Introduction

The years of the American crisis and its escalation into the War of American
Independence are a period of uncertain, even eccentric developments. As
Britain argued with her once loyal subjects the nation appeared mired in
luxury, its economy bloated by the rampant successes of the Seven Years'
War. Her merchants had grown wealthy, but her people, especially the elite,
seemed enfeebled by idle pleasures. Fops and Macaroni pranced on the
streets, sipped coffee and dressed appallingly. They did not seem to be the
men to fight a war. Worrying comparisons with Roman luxury and decline
soon became the common currency of debate. The struggle for the colonies
would indeed prove disastrous; huge and embarrassing defeats, at Saratoga
in 1777 and later at Yorktown, led to the loss of some of Britain's most
valuable possessions. Defeat in America encouraged French, then Spanish
aggression, and the country was twice threatened with invasion. The war
was also costly and divisive as Stephen Conway and others have shown.
Protests and petitions were offered in Parliament and beyond, sometimes
coupled with radical programmes for reform, though, in the end, Loyalism
reasserted itself.[1] In this sense politics was enlivened, and the decade was
witness to the first great phase of Edmund Burke's career, as he argued for
the necessity of conciliation. This was also the moment of Edward Gibbon's
Decline and Fall, as well as Dr Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and Thomas
Warton's *History of English Poetry*. As history and criticism took a scholarly

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[1] Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2000); James E. Bradley, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England:
Petitions, the Crown and Public Opinion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); Eliga H. Gould,
The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution (Chapel Hill:
The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); H. T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the American
Revolution* (London: Longmans, 1998); P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain,
India, and America c.1750–1783* (Oxford University Press, 2005); John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots:
London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press,
1987); and Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England,
1715–1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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path, men and women of sensibility looked to their own exquisite feelings
for new sources of refined pleasure. In the theatre Sheridan's plays, emblem-
atic of a gossipy and idle society appeared alongside patriotic dramas and
the sentimental comedies of Richard Cumberland and Elizabeth Griffith.
Despite the good intentions behind these works, the theatre and the
associated worlds of fashion and sociability came to represent the delin-
quency of the culture as a whole. As Gillian Russell and Felicity Nussbaum
have argued, women like Frances Abington and the Duchess of Devonshire
took leading roles in a new feminisation of culture, not in the name of
domesticity or retirement, but in order to enjoy the pleasures of fashion,
celebrity and scandal. The 1770s were then a decade of varied aspirations
and clashing values, a period in which political and social purpose was often
hard to define, and the public sphere appeared disordered by untoward
gendered performances.[2]

It is impossible to appreciate the contradictions of such a vibrant decade
in a single study. Instead what is proposed is an investigation of two
interrelated ideas: the politics of opposition and the performance of mas-
culinity, principally as a claim to political stature. The central claim of this
book is that when confronted by the difficulties of their political position,
the parliamentary Opposition relied on a highly gendered mode of political
discourse which sought to combine the language of honour with the more
ameliorative claims of sensibility. Throughout the American War manliness
(and its contraries) gained an ambiguous though privileged position in
political discourse, becoming a sensitive, even over-sensitive guide to the
state of the nation. This book explores these investments, in order to
understand how politics was gendered, and how an unsuccessful war
enabled competing articulations of what it was to be a man and a political
subject, the two identities being never quite coincident. A focus on mascu-
linity in its political as well as cultural contexts marks a particular inter-
vention in a crowded field, not least because the focus lies beyond the social
realm more familiar to literary and cultural historians. The political world,
especially that of Parliament, was still dominated by the landed elite and
remained largely committed to a form of masculinity that claimed distinc-
tion and purpose on the grounds of its separateness from women, and the
worlds of commerce and fashion. Study of this aspect of the public sphere
can offer a different perspective on the performance of gender in the late

