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# REVIEW ARTICLE

## A POLITE AND ENLIGHTENED LONDON?

*Women, feminism and religion in early Enlightenment England*. By Sarah Apetrei. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. x + 325. ISBN 9780521513968. £63·00.

*Sympathy, sensibility and the literature of feeling in the eighteenth century*. By Ildiko Csengei. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pp. xii + 261. ISBN 9780230308442. £60·00.

*The origins of sex: a history of the first sexual revolution*. By Faramerz Dabhoiwala. London: Allen Lane, 2012. Pp. xi + 484. ISBN 978–1846144929. £25·00.

*Cruelty and laughter: forgotten comic literature and the unsentimental eighteenth century*. By Simon Dickie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. xvii + 362. ISBN 9780226146188. £35·00.

*The first bohemians: life and art in London's golden age*. By Vic Gatrell. London: Allen Lane, 2013. Pp. xxviii + 484. ISBN 9781846146770. £25·00.

*Madam Britannia: women, church and nation, 1712–1812*. By Emma Major. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 371. ISBN 978–0–19–969937–7. £64·00.

*Women and Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Britain*. By Karen O'Brien. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. viii + 310. ISBN 9780521774277. £20·99.

Exhibition reviewed:
*Georgians revealed: life, style and the making of modern Britain*. British Library, London, 2014.

The character of eighteenth-century English society remains a subject of debate, and diverse perspectives are particularly pronounced when it comes to the cultural influence and power of politeness. The monographs discussed below all engage with politeness in different ways. Emma Major and Sarah Apetrei explore the means by which polite culture facilitated female cultural agency, and thus follow Lawrence Klein's call to comprehend the lived experience of politeness.[1] Taking a different tack, Simon Dickie and Vic Gatrell reject the idea that politeness enjoyed the cultural dominance ascribed to it by Klein

[1] Lawrence Klein, 'Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), p. 878.



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and other historians.[2] In Ildiko Csengei's study, the narrative of an emergent civility is challenged through an analysis of sensibility's 'darker side'.[3] This move towards an acceptance of the power of the impolite in British culture is also explored by Faramerz Dabhoiwala, who emphasizes the power of the liberated male libertine, and broadens the scope for understanding eighteenth-century culture. Yet, an abandonment of politeness risks removing women's agency from the picture, with Major, Apetrei, and Karen O'Brien all emphasizing the importance of the feminine to politeness and virtue; in O'Brien's case, in the context of Enlightenment concepts of civility, where the feminine symbolized progress and refinement.

Alongside politeness, the Enlightenment is deployed for different ends in these books, and engaged with to varying degrees. There is little agreement in eighteenth-century studies as to what exactly constituted Enlightenment, even in the British context, and these books reflect this. In each book, the Enlightenment means different things, and we move from a largely religious, conservative Enlightenment in Major's, Apetrei's, and O'Brien's studies which all focus on women to a narrower and more radical Enlightenment in Dabhoiwala's *Origins of sex* (2012), where the primary subject is male. In Dabhoiwala's book, the Enlightenment is explicitly associated with cultural change; in this case, in the context of liberalizing attitudes toward male heterosexuality. By contrast, in Dickie's and Gatrell's books, both exploring impolite and bohemian London, the Enlightenment is marginalized. Yet, if we adopt a view of the Enlightenment as cultural phenomenon, as suggested by scholars such as John Brewer, Robert Darnton, Dena Goodman, Margaret Jacob, and Thomas Munck, then the bohemian art and print culture of eighteenth-century Covent Garden and unsympathetic, bawdy texts enriches our understanding of the Enlightenment's impact in England, particularly intersections of elite and popular culture.[4]

The relationship between elite, or polite, and popular culture is an important theme in Major's and Apetrei's studies, and in both books we see the influence of Barbara Taylor's study of the impact of religion on Mary Wollstonecraft's thought.[5] Both authors stress the importance of religion to women's public identities, and the connections between religious and secular thought in the Enlightenment. Whereas Taylor's focus was the radical Wollstonecraft, in *Madam Britannia* (2012), Major is concerned with women who were

[2] See also John Brewer, *Pleasures of the imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (London, 1997).

