

ALEXANDER POPE AND THE TRACTS ADVISING WOMEN OF THE LONG
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contextualises the treatment of women in Alexander Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* (1743) against three conduct manuals from the eighteenth century. These three texts are *The Whole Duty of a Woman* by A Lady (1696), *The Art of Knowing Women* by Le Chevalier Plante-Amour (1732) and *An Essay in Praise of Women* (1733) by James Bland.

The Art of Knowing Women has been paid only passing reference by feminist scholars. *The Whole Duty of a Woman* appears to be known solely for the compilation of recipes which forms its final section, and *An Essay in Praise of Women* is, as far as I have been able to discover, completely unknown. Despite the critical work on the supposed misogyny of Pope, virtually no attention has been paid to the context supplied by these advice manuals, symptoms of their age. In my reading, however, these manuals function both as sources for the *Epistle to a Lady*, and as subjects of Pope's imaginative satire.

I begin by surveying the relevant aspects of Pope's personal history. Drawing on recent historical scholarship, I go on to outline something of the situation of women in the eighteenth century. My comparative study follows. I take each manual in turn, comparing its ideological content and rhetoric with those of Pope. By contrast with these tracts, Pope's poem emerges as far from misogynistic. Indeed, it conveys a nuanced, complex and sympathetic attitude towards women.

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CHAPTER 1: POPE'S PERSONAL HISTORY

The facts surveyed in this chapter are, inevitably, drawn from the existing major studies of Pope's life, in particular Maynard Mack's seminal work *Alexander Pope: A Life* (1985) and, to a lesser degree, Valerie Rumbold's *Women's Place in Pope's World* (1989).

From the outset, powerful women were prominent in Alexander Pope's life. Pope was born in London in 1688 to Alexander and Edith Pope, their only child together. Edith Pope was unmarried until at least forty-one, and until her marriage was relegated to the role of the "dependent spinster" (Rumbold 24). Her husband was three years her junior, and had been previously widowed. Of the son and daughter from Alexander Pope (senior)'s first marriage only his daughter, Magdalen, survived. Alexander junior was born nine years after Magdalen, when his own mother was almost forty-five, a dangerous age for childbirth, let alone of a first child. Like many families of their social standing, the Popes employed a wet nurse. This was Mary Beach, who stayed with the family until her death. Also in the house with them lived a maternal aunt, Elizabeth Turner. It was Elizabeth who taught Pope to read, laying the foundation for a lifetime of informal but avid education. Elizabeth lived with the family for the rest of her life. Pope was very fond of both Mary and Elizabeth, and wrote tributes for them when they died. The majority of the Pope household was elderly. Pope himself was the only child: his half-sister Magdalen, nine years his senior, was sent to live with a paternal aunt when her own mother died (Mack 21). Growing up in this context meant that from childhood Pope was adept at getting along with his elders. Perhaps as a result, unlike most children, Pope never displayed the boisterousness characteristic of young boys (Mack 28-29).

As Rumbold notes, Pope's family seems to have been remarkably affectionate, tight-knit and comparatively easy-going: later in life, Pope and his half-sister's letters to his mother are affectionately addressed "Dear Mother," which can be contrasted with Samuel Johnson's formal address to his own mother as "Honour'd Madam" (Birbeck Hill 75). Also contributing

to the closeness of the family is their Catholic faith. As Mack has pointed out, women in Catholic households such as the Pope household enjoyed special status owing to their central role as transmitters of the devotional practices honouring Mary. Women were especially responsible for leading dietary observances, particularly during the Lenten and Advent periods, focused around the kitchen which is traditionally a woman's domain (Mack 28-29). His father, the only other male in the house, is the only potential autocrat in the family; but instead he appears to have been a quiet and unassuming figure.

Legislation prohibiting Catholics from living within ten miles of London had forced the Pope family to move to Binfield, Berkshire, near Windsor Forest in 1700. With the move came the end of Pope's formal education at local Catholic schools (first at Twyford, then in Hampshire, near Winchester, which was known as a "refuge" for Catholics [Mack 48]), aged twelve, leaving him free to read and write as he wished. His school days, Pope reflected later, were not very profitable for him. This is perhaps because his temperament was so unsuited to the "quasi-tribal life-style" (Mack 51) of a boys' school: Pope first displayed symptoms of Pott's Disease, a tubercular illness, when he was around twelve, which he would most likely have contracted from his wet nurse. Even before his illness Pope was a slight boy, and having been brought up largely by women he may well have been unfamiliar with the games played by his schoolmates. The curriculum, too, did not leave much scope for the imaginative mind. At the end of his school days, Pope sought a more challenging and self-directed education. His sister said that "he did nothing but write and read" (Mack 56).