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[2] Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge University Press,
2007); Felicity Nussbaum, *The Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British
Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

century, not least because it is often claimed that masculinity was rethought during the eighteenth century in order to accommodate men to the new heterosocial spaces of urban modernity. Men were expected to express themselves with grace and politeness. This reformist agenda is visible in the fictions of Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney who represented masculinity as a problem requiring some measure of reform. These developments built upon the earlier efforts of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison and David Hume to foster ideas of benevolence and refinement as an antidote to Hobbesian notions of competition.[3] The result was a more comfortable relationship between commerce and emerging cultural values in which feminine virtues played a leading role. Women consequently played a formative role in this development, mediating between what Jürgen Habermas terms the bourgeois public sphere and the energies of the town. In a much-used formulation, Terry Eagleton describes these developments as a bourgeois 'feminisation of discourse', which translated the manners of middle-class homes into a scheme of heterosocial improvement on a wider scale.[4]

During the American War this process was challenged, even reversed. Although polite sociability retained its allure, more effort was taken to exclude women from public life. This occurred partly in response to the emergencies of the war, which, it was claimed, demanded a return to more masculine values, and partly in response to what appeared to be the excesses of fashionable sociability. By the beginning of the 1770s society ladies and demi-reps had risen to dubious prominence, while men seemed to have lost something of their status in an increasingly commercial and theatricalised culture.[5] Commenting on this period Harriet Guest argues that although women like Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Anna Seward continued to enter political debate, the 1770s were more obviously characterised by an abhorrence of public women and a corresponding demand that the political

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[3] Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[4] Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class-Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 13–14. See also Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (Harlow: Longman, 1997); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660–1800* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650–1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998).

[5] Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre*, pp. 17–37.

sphere resume an appropriately masculine character.[6] The reiteration of male pre-eminence ensured that there was a tremendous effort made to insist that it was relations between men that were essential to the social order. The re-emergence of what Carole Pateman terms the 'fraternal social contract', is indicative of wider concerns about the nature of the public sphere, especially the fear that the citizen had lost his independence, and had become weak and affected.[7] While complaints about 'effeminacy' were longstanding in British culture, they reached fever pitch during the American War. At this moment the style and manners, particularly of young men, was imagined to be indicative of a wider malaise, best characterised as a luxuriant indifference to the fate of the nation. The print satires of the period display these anxieties vividly and unpleasantly. In Carington Bowles's *A Morning Frolic, or the Transmutation of Sexes* and *An Officer in the Light Infantry, Driven by his Lady to Coxheath*, the presence of fashionable or ambitious women appears destructive of masculine character. Dressed in smart uniforms the women dominate their men folk who merely smirk or doze beside them.[8] The inadequacies of the men in these images would have seemed terrible indeed when invasion threatened. But even before the near-run of the invasion scare, there was a much repeated desire to re-masculinise men, a demand for action and authority, which placed the nature of masculinity at the centre of debates about political integrity. These pressures ensured that the sociable values of politeness and sensibility competed with a revived emphasis on the traditionally male attributes of honour, candour and independence.[9]

Masculine identity was critical during the American War, with much attention paid to its style, appearance and conduct. However, eighteenth-century men did not understand their gender as an identity in its own right, or at least not quite. Manliness most often functioned as a sign of approval and as a metaphor for virtue. Men might praise each other for acting in a manly fashion, but it was the act they praised, not the gender as such. As Carolyn Williams points out, women could be admired for a manly caste of mind.[10] Above all masculinity was a social personality, to be achieved in

[6] Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (The University Press of Chicago, 2000), pp. 47–8, 156–62.

[7] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

[8] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 353–6.

[9] See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 237–81; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 18–27.

