WOMEN, WRITING AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE, 1700–1830

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The coffee-house has a privileged status in accounts by historians and sociologists of the early eighteenth century, in which it figures as the paradigmatic social institution of the profound and various transformations in English society in this period. The most significant argument is that advanced in Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, translated into English 1989), an account which has been repeated and elaborated by an influential range of critics in the Anglophone world, such as Eagleton, Hohendahl, and Stallybrass and White.[1] In Habermas's account, the public sphere is founded in its simple accessibility to individuals, who come together without hierarchy in an equality of voice. He stresses the role of 'new institutions' in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, and identifies the coffee-house as its first, and to some extent paradigmatic, institution. Through their discussions, first of literature and later of news and politics, the individuals who assemble in the coffee-house come to form a new public culture. Habermas sees the new moral essays and literary criticism associated with periodicals like *The Spectator* as central to this discursivity. The coffee-house encourages such discussion through its institutional and spatial character, by facilitating a social interaction that disregards status, fosters the toleration of a broad range of discussion, and is accessible to all. As many critics have suggested, Habermas's account does not pay sufficient attention to the exclusionary mechanisms that are simultaneously at work within the public sphere, which do not allow the participation of the greater mass of the population: the lowest stations of life and women.[2] Here the coffee-house is again a curiously apt example, Habermas finds, because it too was not ordinarily available to these majorities. The coffee-house was 'shaped', in Habermas's term, by the sociability of men, and 'the fact that only men were admitted to the coffee-house society may have had something to do with' the extension

of coffee-house debate to include not 'inconsequential economic and political disputes'.[3] As the lived experience of women was excluded, the universality that Habermas accords to the public sphere was largely conceptual. Women are instead confined to the 'private sphere', attached to the house, regulated by a domestic ideology under the mastery of the husband and the father. The coffee-house, to contemporaries, was one of the most characteristic aspects of eighteenth-century London, although as they noted, it was also an innovation. Anthony Hilliar's fictional Arab visitor to London, Ali-Mohammed Hadgi, remarked that the English 'represent these coffee-houses as the most agreeable things in *London*' – although he himself found them 'loathsome, full of smoak, and much crowded'.[4] Henri Misson, a French traveller, in London in 1698, remarked that the coffee-houses, which were 'very numerous in *London*, are extremely convenient. You have all Manner of News there: You have a good Fire, which you may sit by as long as you please: you have a Dish of Coffee; you meet your Friends for the Transaction of Business, and all for a penny, if you don't care to spend more.'[5] As Misson emphasises, the London coffee-house was a business, which served coffee and provided newspapers for its customers, at a certain level of comfort and at a price to entice them to return. The manner in which they did this was notable, however. Coffee-houses specialised in developing a particular type of sociability. Customers were attracted not only by the beverage, but by the prospect of other like-minded men in a convivial social space. Contemporaries argued that the coffee-house inculcated a virtuous model of sociability through its discursive regime: 'Good Manners and commendable Humours are here infused into Men by the contemplation of the Deformity of their contrarie's.'[6] Contemporary visual representations in or of coffee-houses reinforce this picture. The most widely reproduced image, 'Interior of a London Coffee House' (c. 1705) demonstrates how the architecture established and confirmed the sociability of the coffee-houses.[7] The coffee-room is here portrayed as a single large space with long communal tables round which the clients sat on benches, although other images depict the provision of more private booths. The assembled men appear to be conversing over the news-sheets: conversation competes with private reading or writing. Around them work the coffee-boys, or waiters, taking the coffee-pots from the fire to the customers and fetching clay pipes from a chest. Presiding over the scene, behind the 'bar', is the coffee-woman.

The Spectator famously uses the coffee-house as a model for its convivial moral conversation. As Richard Steele declared in *The Spectator* 10 (Monday 12 March, 1711), the periodical was part of a plan to urbanise philosophy and reform a corrupt public culture. Mr Spectator famously declared: 'I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-houses.'[8] The coffee-house plays a significant role in *The Spectator*'s project, not only as a metaphorical site but also as a potential agent of moral reform. In *The Spectator* 49 (Thursday 26 April, 1711), Steele explores the social space of the coffee-house by charting the ebb and flow of customers through the day in Mr Spectator's favourite coffee-house.[9] He discerns some subtle distinctions between the types of men who frequent the coffee-house at different times of the day, and uses these differences to launch an argument about the most desirable model of sociability. Early in the morning he sees a group who, rejecting commercial hours, assemble to read newspapers and discuss government policy. These coffee-house politicians, as they were often known, depart when the day grows too busy and their negligent dress becomes embarrassing. They are supplanted by 'Men who have Business or good Sense in their Faces, and come to the Coffee-house either to transact Affairs or enjoy Conversation'. Between the extremes of these two groups Mr Spectator finds men suited to his moral project. These men are content 'to be happy and well pleased in a private Condition' – seeking neither political advancement nor the sordid scenes of commerce – while not neglecting 'the Duties and Relations of Life'. 'Of these sort of Men consist the worthier Part of Mankind; of these are all good Fathers, generous Brothers, sincere Friends, and faithful Subjects . . . These are the men formed for Society, and those little Communities which we express by the Word *Neighbourhoods*.'[10] Identifying such men as the best of men and the rightful inhabitants of the midday coffee-house, Steele consciously revises the character of the coffee-house in his own reformative image.[11] In his vision, the coffee-house becomes the 'Place of Rendezvous to all . . . thus turned to relish calm and ordinary Life'. Over this charmed group presides the imaginary figure of Eubulus: a rich man who lives modestly, a man of wisdom and influence who holds no political or judicial office, a man who lends money to his friends rather than calculating the highest rate of return.