[3] Csengei, *Sympathy, sensibility and the literature of feeling*, p. 1.

[4] Brewer, *Pleasures of the imagination*; Robert Darnton, *George Washington's false teeth: an unconventional guide to the eighteenth century* (New York, NY, 2003); Dena Goodman, *Republic of Letters: a cultural history of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY, 1996); Margaret C. Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment: pantheists, freemasons and republicans* (London, 1981); Thomas Munck, *The Enlightenment: a comparative social history, 1721–1794* (London, 2000).

[5] Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2003).

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conservative and loyalist, though not necessarily conventional. Examining Elizabeth Montagu and the women of the bluestocking circle, Major convincingly argues that virtuous Anglican womanhood symbolized English nationhood and offered an identity through which elite women could participate in the public worlds of intellectual exchange and political debate. Where O'Brien's *Women and Enlightenment* (2009) emphasizes the importance that Scottish Enlightenment historiography placed on women's cultural participation, Major looks at the ways in which women appropriated this discourse to claim a public agency founded upon feminine piety. The primary model for this was Madam Britannia; a symbol of a specifically 'civilised Protestant politeness'.[6]

The ubiquity of Madam Britannia, Major argues, created a discursive space where religion was feminized, enabling Anglican women to claim an important role in church and society. For women such as Montagu, these associations extended to personifying Britannia and gaining an authoritative voice by performing pious sociability in opposition to the corruptions of fashion which vexed eighteenth-century moralists. Women's piety was viewed, like the Church of England itself, as a golden mean between the excesses of the Roman Catholic church on the one hand and the dissenters on the other. In the 1790s, this extended to radicals at home and abroad, with Montagu and Sarah Scott presenting themselves as Protestant patriots and associating (in a similar manner to Edmund Burke) the disorder of the French Revolution with the disorders of France's supposedly masculine revolutionary women. For Hannah More, participation in polite culture became 'an engagement in a front-line battle to save the virtue of the nation'.[7]

The women in Major's study were most empowered to forge and express a patriotic identity as pious, polite Christian women in the context of the turmoil of the French Revolution, and the sense of apocalypse it engendered. A similar context motivated the women in Apetrei's *Women, feminism and religion* (2010). Here, rather than Revolution, it was the perceived moral collapse of Britain during the Restoration and 'the general cultural and psychological disruptiveness' of the Glorious Revolution that motivated women's religious conviction and public action.[8] Examining well-known characters such as Mary Astell and lesser-known women including the Quaker preacher Elizabeth Bathurst and prophetess of the Philadelphian Society, Jane Lead, Apetrei provides an historical, and religious, background to the Enlightenment's association of women and sensibility. In doing so, she illustrates a precedent for the associations of Christian virtue, politeness, and patriotism examined by Major.

Apetrei locates these religious women as part of the early Enlightenment, following scholars such as Brian Young who have stressed the centrality of religion

[6] Major, *Madam Britannia,* p. 17.
[7] Ibid., p. 276.
[8] Apetrei, *Women, feminism and religion,* p. 11.

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in the English Enlightenment.[9] As with the bluestocking circle later in the century, some women of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries 'were beginning to regard themselves and their sex as the authentic defenders of the faith, rationality and morality'.[10] Mary Astell, for instance, was able to invert the association of women with passion and men with reason, by emphasizing the brutish irrationality of male libertines. This inversion was crucial to Astell's feminism, and Apetrei's, Major's, and O'Brien's studies of women and religion in the long eighteenth century emphasize the importance of theological engagement in the formation of feminism prior to Wollstonecraft's interventions.

