, insects, shells, corals, minerals, and petrifications was so immense that out of the thirty eight day posthumous sale of her estate, there were but eight that exhibited anything other than natural history objects.<sup>17</sup> The frontispiece to the Duchess of Portland's sale catalog illustrates the overwhelming presence of such items in her collection (Fig. 1.1).<sup>18</sup>

The Duchess descended from a long line of collectors and was heiress to a family collection stretching back to Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel. Her grandfather, Robert Harley, and father, Edward Harley, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earls of Oxford, accumulated an extensive and diverse collection of illuminated manuscripts and books which later formed the basis for the British Library.<sup>19</sup> Her mother, Henrietta Cavendish Harley, Lady Oxford, was also a collector assembling a “prodigious Collection of portraits of her Ancestors, & had reserved the fine Miniatures, Enamels, & Vases of crystal & all which she left as

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<sup>16</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Duchess of Portland's Museum* (New York: Grolier Club, 1936), vi.

<sup>17</sup> John Lightfoot, *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum, Lately the Property of the Duchess Dowager of Portland, deceased....* [London; 1786], *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/ECCO>.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Grignion, *Frontispiece for the Portland Sale Catalog*, after Edward Frances Burney, April 24-June 7, 1786, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/ECCO>.

<sup>19</sup> Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Peter Springborg, eds., *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts 5* (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 2000), 8.

Heirlooms to her Daughter & her Descendants.”<sup>20</sup> Exposed early on to an appreciation for the social and intellectual processes inherent in collecting, the Duchess was predisposed to adopt and advance similar practices in her own household.

For the Duchess of Portland the formation of a museum of natural history was the great enterprise of her life. Her marriage to William, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Portland, in 1734 secured her position as a noble lady of the house with an annual income of her own over £8000.<sup>21</sup> Yet, this did not mean that she quietly retreated into a leisurely domestic detention. On the contrary, the Duchess of Portland took advantage of her privileged circumstances and reached out into an elite, public company of explorers and naturalists in order to satisfy her quest for, and study of, curiosities. An adroit networker with deep pockets, the Duchess understood the benefits that associations with professionally skilled, well-connected individuals could offer. Patronage of such men afforded the Duchess unparalleled opportunities to develop her cabinets, make valuable links within the exploratory and natural history communities, and enhance her scientific erudition.

As early as 1742 the Duchess of Portland was in contact with influential natural history collectors, such as Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) with whom she shared a passion for conchology, visiting their exhibitions and returning with objects for her collection.<sup>22</sup> The Duchess’s interest in shells and other marine articles led her to establish ties with naval officers, commercial captains and shipboard naturalists, including Charles Clerke (1743-1779), James Cook (1728-1779) and Joseph Banks (1743-1820). These men were

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<sup>20</sup> Walpole, *Portland’s Museum*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> In February of 1742 she remarked to friend and famed Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800): “I am but just come from Sir Hans Sloane’s where I have beheld many odder things than himself... however, I will not rail, for he has given me some of his trumpery to add to my collection, and till I get better they shall remain there.” Duchess of Portland to Elizabeth Montagu, February 1742, in *Elizabeth Montagu, The Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720- 1761*, vol.1 (London: John Murray, 1906), 103.

contracted by the Duchess to retrieve natural specimens from their journeys overseas and present them to her upon their return so that she might extend the breadth of her cabinets to include articles from the newly navigated East and West Indies.<sup>23</sup>

In December of 1753 Mary Delany (1700-1788), the Duchess's closest friend and fellow collector, wrote of the fruitful relationship the Duchess had developed with another ships' captain:

The Duchess is at present very happy in the company of Captain Maccnamara, Cap.<sup>t</sup> of an East Indiaman, the Rhoda: he brought her fine corals, and is to bring her fine shells: the man seems to have no great judgment about them, and it would divert you to hear the Duchess and I tutoring him on the subject, and coaxing him to bring us the treasures of the deep.<sup>24</sup>

The associations the Duchess of Portland cultivated with these mariners were extremely productive— so much so that other collectors expressed their frustration concerning the Duchess's aggressive methods of procurement. For example, in November of 1761 naturalist Daniel Solander (1733-1782) complained to taxonomist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) of the rapidity with which natural curiosities disappeared from the docks once the West Indian fleets returned to port.<sup>25</sup> Despite succeeding in obtaining the names of several captains who had supplies of insects he wished to acquire, he failed to attain them as they were already “destined for the Duchess of Portland.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps feeling somewhat

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Dance, “The Cook Voyages and Conchology,” *Journal of Conchology* 26 (1971): 354-379.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Delany to Miss Dewes, December 28, 1753, in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany: With Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte*, vol. 3 (London: R. Bentley, 1861), 262.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Solander to Carl Linnaeus, November 16, 1761, in *Daniel Solander: Collected Correspondence, 1753-1782*, ed. Edward Duyker and Per Tingbrand (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

resentful, he added that if he could “select a few first” he would not “reproach” himself because of it.<sup>27</sup>

Over time, the Duchess of Portland’s collection became so large that even in Bulstrode’s reception areas it was at times “indeed *difficult* to find a seat.”<sup>28</sup> Delany remarked of the surfeit:

Her Grace’s breakfast-room, which is now the repository of sieves, pans, platters, and filled with all the productions of *that nature* [fungi] are spread on tables, windows, chairs, which with books of all kinds (opened in their useful places), make an agreeable confusion.<sup>29</sup>

In order to prevent her cabinets from becoming an impenetrable, virtuosic hodgepodge, the Duchess of Portland commissioned naturalists, most notably Daniel Solander and John Lightfoot (1735-1788), to convert this collection of “cunning confusion, and vast variety, and surprising universality” into an intelligible, disciplined, and orderly museum.<sup>30</sup> These men worked alongside the Duchess of Portland and Delany in arranging, cataloguing and studying Buslrode’s stores.

A Linnaean disciple and fellow Swede, Solander acted as cataloguer of the natural history collections at the British Museum before taking a position in 1765 “surveying” the Duchess of Portland’s “very great collection of shells and marine productions, gems and precious stones.”<sup>31</sup> Solander generally spent one day a week at the estate analyzing

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Delany to Miss Dewes, September 3, 1769, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany*, vol. 2 (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1879), 153.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Montagu to the Duchess of Portland, January 27, 1741, in *Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2 (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 134. On separate occasions, the Duchess of Portland also patronized Philip Miller (1691-1771), Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), Richard Pulteney (1730-1801), James Bolton (1735-1799), Henry Smeathman (1742-1786), and William Lewin (1747-1795).

<sup>31</sup> Peter Collinson to Carl Linnaeus, May 1, 1765, in *A Selection of Correspondence of Linnaeus, and Other Naturalists*, ed. James Edward Smith (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), 65.



and ordering cabinets of gastropods.<sup>32</sup> The descriptions he made of these conchoids were delivered to the Duchess for her review and considered of import to the natural history community as indicated by Joseph Banks who reported to Johan Alstromer (1742-1786) “we daily expect to see them made public in the same state that he left them.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, the Duchess of Portland’s natural history project was a domestic pursuit with public consequences.

Many specimens, particularly shells, collected by the Duchess were often hitherto unknown to science. Even Linnaeus, “who had studied the Subject, and methodized the Materials of it,” had not described “One Forth Part” of the objects contained in the Duchess of Portland’s museum.<sup>34</sup> According to Lightfoot, it was “the intention of the enlightened Possessor to have had *every unknown* Species described and published to the World.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, the Duchess’s patronage of Solander was conceived with public goals in mind. As a gentleman held in high regard by members of Enlightenment coteries, Solander enjoyed connections with some of the most prominent scientific minds of the age including John Ellis (1710-1776) and Emanuel Mendes da Costa (1717-1791). He also had experience organizing natural history collections according to Linnaeus’s sexual taxonomy which was quickly gaining credence in Europe. These facts could not have been lost on the Duchess and must have made Solander an ideal candidate for employment. While his public profile and professional affiliations no doubt benefited the Duchess by augmenting her circle of scientific associates, the application of a binomial

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<sup>32</sup> Joseph Banks to Johan Alstromer, November 16, 1784, in *Daniel Solander: Collected Correspondence*, 412. Alstromer was a Fellow of the Royal Society of London and director of the Swedish East India Company.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Lightfoot, *Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, preface.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

nomenclature to the Portland Museum would have increased its prestige and significance among natural history practitioners.

Lightfoot's service to the Duchess of Portland further solidified the legitimacy and importance of the scientific ventures at Bulstrode. Lightfoot, who became a founding member of the Linnaean Society, was an expert botanist and began his work for the Duchess of Portland around the same time as Solander. The naturalist arrived at the estate each Wednesday and stayed until Saturday morning during which time he was occupied with all sorts of natural history assignments, including classifying the Duchess's collection of insects and fossils in scientific order and compiling a comprehensive catalogue of her entire museum.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to these systematizing efforts, Lightfoot also provided in-house scientific instruction for the Duchess and her female guests. Because eighteenth-century gender conventions barred women from participation in certain public institutions and organizations such as universities and academic societies, the Duchess of Portland shifted the center of learning to her home. There, education in the natural sciences could flourish unabated. On September 3, 1769 Delany reported that "Mr. Lightfoot and botany go on as usual; we are now in the chapter of *Agaricks* [sic] and *Boletus's* &c. &c., this being the time of their perfection."<sup>37</sup> When business in town called Lightfoot away from Bulstrode, learning continued with the assistance of other scientifically inclined individuals such as botanical artist Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-1770). Ehret, whom the Duchess commissioned to complete hundreds of horticultural illustrations on vellum, took over

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Delany to Mrs. Port of Ilam, October 1773, in *Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1862), 566.

<sup>37</sup> *Agaricus* and *Boletus* are genera of mushroom. Mary Delany to Miss Dewes, September 3, 1769, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany*, vol. 2 (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1879), 153.

lecturing responsibilities in mid September 1769 (Fig. 1.2).<sup>38</sup> Delany recorded that although she found Ehret's German dialect "puzzling," his lectures on fungi were "productive of much learning" and complete with "excellent observations" from the artist.<sup>39</sup>

Botanical lectures and readings were commonplace at Bulstrode, as were mineralogical examinations. After inspecting a variety of stalactites, selenites and other crystalline deposits in 1771, Delany wrote to her great-niece that she had recently experienced so much "learning" that she hoped to have retained even a portion of what she had been taught.<sup>40</sup> The relocation of scientific study to Bulstrode and the employment of individuals such as Lightfoot as pedagogues circumvented the problem of limited access to fraternal associations like the Royal Society by establishing the domestic household as a legitimate setting for sincere and erudite involvement with natural history.

Though the Duchess of Portland was, without contest, the greatest female scientific patron and collector of the eighteenth century, she was not the only domestic to interact with an international community of naturalists or accommodate a museum of natural history in her home. Anna Blackburne (1726-1793), who corresponded with "ardent admirers of Nature's works in Russia, Prussia, Germany, America, and all over the world," developed a considerable collection of birds, insects, corals, and shells which drew great attention from naturalists such as Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), Johann

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<sup>38</sup> There were 622 numbered drawings on vellum in the sale of the Portland Museum. *Catalogue of the Portland Museum* [London; 1786]. Georg Dionysius Ehret, [*Drawing, Study of a Marsh Pine*], 1725-1770, British Museum, London.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Delany to Miss Dewes, September 17, 1769, in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany: With Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte*, vol. 1 (London: R. Bentley, 1862), 240.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Delany to Mrs. Port of Ilam, November 19, 1771, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, vol. 1, 371.

Reinhold Forster (1729-1798), Emanuel Mendes da Costa, and Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811).<sup>41</sup>

Blackburne acquired an interest in natural history from her father, John, a wealthy merchant and horticulturalist, who cultivated a well-known garden and hothouse at the family estate, Orford Hall, near Warrington.<sup>42</sup> The fifth of nine children, Blackburne became lady of that house at an early age upon the death of her mother, Catherine Ashton, in 1740 and assumed the responsibilities of its management.<sup>43</sup> However, her correspondence suggests that whatever those domestic duties, her devotion to the study and collection of natural history took precedence. Like the Duchess of Portland, Blackburne was excluded from formal scientific education in the public sphere and experienced her learning privately in the home. Although it is probable that her father provided some elementary scientific instruction, a letter written to Linnaeus in October of 1771 confirms that at least her understanding of Latin was self taught:

This knowledge [botany] I have taken some pains to acquire & tho: I have labour'd under many difficultys, not knowing one word of latin when I began to study your System Naturae, which hath emply'd my leasure hours for the last 4 or 5 years... I have so far succeeded as to be able to find out most things... My father has one of the best Colections of plants in this country, but at 73 years old, thought it late to begin to learn a new system and therefore I had little help from him.<sup>44</sup>

Blackburne's confident presentation of herself as a learned individual who comprehended the naturalist's complex classification system was an important step in a project of

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<sup>41</sup> Lancastriensis, "Letter to the editor," *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, XCIV (London: John Nichols and Son, 1824), 210.