The 'Authority' of Eubulus extends over all in 'his little Diurnal Audience', and each in turn becomes his own Eubulus in the coffee-house. 'Nay, their [the coffee-drinkers'] Veneration towards him is so great, that when they are in other Company they speak and act after him; are Wise in his Sentences, and are no sooner sat down at their own Tables, but they hope or fear, rejoice or despond as they saw at the Coffee-house. In a word, every Man is *Eubulus* as soon as his Back is turn'd.'[12]

Steele's model of the 'Eubulus effect' is a key component of his project of the moral reform of public culture: as Norbert Elias suggests, a notion of self-consciousness in the emulation of others is the motor of early modern self-fashioning.[13] The coffee-house regime of unregulated egalitarianism is here subsumed by another argument, in which the coffee-house environment enables men to achieve their mannered self-fashioning into the rational and polite residents of the new sentimental society. The coffee-house is made the model by which *The Spectator*'s moral project is achieved. The argument, however, also suggests a precise and powerful reform of the coffee-house. The men of the coffee-house derive their entertainment 'rather from Reason than Imagination: Which is the Cause that there is no Impatience or Instability in their Speech or Action. You see in their Countenances they are at home, and in quiet Possession of the present Instant, as it passes, without desiring to Quicken it by gratifying any Passion, or Prosecuting any new Design.'[14] Eubulus's new coffee-house is the site of rational and quiet discussion that does not raise men's passions, where no wild schemes are conceived and no unchecked flights of discourse occur.

The coffee-house transformation of manners renders its public space a more private and sentimental arena (the 'home' or 'neighbour-hood'). The structural privatisation of the public sphere into the sentimental division of the 'neighbourhood' is managed according to a model celebrating values associated with and derived from the construction of femininity: politeness, virtue, orderliness, propriety, decorum (a model that is supplemented by the masculine Enlightenment characteristic of rationality). This new polite model is intimately associated with the conversational social space of the coffee-house.[15] However, the process is only available to men: although the essay refers to 'Mankind', a term which might apply to both men and women, the 'worthier part of Mankind', as we have

seen, is detailed as 'all good Fathers, generous Brothers, sincere Friends, and faithful Subjects'. The construction of femininity fills a central but paradoxical role in the civilising process.

The evidence of contemporaries, in fact, suggests that the coffee-house was often anything but quiet, polite and business-like, and, more-over, that this disputatious stimulation was a signal source of the customer's interest in attending the coffee-house. The unruly element was described in terms of babble, noise and smokiness, argument and faction. A diverse array of figures articulate this counter-culture coffee-house, amongst whom might be numbered the gambler and card-shark, the drunkard duellist, the projector (a promoter of mad-cap schemes), the philosopher and literary critic (given to extreme opinions), the but-tonholer (one who literally seizes the observer by the buttonhole, in order to secure undivided attention) and the coffee-woman. The next section of this essay gives an account of this rival view of coffee-house manners. The various text types surveyed here, such as essay, drama, tract and criminal biography, adopt another model of sociability to construct the coffee-house (one that is vulgar, popular, subversive, grotesque and sexual). My account focuses on the coffee-women, not just in the inter-ests of brevity, but because the figure of the coffee-woman, by also ani-mating the issue of gender, has the greatest power to disrupt Habermas's model of the public sphere.

WOMEN OF THE COFFEE-HOUSE

As a number of commentators have noted (Bramah, Clery and Pincus especially), there were some women in coffee-houses, although all these writers tend to suppose that women in coffee-houses express the interest of their gender.[16] Steven Pincus particularly rejects 'the claim that women were excluded from the coffee-houses' – although on closer examination his argument that women were welcome as clients of coffee-houses is justified by just three examples, at least two of which are not clear.[17] As all three commentators signal, however, the most common reason for women to be in the coffee-house was as workers. Many women 'kept' coffee-houses in the period, some of which were named after them, for example Anne Blunt, proprietor of Blunt's Coffee-House, Cannon Street, in 1672;[18] Widow Wells, proprietor of Mrs Wells Coffee-House in Scotland Yard, between 1696 and 1712;[19] Jenny Man, proprietor of Jenny Man's Coffee-House in Charing Cross, in 1712;[20] Jane Rudd, who as proprietor of Widow Rudd's Coffee-House

in the Haymarket was found bankrupt in May 1731;[21] and Mrs Edwards, proprietor of Daniel's Coffee-House in Temple Bar and later Edward's Coffee-House in Fleet Street, in 1739.[22]

A woman was not, it seems, unusual in a coffee-house: indeed, to contemporaries, they were ubiquitous. The Grub Street satirist Tom Brown commented in 1702 that 'Every Coffee-House is illuminated both without and within doors; without by a fine Glass Lanthorn and within by a Woman so *light* and *splendid,* you may see through her with the help of a Perspective. At the Bar the good man always places a charming Phillis or two, who invite you by their amorous Glances into their smoaky Territories, to the loss of your Sight.'[23] Critics and competitors of the coffee-houses argued that the coffee-women tempted men into their businesses. The coffee-men, they complained, 'take Care always to provide such tempting, deluding, ogling, pretty young Hussies to be their Bar-Keepers, as steal away our Hearts, and insensibly betray us to Extravagance'.[24] The beguiling flirtation of the coffee-women offered their sexuality as a commodity alongside the addictive bitter liquid. Leya Landau argues that the association of the coffee-women with deception and trickery, as the 'naive customer is gulled into parting with his money', equates their influence with prostitution.[25] A Swiss visitor to London, César de Saussure, remarked that many coffee-houses were 'temples of Venus', or brothels: 'You can easily recognise the latter, because they frequently have as sign a woman's arm or hand holding a coffee-pot. There are a great number of these houses in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden; they pass for being chocolate houses, and you are waited on by beautiful, neat, well-dressed, and amiable, but very dangerous nymphs.'[26] Ned Ward's fictional country visitor in *The London Spy* (1698) observed the working life of two prostitutes in the coffee-vaults of the Widow's Coffee-House.[27]

It is clear, then, that women were not unknown in the coffee-house of eighteenth-century London, but their presence requires a more complex model of social interaction than that proposed by Habermas. The erasure of hierarchy in the coffee-house observed by Habermas and eighteenth-century commentators is overlaid by another kind of status difference that recognises and reads gender and sexuality. In the engraving noted earlier, 'Interior of a London Coffee House' (c. 1705), Emma Clery has argued that the spatial organisation of the room reinforces a gendered structure clearly demarcating the woman's space from that of the men. To underline this, the woman proprietor (or servant) is separated off from the customers in a little booth, or bar. Rather than simply

affirming a masculine sociability, the coffee-house proposes a fractured sociability riven by significant gender difference, within which the coffee-woman is figured as a subversive sexual renegade.