[10] Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer, and Manliness: Some Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Classical Learning* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 8–9.

relation to others. It was never a matter of personal volition, still less the revelation of a complex interiority, as Dror Wahrman has explained.[11] Within a range of discourses including classical republicanism, elite definitions of honour, modish sensibility and a variety of fraternal associations, masculinity was constituted via the relationships that existed between men. Although women played a key role in the formation of male identities, masculinity was often defined in terms of the imagined alterity of other men. In this respect effeminacy, whether defined as an unrestrained excess (the complaint against rakes, soldiers and others) or foppish inadequacy, was critical and other men could be viewed with suspicion. To maintain the required distinction there was a roll call of delinquent types, many drawn from the stage, including bobadils, boobys, fribbles, and macaroni. The anxieties encapsulated in these terms could be projected back upon the self: the fear of discovering one's own effeminacy and of revealing it to others dominates many eighteenth-century texts. James Boswell is only the most extraordinary example of a more general trend. There was no crisis of masculinity in the late eighteenth century, at least not an epistemological crisis. Everybody knew what it was. If a 'crisis' occurred during the eighteenth century, then it was concerned almost entirely with the performance of a socialised mode of manhood. We need to understand the difficulties of that performance, and the effort it cost to make it succeed.[12]

While it is important to appreciate how men distanced themselves from the excesses and weakness of a culture often thought effeminate, it is equally necessary to understand how, in the fraternalist world they created for themselves, men expressed their masculinity in its most public and political form. For a Georgian gentleman the imperative always was to be a man possessed of certain qualities and to enact that more complex personality convincingly. The men studied in this book all expected to be recognised as men of honour, and in some senses, sensibility, wit and fashion. These were not just personal preferences, but means to participation in political culture. One attribute, however, remained paramount for political identity. In a society dominated by the aristocracy and gentry, being a man of property, and landed property in particular, remained crucial. It was the possession of land that allowed for a reconciliation of power with political identity in ways which guaranteed the independence of mind thought

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[11] See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 29–40.
[12] See Philip Carter, 'James Boswell's Manliness', in Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen, eds., *English Masculinities, 1660–1800* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 111–30.

essential to a dispassionate view of the nation.[13] Men who lacked such property, especially if their wealth stemmed only from money or, far worse, government contracts, could be condemned as unworthy, or rejected on the grounds that they lacked character. The idea that property guaranteed independence and hence entitlement was central to Country Party ideology, a mode of backwoods protest which underwrote much of the political discourse of the period. From the late seventeenth century, this view of politics had enabled Englishmen, often identifying themselves as freeholders, to complain about the encroaching power of government, while reconciling their liberty with the monarchy's resurgent authority. They had achieved this accommodation by reserving the right to express their horror at any encroachments on their rights, and especially their right to enjoy their own property unmolested.[14]

These claims derived much of their authority from the civic humanist philosophy of classical republicanism. During the eighteenth century, civic humanist analysis, because it enabled a focus on the political present as well as upon longer developmental narratives, provided a vocabulary through which citizens could articulate their claims to political personality relative to the acknowledged certainties of landownership. However, civic humanism also required the citizen to enact their virtue, as a function of that property, in the service of the public. Service in the voluntary militia was consequently highly prized, as it demonstrated the citizen's willingness to bear arms in defence of liberty and property. It was critical in these debates that the militia was defined in opposition to the standing army which, because it was paid by the Crown, had the potential to threaten the rights of the citizen. The reciprocity of property and military service was critical, however in a much more wide-reaching sense; as J. G. A. Pocock writes: 'if liberty, and with it the foundations of government, consisted in the exercise of property, there must be property in the exercise of arms; the state of nature and the transition to the state of government depended on this truth. This important . . . proposition in juristic political theory was reinforced by the ancient proposition . . . that it was the capacity to bear arms in a public

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[13] Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 10; and John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–1780: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), pp. 17–50.

[14] See J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975); and Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

cause which made man a citizen.'[15] This argument would remain powerful during the American War, especially in Scottish social theory. It would also play a key role in the articulation of American ideas of selfhood and political personality.[16] In Britain the argument would be adapted in order to make its claims fit the world of Georgian modernity. By the eighteenth century the commitment to civic participation, especially military service, had been replaced by a reliance on professional armies and a separate political and financial class. The property inherent in bearing arms seemed consequently to be lost. However, the connection between dependable political character (now often termed honour) and the bearing of arms was revived when Lord North defended Parliament's right to use force in the colonies by claiming that officers who served abroad secured not only Parliament's honour, but their own. His argument rested on the novel assumption that the violent exercise of state power guaranteed the propertied character of those sent to exact it, and vice versa.