<sup>42</sup> Anon., "Obituary of Anna Blackburne," *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, LXIV (London: John Nichols, 1794), 180.

<sup>43</sup> Though she never married she referred to herself as "Mrs. Blackburne," suggesting her elevated rank in the household.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Blackburne to Carl Linnaeus, October 14, 1771, in *Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné*, ed. J.M. Hulth (Upsala, Sweden: Akademiska Bokhandlen, 1916), 286.

calculated self-promotion which she had begun several months earlier when she proffered to send Linnaeus “a few Birds & insects, which I believe are not in your Sys. Nat<sup>ae</sup>.”<sup>45</sup>

Claiming ownership of previously unidentified species was a bold move and suggests that Blackburne was a woman of resolute public ambition. The potential impact of her offer made it very likely that Linnaeus would not only accept her gift, but also attempt to repay her in some way, establishing a relationship marked by its reciprocity. If Linnaeus would not offer to compensate her in kind, then the least he could do was acknowledge her contributions to his taxonomy publicly. This is precisely what occurred. As if forecasting Blackburne’s expectation, Linnaeus responded to “the lady of celestial mind”:

I am at a loss to account for your kindness in lavishing upon a mere foreigner, altogether unknown to you, such bounties as are to me more valuable than gold.... Should you transmit to me either insects or birds, or plants, you will find me not altogether ungrateful, while I shall have it in my power to publish to the world those articles belonging to your curious collection.... Oh! that you would send me some new discovery you have made in the vegetable kingdom, that I might consecrate your name to immortality.<sup>46</sup>

An endorsement from the father of modern taxonomy was a public credit that Blackburne eagerly welcomed: “I wish it was as much in my power, as it is in my inclination to send you a new plant, and shou’d think my self very highly honour’d by Your putting my name to it.”<sup>47</sup> Recognition in scientific society would surely increase her notoriety and supplement her company of potential trading partners. To further secure the possibility of future transactions and acclaim, she pressed forward assuring Linnaeus that her collection

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<sup>45</sup> Anna Blackburne to Carl Linnaeus, June 29, 1771, in *Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné*, 188.

<sup>46</sup> Anna Blackburne to Carl Linnaeus, in V.P. Wystrach, “Anna Balckurne (1726-1793): A Neglected Patroness of Natural History,” *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History* 8 (1976-8): 148-168, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Anna Blackburne to Carl Linnaeus, October 14, 1771, in *Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné*, 286. Blackburne was immortalized by both Thomas Pennant and Johann Reinhold Forster who named the Blackburnian warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) and the Australian plant, *Blackburnia pinnata*, in her honor.

of dried birds was “pritty num[erous]” and declared that her “cabinet is not destitute of shells, Insects, fish, & Fossils, & if my Brother lives will increase fast.<sup>48</sup>

Blackburne’s collection at Orford did grow quickly with the help of her brother, Ashton, who sent her specimens from his home near New York. In 1772 Thomas Pennant remarked that “Mrs. *Blackburne*... extends her researches still farther, and adds to her empire another kingdom: not content with the botanic, she causes *North America* to be explored for its animals, and has formed a *Museum* from the other side of the *Atlantic*, as pleasing as it is instructive.”<sup>49</sup> The “instructive” quality of Blackburne’s collection appealed to Pennant and German naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster who were regular visitors to Orford. While Forster dined each Saturday evening there, lecturing on entomology and arranging and classifying Blackburne’s insects, Pennant recorded observations from her North American collections which he subsequently published.<sup>50</sup> For as much as her brother’s largesse contributed to the growth of this museum, Blackburne’s plans for it were considerably more ambitious and involved expanding her collecting efforts beyond domestic, familial relationships into the public scientific community.

Following her communication with Linnaeus, Blackburne developed contacts with a number of male naturalists based on professional collegiality and mutual exchange. Both Blackburne and her correspondent profited from this type of association through the interchange of ideas, favors, and specimens. On August 30, 1774, for example, Emanuel Mendes da Costa wrote to Blackburne informing her that he was

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Herbrides, 1772* (London: John Monk, 1776), 13.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Hoare, ed., *The Resolution Journal of Johann Reinhold Forster, 117-1775*, vol. 1 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982), 34; Pennant, *Arctic Zoology* (London: Henry Hughs, 1784-1785).

sending a syllabus of his unpublished lectures on fossils and shells for her “perusal” and confirmed that he would be happy to meet with her on his next visit to Warrington at which time they could “proceed on a Catalogue of your Museum.”<sup>51</sup> Though there is no record of any such catalogue being compiled, it appears that Blackburne did her part in attempting to find an audience for da Costa’s natural history lectures. In October Blackburne replied regretfully: “[I] have been with Mr Aiken about your lectures and find nothing can be done [with] it, what students they have this year are very young boys... & I do not know any one except my self that wou’d attend them so little curiosity we have amongst us.”<sup>52</sup> Although this particular undertaking proved unsuccessful, their association evidently continued and grew to be beneficial for both parties as in March of the following year Blackburne wrote to da Costa: “I have got a parcel of coal pit fossils w<sup>ch</sup> are the fullest of plants of any I have seen, some of them I intend for you, as soon as I have received yours.”<sup>53</sup>

Blackburne’s involvement in professionally reciprocal relationships continued with Russian naturalist Peter Simon Pallas. Pallas’s trading with Blackburne was facilitated by Pennant who acted as an intermediary between the two collectors. In the summer of 1778 Pallas wrote to Pennant: “The present Letter is only to acquaint You, that I had delivered... for Mrs. Blackburne of Orford about a Dozen Animals & Birds in fine preservation and a Box of Russian ores.”<sup>54</sup> Pallas was a hardnosed and fastidious collector who could not conceive of the possibility of exchanging those things which

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<sup>51</sup> Emanuel Mendes da Costa to Anna Blackburne, August 30, 1774, BL Add. MSS 28534, f. 282.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Blackburne to Emanuel Mendes da Costa, October 12, 1774, BL Add. MSS 28534, f. 283.

<sup>53</sup> Anna Blackburne to Emanuel Mendes da Costa, March 3, 1775, BL Add. MSS 28534, f. 284.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Simon Pallas to Thomas Pennant, 1778, in *A Naturalist in Russia: Letters from Peter Simon Pallas to Thomas Pennant*, ed. Carol Urness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 23.

“have cost me so much trouble to collect” for “trifling or common things.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, he was very keen on trading duplicate specimens, “provided they may be in perfect condition,” so that he and his colleagues might rid themselves of spare items while simultaneously acquiring new and curious replacements.<sup>56</sup>

As soon as cold comes on, I will take out [of storage] all doubles, & chiefly Birds remarkable for colour & have a Parcell of them, together with fine Siberian ores and plants, ready in Spring. If by that time Mrs. Blackburne will have the Cornwall & Derbyshire ores, she has been so kind to promise, she may send them by her Brother’s Ship & be sure of a very acceptable return.<sup>57</sup>

Such an arrangement worked out well for Blackburne who benefited not only from increased exposure on the international stage, but also from the excellent examples of natural history which she added to her stores. These mutually advantageous transactions continued at least through March of 1781 when Pallas notified Pennant that “A Parcell of fresh received Siberian seeds, most part very scarce plants,” was sent to Blackburne, “whome I beg you will give my respectfull compliments & assure her that she will certainly receive my due acknowledgements as soon as Ships will return to England.”<sup>58</sup>

Following the death of her father in 1786, Blackburne relocated her mounting collection to “Fairfield,” a new residence also near Warrington, which was constructed to include a dedicated space for her museum. One observer considered Blackburne’s new museum superior to that at Orford as Fairfield had a room built specifically for the collection’s “reception... a room about 15 yards long, or the whole front of that house,

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<sup>55</sup> Pallas to Pennant, October 24/November 4, 1777, in *Letters from Peter Simon Pallas*, 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Pallas to Pennant, August 13, 1778, in *Letters from Peter Simon Pallas*, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Pallas to Pennant, February 25/March 8, 1781, in *Letters from Peter Simon Pallas*, 150.



and a depth proportional.”<sup>59</sup> At Fairfield, Blackburne’s “extensive” collection of “rare and curious productions” were arranged in scientific order.<sup>60</sup> She had formed a plan of ordering her garden in a similar fashion, however, ill health “prevented for some years past that high and varied state of cultivation in which she intended to complete it, and which would have been a great means of facilitating the knowledge and study of botany.”<sup>61</sup>

Like the Duchess of Portland’s natural history project at Buslrode, Blackburne’s scientific endeavors at both Orford and Fairfield had public import and consequence. Although a taxonomy of her gardens was never realized, the specimens she collected were studied, referenced in scientific publications and exchanged among an international community of naturalists.<sup>62</sup> The public success of domestic natural history ventures were largely determined by the intellectual and practical opportunities female patrons and collectors created for themselves. Female domesticates such as the Duchess of Portland and Blackburne did not recognize the household as the limitation of their experience, influence, or ambition in terms of their engagement with science. For them, the home functioned as a socially permeable space where female and male naturalists could study, collect and order biological organisms and geological specimens.

The domestication of scientific instruction, for example, established the home as a locale conducive to activities other than those related to the rearing of children and the day to day supervision of the household economy. In the context of female involvement

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<sup>59</sup> Lancastriensis, “Letter to the editor,” 210.

<sup>60</sup> Anon., “Obituary of Anna Blackburne,” *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 180.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> In his introduction to *Arctic Zoology* Pennant expressed his gratitude “To the rich museum of American Birds, preserved by Mrs. Anna Blackburn, of *Orford*, near *Warrington*, I am indebted for the opportunity of describing almost every one in the provinces of *Jersey*, *New York*, and *Connecticut*.” Pennant, *Arctic Zoology*, 5.

with natural history, the home was not set apart from the masculine public sphere, but a place where the public and private intermixed. The Duchess of Portland's patronage of John Lightfoot privatized an intellectual aspect of Enlightenment culture which otherwise would have remained restricted to civic fraternities. Lectures, lessons and hands-on examinations of natural curiosities transformed Bulstrode into a place of critical academic expression, production and discussion. Orford, though less of a site of deliberate patronage, was also a domestic space which encouraged scientific stimulus and exchange. Blackburne's collection attracted naturalists who not only introduced instruction into the home, but also treated the home as an appropriate setting for the inspection and analysis of natural history.

Despite taking place in the private domicile, female patronage and collection of natural history incorporated very public elements. Both the Duchess of Portland and Blackburne craved widespread recognition in scientific circles and thus actively sought out opportunities to collect, categorize, and correspond with high profile figures. For instance, the Duchess's association with explorers and naturalists such as Captain Cook and Joseph Banks reflects the publicness of her designs. The celebrity and esteem associated with these men would have generated public exposure and excitement about the provenance of the items housed in the Duchess's collection. Additionally, the choice of Solander as head curator indicates that even in her patronage she was still aware of the potential for publicity. As a well connected individual, Solander's scientific achievements at Bulstrode were advanced throughout the natural history community forever affixing the Duchess of Portland's name with those discoveries made in her museum.

The publicness of Blackburne's natural history agenda is best seen in her correspondence and trade with an international body of naturalists. Her communication with Linnaeus in particular confirms that she was not content to rest in domestic obscurity and that the scope of her collecting objectives transcended the boundaries of domesticity. The proposal of new specimens to the most famous naturalist of the period showed great mettle and suggests that like the Duchess of Portland, Blackburne also aspired to have her name honored in scientific perpetuity. In the short term, Blackburne's offer garnered her regard among colleagues and introduced her into a very public circuit of collectors interested in exchanging information and specimens. Her collecting activities with da Costa and Pallas connected Blackburne to a scientific public which embraced her contributions to the advancement of natural history.