One such coffee-woman is noted in *The Spectator* 87 (Saturday 9 June, 1711), in a letter purporting to be from a coffee-woman maligned for flirtatiousness, probably composed by Laurence Eusden.[28] This letter directs us back to an earlier essay by Joseph Addison examining the vanity and coquetry of women he calls '*Idols*', whose aim is 'to gain Adorers' and 'to seduce Men'.[29] These women concatenate anxieties about luxury, gender, promiscuity and immorality. In *The Spectator* 87 Steele returns to the topic of the '*Idols*'. The letter contributed by Eusden points to the deforming influence of female beauty (and coquetry) in the marketplace, using the example of a beautiful coffee-woman. 'There are in six or seven Places of this City, Coffee-houses kept by Persons of [the] Sisterhood [of *Idols*].'[30]

These *Idols* [of the coffee-houses] sit and receive all day long the Adoration of the Youth within such and such Districts; I know, in particular. Goods are not entered as they ought to be at the Custom-House, nor Law-Reports perused at the Temple, by reason of one Beauty who detains the young Merchants too long near Change, and another Fair one who keeps the Students at her House when they should be at Study.[31]

The adoration inspired by these coffee-women drives young men to suicide, perverting the proper operation of the market (as the lovelorn customers accept poor-quality coffee) and worse, 'poison[s]' the conversation of those 'who come to do Business, and talk Politics' – presumably because the force of love (figured as 'Heartburnings') perverts the masculine discourse of the assembly.[32] Eusden sees coquetry (and women) as a poison, 'a Ratsbane', to the coffee-house sociability, which ought properly to be orderly, conversational, convivial and homosocial.

Steele returns again to the coffee-woman 'Idol' in no. 534, (Wednesday 12 November, 1712), in an essay composed of miscellaneous letters to Mr Spectator, most of which address the topic of flirtation in courtship. The correspondent, signing herself Lucinda Parly, claims to be a 'Bar-keeper of a Coffee-house' in 'the Condition of the Idol'. From the women's point of view, of course, the disruptive impetus of seduction flows the other way across the bar. The assiduous courting of her Gentleman wooer is comically phrased in the language of a military siege, like that of Uncle Toby's approach to Widow Wadman in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–8). However, her erstwhile lover keeps her from her

business (her tea grows weaker), and destroys his own trade in the law: 'while we parly, our several Interests are neglected'.[33] Behind the ironic badinage one might detect a note of barely suppressed sexual harassment, and conclude that the coffee-woman places the Spectatorial coffee-house sociability under considerable and revealing pressure. This is explored in depth by some later texts that consider the coffee-women in more detail.

<div align="center">THE VELVET COFFEE-WOMAN</div>

The first such text is *The Velvet Coffee-Woman* (1728), a 46-page biography of Anne Rochford, the eponymous velvet coffee-woman. As the subtitle signals, the text promises to relate *The Life, Gallantries and Amours of the late Famous Mrs. Anne Rochford*.[34] The text, in short, is something between a whore's biography and a scandalous memoir. After a supposedly virtuous upbringing, and a briefly successful business career as a property developer,[35] an unexplained turn in her fortunes, referred to as the 'Vicissitudes of Female-Affairs',[36] forced Rochford to become the proprietor of a coffee-house in Charing Cross,[37] and to turn prostitute. These occupations are seen as nearly synonymous, referred to by the concealing cognomens of 'Obliging Lady' or 'Lady of Industry'. Here, she seems to have found her mettle. As her biographer pronounces, Ann Rochford 'had something *Strong* in her *Diversions*, loved to associate chiefly with Rakes, and affected *Masculine Pleasures*', such as drinking games and gambling.[38] Her coffee-house became a fashionable and reputable business. Macky, in his *Journey Through England* (1723) reports that at 'About Twelve the *Beau-Monde* assembles in several Chocolate and Coffee-houses: The best of which are the *Cocoa-Tree* and *White's* Chocolate-Houses, St *James's*, the *Smyrna*, Mrs. *Rochford's* and the *British* Coffee-Houses, and all these so near one another, that in less than an Hour you see the Company of them all.'[39]

    She earned her cognonym – 'the Velvet Coffee-Woman' – after her role in a notable public scandal: a 'noble Peer' introduced her, dressed in velvet, with two other women to the King's court in the guise of ladies of virtue, wealth and merit. In fact, all three were 'coffee-women' (or proprietors of coffee-houses) and prostitutes or coquettes (women of 'Intrigue'). Each '*Coffee-Lady*' played her part well at court, and in a witty stroke, pretended to represent the opinion of a lobby close to their heart (reflecting the interests of the customers of their coffee-houses). One of the coffee-women argued the case of the officers of the army, another

the Scottish clans, while Nanny Rochford argued 'the Cause of Love'.[40] The narrative hints that Rochford's pleading earned her the special favour of the King, who allowed her to open a 'polite *Cabaret*' in the Palace mews, and thus caused her to leave off 'retailing *Coffee, Tea and Chocolate*'.[41]

Another coffee-woman's biography, *The Life and Character of Moll King, Late Mistress of King's Coffee-House in Covent-Garden* (1747?), relates the history of Moll King, born in 1696 in Vine Street, the daughter of a shoe-maker and a market-seller.[42] After working as a market-trader and a servant, she married (in the Fleet) a fallen gentleman, Thomas King (called 'Smooth'd-Fac'd-Tom'[43]) when she was fourteen years old.[44] Moll soon left her husband, seduced by a man named Murray, after which she became a common prostitute, 'one of the gayest Ladies of the Town', a friend of notorious whores like Nanny Cotton and Sally Salisbury.[45] Moll however returned to her husband, who was working as a waiter in a 'bawdy-house' in Covent Garden, and, with the profits from a nut-stall, they opened a small coffee-house in the market-place (then a raggle-taggle collection of single-storey market stalls). The coffee-house was known as Tom King's Coffee-House until he died in 1739, and thereafter, Moll King's.