While living at Binfield, Pope made many important friendships. He was befriended by John Caryl, who was twenty years his senior, and responsible for introducing Pope to many literary figures, including William Wycherley. Wycherley, by this time an old man, represented for Pope high society, and perhaps more especially, the gratifications of literary fame. Pope could listen to Wycherley's anecdotes of conversations from his prime, and so

experience, vicariously, the literary circles that predated his as coloured by Wycherley's own predilections. Wycherley stressed the pre-eminence of masculine friendships, which Pope could reply to with warmth born of his own insecurities about his own appeal to women. Pope was conscious that his physical appearance, weakness and frequent illness meant that women saw him as "that funny little Alexander that people laugh at" (Rumbold 4). Both Rumbold and Mack suggest that in an effort to save himself the embarrassment of this, Pope was extremely lively in social company; he was anxious as to how people would respond to his very obvious disability, which set him apart from "we normals" (Mack 104) so he was eager to please.

By the time Pope had published the first version of *Rape of the Lock* he was already famous thanks to the 1709 publication of *The Pastorals*, and *An Essay on Criticism* published in 1711. Also in 1711, Pope befriended Swift, Arbuthnot, Gay and Parnell, drawn to each other by their Toryism. After the publication of *Windsor Forest* in 1713 a revised edition of *Rape of the Lock* in five cantos appeared in 1714.

Despite his conviction that people would be unable to look past his physical deformity, Pope was very good at making friends and maintaining quality friendships. He maintained epistolary contact with a diverse network of friends, both men and women, literary and otherwise, old and young, by writing not only when he had news to impart but even when he did not. When he was feeling well, Pope was known for his penchant for mischief, and could be irresistibly charming, although sometimes, according to his enemies, such as Lord Hervey, he may have tried a little too hard (Mack 272). He is also known to have drunk too much on occasion, was more charming drunk than sober, and frequently fell asleep having drunk too much (Mack 272-23).

Pope's significant friendships with women played a large role in shaping his perspective of women, later expressed in the *Epistle to a Lady*. The three most important

friendships are arguably with the Blount sisters Martha and Teresa, and with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Of these three friendships, the latter two both soured, and the women were depicted as among the flawed portraits in the *Epistle*. His enduring friendship with Martha, perhaps the most significant relationship of his life, earned her the position of muse in the *Epistle*.

In the first half of 1715 Pope became acquainted with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Pope's friendship with Lady Mary was one of the main friendships maintained largely through correspondence for which Pope had become renowned. Pope undoubtedly had strong feelings for Montagu: he was dazzled by her intellectual abilities, charm and great aristocratic glamour. She was also very beautiful, a blessing that could have been used to garner royal favour for her politically ambitious husband. Unfortunately, in December 1715 she contracted smallpox. As a result she permanently lost her eyelashes and her face remained deeply pitted. She was "pitted but not pitied" as the common pun ran (Mack 295), because even after losing her looks she was sharp tongued, especially of other London women. Pope was perhaps enamoured of Montagu after her illness because he saw her as, like himself, "damaged." Now that she was physically damaged she was less remote and, in Pope's eyes, closer to him, as she too would experience the social isolation to which he was subjected.

From August 1716 to October 1718, Lady Wortley Montagu and her husband, Edward, departed England for Adrianople and Constantinople where Edward was posted as the British envoy to the Sultanate. During their twenty-six months abroad, Pope stayed in contact with Lady Wortley Montagu. His letters, as is characteristic of his style, are lavish and excessive in their praise, and it is hard to ascertain the degree of sincerity in his declared feelings. One example of his typical dramatic outbursts in their correspondence is upon hearing that the Montagus were due to return to England, in a letter in response to one from Lady Mary dated 17 June 1717:

I can keep no measures in speaking of this subject. I see you already coming. I feel you as you draw nearer, My heart leaps at your arrival: Let us have You from the East, and the Sun is at her service.

I write as if I were drunk, the pleasure I take in thinking of your return transports me beyond the bounds of common Sense [sic] and decency (Montagu 1: 273).