Read together, Major's and Apetrei's books illustrate what O'Brien refers to as 'the profoundly divergent kinds of feminism that can arise from different Christian epistemologies'.[11] As O'Brien points out, Astell's emphasis on the inner intellectual and spiritual self was markedly different from the emphasis on sociality within Anglican bluestocking feminism, and was criticized in her own time by Damaris Masham. O'Brien's study spans the long eighteenth century, and includes studies of Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft, alongside Anglican Whig feminists. This long chronological approach enables women's intellectual interventions, religiously motivated or otherwise, to be securely placed as a part of an English Enlightenment that 'encompassed both conservative and radical political beliefs'.[12]

O'Brien does not argue that the Enlightenment was often feminist in its ambitions but that its focus on progress provided a discursive space for the emergence of feminism. Crucial to this was Scottish stadial history that envisioned women as important markers of progress, something continued. This discursive space opened up by Enlightenment was taken by Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, whose philosophy was, as O'Brien explores, part 'of a Latitudinarian tradition emphasizing benevolence, rational moral autonomy and female education as the means of integrating women into a reformed social order'.[13]

These studies, along with other recent work, such as Elizabeth Eger's *Bluestockings: women of reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (2010), warn against what Taylor refers to as a caricature of Enlightenment, which paints it as a one-dimensional narrative aimed at the subordination of women.[14] Rather, the character and position of women was a core subject of debate. As Taylor writes, 'Women were no mere victims but active subjects and pivotal

[9] Brian W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in eighteenth-century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998). See also Roy Porter, 'The Enlightenment in England', in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in national context* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 6.

[10] Apetrei, *Women, feminism and religion*, p. 17.

[11] O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 44.

[12] Ibid., p. 67.

[13] Ibid., p. 153.

[14] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: women of reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2010); Barbara Taylor, 'Enlightenment and the uses of woman', *History Workshop Journal*, 74 (2012), pp. 1–9. See also Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott, eds., *Women, gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2005).

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objects of Enlightenment philosophizing.'[15] The acceptance of a need to incorporate a gendered analysis when considering the intellectual and cultural developments of Enlightenment is apparent in Ildiko Csengei's *Sympathy, sensibility and the literature of feeling* (2012). Unlike Major, Apetrei, and O'Brien, Csengei is not concerned with feminism explicitly, but her work emphasizes female negotiation of a patriarchal ideology that had adapted to Enlightenment ideas. Seeking to connect Enlightenment philosophies of sympathy and the culture of sensibility to modern psychoanalytic theory, Csengei examines the sentimental swoon in the eighteenth-century novel.

Exploring the connections between ideas of female emotions and the body, and placing these in a psychoanalytic framework, Csengei argues that in novels by writers such as Sarah Fielding, fainting instead represents 'disruptions to female consciousness' and challenges the repression of female self-expression (particularly sexual expression).[16] For instance, by manifesting sensibility in an extreme form, Fielding's Ophelia faints as a negative response to the limitations the culture of sensibility placed on women. Interpreted within a psychoanalytic framework, 'by their presentation of the negated, oppressed, banished woman, [novels of sensibility] perform an act of affirmation, taking cognisance of the discontents behind women's fevers, swoons and tears'.[17] By symbolizing extreme sensibility, Csengei argues that fainting offered women a means to disrupt the cultural limitations placed on women's self-expression whilst also underlining the power of this culture.

This analysis is based upon the emotional responses of fictional women, and when read alongside Major's study of bluestocking women and O'Brien's examination of the emergence of a feminist discourse in the later Enlightenment, Csengei's analysis appears to underappreciate the extent to which some eighteenth-century women were able to forge a loud, critical voice in opposition to the disruptive but silencing swoon. However, Csengei's argument is strengthened by her analysis of Wollstonecraft. She maintains that Wollstonecraft critiqued sensibility whilst simultaneously displaying a self that was in a 'fragile state of sensibility', as indicated by her 'trembling'.[18] That Wollstonecraft might fall prey to the sensibility that she forcefully critiqued in *Vindication of the rights of woman* (1792) would indicate its discursive power, and perhaps, if we follow Csengei's argument, an emotional response to abandonment that would later find definition in Freudian psychoanalysis.