The Kings' coffee-house, on the south side of the Market opposite Southampton Street, was a mean concern, described as 'a little House, or rather Hovel' where they sold coffee and tea. 'In this House they first set out with making Coffee at a Penny a Dish for the Market People, and Tea and Chocolate in Proportion.'[46] Established prior to 1732 at least, their business grew rapidly, and though it encompassed two of the surrounding Houses, it was still 'hardly room to accommodate their Customers'. Because their main customers comprised their fellow market-sellers, this coffee-house kept odd hours, opening at one or two o'clock in the morning, especially on market days in the fruit season. As these hours and these parts were also the favourite 'Rendezvous' of 'young Rakes, and their pretty Misses', the Kings' coffee-house became their 'Office to meet at, and to consult of their nocturnal Intrigues'. The coffee-house gained a certain notoriety. In Fielding's prologue to his *Covent Garden Tragedy* (1732) he asks, 'What rake is ignorant of King's Coffee-House' – but while he was confidant of rakes, he was less sure of readers' comprehension, and so added a footnote which explained that

it was 'A Place in *Covent-Garden* Market, well known to all Gentlemen to whom Beds are unknown'.[47] It became a place where assignations were made, 'famous for nightly Revels, and for Company of all Sorts', where 'Every Swain, even from the Star and Garter [nobility] to the Coffee-House Boy [waiter], might be sure of finding a Nymph in waiting',[48] and it 'was at midnight resorted to by all the Bucks, Bloods, Demireps and Choice Spirits in London'.

At *Tom King*'s you might see every evening Women of the Town the most cele-brated, and dressed as elegant as if to sit in the stage box at an Opera. There you were sure also of meeting every species of human kind that intemperance, idleness, necessity, or curiosity could assemble together.[49]

Here the free mixing of status groups brought about a different kind of non-hierarchical intercourse from that imagined by Habermas. In George Stevens's Ned Wardian 'Authentic Life of a Woman of the Town' (1788), the sociability of the coffee-house is rough and bawdy, characterised by 'riots, bowls breaking, shrieking, murder, and such like amusements' and articulated by linguistic muddle as 'pell-mell, higgle-de-piggle-de'.[50] The sociability of King's Coffee-House was, then, uncomfortably close to a brothel, for which Moll King was repeatedly prosecuted.

Here you might see Ladies of Pleasure, who appear'd apparelled like Persons of Quality, not at all inferior to them in Dress, attended by Fellows habited like Footmen, who were their Bullies, and wore their Disguise, the more easily to deceive the unwary Youths, who were so unhappy as to Cast their Eyes upon these *deceitful Water-Wag-Tails*.[51]

Moll defended herself from prosecution for running a bagnio or brothel, on the grounds that there were no beds in the house, though not always successfully.[52]

Moll King had a provocatively transgressive femininity, crossing and destabilising boundaries that the period spent much energy in making and maintaining.

She made a great Distinction between Industry and Vice; for she was a Woman well acquainted with the World, both in low and genteel Life, had not her love of Wealth led her on to do such Things as were highly inconsistent with Morality, and very unbecoming her Sex.[53]

Her coffee-house was transgressive not only because of its character as a place of resort for the sexual underworld, but also for its promiscuous mixture of high and low status groups. The 'witty Beaus' who frequent the coffee-house perceive the transgressive company of the female host as a part of the entertainment offered by the house, enjoying '*a Dish of*

Flash *with* Moll'. As the text delineates, 'flash' is an underground crimi-
nal lexicon, which the text examines in a witty dialogue composed of
almost impenetrable cant terms and phrases, imagined to be spoken by
Moll and a customer (although the dialogue is a reprint of an untraced
earlier text, *The Humours of the Flashy Boy's at Moll King's*).[54] That flash dis-
course is characteristic of the coffee-house conversation further
identifies the coffee-house sociability, in this instance, as criminal,
immoral and low. The Kings' coffee-house (which was known ironically
as 'Moll's Fair Reception House', and elsewhere as 'King's College') is
clearly a different sort of coffee-house from that celebrated in the
Habermasian model, with a significantly different and more subversive
regime (boisterous, sexually promiscuous, heterosexual, status-obsessed
and heterodox).

The Kings' coffee-house features in Hogarth's 'Morning' plate from
The Four Times of the Day (May 1738). The plate is located in a snow-
covered Covent Garden Market, where Hogarth contrasts the morning
ritual of two groups of residents: an old and pious woman heading into
the church (St Paul's Covent Garden) for her morning devotions, accom-
panied by her scruffy house-boy, and a riotous group of revellers outside
Tom King's Coffee-House, at the centre of which is a beautiful young
prostitute being fondled by a gentleman, and around which crouch
dishevelled beggars seeking alms and warming themselves next to a sput-
tering fire. The setting, offering a prospect across the bustling market, is
dominated in the top right by the architectural contrast Hogarth draws
between the cold neo-classical facade of the Palladian church and the
shambolic hovel that is the coffee-house, through whose open door one
can see only more riotous revels (a violent altercation, in fact).[55] Hogarth
has relocated the coffee-house, across the market, in order to underline
the ideological difference implied in the contrast. To Hogarth, the
coffee-house has a boisterous sociability equated with promiscuity,
tumult and poverty: a carnivalised sociability, more popular than polite.