The information presented in this chapter should be situated within the discourse challenging the ideology of separate spheres as it further complicates our understanding of female domesticity by expanding our view of women's agency in creating and modifying the social and intellectual framework within which they lived. Through the patronage and collection of natural history eighteenth-century women engaged with the public world in a meaningful way. Working from within the domestic milieu, women struck a balance between the public and private, making valuable intellectual contact with men in prominent Enlightenment circles which solidified their positions in the scientific community. Such professional connections enhanced the public identities of female patrons and collectors and liberated them from the gender restrictions of associational life by redefining domestic space to include creative, intellectual outlets which had been

denied them by invented patriarchal constructions such as “accomplishments,” which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

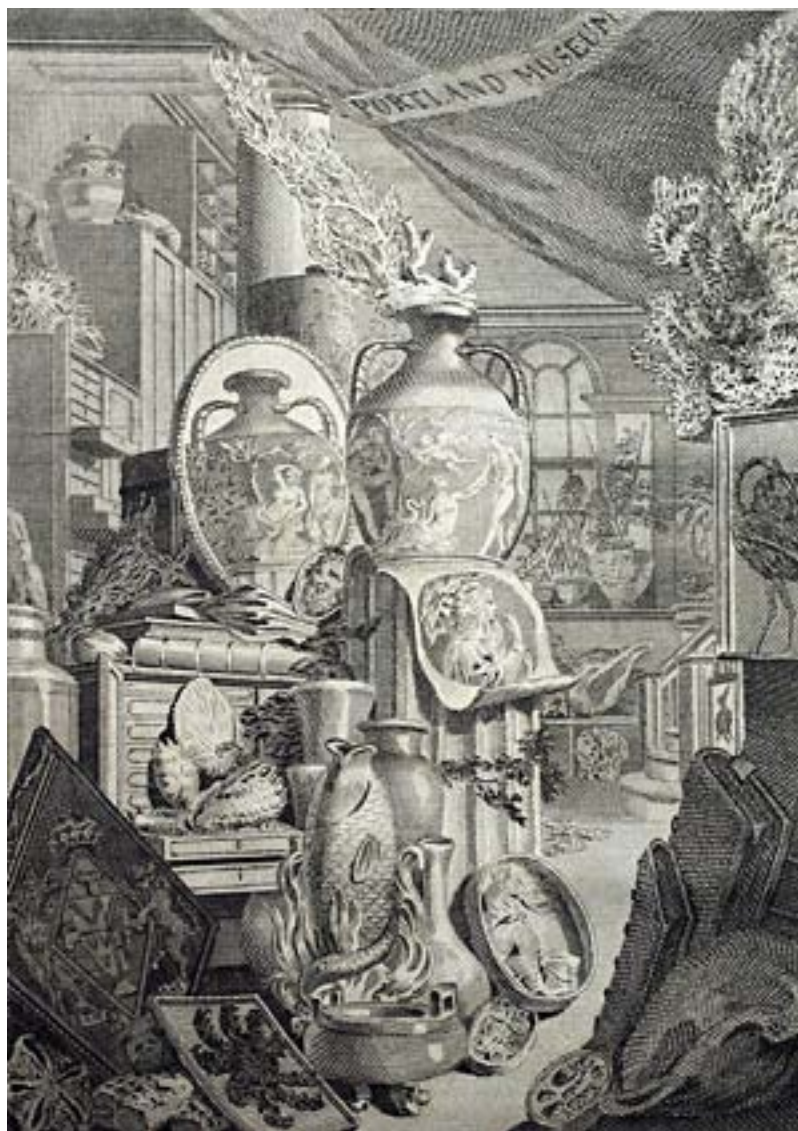


Fig. 1.1: Charles Grignion, *Frontispiece for the Portland Sale Catalog*, after Edward Frances Burney, April 24- June 7, 1786. From Gale. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. © Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. [www.cengage.com/permissions](http://www.cengage.com/permissions).



Fig. 1.2: This watercolor study of a Marsh Pine done on vellum is similar to those botanical illustrations carried out by Ehret for the Duchess of Portland. Georg Dionysius Ehret, [*Drawing, Study of a Marsh Pine*], 1725-1770. British Museum, London.

## Chapter Two

### Expanding the Compass:

#### Theresa Parker, Connoisseurship and Female Intervention in Visual Culture

Over the course of the eighteenth century, collectors increasingly distinguished between the knowledge required for collecting natural history specimens and the knowledge necessary for creating fine art collections. Connoisseurs of art relied on their taste, at once an innate sense, a mechanical skill, and a philosophical enquiry. Connoisseurship was characterized by an emphasis on personal pleasure and individual acuity and defined as the ability to identify the beauty in an object and judge it against an internalized set of aesthetic standards. Due to longstanding gender stereotypes which advanced theories of female intellectual inadequacy and a propensity for inexpert consumption, the program of connoisseurship was considered incommunicable to women and thus impeded their acceptance in a burgeoning aesthetic “republic of taste.”<sup>63</sup>

Despite the promotion of such conventions, female intervention in visual culture existed in the eighteenth century through sophisticated acts of collection and patronage. Although their engagement with the fine arts was not exercised in a way that blatantly flouted proprieties, women participated in acts conventionally designated as masculine. They demonstrated a practical and intellectual agency in their collecting and patronage practices which belied period typecasts.

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<sup>63</sup> Ann Bermingham, “Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship,” *Oxford Art Journal* 6 (1993): 3-20, 14.

The rationalization and codification of connoisseurship arose as the collection of art became more pervasive as an indicator of social status and taste.<sup>64</sup> In 1719 Jonathan Richardson's influential *Two Discourses* endeavored to define good taste by advancing the new science of the connoisseur.<sup>65</sup> The advancement of connoisseurship as a science is significant, for in the context of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, it posits connoisseurship as a rational, intellectual application, an eminently comprehensible activity that advocated independence of thought. According to Richardson, this pursuit offered gentlemen a "New Scene of Pleasure, a New Innocent Amusement" in which "one Man may be as Good a Judge as another."<sup>66</sup> For to be a connoisseur meant that one was to be void of all prejudice, false reasoning and influence of custom. The judgment of a work of art was governed by a "system of rules" which Richardson argued must be conceived of and applied independently.<sup>67</sup>

Although Richardson's emphasis on independence of thought might lead one to believe that the ultimate implications of aesthetic theory could be democratic, the literature on connoisseurship was decidedly elitist and intended for an exclusive patriciate. Legitimate connoisseurship necessitated the development and employment of a well articulated set of systematized skills, including the ability to recognize manners or schools of painting, distinguish originals from copies, judge the quality of craftsmanship, and assign attribution. The mastery of such specialized knowledge was widely regarded

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<sup>64</sup> Brian Cowan, "An Open Elite: The Peculiarities of Connoisseurship in Early Modern England," *Modern Intellectual History* 1, no. 2 (2004): 151-183.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses: I. An Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting. II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of the Connoisseur* (London: Printed for W. Churchill, 1719).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. "To Judge the Goodness of a Picture, Drawing, or Print, 'tis necessary to establish to our Selves a System of Rules to be apply'd to that we intend to give Judgment... And these Rules must be our Own; whether as being the result of our Own Study, and Observation, and Drawn up, and Compos'd by Us."



as a gentlemen's prerogative and served to "reduce within a narrow compass those who [were] qualified to judge in the fine arts."<sup>68</sup>

It should be little surprise that the project of connoisseurship was considered too complex for women to fathom. Conventional wisdom held females to be inherently incapable of reasoning theoretically, comprehending philosophical arguments, or expressing an essential aesthetic perspicacity. Ladies were thus thought predisposed to appreciate only those genres of art that had some immediate relatability, or allusion to the reconstruction of reality, such as portraiture.<sup>69</sup> It was believed that highly conceptual or abstract arts, including history painting and architecture, were too complicated for the female mentality to follow.

Satirical cartoons perpetuated contemporary assumptions that women were ill suited to engage with the science of connoisseurship by emphasizing their benighted approach to the consumption of art. These illustrations portrayed females as consumers, who purchased "for the sheer joy of buying," rather than collectors, who viewed their acquisitions "as an ensemble with a philosophy behind it," to use the words of Remy Saisselin.<sup>70</sup> This classification rendered ladies as imprudent shoppers swayed by trend and egotism— impulsive and uncritical as they assembled a medley of things that passed their way. In *Progress in the Polite Arts* (1777) (Fig. 2.1), for instance, two caricatured women admire a miniature which is advertised for sale along with a mutton chop.<sup>71</sup> The wall to the right is lined with play bills reading "Who's the Dupe," and "High Life Below

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<sup>68</sup> Henry Home Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1870), 501. Kames's work on criticism was first published in 1761 and dedicated to King George III.

<sup>69</sup> Louise Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Consumption of Culture*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Remy G. Saisselin, *Bricobracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 68.

<sup>71</sup> Anonymous, [*Progress in the Polite Arts*], 1801, British Museum, London. The earliest alternative associated title for this image is *School for Scandal* (1777).

Stairs.” These notices advertise the inferiority of the female relationship to art by underscoring its deluded and base nature. The notion that a woman might buy art the way she buys meat, as a mean commodity from a foul stall in the street, certainly did not correspond to the ideal of the sophisticated collector or connoisseur.

Exposed as anything but urbane, these figures can only be understood as gauche “buyers of bargains” that held “in the duty of an economist to buy” whatever they thought “cheap.”<sup>72</sup> This rationale influenced the perception of women in relation to the commissioning of artful objects. When a male contracted with an artist, it was patronage; when a female did it was simply retail. Patrons not only remitted payment, but also participated in a form of self-expression which required discernment, prudence, and introspection. These qualities did not easily reconcile with sophomoric, faddish, and unprincipled female consumerism. The fabrication of this unflattering identity had both immediate and long term consequences for women, hampering their recognition as collectors and complicating their acceptance as connoisseurs.

Such constructions complemented the discourse of many pundits who reinforced stereotypes of female intellectual inadequacy by promoting a representation of connoisseurship which was conflated with masculinity. Of the polite lady, for example, James Usher wrote in 1772:

She should have an acquaintance with the fine arts, because they enrich and beautify the imagination; but she should carefully keep them out of view in the shape of learning, and let them run through the easy happy vein of unpremeditated thought: for this reason she should

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Printed for T. Davies, 1767), 196. *The Idler* was featured as a Saturday installment in the *Universal Chronicle* (London, 1758-1760). I have taken these excerpts from the essay dated December 16, 1758.

never use nor even understand the terms of art: the gentleman will occasionally explain them to her.<sup>73</sup>

Here, familiarity with the fine arts was seen not as a constructive extension of the female education, but as a means to “give a greater energy to [feminine] goodness.”<sup>74</sup> A woman’s informal awareness of painting and sculpture, which could be conveniently achieved with minimum energy, abstraction, or richness of mind, kept intellectual and gender hierarchies in check. For instance, while a man’s comprehension of the fine arts gave him license to instruct or interpret, a woman’s acquaintance with the same only served to make her a more polished, charming and entertaining companion.

Quotidian visual references from the period illustrate the peripheral and passive role of females in artistic spaces. Representations of women in galleries or museums show that they are not in control of the scene, but rather piloted or directed around a given set by men. Issac Cruikshank’s *Drawing of the Octagon Room in the Royal Academy of Arts* (1756-1811) provides an excellent example (Fig. 2.2).<sup>75</sup> Here, a group of smartly dressed gentlemen and ladies mingle while observing a series of pictures. As the men gesture expressively towards the paintings and examine brushstrokes with their magnifying glasses, unescorted ladies huddle together in the background. Based on his limited treatment of the art work itself, it can be assumed that Cruikshank’s focus was not the exhibition, but the spectators. In this image, the men are very much in charge of both the edification and the spectacle. Under their influence an artistic setting is transformed

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<sup>73</sup> James Usher, *Clio: Or A Discourse on Taste, Addressed to a Young Lady*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: T. Davis, 1772), 49.

<sup>74</sup> John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: W.E. Norman, 1811), 80. The first edition of this work was published in 1789.

<sup>75</sup> Isaac Cruikshank, [*Drawing of the Octagon Room in the Royal Academy of Arts*], 1756-1811, British Museum, London.

into a social site where men assert their intellectual dominance and exercise taste, while women appear to defer to their escorts' authority.

The minimization of female rationality was contested by some progressive women, such as writer and philanthropist Hannah More, who argued that females possessed “in a high degree the delicacy and quickness of perception, and that nice discernment between beautiful and defective, which comes under the denomination of taste.”<sup>76</sup> Yet, More's contention held little water given the assumption that despite having “equal parts” women were still “inferior in wholeness of mind.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, although women enjoyed “in an equal degree the faculty of fancy [or imagination] which creates images, and the faculty of memory which collects and stores ideas,” they seemed “not to possess in equal measure the faculty [reason or reflection] of comparing, combining, analyzing, and separating these ideas; that deep and patient thinking which goes to the bottom of a subject.”<sup>78</sup> As it applies to knowledge of the arts, this observation suggests that while women may have been capable of recognizing the outward constructs of connoisseurship, their natural lack— lack of sophistication, lack of insight, and lack of profound reason— prevented them from successful application of its principles.