The use of psychoanalytic theory offers an interesting insight into writings on and by women in the eighteenth century, but the connection to modern psychological concepts made by Csengei causes some of the historical specificity to be lost. Reading sensibility through the lens of psychoanalysis does, however,

[15] Taylor, 'Uses of woman', p. 2.
[16] Csengei, *Sympathy, sensibility and the literature of feeling*, p. 142.
[17] Ibid., p. 168.
[18] Ibid., p. 177.

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expand our understanding of it, and Csengei examines the importance of pain in theories of sensibility and its 'others', such as the poor. Where Csengei emphasizes the importance of sensibility's dark side, in *Cruelty and laughter* (2011), Dickie questions whether sensibility dominated eighteenth-century culture.

Dickie's examination of jest books reveals a Georgian populace who responded to poverty, disability, domestic violence, and rape in a manner that displayed the opposite of Smithian sympathy. Taking pains to understand the mid-eighteenth century in its specific historical context rather than as a prelude to romanticism or the emergence of polite urbanity, Dickie portrays a culture where cruel and violent pranks were perpetrated across classes; with printed tales of these exploits readily consumed by men and women. In his study, richly illustrated with examples from a wide range of texts and illustrations, Dickie exposes a culture in which poor, disabled, and marginalized people were considered acceptable figures of fun. He does not deny the existence of discourses condemning this humour, but amply demonstrates how even literature ostensibly condemning cruel jokes and pranks could drift into satire of moralizing tendencies.

Dickie's focus on attitudes towards society's marginalized population is similar to that of Csengei, but by emphasizing the historical context, Dickie's argument is more compelling. For example, both writers devote attention to Sarah Fielding's *History of Ophelia* (1760), but Dickie sees less female power in this text; rather than subject it to a psychoanalytic reading, he examines the text in the context of mid-century attitudes towards rape, expressed in print culture and the courtroom. Accepting that sentimental rape plots demonstrated recognition of female emotions and that there were 'Enlightenment assertions about the moral and intellectual equality of women', Dickie urges scholars to avoid the trap of adopting a model of progression regarding attitudes to rape and instead recognize the 'murky continuum of ambivalence and inconsistency' in contemporary responses to sexual violence.[19] He establishes how the reporting of Old Bailey rape trials in the comic genre served to silence women by rendering their accusations false. Rather than a social pariah, in the unsentimental world portrayed by Dickie, the violent gentleman rake performs an acceptable cultural role. While his gender privilege was displayed by his violent sexuality, his class privilege was reinforced by laughing at social inferiors such as servants, and sometimes committing violent acts against them. That other people also laughed at these scenes is a strong indication of the limits of a sensibility founded upon sympathy.

In *The origins of sex*, Dabhoiwala also emphasizes the violent sexual power of elite men, demonstrating the libertine's continued presence as a 'ubiquitous danger' in literature and on the streets of London.[20] Yet, unlike Dickie, Dabhoiwala repeats the more conventional narrative of changing attitudes towards women, where they were increasingly seen as victims; a shift in

[19] Dickie, *Cruelty and laughter*, p. 190.
[20] Dabhoiwala, *Origins of sex*, p. 176.

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perception expressed in the cult of seduction and manifested by Magdalen asylums. Although Dabhoiwala accepts that the impact of this on women was ambiguous, he pays less attention to prostitutes' actual experience than previous scholars such as Tony Henderson, who takes a far more critical, and convincing, view of the cult of seduction.[21] Also, while Dabhoiwala does not ignore the satire that Dickie explores, he sees it differently, claiming that it illustrates the pervasiveness of the discourse of seduction developed by novelist Samuel Richardson. There is some consensus between Dickie and Dabhoiwala regarding male sexuality, but they differ on the degree to which attitudes towards female sexuality changed. Both agree that the treatment of female rape victims by the courts barely changed during the century, but Dickie pays more attention to this and his research of reports of Old Bailey proceedings provides a convincing argument that this legal context was in step with much contemporary culture rather than opposed to an emergent sympathetic discourse.