While the Opposition could challenge the specific application, decrying service in a professional army, especially in a civil war and more so at the behest of a corrupt administration, their most impressive contribution was to create new forms of property upon which to base their claims to political involvement. Such an investment accords with the wider shifts of the period. G. J. Barker-Benfield has argued that by mid-century neither virtue nor honour were defined in terms of valour and liberty, but relied instead on politeness and financial dependability.[17] However, being polite or simply good for one's debts was hardly a qualification for office, still less an account of political personality. Property, the conceptual property which Pocock sees as deriving analogously from militia service, had to come from else-where. What was required was a way of defining a form of property which might be seen to emerge as a function of opposition and which could also be thought to provide the justification for that protest. It was necessary indeed to argue that political identity could derive from opposition as if it were a property. Something comparable to what I am trying to describe can be found in Addison's account of the property-acquiring effect of a refined imagination in the *Spectator*. When the Man of Polite Imagination gazes upon a prospect, or contemplates a work of art, Addison suggests that he

[15] J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1: *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 104.

[16] See Robbins, *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*; and Dror Wahrman, 'The Problem of English Identity in the American Revolution', *American Historical Review*, vol. 106 (2001), 1236–62.

[17] Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 77–103.

gains a 'kind of Property' independent of legal possession.[18] The property that Addison describes must exist partly in the gratifications of perception, but more forcefully in the *possession* of the ability to experience that pleasure. The Man of Polite Imagination carries that property within himself, thus qualifying him for membership of Addison's spectatorial elite. The opposition – most especially Burke – similarly proclaimed their particular and self-defining internal property. In part this was located in the fact of their own opposition, their integrity itself standing as the mark of their character. There was honour in this too, as resistance to governmental corruption was imagined to function as a *kind of* bearing of arms, a claim to character that equalled that accorded to military service. The potential for new modes of identity created by such conceptual detachment created a set of opportunities and concomitant risks which needed to be negotiated with considerable care. Burke's idea of honour (as property) might make a claim to character in a broad political and cultural sense, but it was not a demonstrable possession like land, but a far stranger commodity, one that required constant reassertion.

Providing a partial complement to the rhetoric of honour within opposition discourse was the language of sensibility. Less closely associated with masculinity and indeed often thought the province of women, sensibility provided potentially a powerful set of claims and expectations which could both constitute and undermine masculinity. As Sarah Knott has argued, the profession of sensibility constituted a crucial claim to social identity during the eighteenth century. Sentimental literature, she explains, allowed the reader access to forms of self-knowledge and self-perception which could become a way of articulating a sophisticated, indeed superior, mode of social being. An ability to apprehend the suffering of others and to wish intuitively to remove pain could be accorded considerable merit; but when an attention to the distresses of others became an obstruction to judgement, sensibility was derided as a lachrymose incapacity.[19] Despite this objection, a feeling for others rather than a narrow attention to one's own position remained a morally valuable component of modern sociability. Described

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[18] Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, no. 411 (21 June 1712), in *The Spectator*, ed. and intro. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. III, pp. 538–9.

[19] Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 19–22. See also Barbara M. Benedict, *Framing Feeling: Sentiment and Style in English Prose Fiction, 1745–1800* (New York: AMS Press, 1994); John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987); Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