Differentiated from their male peers by what Ann Bermingham has called a “trope of lack,” conduct guides and advice manuals recommended that women pursue less recondite endeavors in the fine arts.<sup>79</sup> For example, *Letters to a Young Lady on a Variety*

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<sup>76</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, vol. 2, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Printed by A. Strahan, for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1800), 25. The first edition was printed in 1799.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Following this commentary, More goes on to argue that “the alleged inferiority of [women's] minds” should be attributed to the “defective” nature of their education and not, as it was widely suggested by men, their “natural make.”

<sup>79</sup> Ann Bermingham, “Elegant Females and Gentleman Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Consumption of Culture*, 505.

of *Useful and Interesting Subjects* (1789) encouraged a simplistic and domesticated approach to aesthetic pursuits:

Whilst *men*, with solid judgment and superior *vigour* are to combine ideas, to discriminate, and examine a subject to the bottom, *you* are to give it all its *brilliancy* and all its charms. *They* provide the furniture; *you* dispose it with propriety. *They* build the house; *you* are to fancy, and ornament the *ceiling*.<sup>80</sup>

Conduct guides proliferated in the eighteenth century and were a significant agent of reinforcing patriarchal attitudes on feminine comportment, politeness, morality, and social decorum. The disciplinary rhetoric inculcated by instructional literature was internalized by young women throughout the period and contributed to their alienation from the cultures of connoisseurship, collecting, and patronage by highlighting the female's putative tendency to superficiality. Such literature reinforced the portrayal of women as maintaining a nonessential and casual association with art, unlike their male counterparts who delve deeply and meaningfully into "the bottom" of the subject. Although imaginary, such constructions were an extremely powerful and persuasive medium for indoctrinating patriarchal superiority, strengthening gender stereotypes, and promoting idealized conceptions of the "accomplished" woman.<sup>81</sup>

The accomplished woman emerged late in the century as a complement to the male connoisseur. Based on pedagogy which presumed that females learned by doing, the teaching of accomplishments such as drawing, painting, and musical recital was a way for women to cultivate refined artistic skills. However, the performance of such skills had a potent ostracizing effect. Because women were taught to appreciate the arts through imitation or copying, their sketching, painting, and playing merely confirmed their lack

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<sup>80</sup> Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 80.

<sup>81</sup> Bermingham, "Aesthetics of Ignorance," 8.

of creativity and reason and pronounced their association with superficiality. Although this learning allowed a lady some degree of social influence, her proficiency remained merely mechanical, not intellectual. Therefore, accomplished women were not meant to cast their own “gaze” over others’ artistic creations, but be observed and judged, much like works of art themselves.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, instead of introducing women to the practices of connoisseurship, virtuosity in the fine arts preserved women’s exclusion from the “republic of taste.”

In sum, the depreciative rhetoric and female typecasts of the eighteenth century made it extremely difficult for women to be publicly recognized as connoisseurs, collectors, and patrons. Yet, this does not mean that they did not exist. On the contrary, evidence indicates that a great number of early modern women, equipped with both financial resources and aesthetic sentience, took up collection and patronage of fine arts. The aforesaid and orthodox narrative of eighteenth-century connoisseurship is problematized by women like Theresa Robinson Parker (1745-1775) who displayed intellectual prowess, independent judgment, and aesthetic sensibility in her collection and patronage of the fine arts.

Parker was the daughter of the Thomas Robinson, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Grantham, then ambassador to Vienna, and his wife, Frances Worsley. Parker was christened after her god-mother, the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and experienced a worldly and cultured upbringing in the Habsburg court.<sup>83</sup> A product of polite rearing, it is likely that Parker was “accomplished” in the fine arts, yet her aptitude for the same exceeded perfunctory imitation and extended into the realm of the connoisseur. Parker had a

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>83</sup> Trevor Lummis, *The Woman’s Domain: Women and the English Country House* (London: Viking, 1990), 67.

judicious and discriminating eye for painting and familiarized herself with the principles of aesthetic theory as outlined by experts such as Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792).<sup>84</sup> As a result of her creative vision and engagement with some of the century's finest painters, her home at Saltram in Devon was transformed into a showcase of "infinite splendor" achieved by "immense expense" and realized with the "greatest taste."<sup>85</sup> The period from her arrival in 1769 to her untimely death six years later has been referred to as Saltram's "golden era."<sup>86</sup>

Parker worked hand-in-hand with her husband, John, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Boringdon (1735-1788), to grow their collection, recruiting friends and family when able to assist in the search for suitable paintings. Her elder brother, Thomas, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Grantham (1738-1786), was a favorite agent of Parker's. As an amateur architect, member of the Society of Dilettanti, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and Fellow of the Society of Arts, Grantham was well qualified to act as such. As he was often abroad on the Continent, and therefore exposed to broader markets than could be found in London, Parker appealed to him to help furnish Saltram. In August of 1771 she wrote:

This place continues improving, The Great Room is well finished indeed, remember that if you should meet with anything abroad, of pictures, bronzes, etc. that is valuable in itself, beautiful and proper for any part of Saltram we depend so much on your taste and judgement that you must not lose an opportunity of procuring it for us.<sup>87</sup>

And again in April of 1772:

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<sup>84</sup> It is likely that Parker's working relationship with Joshua Reynolds exposed her to the study of art theory. Writing to her brother Thomas, Baron Grantham, Parker remarked: "I have a faithfull promise from S<sup>r</sup> Jos. Reynolds that he will write to you this post & send you his discourse, which I think you will approve as much as you did the former ones." Theresa Parker to Grantham, April 20, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 111.

<sup>85</sup> George Lipscomb, *A Journey into Cornwall, Through the Counties of Southampton, Wilts, Dorset, Somerset and Devon* (Warwick: H. Sharpe, 1799), 318.

<sup>86</sup> Ceri Johnson, *Saltram, Devon* (London: National Trust, 1998), 4.

<sup>87</sup> Theresa Parker to Grantham, August 23, 1771, BL Add. MSS 48218, ff. 107-108. The neoclassically inspired Great Room, or Saloon, was designed by esteemed Scottish architect Robert Adam (1728-1792).

Are you likely to pick up any very good Picture to match our Van Dyke [sic] as to the size and partly to the subject? I am not sure the latter is of great consequence as the Vandyke hangs over the door of the Great Room going into the Library, & its Companion must therefore hang over the Door going into the Velvet Room, & consequently cannot be seen at the same time.... There remains wanting for the Great Room what I have just desired you to look out for and two very good landscapes.<sup>88</sup>

Aside from demonstrating Parker's reliance on Grantham to aid in the acquisition of paintings, this passage also proves that she was conscious of specific interior schemes and concerned with the construction of a visually balanced and harmonious space.

Though there was no fixed rule about the hanging or placement of paintings during the period, technical tracts on perspective as well as advice manuals did offer suggestions:

A proper attention should likewise be paid, in the disposition of a picture, to the posture and attitude of the painter and his eye were in when he painted it, as that position must always be most natural.... Paintings should also be disposed as well according to their quality as to their beauty. Those pictures whose subjects are comic and humorous should be placed in a dining-room; those of a serious turn, in the salon, hall, or stair case; and landscapes, in a parlour or ground floor.<sup>89</sup>

Given the circumstances, it appears that Parker chose to forgo a hang based on perspective or subject and instead implement her own organizational system, arranging her pictures proportionally in size (frame-to-frame).<sup>90</sup> However, Grantham's response to

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<sup>88</sup> Theresa Parker to Grantham, April 20, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 111. The only Van Dyck on record as belonging to the Parkers was a portrait piece referred to as the "Bolingbroke family." Painted circa 1634, the subject of this relatively large work (111.8 x 162 cm) was the seven children of the Oliver St. John, the first Earl of Bolingbroke. For detailed description of the work see Julius Samuel Held, *Flemish and German Paintings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts* (Detroit, MI: Wayne University Press, 1982), 32-37.

<sup>89</sup> Cosmetti, *The Polite Arts, Dedicated to the Ladies*, by Cosmetti (London, 1767), 22.

<sup>90</sup> Parker's regard for the aesthetics of space extended beyond the walls of Saltram to the display of art in other collections. For instance, in November of 1774 she remarked on the position and presentation of a series of "cartoons" which she had seen the previous spring and concluded to be of little worth: "Mr Fordyce built a Room on purpose for them & placed them very high as the figures are larger than life. so far he was right but there was something in the colouring that did not suit that great distance, & you entirely lost the beauty of all the faces which is one of their greatest merits, & there was a great deal of bare wall



Parker's request, in which he proposes a series of paintings that would have been conducive to a thematic grouping, implies that she may have ascribed to formalized strictures like those mentioned above elsewhere in the house.

Reporting back in late August of 1772, Grantham sent Parker a list of five potential picture purchases with their sizes and prices followed by his valuation of each. These paintings, belonging to "an Old Painter's Widow," were chiefly religious scenes totaling just over 131 pounds.<sup>91</sup> Grantham reassured his sister that he had "no doubt" of the works' originality and judged even the least desirable of the lot (the "Holy Family") to be a "good Cabinet picture."<sup>92</sup> Though it is unknown if Parker chose any or all of the items described, it is notable that Grantham yielded to his sister in matters of effecting the sale. His letter made plain that regardless of his thoughts upon the paintings, Parker was responsible for making the final "determination" and that he would "obey [her] orders" in the matter.<sup>93</sup> Unlike that described by Usher, Parker's relationship with art seems to have been characterized by the necessity of her independent judgment and not by the surrender of her freedom of thought to male authority.

The employment of agents abroad was only one aspect of the international nature of Parker's collecting practice. Her letters reveal that she kept a finger on the pulse of overseas markets and used it to gauge the value of her and her husband's acquisitions. For instance, upon returning from Paris in the summer of 1772 an acquaintance relayed to

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seen underneath which made the room look unfinished." Theresa Parker to unknown, November 1774, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 155.

<sup>91</sup> Grantham records these paintings as "Mary Magdalen" by Pier Francesco Mola, "Judgt of Solomon" by Rubens, "Daniel & Leons" by Carlo Mara[tti], "Charity & three boys" by Paul Veronese, and a "Holy family" by Carlo Dolce (Dolci). Grantham to Theresa Parker, August 10, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 119.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

her that at auction “a small Wouverman [sic],” had been marked at £700.<sup>94</sup> This information was of particular interest to Parker considering the couple’s ownership of a large landscape by the same artist. Heartened by this report, she declared that “such is the rage for his works at present in France that we are assur’d that ours (which really is a very big one) would fetch 13 or 1400 there.”<sup>95</sup> Though Parker gave no indication that she or her husband intended to sell the picture, it is obvious from her notation of its estimated worth that she felt some satisfaction in owning such a valuable piece. Furthermore, her mention of Wouwermans’s excellent repute in France suggests that she viewed the painting not just as a lucrative investment but as a status symbol. Taking pride in the purchase, ownership, and display of esteemed works of art was very much distinctive of the collector’s mentality that objects acted as reminders and confirmers of both public and private identities. The quality of objects collected was therefore a reflection of the collector’s education, social condition and moral fiber. For Parker, the Wouwermans landscape was a powerful semiophore which made an important statement about her refined and cultured taste.

Parker’s collection of Old Masters, including the Van Dyck and Wouwermans, reflected prevailing tastes for the previous century’s Continental art. Yet her ownership of a number of works done by French landscape painter, Phillipe Jacques de Louterbourg (1740-1812), British portraitist, Joshua Reynolds, and Swiss history painter, Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), suggests that she recognized the value of more recent Continental and British art as well. Although the work of modern Continental artists sold well in the market for copies, original pieces were seldom exhibited in

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<sup>94</sup> Theresa Parker to Fritz Robinson, April 9, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 178. Philip Wouwermans (1619-1668) was a Dutch painter of landscape, hunting and battle scenes.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

dealers' shops or sold at auction as the trade was not in the new, but in the high art of the Renaissance and seventeenth century. The collection of British contemporary art was undertaken by few prior to the founding of the British Academy in 1768, as many gentlemen collectors and connoisseurs preferred to travel abroad to view or obtain works based on classical Roman and Greek aesthetics instead of patronizing local art which they criticized for lacking mechanical expertise and elevated themes.<sup>96</sup> Despite these somewhat unfavorable circumstances, female collectors appear to have found merit and meaning in contemporary art and established working relationships with its painters. Parker's patronage of London-based artists Loucherbourg, Reynolds and Kauffman, for example, demonstrated her preference for a burgeoning school of modern artists.