In Dabhoiwala's study, men are the clear winners of the sexual revolution caused by the 'intellectual earthquake of Enlightenment' combined with urbanization and a demise of religious moral and legal authority.[22] He examines the double standard that accompanied a decline in religious authority on sexual matters, spurred on by the Enlightenment's encouragement of natural religion. Yet, women are not restricted to victimhood in this narrative, and he touches on the ways in which female critiques of male sexual liberty drew on conservative moral (and often religious) discourses to intervene in debates concerning sexuality and marriage; critiques explored in detail in Major's, Apetrei's, and O'Brien's studies. Unlike these historians, Dabhoiwala's Enlightenment is more radical, orientating itself away from religion. This is disappointing, as more engagement with the heterogeneity of opinions regarding religion and morality in Enlightenment discourse would have enhanced this investigation of sexual liberty, sensibility, and politeness in eighteenth-century London.

Also concerned with libertine and other 'illicit' sexual activities, particularly prostitution in London's Covent Garden, is Gatrell in *The first bohemians* (2013). Rather than the Enlightenment, Gatrell locates the emergence of this world in the growing bohemian culture led by artists and writers, and dependent on the mixed-class interaction in the narrow streets and courtyards of Covent Garden. He does not dismiss class hierarchies nor the oppression of impoverished women, but he emphasizes the vitality of plebeian culture. To do so, he points to depictions of plebeian sorts, from Tobias Smollett's novels and William Hogarth's prints, to the particularly sympathetic portrayals by Thomas Rowlandson at the end of the century. This builds on his earlier work, *City of laughter* (2006), which explored the 'malicious, sardonic and satirical humour' of the

[21] Tony Henderson, *Disorderly women in eighteenth-century London: prostitution and control in the metropolis, 1730–1830* (London, 1999).
[22] Dabhoiwala, *Origins of sex*, p. 78.

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Georgians, expressed in satirical prints.[23] This important study, which demonstrated the impolite and 'illicit' side of culture, influences Dickie's book.

Like Dickie, Gatrell's *First bohemians* is attuned to the nuances of class relationships in this period. Although he emphasizes the intimate spatial, economic, and cultural connections between the poor, middling sorts and, to a lesser extent, the elites, he also points to a growing gulf in ideas about art and the varied patterns of its consumption. While the rising population and consumer power of middling sorts spurred the creation of a visual print culture depicting ordinary people in spaces such as Covent Garden, the emergence of the Royal Academy pushed the art of the elite in a direction committed to a polite neo-classicism.

To explore the relationship between polite and impolite worlds, Gatrell points to the opposing attitudes and different background and characters of contemporaries Joshua Reynolds and William Hogarth. Reynolds was the first president of the Royal Academy and comfortable participant in polite society (including bluestocking gatherings), while Hogarth was a 'realist' painter from a middling background who refused to flatter the elites; born a quarter-century apart, the differences between them was, Gatrell argues, 'partly determined by differences in age and shifts in the market, but chiefly by differences in class, opportunity and manners'.[24] While emphasizing the distance between social worlds, Gatrell also points to the fact that plebeian culture posed a challenge to that of the polite world of Reynolds and the social elite.

Gatrell's picture of the Covent Garden world prior to the rupture of the 1780 Gordon Riots points to greater class integration than that suggested by Dickie's study. Like Dickie, Dabhoiwala also stresses class division, particularly in the application of sympathy, and his emphasis on changing sexual norms means that the male libertine is more present than the polite gentleman who has previously dominated historiography on eighteenth-century manhood.[25] Like Helen Berry's study of flash talk and Moll King's coffee house, his examination of this culture creates space for the impolite in our understanding of urbanity.[26] However, an alternative focus on the libertine may obscure our understanding of eighteenth-century manhood, as much as the refined gentleman did.[27] The crucial issue is change; did politeness and Enlightenment lead to new models of manhood and greater sexual liberty? To answer this, account must be taken of recent historiography which shows that while its manifestations were slightly

[23] Vic Gatrell, *City of laughter: sex and satire in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2006), p. 4.