in these terms honour and sensibility appear as opposites. However, sensibility and honour functioned in comparable ways, particularly as they bore on the formation of male identities. Sensibility, as Lynn Festa argues, was often exhibited in terms of the felt relations that were imagined to exist between subjects and, in certain special cases, objects. The contemplation of such relations, and the perceiving subject's awareness of their own perception of them, was productive in turn of a 'kind of Property'.[20] But as with honour-as-property, investment in emotional property as a claim to citizenship was vulnerable to challenge because it required the approval and sanction of others in a way tangible property never would. Adam Smith's work is most instructive in this context. Writing in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that the desire to be esteemed or thought honourable was the primary motive for military service, a calling which he defined as the legitimate pursuit of fame.[21] In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the expression of sympathy is similarly predicated and ultimately judged in terms of how others gauge its performance. To be a man of either sensibility or of honour therefore required the subject to imagine the judgements of others and to regulate his conduct accordingly. This self-reflexive experience meant that the concept of honour or sensibility, newly central to virtuous forms of masculinity claimed by Burke and others, remained open to challenge, indeed condemnation.[22]

Examining these uncertain developments as they occur within opposition culture and politics, this book attempts an interdisciplinary synthesis in so far as it engages with both the detail of literary texts and the machinations of the political world. The intention is to examine how masculine identities are performed in a variety of contexts, such that the collision between the emergencies of wartime politics and wider shifts of the culture become visible. This focus requires examination of a variety of literatures including parliamentary speeches. Although close attention has been paid to Burke's oratory, few critics have followed Christopher Reid's call to consider the performative nature of political speeches or the extent to which speakers created identities or voiced positions in ways highly sensitive to the audiences immediately before them.[23] Crucially Parliament remained a location

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[20] Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 44–55.

[21] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner and W. B. Todd, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 126–7.

[22] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982), pp. 16–19.

[23] See Christopher Reid, *Edmund Burke and the Practice of Political Writing* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985); and his 'Speaking Candidly: Rhetoric, Politics, and the Meanings of Candour in the Later Eighteenth Century', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 28 (2005), 67–82.

where male identities were staged in relation to a set of discursive expect-
ations, elite in character and form, which had changed little during the
course of the century. This context posed a problem in terms of the new
discourse of property that I have been describing. What might succeed on
the pages of sentimental literature failed miserably in the Commons, where
members preferred the public power of classical rhetoric. Yet sensibility
remained a potent language in which to protest, providing a ready vocabu-
lary through which to oppose governmental power. These competing
imperatives are found most dynamically in Burke's speeches which domi-
nate the first two chapters of this book. Although Burke attempted to win
support for his party on the basis of their characters as landowners and men
of honour, he located political identity, not only in the interpersonal
relations which he termed 'connexions', but in the expression of his private
emotions. This did not always serve his cause well, as his mode of arguing
could seem out of place, even out of control, in debates about public policy.
The conflict between Burke's sentimentalism and the realities of the war
moves centre stage in the second chapter, which explores how Burke used
the rhetoric of private grief to create a new form of protesting subjectivity,
one that continues to have resonance today.

The later chapters of this book take the questions of identity and
performance into the wider culture of the period. The intention is to look
at the ways in which honour and sensibility were combined within the
figure of the devoted hero. The third chapter examines how General
Burgoyne represented himself after his defeat at Saratoga. Wishing to
exonerate himself, Burgoyne attempted to recast his identity, blending a
defence of honour with a more obviously emotive language. His gambit was
resisted by opponents who not only doubted the truth of his assertions, but
were appalled by the sensational way he expressed himself. A contrast to
Burgoyne's efforts is provided, in the fourth chapter, by the trial of Admiral
Keppel. Keppel was accused of cowardice after the Battle of Ushant, but
defended himself on the more certain grounds of his naval honour. Sensing
an opportunity, Opposition writers and politicians invested in Keppel's
character, representing him as both the antithesis of ministerial corruption
and the champion of commercial enterprise. The final chapters move
beyond elite politics to examine theatrical and poetic performances that in
some degree challenged masculine and aristocratic politics dominant in
Parliament and the court house. Focus for the fifth chapter falls upon
Sheridan. Although active in debates surrounding Keppel's trial, Sheridan
is best understood as a playwright who successfully evaded the masculinised
and patriotic tastes of London theatre audiences. At the forefront of his