The evidence about the coffee-women suggests, then, that it was con-
ventional for women to act as proprietors of coffee-houses. Their pres-
ence changed the modes of sociability available within the coffee-house.
Many contemporaries report that the flirtatious discourse engendered
by their presence was an integral part of the coffee-house experience.
These women, as I have argued, were unruly ciphers of a sexuality else-
where repressed by the hegemonic masculinity of coffee-house sociabil-
ity. They were also women of business, although Ann Rochford called
herself a 'bar-slave', suggesting that not all work in the coffee-house was

glamorous[56] (the coffee-woman's role might, however, have included management, keeping accounts and stock control, as well as making and serving coffee). Coffee-house keeping was, then, one of the occupations that widows might have followed: an avenue of business activity and in a sense somewhat emancipatory. Yet this does not seem to have necessarily implied that they were in possession of financial independence or economic agency. There were many impediments, both legal and cultural, to women engaging in business, as many historians have noted. Indeed, as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has argued, femininity was perceived as antithetical to business, and as such, all kinds of women's businesses were repeatedly equated with prostitution.[57]

The coffee-women were purveyors of gossip and scandal (their 'Calling' was 'both for *Coffee* and *Intrigue*', as *The Velvet Coffee-Woman* says). To many contemporaries they were dangerous sexual nonconformists: sexually promiscuous, if not actually prostitutes or procurers. Henry Fielding, in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), offers a miniature recapitulation of the criminal version of a woman's coffee-house keeping. On his travels, Parson Adams encounters a hypocritical Squire, renowned for encouraging the ambitious poor only to deceive them in time. Amongst his victims is 'a young Woman, and the handsomest in all this Neighbourhood, whom he enticed up to London, promising to make her a Gentlewoman to one of your Women of Quality: but instead of keeping his Word, we have since heard, after having a Child by her himself, she became a common Whore; then kept a Coffee-House in Covent-Garden, and a little after died of the French Distemper in a Gaol'.[58] The coffee-woman, in short, presents us with a fascinating ambiguity: on the one hand, she is figured as a masterless criminal in the feminine underworld, akin to a prostitute. On the other hand, as an unconventional self-mastering woman, the coffee-woman is a subversive figure, possessed of a kind of empowered femininity.[59] The whore's narrative offers the representation of a woman who refuses to identify with any of the sanctioned ideas within the dominant constructions of femininity (patriarchal or sentimental). The coffee-woman retains some of the worrying power of the whore, a power that is enhanced by her presence within the nominally homosocial masculinity of the coffee-house (where she stands behind her bar as both spy and subversive).

Reading the coffee-woman as a sexual radical, however, presents considerable difficulties. The radical posture of the coffee-woman as masterless woman may be an impolite fiction for more pernicious forms of sexual predation, like that of the madam who 'runs' a brothel. *The Life*

and Character of Moll King suggests that coffee-house keeping was an offshoot of the sex industry, with the coffee-woman one of the pimped professions. Moll King relates the practice of Mr Haddock, a notorious brothel-keeper: 'of all the Slaveries he impos'd on unhappy Women, by taking Coffee-Houses, and putting them into them as Mistresses, for which they paid sometimes three Guineas a Week, but seldom less than two; and if they could not make good their Payments, the Marshalsea Prison was their next Quarters'.[60] In this view, coffee-women were coerced into coffee-houses by organised crime, victims of the sex industry. In this material, the trope of the coffee-woman expresses the transgressive characteristics of the new coffee-house sociability. The Spectatorial coffee-house aims to reject and eliminate the coffee-woman from its ordered and decent interior, for the reason that her sexuality disrupts the coffee-house's sense of its own prestige and status. The coffee-woman, however, does not entirely go away, as can be seen in James Miller's sentimental comedy *The Coffee-House* (1737), where the coffee-house, improbably, is recast as the scenario for the development of a transgressive tale of romantic love.[61]

JAMES MILLER'S COMEDY *THE COFFEE-HOUSE* (1737)

The Coffee-House is set entirely within the coffee-room of a coffee-house owned by a widow, Mrs Notable.[62] Under the watchful gaze of the 'The Widow in the Bar'[63] a group of regulars assemble, including a scrivener, an officer, a poet, a politician, a fox-hunter, a 'solemn beau', a law student and a comic actor called Cibber, played by Colley Cibber himself. These men are made the subject of a gentle satire on the follies of their conversation, behaviour and aspirations, which depicts them engaged in various activities (backgammon, writing verse, reading newspapers, smoking). Their conversation swirls around diverse topics – such as the conduct of the war in the Balkans, the quality of the poet's verses, the propriety of cheating at games, the quality of a castrato's voice – elaborating a scene of convivial social engagement, mixing professions and occupations. The light satire effectively masks the combative quality of their disagreements, in which an injured party may profess rage but is seen to forget it almost immediately. The masculine social environment, then, conforms to the Spectatorial model of the convivial coffee-house, even as the satire appears to criticise it.