[24] Gatrell, *First Bohemians,* p. 260.

[25] Michéle Cohen, *Fashioning masculinity: national identity and language in the eighteenth century* (London, 1996); Philip Carter, *Men and the emergence of polite society: Britain, 1660–1800* (Harlow, 2001); Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

[26] Helen Berry, 'Rethinking politeness in eighteenth-century England: Moll King's coffee house and the significance of "flash talk"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 11 (2001), pp. 65–81.

[27] For a critique of singular definitions of eighteenth-century manhood, see Karen Harvey, 'The history of masculinity, circa 1650–1800', *Journal of British Studies,* 44 (2005), 269–311.

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altered, for many men, manhood in the eighteenth century remained defined by self-control, social credit, and domestic authority and oeconomy, all features of the early modern period.[28] These continuities are sidelined in Dabhoiwala's narrative of a revolution in sexual attitudes.

Emphasizing the increasing liberty of the male subject, Dabhoiwala chronicles a demise in the policing of heterosexual sexual activity and connects this to an emerging 'doctrine of sexual liberty' that by 1750 offered 'not merely a rejection of existing laws, but a new way of conceiving of the boundaries between permissible and impermissible behaviour'.[29] This re-conception can also be gleaned from the relationship between male liberty, politeness, and violence.[30] However, while there certainly was a reconfiguration of manhood, Dabhoiwala's focus on a 'revolution' in attitudes to male sexuality follows a thrust of historiography on sexuality in eighteenth-century England that has been critiqued by Karen Harvey in this journal.[31]

It is the focus on the printed and public urban world that enables Dabhoiwala to point to an enlarged libertine culture, and is the main reason for the portrayal of a Georgian masculinity different to the domestic family men who populate recent studies by Joanne Bailey, Henry French and Mark Rothery, and Harvey. These studies locate eighteenth-century manhood in the context of family and home, and stress the connections between men's private and public worlds.[32] Adopting (though not uncritically) the narrative of an emergent polite culture and moving beyond Habermasian public spaces, Joanne Bailey argues that the 'man of feeling' 'was imagined in a domestic setting, and embodied emotion, sensitivity and gentleness'.[33] In the Georgian home, the importance of female taste in polite culture also facilitated female influence even if, as Amanda Vickery notes, 'Neither the development of a contract theory of government, nor the spread of politeness, nor the fashion for domestic sensibility made much impact on the *structures* of authority in the family and household organisation.'[34]

[28] Karen Harvey, *The little republic: masculinity and domestic authority in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2012); Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's estate: landed gentry masculinities, 1660–1900* (Oxford, 2012); Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in early modern England: honour, sex and marriage* (London, 1999); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of manhood in early modern England* (Oxford, 2003).

[29] Dabhoiwala, *Origins of sex*, p. 108.

[30] Robert Shoemaker, 'The taming of the duel: masculinity, honour and ritual violence in London, 1660–1800', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 525–45; Elizabeth Foyster, 'Creating a veil of silence? Politeness and marital violence in the English household', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 395–415.

[31] Karen Harvey, 'The century of sex? Gender, bodies, and sexuality in the long eighteenth century', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 899–916.

[32] Joanne Bailey, '"A very sensible man": imagining fatherhood in England, c. 1750–c. 1830', *History*, 95 (2010), pp. 267–92; French and Rothery, *Man's estate*; Harvey, *Little republic*.

[33] Bailey, 'Imagining fatherhood', p. 271.

[34] Amanda Vickery, *Behind closed doors: at home in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 2009), p. 7. Original italics.

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The domestic and social worlds of eighteenth-century England were combined in *Georgians revealed: life, style and the making of modern Britain* (2014). This exhibition emphasized the politeness of eighteenth-century culture, and in doing so offered an interesting but narrow picture of the lived experience. Adopting a cultural rather than a political narrative, the visitor was met with a brief chronology of political events in the form of placards interspersed among images taken from the rich pictorial heritage of the era. As the subtitle suggests, the exhibition adopted a chronology, dismissed by Dickie, whereby eighteenth-century culture is viewed through the lens of the modernity that followed. This encouraged a focus on the elegant polite culture of the elites and middle classes, with the impolite, the libertine, the criminal, and the violent occupying a marginal space in the exhibition.