Following tastes *à-la-mode*, Parker collected fashionable genres of art including scene-scapes and portraiture.<sup>97</sup> Writing to her brother, Fritz, in April of 1772 Theresa wrote that she "bought a Landscape yesterday that I believe is a very good one, at least it is one of the most pleasing I ever saw done by the first Landscape Painter in France his name is Loucherbourg.... Perhaps you might have seen him at Paris."<sup>98</sup> The youngest person ever to be elected into France's prestigious Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, Loucherbourg was an early Romantic painter who enjoyed great success in both his native France and adoptive home country of England. Though Parker was writing at a time when landscape painting's popularity was reaching its height in Britain, and adequate reproductions could be found in the stalls of the Pall Mall markets, she still

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<sup>96</sup> John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 205.

<sup>97</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 206. Because these genres "represented everyday life" they were generally considered to be situated lower in the painting hierarchy.

<sup>98</sup> Theresa Parker to Grantham, April 20, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 111. In 1772 Loucherbourg debuted seven well-received works at the Royal Academy.

would have needed to make direct contact with an artist as popular as Louthembourg in order to secure a commission. Indeed, this is what occurred as she noted in that same letter that she called on him at his home.<sup>99</sup> The meeting evidently went well for five months later she awaited the arrival of “two very pretty Landscapes for the Great Room by Louthembourg, much the best I have seen of his performance.”<sup>100</sup>

Parker’s direct style of patronage was atypical by eighteenth-century standards which preferred women promotionally endorse rather than openly finance artists. This type of support, which has been referred to unflatteringly by art historian Iain Pears as “bastard patronage,” advertised for an artist “either by the elementary means of being well-known and buying a painting, or by putting the word around and recommending him to friends and relations.”<sup>101</sup> Women such as artist and natural history collector Mary Delany participated in this sort of fringe patronage when she wrote to her sister: “This morning we have been to see Mr [Benjamin] West’s and Mrs Angelica’s [Kauffman] paintings... My partiality leans to my sister painter. She certainly has a great deal of merit, but I like her history still better than her portraits.”<sup>102</sup> Given Delany’s limited income, indirect sponsorship, which improved the artist’s reputation with little personal cost, effort, or involvement, may have been necessary. However, women like Parker who did have the capital to directly patronize artists did so enthusiastically and with specific tastes in mind.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; Luke Hermann, *British Landscape Painting of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 114.

<sup>100</sup> Theresa Parker to Fritz Robinson, September 1, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, ff. 111, 180.

<sup>101</sup> Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1786* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 145.

<sup>102</sup> Mary Delany to Mrs. Port of Ilam, February 4, 1771, in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany: With Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte*, vol. 1 (London: R. Bentley, 1862), 329.

Parker's relationship with Reynolds best establishes the extent to which she was personally involved in her commissions. As the first president of the Royal Academy, Reynolds was one of the most influential painters of the period. His studio date books record her attendance frequently between 1770 and 1772, and there are multiple appointments under her name in 1773.<sup>103</sup> The artist completed several works for Parker including her portrait which was intended to hang in the Great Room at Saltram. The execution of this painting caused some frustration for Parker as a patron. Begun in 1770, the work rendered her in a contemplative pose, leaning against a pedestal supporting a classical vase and taking her pulse, as she was "apt to do so," (Fig. 2.3).<sup>104</sup> By the fall of 1772 the piece remained unfinished. Clearly bothered by the time it was taking to finalize the composition, Parker accused Reynolds of being "lazy" complaining later that because he did not think it "worthy of a place in the Exhibition" her commission was laid aside at her expense and "stood no chance of being finished."<sup>105</sup>

Though it is not known if any action was taken to accelerate its completion, Reynolds delivered the portrait later that year and any bad feelings that may have been engendered by the delay were forgotten by the following March. At that time Parker was contemplating approaching Reynolds with another commission to have her son, John, painted:

I have some thoughts (that is) Mr. Parker talks of having the little Boy put into the half length at Sir Joshua's which remains... in bright yellow, which he is very fond of at present but I do not approve of.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 366. After Parker's arrival at Saltram the names "Parker" and "Boringdon" appear more frequently than any other sitters.

<sup>104</sup> Theresa Parker to Grantham, October 20, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 121. Thomas Watson, *Hon. Mrs. Parker*, portrait after Joshua Reynolds, 1773, British Museum, London.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*; Theresa Parker to Grantham, May 5, 1775, BL Add. MSS 48218, ff. 159-160.

<sup>106</sup> Theresa Parker to Grantham, March 5, 1773, BL Add. MSS 48218, f. 131.

The parenthetical correction in this letter is extremely significant as it confirms that Parker's role as patron was not limited to visiting artist's studios or surrendering funds. Her letter conveys an active agency in the conception and oversight of Reynolds's work. More importantly, it exposes Parker, and not her husband, as the individual who independently sought out opportunities for artistic invention. John Parker occupied himself chiefly with hunting, racing, gambling, drinking, and pushing politics.<sup>107</sup> This would have left little time for serious devotion to acts of collecting and patronage. The act of a woman outwardly attributing decisions to a male counterpart is a behavior symptomatic of early modern gender hierarchies and it is likely that Parker de-emphasized her involvement in such matters in order to fulfill her role as the female subservient. If this was indicative of common behavior in their household, it is possible that any number of the acquisitions for Saltram originally ascribed to Mr. Parker between 1769 and 1775, may have been, in fact, conceived of or obtained by his wife.

The Parker's ownership of a series of history paintings made by Kauffman should be reassessed in this light. On August 24, 1775 Parker wrote to Fritz Robinson:

You next ask what subjects Angelica has painted for us. The prettiest, and I think the best she ever did, is the painting of Hector and Andromache (Fig. 2.4) [.] We have also got Ulysses discovering Achilles disguised in women's clothes by his handling the sword, Venus conducting Aeneas in character of a huntress- Penelope hanging up Ulysses' armour and two subjects out of the English history... the feast given upon the landing of the Saxons where Rowena presents the cup to Vortigern, and Elfrida receiving King Edgar.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life: 1754-1790* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183; Lummis, *Women's Domain*, 70. Parker was MP for the county of Devon.

<sup>108</sup> Parker called Kauffman's painting of Hector and Andromache, "The prettiest, and I think the best she ever did." Theresa Parker to Fritz Robinson, August 24, 1772, BL Add. MSS 48218, ff. 212-213. James Watson, *The Parting of Hector and Andromache*, after Angelica Kauffman, 1772, British Museum, London.

Given that Parker attributed earlier artistic decisions to her husband, the use of inclusive language such as “us” and “we” might be understood as simple formality and leaves room for debate that the attainment of these paintings was achieved solely by Mr. Parker, as previous scholarship has suggested.<sup>109</sup> Even if Parker was not in some manner responsible for collecting these paintings, her engagement with such symbolic works contradicts period typecasts which intimated that women were too unenlightened to comprehend figurative, metaphorical works.

Deemed a noble art because it portrayed general truths and represented moral choice which accorded with the *beaux ideals* of the Grand Manner, history painting gave pictorial embodiment to the great themes of ancient literature, history and religion. This genre was lauded by theorists such as Reynolds who defended its civic and intellectual worth in his *Discourses* by claiming that such works appealed not to “the gross senses; but to the desires of the mind.”<sup>110</sup> The complicated visual and literary influences and references intrinsic to history paintings suggests that one who collected them must have had an acute understanding of allegory and mythology in addition to biblical and classical allusion.

Parker’s affiliation with Kauffman, with whom she was familiar enough to refer to her by first name, is intriguing for several reasons. First, the collection of history paintings went against the grain. The British public, in general, did not collect pictures of historical themes due to their cost and lack of supply in Britain. Portraits and landscapes were far more popular forms of art despite academic theories which submitted history

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<sup>109</sup> See Christopher Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 211; Frances A. Gerard, *Angelica Kauffman, A Biography* (London, Ward and Downey, 1892), 119.

<sup>110</sup> Joshua Reynolds, *The Discourses* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), 229.

painting to be the most elevated genre. Second, the collection of history paintings by a female artist was extremely rare. Historical compositions were typically the preserve of male artists as they had more formalized instruction in classical literature and scripture, as well as training in anatomy and perspective.<sup>111</sup> Kauffman was one of only a few female artists to master such subjects during the eighteenth century. Third, the series which hung at Saltram was pioneering in its inclusion of works inspired by English history. Kauffman's representation of *Vortigern Enamoured with Rowena* (1770) was the first scene from England's medieval past to be exhibited at the Royal Academy.<sup>112</sup>

A far cry from the sophomoric female consumerism satirized in *Progress in the Polite Arts*, Parker's intervention in visual culture was sophisticated, educated and deliberate. It is clear from her correspondence with Grantham that Parker's association with the fine arts was by no means casual or insincere. Her request for particular companion pieces and landscapes which would hang well within Saltram's Great Room is evidence that Parker did not simply acquire paintings for the sheer pleasure of purchase, but viewed her collection as an "ensemble with a philosophy behind it." Although her reliance on Grantham to retrieve these works reveals a certain female dependency in consonance with early modern gender hierarchies, her brother's ultimate deference to Parker highlights the preservation of her independent judgment instead of its surrender to male authority as advocated by period discourse.

Parker's collecting and patronage efforts complicate the peripheral and passive construction of the female aesthete by revealing a practical and intellectual agency. Her

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Myone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750-1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>112</sup> Juliet Feibel, "Vortigern, Rowena, and the Ancient Britons: Historical Art and the Anglicization of National Origin," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (2000): 1-21, 6.



visit to Lutherbourg's home, for example, and her direct involvement with the Reynolds commissions shows that she was immediately and actively occupied in the very processes of artistic cultural production assumed to be alien to the female sensibility. Her patronage of these artists demonstrated the application of aesthetic judgment, the casting of her "gaze" over another's artistic creation, a behavior not in keeping with the ideologies of an accomplished woman, but of a male connoisseur. In this way, Parker exhibited certain characteristics and participated in aesthetic activities conventionally assigned to the masculine.

Yet, as can be intimated from her letter to Grantham in which she discusses the Reynolds commission, Parker's involvement in visual culture was a calculated enterprise in which she attempted to keep proprieties in check. Although unsurprising given the nature of eighteenth-century gender conventions, Parker's attempt to distance herself from an artistic, creative decision does more to reveal than disguise her role as a practiced collector and patron. Unfortunately, her early death in December of 1775 cut short her promising and inspired engagement with the fine arts.<sup>113</sup> Despite the relative brevity of Parker's collecting and patronage pursuits, her "skill and exact judgment" in such matters did leave a lasting impression on those with whom she worked: In an obituary published the following year, Reynolds declared that Parker "seemed to possess, by a kind of intuition, that propriety of taste and right thinking, which others but imperfectly acquire by long labour and application."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Parker's death on December 21, 1775 was caused by complications following the birth of her daughter, Theresa.

<sup>114</sup> Joshua Reynolds, "Character of the late Hon. Mrs Parker, promised in our last magazine," in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 46 (1776), 75.



Fig. 2.1: Anonymous. [*Progress in the Polite Arts*], [1801]. British Museum, London.



Fig. 2.2: Isaac Cruikshank, [*Drawing, Octagon Room in the Royal Academy of Arts*], 1756-1811. British Museum, London.



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Fig. 2.3: Thomas Watson, *Hon. Mrs Parker*, portrait after Joshua Reynolds, 1773. British Museum, London.