The romantic love plot that structures the comedy disrupts the convivial homosociality of the coffee-room. Mrs Notable's daughter Kitty is
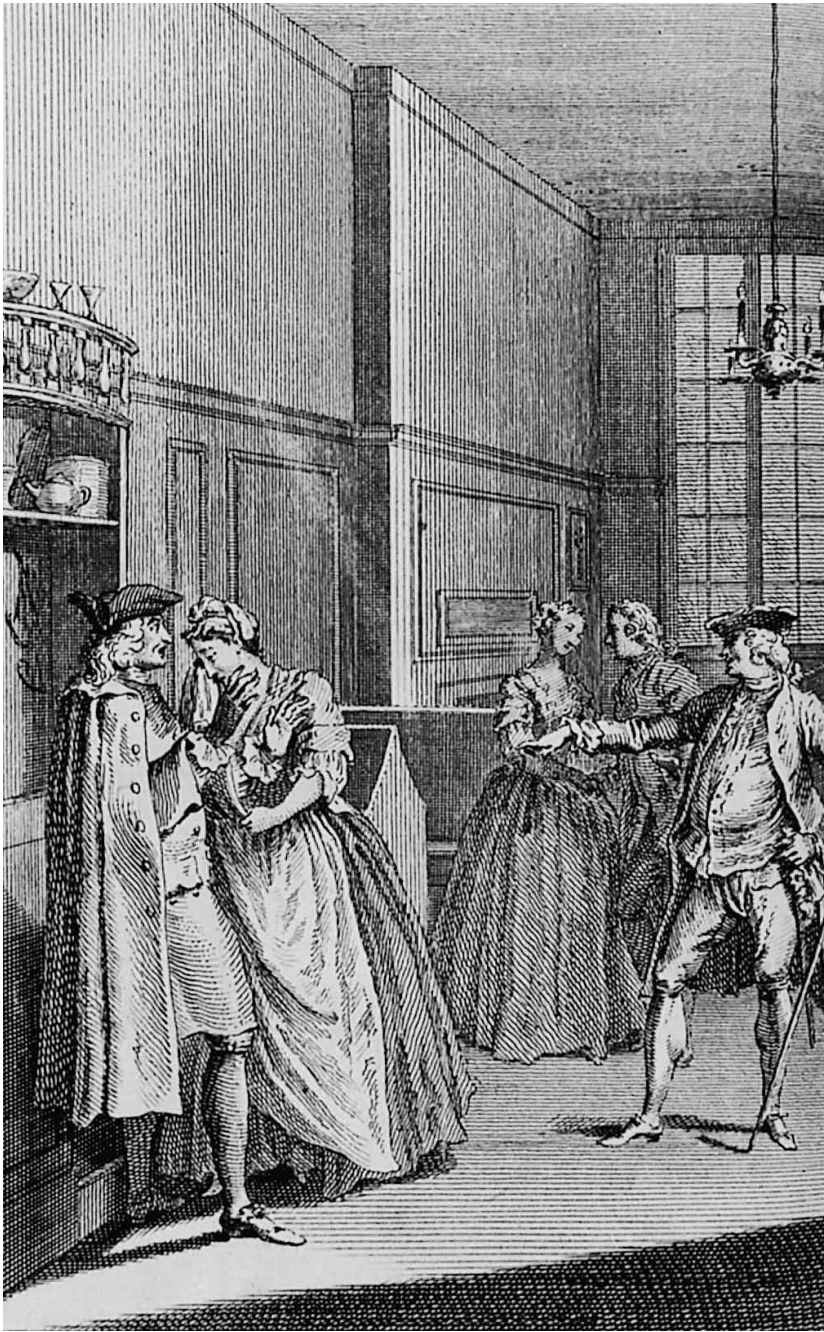
a beautiful and sprightly young woman, and although it is not made explicit, it seems that Mrs Notable has raised her to affect genteel status. Kitty has in any case inspired the love of Hartly, 'a Gentleman of the Temple' or law student. As his friend Gaylord remarks, 'But for a Gentleman to marry a Coffee-Man's daughter – 'Sdeath!, 'tis a Scandal'. Hartly, however, replies that 'upon balancing the Account', he finds she is doubly attractive, as she stands to inherit the coffee-house. 'I am a Gentleman and poor; she a Coffee-Girl, and Rich; why, if I have her money for my gentility, troth, I think 'tis a good Bargain.'[64] The bar separates the world of women from that of men, but it also encodes social distinctions of rank. The two are eventually married, which comes as no surprise, but only at the end. The plot extends their lovelorn separation by exposing the widow's schemes to marry her daughter to Harpie, an ugly old man made rich by his work as a scrivener. He comes 'gallanting' in old-fashioned and overly formal dress, which the other men dishevel. His address to Kitty, composed in ornate and formal legal diction, leaves her speechless with mirth. He is eventually conned by Gaylord into thinking he has injured Cibber in a fight. To conceal this criminal scandal, Harpie agrees to withdraw his suit and Mrs Notable agrees to Kitty's marriage to Hartly.

In the course of the play, Kitty upsets a number of conventions of virtuous behaviour in the coffee-house, where she transgresses distinctions of status and gender. The most extensive of these occurs when she plays at being a coffee-house proprietor: she comes into the coffee-room and finding the bar empty, decides to get into it. In the bar she comments 'Lah! how pure it is to sit here, and have all the fine gentlemen crowding about one, one saying This, and another saying That; one doing one pretty Thing, and another Pretty Thing.'[65] After the men re-enter the

Figure 1 Frontispiece to James Miller's comedy *The Coffee-House A Dramatick Piece. As it is Perform'd at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane* (London: J. Watts, 1737). The interior of a coffee-room, as depicted in Miller's play, which was performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane in January 1738. In the coffee-house, the assembled gentlemen drink coffee, converse and play backgammon in the booths (visible beyond the figures in the plate), while Mrs Notable serves coffee and other drinks from behind the bar (unseen), aided by her coffee-boys. The plate depicts a moment in the final scene: to the left, Widow Notable, mistress of the coffee-house, is consoled by Mr Harpie, a scrivener; while in the background Miss Kitty is conversing with her betrothed, Mr Hartly, a gentleman of the Temple, with whom Kitty proposes to establish a coffee-house that admits women. Presiding over the scene is Mr Gaylord, an officer, who has pretended to murder Mr Cibber, an actor at the Comedy (played by Colley Cibber), so as to persuade Mrs Notable to give her daughter's hand to his friend Hartly.

coffee-room, Kitty continues to play coffee-woman by serving her male admirers. This scene only works as scandal, yet it is not entirely clear how this scandal operates: clearly, it is not a scandal for a woman to serve coffee, but it is for a woman who aspires to gentility, innocence and virtue. Kitty here conflates the sentimental construction of femininity and the unruly femininity of the coffee-woman, a conflation the play experiences as a nervous kind of satire.

The play concludes with marriage, but ends with yet more evidence of Kitty's perverse disposition. After marriage, she suggests to Hartly that they could continue to run the coffee-house.

——But Mr *Hartly*, must I quite leave our Coffee now? I wish you'd keep a Coffee-House, with all my Heart I do; you shou'dn't have any Trouble in it, my Dear; I could serve all the Gentleman with what they want, and I shou'd love to do it dearly too!