The exhibition's engagement with leisure, such as the theatre and horse races, and the inclusion of female objects, from tea pots to Jane Austen's writing desk, indicates an acceptance of cultural and gender history within and outwith the academy. It also reveals a desire among the public for the stories of Georgian life; something also suggested by recent television documentaries, film, and blogs.[35] In the context of public engagement with the eighteenth century, it is significant that Gatrell's and Dabhoiwala's studies of the sociable and sexual lives of eighteenth-century people are published by Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books that aims to make academic history accessible (both in style and price) and tell the stories of 'real people'.[36]

For the eighteenth century, this is not just about the inclusion of plebeian culture, a subject where more research is needed but on which we are not entirely lacking in information.[37] It is also about understanding the lived experience of the elite beyond the exhortations of moral philosophers and preachers. As Dickie shows, both men and women invented and laughed at cruel and rude jokes, even in the mixed-sex company that Joseph Addison believed would facilitate male refinement, and, David Hume assured readers, would encourage gallantry in men.[38] However, that the discourse of politeness remained powerful is indicated by the fact that

[35] Amanda Vickery (presenter), *At home with the Georgians* [documentary], BBC2, 2010; *Belle*, directed by Amma Asante (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2013); Joanne Bailey, 'Muses on history: talking through my research', https://jbailey2013.wordpress.com/, accessed 13 Mar. 2015; Lucy Inglis, 'Georgian London', http://georgianlondon.com/, accessed 10 Mar. 2015; Sarah Murden and Joanne Major, 'All things Georgian', https://georgianera.wordpress.com/, accessed 10 Mar. 2015; Caroline Warfield, 'A Covent Garden Gilflurt's guide to life: glorious Georgian dispatches from the long eighteenth century', http://www.madamegilflurt.com/, accessed 18 Mar. 2015; Alun Withey, https://dralun.wordpress.com/, accessed 10 Mar. 2015.

[36] Allen Lane, http://www.penguin.co.uk/about-penguin/allen-lane/, accessed 28 July 2014.

[37] Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (London, 1995); Robert Shoemaker, *The London mob: violence and disorder in eighteenth-century England* (London, 2007); Carolyn Steedman, *Labours lost: domestic service and the making of modern England* (Cambridge, 2009).

[38] Lawrence Klein, 'Gender, conversation and the public sphere in early eighteenth-century England', in Judith Still and M. Worton, eds., *Textuality and sexuality: reading theories and practices* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 100–15.

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polite culture was a key site for female public engagement, as Major's study shows.[39] Klein has argued that the discussion should not be whether politeness is relevant but how it was variously understood by contemporaries. Politeness is a useful analytical category precisely because it was not static.[40] Dickie's and Gatrell's books demonstrate that we should not pretend that politeness was the only available cultural model in eighteenth-century England, but nor should we dismiss its discursive power.

The array of objects, images, and texts displayed in the British Library's exhibition, including fashionable shoes, *Rules and instructions for playing at skittles* (1786) by a Respectable Company of Gentlemen, the neo-classical designs of the Adam brothers, and paintings of new garden landscapes such as Heinrich Joseph Schütz's *A view in Kew Gardens* (1798), warn against abandoning politeness altogether. Yet this approach is not entirely oppositional to that taken by Gatrell, as the inclusion of some aspects of popular culture and satirical prints points towards a theme stressed in his study: that the elites, middling sorts, and plebeians occupied the same urban geography even if they did not always share the same outlook.