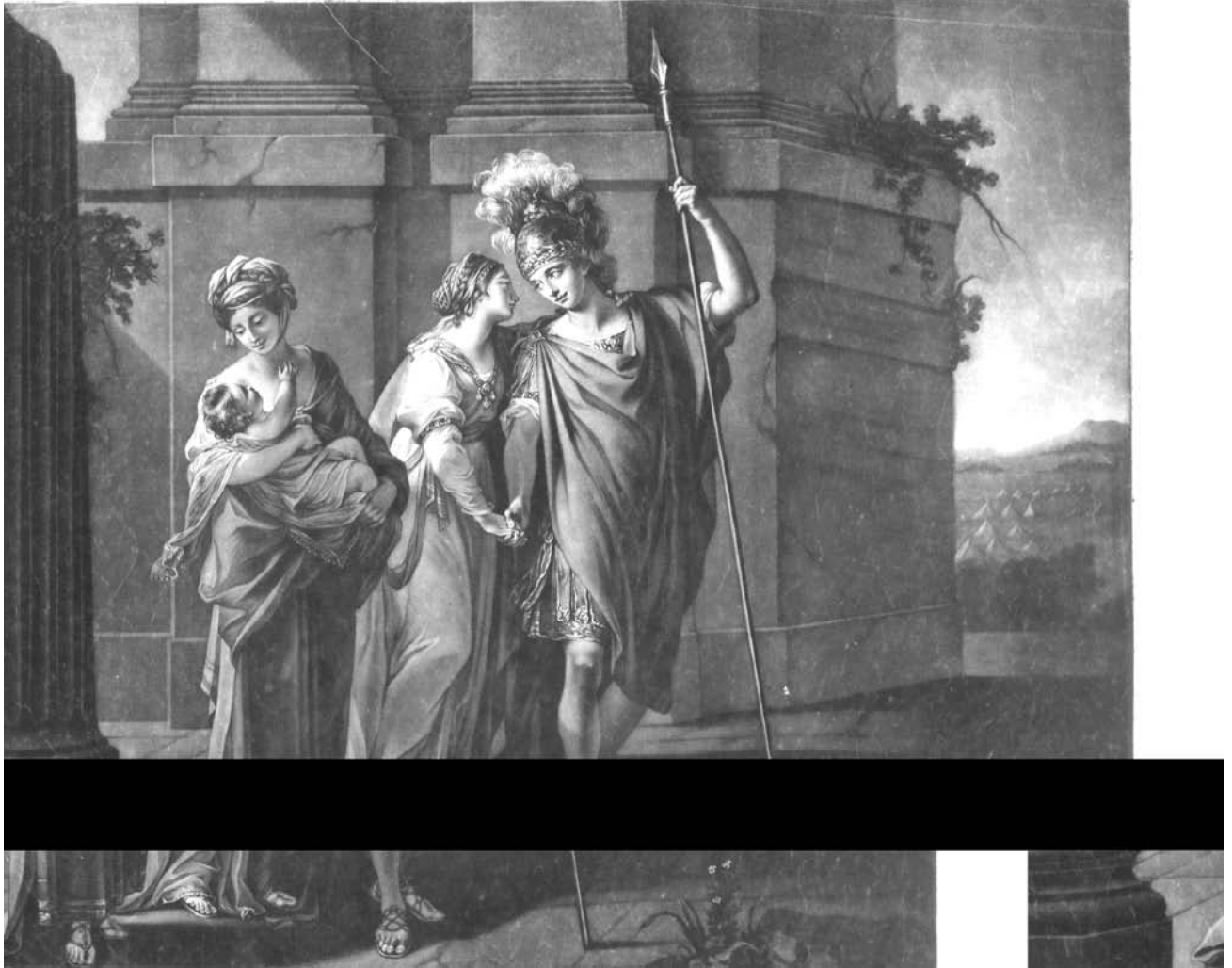


Fig. 2.4: James Watson, *The Parting of Hector and Andromache*, print after Angelica Kauffman, 1772. British Museum, London.

## Chapter Three

### Recovery, Recollection and Reimagination:

#### The Neoclassical Patronage of Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire

Throughout the long eighteenth century there existed in Britain a distinct cultural milieu in which neo-classical themes developed with intensity and enthusiasm. Rooted in the belief that the ancients' contemporary civic, moral and aesthetic virtues should follow as naturally in Britain as it had in antiquity, classicism inspired much direct imitation and appropriation of ancient models. English author Samuel Johnson referred to this emulation when he remarked in 1776, "All our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean."<sup>115</sup> British fascination with the classical past, which over time crystallized into what historians have called the "cult of the antique," manifested itself through a variety of channels, the foremost of which included the interpretation of classical aesthetics via the collection and patronage of the finest examples of antiquity or, alternatively, the best copies of the mythological and historical characters of ancient Rome and Greece.

Through networks of collecting and patronage, antiquity was actively recovered, recollected and reimaged as ancient artifacts and aesthetic traditions were "transposed from one cultural context and, in many cases, medium and appropriated into another."<sup>116</sup> Most scholarship, which approaches the "packaging and repackaging" of ancient material

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<sup>115</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for Jones and Co. Acton Place, Kingsland Road, 1827), 298.

<sup>116</sup> Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15.

culture as a highly gendered activity, contends that the process of assimilation of the antique into British society was initiated and sustained by a handful of aristocratic men.<sup>117</sup> This interpretation can be understood to an extent—the study of Latin and Greek in addition to knowledge of Roman and Hellenic texts was rarely featured as a component of early modern female education. Additionally, because classical sensibility was dependent on an increasing familiarity and contact with antiquity, travel was considered *de rigueur*. Most often formalized in the Grand Tour, a type of patrician pilgrimage to continental sites of intellectual and artistic importance, such travel was not typically the prerogative of women. The social and political values affiliated with the Grand Tour further underscored its importance for elite men. As Johnson noted, “A man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what is expected every man should see.”<sup>118</sup>

Yet, to focus on men as the sole purveyors of neoclassicism simply because it is easier to elucidate the male collector and patron of antiquities is short-sighted. The omission of women from related historical narratives effects a considerable gap in our understanding of the complexity and totality of the cultural program of classicism in the long eighteenth century. Female engagement with antiquity was advanced in a way that scholars have not recognized in any substantial manner. Women were integrated and invested in intellectual and artistic communities which participated in the preservation and promotion of antiquity through the sponsorship of archeological excavations, patronage of neoclassical artists, and the republication and translation of classical texts.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Vicky Coltman’s *Fabricating the Antique* and Philip Ayers’s *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (1997) are excellent examples of scholarship that have entirely eliminated women from their discussion of British classicism.

<sup>118</sup> Boswell, *Life*, 298.

An attachment to the philosophies of antique architecture, aesthetics and literature developed in the century following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and lasted until the mid nineteenth century when such affinities were supplanted by more Romantic sentiments. Over the course of this period, approaches to the collection, patronage and interpretation of antiquity changed. While the first few decades of the eighteenth century focused on the aesthetics of common visual icons such as Venus or Psyche, the last several witnessed a shift away from iconography to antiquarianism and putting antiques into historical contexts.<sup>119</sup> Although the aesthetics of classical art were still appealing, this movement towards contextualization and a more “scientific” approach to antiquity relied increasingly on the discovery of fresh artifacts from archaeological excavations. The most consequential of these digs took place in Italy, which, following the Second Treaty of Paris in November of 1815, reopened its borders to international exchange.

For most post-Napoleonic era travelers, the associative value of the antique remained preeminent. Many English classicists who visited Italy, particularly Rome, after 1815 carried with them an important revivalist message that the physical uncovering of ancient civilizations should proceed alongside its revivification by modern Britons imbued with true classical taste.<sup>120</sup> Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1759-1824), was one of these classicists whose support for, and collaboration with, the neoclassical cultural program in Rome took a variety of forms (Fig. 3.1).<sup>121</sup> Her multiple attempts to reimagine and collect antiquity occurred concurrently with, and included participation in, ongoing projects to topographically map the Forum, model antique

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<sup>119</sup> Rosemary Sweet, “Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 181-206.

<sup>120</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture*, 113.

<sup>121</sup> Francesco Bartolozzi, *Lady Elizabeth Foster*, after Joshua Reynolds, 1787, British Museum, London.



aesthetics through contemporary sculpture, and perpetuate classical ideologies through textual preservation.

Elizabeth, the daughter of Frederick Augustus Hervey, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bristol (1730-1803) and Elizabeth Davers (1730-1800), spent most of her youth in Ireland where her father was Bishop of Derry. Following a brief but unhappy marriage to Irish MP John Thomas Foster (d. 1796) in 1776, Elizabeth took refuge at Devonshire House in London, the home of Duchess Georgiana (1757-1806) and her husband, William, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire (1748-1811). The circumstances of the trio's living arrangements were the subject of much contemporary speculation and criticism. This is due in large part to the fact that while remaining Georgiana's best friend, Elizabeth bore two children by the Duke whom she later married in 1809.<sup>122</sup>

Upon the Duke's passing in 1811, Elizabeth, now Duchess of Devonshire, was forced to leave the family's properties and after Waterloo decided to permanently relocate to Rome where she established herself as a leading patroness of archaeology and the arts. According to socialite George Brummell (1778–1840), “Her palace at Rome, as well as her purse, was open to all men of genius, without distinction of rank or country.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Sir William Gell (1777-1836), Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), and Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) were all, at one time or another, intimates of her circle. Her influence was so far-reaching that the French

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<sup>122</sup> Vere Foster, ed., *The Two Duchesses: Georgina Duchess of Devonshire, Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1898), vi.

<sup>123</sup> William Jesse, ed., *The Life of George Brummell* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1844), 45.

ambassador, the Duc de Laval, reported, “All Rome is at her disposal: ministers, cardinals, painters, sculptors, society, — all are at her feet.”<sup>124</sup>

Almost immediately on entering the Eternal City, the Duchess made the acquaintance of Cardinal Hercule Consalvi (1757-1824), secretary of state to the Vatican, with whom she shared a passion for classical archeology. Prior to the Duchess’s arrival, Consalvi instituted a public works program aimed at maintaining Rome’s primacy as an historic archeological and artistic capital.<sup>125</sup> The Duchess was made aware of the cardinal’s undertaking as early as February of 1816 when she wrote to her son, Augustus Foster (1780-1848), “Consalvi and I are such friends that when we are at the same place the crowd gives way for him to come up to me. He is doing much here, and is delighted to see the encouragement given to improvements of all kinds.”<sup>126</sup> These “improvements” were part of a general plan of repair, excavation, and monumentalization in the Forum executed under the direction of Italian archeologist Carlo Fea (1753-1836). Earlier eighteenth-century excavations of the Forum were undertaken in the hope of discovering objects of aesthetic significance such as antique columns, statues and marble. While this was still an important consideration, Fea’s chief aim reflected the more modern, scientific archeological bent of ascertaining and recording the original lay-out and purpose of the ruins themselves.<sup>127</sup>

The Duchess of Devonshire was among a number of English aristocrats including Henry Gally Knight (1786-1846), Thomas Hope (1769-1831), and George Hamilton Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen (1784-1860), who financed excavations in and around Rome in

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<sup>124</sup> Duc de Laval, in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Madame Récamier*, ed. Isaphene M. Luyster (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868), 196.

<sup>125</sup> John Martin Robinson, *Cardinal Consalvi, 1757-1824* (London: Bodley Head, 1987), 152.

<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Augustus Foster, February 9, 1816, in *The Two Duchesses*, 412.

<sup>127</sup> Robinson, *Consalvi*, 152.

the post-Napoleonic period. The Duchess's efforts should be understood as a part of a greater British involvement in the study of Roman archeology after the extraordinary phase of excavational activity initiated under the French occupation. During that time, large tracts of terrain were systematically cleared in order to better expose and restore ruined temples, basilicas and triumphal arches. By the time the French departed in 1814, the Forum had begun to take on the appearance of an advanced archeological site instead of a rustic and semi-rural arcade.<sup>128</sup>

Following a "praiseworthy" but failed attempt at dragging the Tiber in the "hope of redeeming some statues which it is well ascertained had been thrown into it at different periods during the civil wars, and the first invasion of Clovis," the Duchess turned her attention to the Forum.<sup>129</sup> With the support of Consalvi, she initiated an excavation around the Column of Phocas which had been partially unearthed three years before (Fig. 3.2).<sup>130</sup> In December of 1816, the Duchess of Devonshire described her enterprise to Augustus:

I have begun a little excavation in the Foro Romano, and they found a little cup or calice. In digging close to the single Pillar, they found it to be a column to Phocas. I am having the Cup cleaned a little and put together. At the great excavation they found a part of the Plan of Rome, which joins on to that which is preserved in the Capitol Museum. Nothing can be greater than the interest which this excites. I have employed poor laborers... which is charity. I saw it particularly pleased my friend Cardinal Consalvi, and therefore I was doubly pleased to do it.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Frank Salmon, *Building on Ruins: The Rediscovery of Rome and English Architecture* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2000), 57.

<sup>129</sup> Jesse, *George Brummell*, 45.

<sup>130</sup> In *The Eagle and the Spade: Archeology in Rome During the Napoleonic Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), historian Ronald T. Ridley argues that the discovery of the Column of Phocas actually took place in 1813 under French authority and has since been wrongly attributed to the Duchess of Devonshire despite numerous contemporary accounts stating otherwise. Luigi Rossini, *Veduta Generale del Foro Romano*, 1817, British Museum, London.

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Augustus Foster, in *Two Duchesses*, 425. Phocas was the Emperor of Constantinople, d. 610.

The excavation exposed the base of the column “to the ancient pavement, laid open the steps, and showed that it was seven feet lower than the triumphal arch [of Severus] alluded to.”<sup>132</sup> In this way, the Duchess of Devonshire’s efforts added to Fea’s continuing project of envisioning ancient Rome through topographically mapping the environs of the Forum. The clearing of sites in order to uncover greater access to buildings, roadways and other architectural elements was in keeping with a move towards a more scientific approach to antiquity rather than a purely aesthetic one.