Hartly nervously agrees that they could, although it would certainly halt his gentlemanly pretensions. But as she concludes, Kitty has a more radical proposal: 'I'll tell you what, Mr. Hartly, we'll have a Room for the Women too, if you will . . . By the Stars! and so we will; for 'tis an unreasonable thing that Women should not come to the Coffee-House.' Kitty's proposal for a coffee-house for young ladies seems to throw the play's conservative closure into limbo. Her revised female coffee-house wears the appearance of a polite and genteel environment (a reformed coffee-house sociability reorganised along sentimental and feminised principles). But this re-gendering is ambiguous, as the play suggests it would be something more akin to a brothel, a place which would create gossip and scandal: 'there would be more News stirring there in a Week, than there is now in six Months.'[66]

Miller's *The Coffee-House* deliberately invokes the trope of the coffee-woman, but does so in order to suppress it. The character of Mrs Notable, through her unseemly recapitulation of the convention of the avaricious widow, recalls clearly enough the unruly coffee-woman. The behaviour of the women, and that of their male customers, continually threatens to spill over into more bawdy material, even as it is disciplined by Miller's irony. Over the unruliness of the coffee-women, Miller lays the girlish coquetry of Kitty, for whom the coffee-house is space for the play of light-hearted courtship wit. Miller's comedy thus attempts to curtail the disruptive power of the coffee-woman by essentialising her subversive status under the rubric of an unthreatening female coquettishness. Transposing the female sexuality of the coffee-woman onto the

widow's beautiful daughter allows the subversiveness of the bar-crossing romance to dissipate into the polite fictions of dramatic comedy. Generic convention is deployed here as a powerful force to shape and repress the unruly coffee-woman familiar from the whore's biography.[67]

There is not space in this essay to trace exhaustively the consequences for Habermas's argument of the repression of unruly material from the coffee-house model of sociability. Instead, the intention is to historicise how *The Spectator's* polite model of sociability came to acquire its hegemonic force in the history books through the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (a hegemony it always claimed to have through its universalising posture). One could pursue and defend the argument that coffee-houses did become more polite and refined through the course of the eighteenth century. A trajectory of polite reform can be traced in the mid-eighteenth century in the tendency of coffee-houses to adopt explicitly exclusive regulations. This took two main forms: coffee-houses like the Baltick and Lloyd's transformed themselves into business associations, where subscribers alone were given access to a coffee-room where business deals could be transacted and highly specialised information disseminated.[68] Other coffee-houses, like White's and Almack's, followed a similar subscriber-led transformation into clubs open only to a highly selective membership, largely appropriated by a distinctive high-status social group and specialising in one particular form of socialising, such as high-stakes gambling.[69] Even 'regular' coffee-houses seem to have adopted a quieter and more restrained model of sociability. However, there is also some solid evidence that the popular coffee-house survives this process of polite refinement. Iain McCalman's work on the convivial debating clubs of the ultra-radical political underground of the 1790s has argued that not only did the coffee-house serve as the site where the clubs could meet, but the type of communal activity and democratic discussion engendered there provided 'the preferred institutional model' for revolutionaries.[70] Yet despite the continuing heterogeneity of the coffee-house experience, the construction of the coffee-house in official culture came increasingly to represent the coffee-house only in its polite mode.

As the coffee-house declined in importance in late eighteenth-century society, its representation became increasingly nostalgic, and the

preserve of historians. By the early nineteenth century, nostalgia for the Spectatorial coffee-house sociability was pronounced. A correspondent identified by the Spectatorial cognonym 'Harry Honeycombe' remarks in the *New Monthly Magazine* (1826), that 'As I never pass Covent Garden . . . without thinking of all the old coffee-houses and the wits, so I can never reflect, without impatience, that there are no such meetings now, and no coffee-room that looks as if it would suit them.' Instead, society now congregates in the pew and the box (church and theatre), which Honeycombe describes as a kind of confinement. He regrets the passing of the old coffee-house, where 'there was a more humane openness of intercourse', and where 'Hostility might get in, but it was obliged to behave itself.'[71]

Victorian historians of the eighteenth century continue this process of nostalgic re-evaluation of the coffee-house.[72] Macaulay, in his *History of England* (1848–55) describes the coffee-house as a 'most important political institution' in its day, one of 'the chief organs through which the public opinion of the metropolis vented itself', equivalent to a 'fourth Estate of the realm'. In Macaulay's estimation, the coffee-houses were the daily resort of every man of the upper or middle class, from which nobody was excluded by rank, profession, religious or political opinion. In a reprise of the *Spectator*'s Eubulusian argument, he claims that the 'gregarious habit' instilled by the coffee-house made it 'the Londoner's home'.[73] Leslie Stephen's *English Literature and Society* (1903) similarly explores the role of the coffee-house in the formation of a new state public culture through its ability to commingle 'the political and the literary class' in a 'characteristic fraternisation', even though his representation of the coffee-house admits of much disputatious rowdiness. Stephen's coffee-house plays a central role in the formation of a literary critical 'tribunal' in which men of the middling state might learn to make judgements and take a place in political life.[74]

The nineteenth-century reconstruction of the coffee-house seems to have some significant points of similarity with that of Habermas. As a student of his footnotes realises, Habermas appears to have used their research to formulate his account of the coffee-house, a reliance that is, in the end, rather significant. Habermas relied on a restricted range of generalist secondary texts on the English coffee-house: making reference to English research by Stephen, Trevelyan and an anonymous, untraced nineteenth-century popular historian,[75] and two German works (both of which are heavily dependent on the nineteenth-century research of Timbs and Robinson).[76] It is likely he did no primary research.[77] It is, of

course, unsurprising that Habermas's work on the coffee-house is under-researched (the work the book does is theoretical, as is appropriate in a *Habilitationsschrift*, or post-doctoral dissertation, submitted to a philosophy department). However the manner in which his research is weak is central to the success of his argument.