As Major illustrates, politeness combined with piety was grasped by Anglican women of the elite as an avenue for intellectual and political agency. Yet, Dickie's research shows that women's voices also created unsentimental texts and expressed cruel but humorous opinions. In sum, all of the books discussed above illustrate that women were not silent receptors and symbols of Georgian culture. This recognition of women's agency is not new; what is significant is that the inclusion of women in studies of the eighteenth century is now commonplace. However, the move away from politics in narratives of the eighteenth century, as indicated by its separation from the main body of the exhibition at the British Library, may deny us an important avenue for the study of female agency.[41]

Polite culture largely belonged to the elite, and while studies that look beyond this culture are important, we should not ignore the power of this group. As Hannah Greig has shown, the social elite were a tiny minority of the population numerically but their cultural power was enabled and manifested 'through strategic public performances in a round of interconnected urban spaces including the court and parliament, pleasure gardens, theatres, and private homes'.[42] This sociable urban world was also a political one; for the elite across the century, sociability and political culture were often inseparable.[43]

[39] See also Amanda Vickery, *The gentleman's daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998), and, in the Scottish context, Katharine Glover, *Elite women and polite society in eighteenth-century Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2011).

[40] Klein, 'Politeness', pp. 869–98.

[41] Elaine Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c. 1754–1790* (Oxford, 2005); Kathryn Gleadle and S. Richardson, eds., *Women in British politics, 1760–1860: the power of the petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000).

[42] Hannah Greig, *The beau monde: fashionable society in Georgian London* (Oxford, 2013), p. 20.

[43] Greig, *Beau Monde*, pp. 131–66.

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Major's study suggests that to abandon politics is to ignore the ways in which the public was mapped onto the private, with women such as Montagu forging a personal identification with the nation in response to the American Revolution and asserting 'a polite patriotism'.[44] Major demonstrates that bluestocking women's public agency required an adoption of the civilizing feminine identity espoused in Enlightenment stadial theory. Reflecting the 'Janus-faced doctrine of "female influence"', discussed by Taylor, the corrupt and immoral was present in the bluestocking's world, but their public influence relied upon the performance of polite, patriotic piety deemed by moralists to protect the nation from a downfall precipitated by licentiousness.[45] To achieve this, 'a balance between society and solitude, selfishness and virtue' was required.[46]

In contrast, Dickie's, Gatrell's, and Dabhoiwala's monographs reveal the power of men, especially elite men, to move easily between polite and impolite worlds. This lack of a clear cultural divide between polite and impolite, including the fact that this does not easily map onto class hierarchies, has long been recognized by scholars of eighteenth-century politeness such as Brewer, Klein, and Paul Langford, with Langford asserting that 'one advantage of the term "politeness" was precisely that it was sufficiently vague to embrace a great variety of values, attitudes, and ideas'.[47] And it was not all-encompassing; as Langford notes 'The most genteel neighbourhoods had pockets of vulgarity.'[48] Yet, while these scholars remained committed to politeness as the dominant cultural discourse (especially for the elites), Gatrell, Dickie, and, to a lesser extent, Csengei and Dabhoiwala offer a different narrative.

Rather than libertinism or impoliteness offering an alternative model through which to read eighteenth-century culture, it should encourage us to recognize the fluidity of this culture. Politeness was powerful but it was not hegemonic. [49] That the men who sought out women working as prostitutes in Covent Garden and elsewhere also occupied the polite drawing rooms of respectable ladies (James Boswell, Esq., being the most obvious example) is missing from a picture of Georgian life defined according to a binary of polite and impolite.

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[44] Major, *Madam Britannia*, p. 186.
[45] Taylor, 'Uses of woman', p. 3.
[46] Major, *Madam Britannia*, p. 190.
[47] Paul Langford, 'The uses of eighteenth-century politeness', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 311–31, at p. 326.
[48] Langford, 'Politeness', p. 323.
[49] This is emphasized in recent studies of eighteenth-century masculinity, including Kate Davison, 'Occasional politeness and gentlemen's laughter in eighteenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), pp. 921–45; Karen Harvey, 'Ritual encounters: punch parties and masculinity in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), pp. 165–203, and my recent monograph, *Gender and Enlightenment culture in eighteenth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), esp. ch. 3.

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