The Duchess’s work in the Forum did not escape the attention of British travelers abroad and provoked much commentary and criticism. Upon his return from Rome in 1817, Francis Leveson, Lord Gower (1800-1857) informed Harriett, Countess Granville (1785-1862) that “the Duchess, Cardinal Consalvi and [Count Alexandre] Souza are digging *à qui mieux mieux*, and that they rout up great curiosities; that the Duchess is adored, that she protects all the artists and employs them and pays them magnificently, and that all the way on the road the inn-keepers are asking, ‘Connaissez-vous cette noble dame?’<sup>133</sup> The uncovering of the Column of Phocas’s base in particular aroused much antiquarian enthusiasm back in England where it was reported in *The Monthly Magazine* (1818) by Henry Sass, a student of the Royal Academy of Arts:

An isolated column of the Corinthian order, called the Pillar of Phocas... was clearing, and was nearly completed when we left Rome, by the order, at the expense, and much to the honour of the Duchess of Devonshire. These are acts which show true nobility. Below its base are seen several steps, by which it was approached... Here we descended and enjoyed the idea that we were standing on the same

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<sup>132</sup> John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour Through Italy*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 1 (London: Printed for J. Mawman, 1821), lxxii.

<sup>133</sup> Harriet, Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Cavendish Morpeth, June 1817, in *Letters of Harriet, Countess of Granville, 1810-1845*, vol. 1, ed. F. Leveson Gower (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1894), 110. Harriet was the daughter of William, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire and Georgina Cavendish, who in life had been Elizabeth’s best friend.

ground, nay, resting perhaps on the same stone, which Caesar, Cicero, or Virgil, had trod before us.<sup>134</sup>

Not everyone looked so favorably on Duchess of Devonshire's patronage. While all in Rome may have been "at her feet," the Duchess suffered from a wounded reputation in England where she was still imagined as the harlot mistress of the Duke of Devonshire. This notoriety may have affected responses to her work. Writing from Rome in the autumn of 1819, Lavinia, Countess Spencer (1762-1831), who never cared for the Duchess, dismissed her patronage in the Forum as nothing more than "pretensions to Maecenas-ship."<sup>135</sup> In a particularly spiteful note Lady Spencer complained:

That Witch of Endor, the Duchess of Devon, has been doing mischief of another kind to what she has been doing all her life by pretending to dig for the public good in the Forum. She, of course, has found nothing, but has bought up a quantity of dirt and old horrors... she has defaced every place where she has poked.<sup>136</sup>

Perhaps a more balanced interpretation of the Duchess of Devonshire's patronage came from American scholar George Ticknor (1791-1871) who wrote that although she attempted "to play the Maecenas a little too much," the Duchess did "a good deal that should be praised" especially in her excavations which he considered "satisfactory and a fair beginning."<sup>137</sup> In reality, her ventures in the Forum yielded a great many things of

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<sup>134</sup> Henry Sass, "A Journey to Rome and Naples Performed in 1817," *The Monthly Magazine* 45 (London: Printed for Sir Richard Phillips, 1818), 597.

<sup>135</sup> Lavinia, Countess Spencer to Lady Sarah Lyttelton, Rome, November 15, 1819, in *Correspondence of Sarah Spencer, Lady Lyttelton, 1787-1870*, ed. Mrs. Hugh Wyndham (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 217.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor*, vol. 1 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 180.

archeological interest, including some of the stones of the Via Sacra, which helped to encourage a full scale reimagination of the Forum.<sup>138</sup>

At the same time that the Duchess was “routing up” great antique curiosities, she also she became a patron of neoclassical sculpture and literature. An article in the *Spirit of the English Magazines* (1817-1818) reported that she seemed determined “to rival her father, the late Earl of Bristol, in her patronage of the fine arts,” by “giving a commission for some one work to every Roman artist who ranks above mediocrity.”<sup>139</sup> To suggest that the Duchess had a professional relationship with all working artists in Rome is an exaggeration. However, such an overstatement implies that the Duchess’s reputation as a patron of the arts had become significant. This éclat no doubt came from her benefaction of, and close association with, two neoclassical sculptors who certainly ranked above mediocrity: Antonio Canova (1757-1822) and Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844).

The Duchess’s patronage of these men is best understood in the context of the appeal of post-antique reproductions and works inspired by classical precedent. As images of the most celebrated ancient sculptures entered the visual consciousness of Europe, the demand for casts and copies proliferated and most often took form in plaster, bronze or ceramic statuettes, busts and reliefs. It would not be uncommon to find copies of the *Farnese Hercules*, the *Venus Medici*, the *Dying Gladiator*, or the *Laocoon* in gardens and fashionable English interiors as such display offered visual confirmation of the collector’s elevated taste, erudition, and classical sensibility.<sup>140</sup> Precise stylistic and

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<sup>138</sup> Dorothy Margaret Stewart, *Dearest Bess: The Life and Times of Lady Elizabeth Foster, Afterwards Duchess of Devonshire, From Her Unpublished Journals and Correspondence* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), 245.

<sup>139</sup> Anon., *Spirit of the English Magazines*, 2 (Boston: Monroe and Francis, 1817-1818), 235.

<sup>140</sup> Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 85.

technical production of casts and copies by burgeoning artists such as Canova and Thorvaldsen led to the development of works modeled after and inspired by the antique. These sculptures reinterpreted classical aesthetics through what was imagined as the “spirit” of the ancients. Therefore, such pieces served as excellent showpieces for the collector who wished to own an original work of art but still retain an associative value with the antique. By the time the Duchess of Devonshire arrived in Rome, Canova and Thorvaldsen were already celebrated as leading creators of classically influenced sculpture.

Although the Duchess liked both men she openly favored the “delightful” Canova, judging that he had the “enthusiasm so necessary to make a good artist.”<sup>141</sup> She made this opinion clear to Augustus, in a letter dated March 22, 1816:

I am sure I have mentioned Thorvaldsen, whom I admire very much, but when they attempt to place him above, or equal to Canova, I think it is like comparing the cinque cento to the antique, but he is very good, and full of genius, but idle.<sup>142</sup>

The Duchess assumed responsibilities of both patron and agent when it came to Canova’s career. The sculptor’s correspondence reveals that she proposed opportunities for creative networking, made thematic suggestions about his works, and monitored the progress of his commissions for other sponsors. For example, in September of 1816 Canova confirmed that he followed the Duchess’s advice and wrote to the Prince Regent on the subject of obtaining plaster casts of the Elgin marbles for his own use.<sup>143</sup> The Duchess also made recommendations for the placement of art works in general and for the subject of Canova’s compositions in particular. Writing the following month to “the most

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Augustus Foster, Rome, 22 March 1816, in *Two Duchesses*, 414.

<sup>143</sup> Antonio Canova to Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, September 1816, in *Two Duchesses*, 419-420.

Illustrious Lady Duchess,” the sculptor lamented not being able to satisfy her request that a portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds be placed in the Pantheon and noted that he had “never done anything having any reference to the poet Virgil- neither statue nor portrait.”<sup>144</sup>

Due to either the well-connected company she kept or her own engagement with the artists, the Duchess was well informed of both Canova’s and Thorvaldsen’s ongoing commissions. Writing to Augustus on December 29, 1816, the Duchess admitted that Thorvaldsen had made a “prodigious improvement” and was being kept busy having “a great deal to do,” specifically a sculpture of *Jason* (1828), based on the Roman copy of the ancient Greek *Doryphorus* (and likely also the *Apollo Belvedere*), commissioned by Thomas Hope.<sup>145</sup> Although she called some of Thorvaldsen’s works “really admirable,” the Duchess never wavered in her preference for Canova, calling his unfinished *Mars and Venus* (1822) “the most beautiful thing I ever saw, and the best of his works” (Fig. 3.3).<sup>146</sup> In addition to *Mars and Venus*, the Duchess recorded that Canova was also occupied “finishing for the Prince his Nymph and Amorino, which he means as an offering,” noting that he had works “ordered that will take up to twelve years.”<sup>147</sup>

Such a close following of both sculptors’ occupations suggests that the Duchess of Devonshire maintained a keen admiration for the aesthetics of neoclassical art in general. Yet, her favoritism of Canova reflects a more deep seated classical sensibility. In addition to his production of some of the finest examples of post-antique statuary in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the artist acted as *Ispettore delle Belle Arti*, or inspector general of the fine arts, which oversaw the inspection, conservation and

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<sup>144</sup> Antonio Canova to Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, October 1816, in *Two Duchesses*, 421-22.

<sup>145</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Augustus, December 29, 1816, in *Two Duchesses*, 426.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. Antonio Canova, *Venus and Mars*, 1816-1822, London, Buckingham Palace, Royal Collection.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.



restoration of Roman monuments.<sup>148</sup> Given their shared interest and involvement in the protection of the integrity of Rome's cultural heritage, the Duchess may have felt a more profound respect and appreciation for Canova's work. Additionally, her professional and personal affiliation with him would have certainly put her into contact with members of an elite intellectual community which no doubt exposed her to an array of classically influenced projects just waiting for a patron with deep pockets.

One such enterprise that the Duchess eagerly took on as another expression of her classical virtù was the publication of a versified Italian translation of Horace's *Fifth Satire* (1817) and a re-edition of Annibal Caro's *Aeneid* (1819).<sup>149</sup> Both volumes were illustrated, at the Duchess's additional expense, with steel engravings by renowned artists then living in Italy including Vincenzo Camuccini (1773-1844), Franz Ludwig Catel (1778-1856), Pierre-Athanase Chauvin (1774-1832), Simone Pomardi (1760-1830), and Charles Lock Eastlake (1793-1865).<sup>150</sup> By most accounts, both texts were well received. Ticknor declared the *Fifth Satire*, which chronicled Horace's journey from Rome to Brundisium, to be a "beautiful book," and the *Aeneid*, "a monument to her taste and generosity."<sup>151</sup> Just as her excavational patronage prompted approval from classical enthusiasts, so did her commission of these antique texts. Upon report that the Duchess's "splendid" editions were ready for print, an editorial in the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* observed that "One cannot be surprised, after this, to hear of an author dedicating the first volume of his work to St. Peter, and the second to the Duchess of

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<sup>148</sup> Frank Salmon, "'Storming the Campo Vaccino': British Architects and the Antique Buildings of Rome after Waterloo," *Architectural History* 38, (1995): 146-175.

<sup>149</sup> The two books referenced here are *Horatius Flaccus Quintus: Satyrarum lib., Roma de Romanis* (1817) and *L'Eneide di Virgilio recata in versi italiani da Annibal Caro, Roma de Romanis* (1819).

<sup>150</sup> Luyster, *Madame Récamier*, 196.

<sup>151</sup> Ticknor, *Life*, 180.

Devonshire,” as she “appeared to be amongst the artists what St. Peter is among the monks, giving employment to almost the entire body.”<sup>152</sup>

The translation of Horatian and Virgilian literature into the vernacular, as well as the subsequent adoption of its tone and spirit in contemporary works, was a principal feature of British neoclassicism as it helped to preserve and indoctrinate classical ideologies into the cultural consciousness.<sup>153</sup> In commissioning these texts, the Duchess not only participated in the program of classicism by espousing the study, imitation and approbation of the ancient’s ideas, but also by textually monumentalizing antique sites. Her deluxe edition of Virgil’s tale, for instance, featured over twenty engravings of classical locations and their corresponding architecture which helped the reader to observe and reimagine the antique.<sup>154</sup> Just as the monuments in and around the Forum were preserved physically, in a sense, publications like the Duchess’s *Aeneid* preserved these monuments textually by creating an enduring visual record and memorial of ancient sites.

The Duchess’s literary, archeological and artistic exploits, were concentrated in, and limited to, Rome. Because similar ventures could have been easily achieved from her home in England, it is fitting to ask why she chose to live out the final years of her life surrounded by vestiges of the ancient world. The answer to this question may speak more to the earnestness of her neoclassical sensibility than her determined financing of classically minded projects. Richard Colt Hoare’s travelogue, *A Classical Tour Through Italy and Sicily* (1819), offers a contemporary explanation of the lure of Italy and helps

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<sup>152</sup> Anon., *Spirit of the English Magazines*, 235; Anon., *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* 3 (London: Printed for Black, Parbury and Allen, 1817), 278.

<sup>153</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture*, 31-32.