Habermas's account of the coffee-house, filtered through the Victorian coffee-house historians, reflects the model of sociability of the Spectatorial reformed coffee-house, even while it recognises the existence of texts, like *The Women's Petition*,[78] that might offer a more unruly model. Habermas's own work was completed, of course, in the 1950s, and in it one might recognise the influence of the post-war coffee-house renaissance. In the 1950s, the coffee-house, in the new guise of espresso bar, underwent a profound phase of renewal. The espresso bar relied on new technology – Achille Gaggia had patented the modern espresso coffee machine in Italy in 1946 – but its real revolution was cultural; it defined an innovative model of sociability to attract, define and refashion a distinct social identity.[79] This 'coffee-bar craze' was closely associated both with high modernist art practices and practitioners, and the emergent popular youth culture. The sociability of the espresso bar was identified as international, cosmopolitan and sophisticated, allying itself with the post-war new world order (managing to be both European and modern, but dissociated from the extreme politics and militarism of the immediate past). In part it did this by cloaking itself in the counter-culture mystique of beat-poets, teenagers and youth rebellion – characterised, satirically, in 1957 by Angus Wilson as the 'espresso-bar rebellion'.[80] Perhaps for the first time since the 1690s, the coffee-house was associated with a reforming and convivial sociability, one in which women were, however, conspicuously central. The new coffee-bar, like the old coffee-house, thus establishes curious but by no means impotent analogies with Habermas's wider project in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in establishing an understanding of a liberal democratic theory that might coherently apply in post-war West Germany.

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); *Strukturwandel der Öffentlicheit* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann

Luchterhand Verlag, 1962). Peter Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 9; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 80–118.

2 Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth, eds., *Women and the Public Sphere: A Critique of Sociology and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1984). Habermas has responded to these criticisms in 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 421–62, p. 423.

3 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 32–3, 36–7. Habermas does not use the term 'sociability', which is here understood to mean the character or quality of being sociable or engaging in friendly intercourse.

4 Anthony Hilliar, *A Brief and Merry History of Great Britain, Containing an Account of the Religions, Customs, Manners, Humours, Characters, Caprice, Contrasts, Foibles, Factions &c., of the People. Written originally in Arabic by Ali-Mohammed Hadgi* (London: J. Roberts, J. Shuckburgh, J. Penn and J. Jackson, 1730), p. 22.

5 Henri Misson de Valberg, *Mémoirs et observations faites par un voyageur en Angleterre* (La Haye, 1698); trans. John Ozell, *Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England. With some account of Scotland and Ireland. Dispos'd in Alphabetical Order* (London: D. Browne et al., 1719), pp. 39–40.

6 M. P., *A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses. By M.P.* (London: John Starkey, 1661), p. 9.

7 *Interior of a London Coffee House* (c. 1705), British Museum. This plate is widely reproduced; see for example Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1600–1730* (London: Methuen 1989), pl. 8. See also Emma Clery's discussion in 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth', *Women: A Cultural Review* 2.2 (1991), [168]–77.

8 *The Spectator* 10 (Monday 12 March, 1711), in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (1st edn 1965; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol. I, p. 44.

9 Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 208–11. The coffee-house is not named, but is said to be near the Inns of Court.

10 Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 209–10.

11 Angus Ross writes of 'the revolution in habits and manners which *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* helped to bring about' (in his introduction to *Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator* (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 52. *The Spectator*, even to near contemporaries, is associated with the introduction of a new and innovative social organisation: Johnson says the periodical had a role in establishing 'the minuter decencies and inferior duties' and in regulating the 'practice of daily conversation'.

12 Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 211.

13 Elias argues that 'the compulsion to check one's own behaviour', through shame and embarrassment, drives the 'structural transformation of society'

into its 'new pattern of social relationships'. Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1st edn 1938; Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 66. See also Scott Paul Gordon's account of a more aggressive 'controlling gaze' in *The Spectator*, in contradistinction to the gentle and polite 'Work of Reformation' articulated in this essay. 'Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle', *The Eighteenth Century* 36, 1 (1995), 3–23.

14 Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. I, p. 210.

15 See Lawrence Klein, 'Coffeehouse Civility, 1660–1714: an aspect of post-courtly culture in England', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 59.1 (1997), 30–51.

16 Edward Bramah, captions in the Bramah Tea and Coffee Museum, Maguire St, London (1996); Clery, 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth; and Steven Pincus, '"Coffee Politicians Does Create": Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture', *Journal of Modern History* 27 (1995), 807–34.

17 Pincus, '"Coffee Politicians"', pp. 814, 815. Thomas Bellingham records in his Diary in 1689 that he had met 'with several women in the coffee-house', but he doesn't comment what he thought of them or their morals; see Anthony Hewitson, ed., *Diary of Thomas Bellingham* (November 1688, Preston 1908), p. 44. Robert Hooke dined with Robert Boyle and his sister Lady Ranelagh at Man's Coffee-House; Henry Robinson and Walter Adams, eds., *The Diary of Robert Hooke, 1672–1689* (London, 1935), entry for October 2, 1675, p. 184. Pincus's claim that Martha Lady Giffard, the sister and biographer of Sir William Temple, was a 'habituée' of the coffee-house is also built on slim evidence: the text he cites does not claim that she was in the coffee-house, but that Swift, in 1710, had heard that one of her servants (the mother of his beloved Stella) had enquired in the coffee house for her; Julia G. Longe, *Martha Lady Giffard: Her Life and Correspondence (1664–1722)* (London: George Allen, 1911), pp. 250–1.

18 Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee-Houses* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), no. 147, p. 127.

19 Lillywhite, *London Coffee-Houses*, no. 1501, pp. 635–7.

20 *Flying Post*, November 6–8, 1712, quoted in Lillywhite, *London Coffee-Houses*, no. 624, p. 625.

21 Lillywhite, *London Coffee-Houses*, no. 1531, p. 647.

22 *London Evening Post*, 16–18 October, 1739, quoted in Lillywhite, *London Coffee-Houses*, no. 331, p. 188.

23 Tom Brown, 'Amusement VIII', originally in *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London* (London, 1702), how in *The Works of Mr. Thomas Brown. Serious and Comical, in Prose and Verse*, 4 vols., 5th edn (London: Sam Briscoe, 1715), vol. III, pp. 71–2.

24 *The Case between the Proprietors of the News-Papers and the Coffee-Men of London and Westminster* (London: E. Smith, 1729), p. 12.

25 I am grateful to Leya Landau for allowing me to read an early version of her dissertation chapter, '"Men of Business, or Men of Pleasure": The London Coffee-House', in 'Reading London: the Literary Representation of the City's Pleasures, 1700–1782' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University College, University of London, 1999).