<sup>154</sup> Jesse, *George Brummell*, 45; Anon., *The Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles, Lettres, Arts, Sciences, Etc.* (London: Printed by Bensley and Son, 1818), 286.

frame what intellectual and aesthetic impulses may have motivated the Duchess's relocation to the Eternal City:

The object particularly pointed out to us in Italy is the recollection of former times, and a comparison of those times with the present; to restore to our minds the classical studies of our youth; to visit those places recorded in history as the residences of illustrious characters of antiquity or rendered interesting by historical facts and anecdotes; to admire and reflect upon those remains of polished architecture and sculpture which the hand of time has fortunately spared.<sup>155</sup>

As a classicist, the Duchess revered all things ancient and in Rome, the ultimate site of historical associations, she could be completely immersed in the “recollection of former times.” Relocation to Italy permanently secured her proximity to “those remains of polished architecture and sculpture” and all but guaranteed her unlimited fruitful opportunities to admire, reflect upon, and interact with the physical fabric and material culture of the ancients. Her correspondence makes plain that she stayed *au courant* with new developments in the city as they pertained to the unearthing of new antiquities and maintained an active acquaintance of those who worked towards the continued preservation and promotion of Rome's ancient character.

She was especially preoccupied with archeological advancements near Rome on which she tended to report with an air of authority to her friends. Writing on March 22, 1823 to novelist and socialite Lady Sydney Morgan (1783- 1859), the Duchess related:

A Marchesa Farra Cuppa has begun an excavation at Torneto, ancient Tarquinia, which has excited a great degree of interest. A warrior with his lance and shield was discovered entire, but the first blast of air reduced it to dust. She gave me part of his shield. A small case of a beautiful form and two very large oxen are, I believe, coming to the Vatican Museum. The antiquity of them is calculated at three thousand years. Other excavations are making by some proprietors at Roma

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<sup>155</sup> Richard Colt Hoare, *A Classical Tour Through Italy and Sicily* (London: Printed for J. Mawman, 1819), vii.

Vecchia. The first *fouille* [search] produced a beautiful mosaic statue of a fine stag, in black marble.

P.S. A fine statue of Bacchus has been discovered, about four days ago, not far from Cecilia Metella's tomb.<sup>156</sup>

Tarquinius, located forty-seven miles northwest of Rome near Corneto, was foremost of the twelve ancient capitals of Etruria and the site of much archeological appeal in the early nineteenth century.<sup>157</sup> The year the Duchess wrote this letter, antiquarian Carlo Avvolta discovered a "celebrated virgin tomb" of an Etruscan prince, "which gave rise to all excavations subsequently made in the neighborhood of Corneto."<sup>158</sup> The gifting of artifact fragments from such a significant site reveals the extent to which the Duchess was intimately connected to the archeological community.

That she felt great pride in her adoptive city is revealed in another letter to Lady Morgan in which the Duchess attempted to persuade her friend, who did not have the same fondness for Italy, to visit Rome.<sup>159</sup> Touting its excavational successes and commitment to classical conservation, she declared that in Rome,

every monument of antiquity is attended to with the greatest care, and every picture that requires it is either cleaned, or noted down to be so. The commission of five attend on every new discovery to give their opinion as to the merit of what is found, and most productive have this year's excavations proved to be in sculpture. Mosaic repairs go on, and new buildings in every part of Rome.... I know not any capitol so adorned by its sovereign as this.<sup>160</sup>

Indeed, for a classicist in pursuit of the past, Rome was a city of unlimited potential and excitement. There, the Duchess experienced meaningful and dynamic interaction with

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<sup>156</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Sydney Morgan, March 22, 1823, in *Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries, and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1863), 160-161.

<sup>157</sup> Nathan Schlanger and Jarl Nordbladh, *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archeology in the Lights of its History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 167.

<sup>158</sup> George Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, vol. 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: John Murray, 1883), 388.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Sydney Morgan, May 31, 1823, in *Lady Morgan's Memoirs*, 169-172.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

some of the most considerable archeological and artistic developments of her time. No doubt the richness of these encounters contributed to her decision to remain in Rome for the rest of her life.

On March 30, 1824, the Duchess died after contracting a severe fever. Soon afterwards, a series of medals were struck in her honor, “in the spirit of old Rome,” commemorative of her “unwearied efforts to preserve or restore to the world any remains of the classical antiquities which she so deeply venerated.”<sup>161</sup> Each of the four coins depicted a bust of the Duchess of Devonshire on the obverse, or front side, while the reverse exhibited an iconographic reference. Two of the four medals patently alluded to her reputation as a classicist. The first represented the Duchess as veiled and wearing a diadem, reminiscent of the headdresses which typically adorned statues of Juno and Venus and portraits of Roman empresses.<sup>162</sup> The reverse side showed the column of Phocas and the inscription “COL. FOC. MONVMENTA DETECTA,” or “Column of Phocas, Memorial Uncovered.”<sup>163</sup> The second medal depicted the same likeness of the Duchess and on the reverse, a helmeted head of Athena, goddess of the heroic endeavor.<sup>164</sup> These medals are evidence that for some of the Duchess’s contemporaries in Rome, she did not simply “play” the role of Maecenas, but effectively achieved acts of classical patronage that were worthy of celebration and memorialization in perpetuity.

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<sup>161</sup> Jesse, *Life*, 45. The British Museum owns proofs of these medals before their lettering in silver and copper.

<sup>162</sup> Silver medal of the Duchess of Devonshire (Column of Phocas reverse), British Museum, London.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Silver medal of the Duchess of Devonshire (Helmeted Head of Athena reverse), British Museum, London. The other two medals illustrate somewhat more obscure references to the Duchess including a bust of the poet Dante Alighieri (George Brummell tells us that “her death interrupted the completion of a Dante, which she had also intended to illustrate with one hundred plates”) and a dog’s head and stag’s head couped, perhaps signifying a familial crest. Jesse, *Life*, 45.

During her time in Rome, the Duchess of Devonshire participated in the cultural program of classicism through patronage activities which recollected, recovered and reimagined the antique past. The results of her excavation in the Forum not only unearthed important architectural remains, but also contributed to the modern scientific investigation of remapping ancient Rome's topography. Her archeological patronage promoted the preservation of classical aesthetics in their original form. Ancient culture was not divorced, isolated, or dislocated from its primary context in the Forum. The Duchess's facilitation of its excavation is an argument for the inherent or intrinsic value of antiquity's authentic and unadulterated form. In this way, the Duchess's classical sensibility extended beyond the "packaging and repackaging" of the past, which tended to transpose ancient artifacts and aesthetic traditions from one cultural context into another. Unlike English neoclassical Palladianism, which looked back to antiquity mediated and transformed by sixteenth-century architects, the Duchess's on-site excavation engaged directly with the classical past. In this way, her patronage in the Forum advocated the revival of the ancients' original values and effectively encouraged and validated attempts to recollect the classical past as a project both nostalgic and natural.

Additionally, the Duchess's patronage of neoclassical sculpture supported the preservation of classical aesthetics through imitation of the antique. While the Duchess contributed to the reimagination of classical aesthetics through her support and sponsorship of neoclassical artists Canova and Thorvaldsen, her republication of Horace's *Fifth Satire* and Annibal Caro's *Aeneid* helped to preserve and indoctrinate classical ideologies into the cultural consciousness through textual monumentalization.

Each of these projects reflected some characteristic aspect of the classicists' attachment to the philosophies of antique architecture, aesthetics and literature and confirms that female collectors and patrons, like their male counterparts, were also integral contributors to the project of classicism in the long eighteenth century.



Fig. 3.1: Francesco Bartolozzi, *Lady Elizabeth Foster*, portrait after Joshua Reynolds, 1787. British Museum, London.





Fig. 3.2: The Column of Phocas can be seen in the middle ground of this veduta to the left of the three remaining columns of the Temple of Vespasian and Titus. This drawing was completed in 1817 and depicts the Duchess's ongoing excavation surrounding the Column of Phocas. Luigi Rossini, *Veduta Generale del Foro Romano*, 1817. British Museum, London.



Fig. 3.3: Antonio Canova, *Venus and Mars*, 1816-1822. London, Buckingham Palace, Royal Collection. (Photo: The Royal Collection (c) 2009 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

## Conclusion

This study has reevaluated the role that women played in the collection and patronage of natural history, fine art, and antiquity during the long eighteenth century. The activities and experiences of a number of early modern female collectors and patrons are linked to prevailing cultural and intellectual influences in order to contextualize and confirm their broader historical significance. In this way, this thesis should be understood as a restoration of women to their central place in the history of collecting and patronage and as a more complete historicization of the corresponding culture between the years 1715 and 1825.

The development and success of eighteenth-century female collecting and patronage enterprises, such as those described in this project, were dependent on a number of factors. First, the existence of at least a modest disposable income was necessary for the acquisition or commission of natural history specimens, art works, and antiquarian items. The Duchess of Portland, for instance, inherited over £8,000 a year from her mother's estate of which she spent a generous sum on her natural history purchases, estimated to have cost no less than £60,000.<sup>165</sup>

Second, an education in the sciences, languages, art, history, and literature was critical for engaging in the underlying intellectual character of collecting and patronage endeavors. As products of polite rearing, the Duchess of Portland, Mary Delany, Anna Blackburne, Theresa Parker, and Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, enjoyed the privilege of leisure time which they filled with occupations directed towards their edification. For

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<sup>165</sup> Anna Blackburne to Carl Linnaeus, October 14, 1771, in *Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné*, ed. J.M. Hulth (Upsala, Sweden: Akademiska Bokhandlen, 1916), 286; Horace Walpole, *The Duchess of Portland's Museum* (New York: Grolier Club, 1936), 6.

example, while Anna Blackburne conducted an independent study of Linnaeus's system of sexual taxonomy over a period of years during her "leisure hours," Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire hosted *conversazioni* in Rome featuring individuals of great erudition which men like George Ticknor attended to "meet what is called the world."<sup>166</sup>

Third, contemporary collecting and patronage enterprises necessitated not only remarkable industry and ambition, but also the freedom to exercise these characteristics. Restrictive eighteenth-century societal and gender conventions often limited or circumscribed female independence by obliging deference to a male authority figure. Male absenteeism, in some ways, released women from established social constraints and allowed an element of female autonomy. Interestingly, with the exception of Theresa Parker, none of the women were married at the height of their collecting and patronage activities. The Duchess of Portland, Mary Delany and Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire were each widowed, and Anna Blackburne never wed. It is likely that a lack of spousal persuasion allowed these women to actively apply their industry and ambition in a way that would have been otherwise difficult or unmanageable.<sup>167</sup> Yet, the fact that Parker worked alongside her husband in collecting and commissioning works for Saltram suggests that the presence of a male figure did not necessarily preclude women from enthusiastic and sincere participation in collecting and patronage ventures. However, even in her role as domesticated wife, it is clear that Parker operated her collecting and patronage arrangements with a great deal of independent license.

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<sup>166</sup> George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor*, vol. 1 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 180.

<sup>167</sup> See Allison Mary Levy, ed., *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).



The collection and patronage of natural history, art, and antiquities by eighteenth-century women is particularly relevant to the study of contemporary culture as it expands our view of women's agency in creating and modifying the social and intellectual framework within which they lived. The scale and public nature of women's collecting and patronage projects, for example, suggests that early modern female utility and will to achieve extended beyond the domestic household to an international community. Female collectors and patrons were motivated figures that advanced a more public private realm through their meaningful engagement with naturalists, explorers, artists, statesmen, and fellow collectors.

The intellectual milieu within which these engagements often took place contradicts early modern constructions which advocated women's inherent incapacity to reason theoretically, comprehend philosophical arguments, or express an essential aesthetic perspicacity. For instance, the female collector and patron's familiarity with taxonomic developments, artistic theory, and history, coupled with judicious and discriminating independent judgment, confirms a refined and learned intervention in scientific and visual culture.

Additionally, female patronage of natural historians, modern artists and classical archeologists reveals that women initiated and sustained direct involvement in widespread socio-cultural movements. For these women, the collection and patronage of natural history, fine art, and antiquity was not simply a form of self expression; it was an expression of collective identity, a form of participatory communication which announced the efficacy of female contributions to the culture of collecting and patronage.

When regarded in context of the above, the pursuits and achievements of eighteenth-century female collectors and patrons take on new import and give cause for a reassessment of scholarship which fails to include women as essential contributors to the intellectual and social practices of that culture. Future literature should investigate the influence of gender on specific collecting and patronage activities. Models of related histories that might prove useful come from historians of consumption who currently study the effect of masculinity and femininity on early modern British material purchases.<sup>168</sup> It is obvious that the accumulation of symbolic and actual capital shaped collecting and patronage behaviors of both men and women as they displayed a taste for luxury goods which embodied ideas of novelty, ingenuity, and fashion.<sup>169</sup> Moving forward, it is worthwhile to question how men and women responded to similar collectibles; whether patriarchal ideologies impacted acts of female patronage; and if women possessed or developed gendered attitudes toward the organization and exhibition of items within their collections.

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<sup>168</sup> See Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (Routledge: New York, 2002); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650- 1850* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *Consumption of Culture, 1600- 1800: Image, Object, Text* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>169</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171-183.

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