The convention of Pope's letters is of epistolary gallantry, and his letters to Lady Mary take the form of intentionally humorous scenarios, in which the supposed vehemence of the message is counterbalanced by the silliness of the means. Pope's letters always emphasise his courteous regard for her husband, which seems to declare that his interest is merely polite gallantry. Lady Wortley Montagu's responses to his epic and imaginative epistles were suitably impersonal, heavily detailed travelogues. Rumbold identifies a vein of frankly erotic implication underneath the fanciful comedy of the fantasies Pope created in his letters, all the while displaying sensitivity to his own physical deformity and the impropriety of "making court" to a married woman (Rumbold 136-37).

Pope was seriously ill from 1716 to early 1717, and in 1717 his father died. As a result Pope became consumed with thoughts of his own mortality which led to the publication of his *Collected Works* and *Eloisa and Abelard*. In 1718 Pope leased a house in Twickenham which he was able to afford with the wealth obtained from his publishing success. In 1719 Pope commissioned a portrait of Lady Mary that he kept in his house for the rest of his life.

The return of the Montagus from their stint overseas was the decisive event in the relationship between Pope and Lady Mary. The distance between them had been a security blanket which allowed Pope to express his romantic desires, however he disguised them. Upon her return he seemed reluctant to discard the safety that the distance had created between them, and their relationship began its gradual decline. They did, however, continue

to exchange trivial letters. By 1727, relations between the pair had deteriorated to a mutual and public loathing, largely expressed through their respective publications. Pope alluded to a bad investment Lady Mary had made, partly on his advice, in *Dunciad II*:

Whence hapless Monsieur much complains at Paris

Of wrongs from Duchesses and Lady Mary's (2: 127-28)

Together with Baron John Hervey (of whose friendship with Lady Mary Pope was extremely jealous) Lady Mary wrote one of the most significant attacks on Pope, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace" (1733), which is perhaps the only attack on Pope written by a worthy adversary.

Some time after the breakdown in the relationship between Pope and Lady Mary, Pope entered into correspondence with poet Judith Cowper, almost fifteen years his junior. Pope and Judith shared mutual friends with whom they had similar political ideals, but they probably became best acquainted when Judith sat for a portrait by Charles Jervas. Judith was in many ways the antithesis of Lady Mary. As well as being politically sympathetic with Pope, she preferred celebratory poetry to the satire favoured by Lady Mary. Pope's correspondence with Judith contrasts with his correspondence with Lady Mary: while his correspondence with the latter, especially during her time in Istanbul, had an underlying current of eroticism, his correspondence with Judith was much less extravagant, and did not contain the sexual innuendo characteristic of his letters to Montagu. The warmth of friendship between Pope and Judith was sustained by her deference to him, something that Lady Mary never exhibited. Pope wrote verses for Judith which mark the contrast between the two friendships, and which also reappear in part as a tribute to Martha in the *Epistle to a Lady*:

Tho sprightly Sappho force our Love & Praise,

A softer Wonder my pleased Soul surveys,

The mild Erinna, blushing in her Bays.

So while the Sun's broad beam yet strikes the sight,

All mild appears the moon's more sober Light,

Serene, in Virgin Majesty, she shines;

And un-observed, the flaring Sun declines. (qtd in Rumbold 148)

The comparative imagery of sun and moon is one that reappears as central to the poet's praise of his companion in the *Epistle*. Three years after the publication of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, Cowper wrote an imagined poetic reply, *Abelard to Eloisa*. Although it is hard to think of this exchange as devoid of sexual connotations, in his correspondence with the "depressed poetess" (Rumbold 43) Pope emphasised friendship (*Works* VIII, 275) as well as speaking frankly of his deformity in a way that he did not with Montagu (Rumbold 147).

Pope had first met Martha and Teresa Blount in 1707 when the sisters were nineteen and seventeen respectively. Mack gives a detailed description of their appearances and personalities: Although close in age, the sisters were very different in disposition and appearance. Teresa was dark and sultry, very beautiful and vivacious. She had been educated by English nuns in Paris, where she was born, and perhaps as a result had developed a rebellious streak, love for material possessions, and a great appetite for the London gossip. In contrast, Martha was strikingly virginal in appearance and attitude and was considered something of a prude; she was extremely uncomfortable in the presence of jokes and innuendoes and much given to blushing. She was blonde haired, blue-eyed, shy, modest, docile and an avid reader (243). The Blounts were a significant Roman Catholic family who lived near the Popes at Mapledurham House, Reading.

Although it was Teresa who was initially the main recipient of Pope's affections, by the 1730s Pope's relationship with the Blount sisters was firmly centred on Martha. This had been noticed by the society he occupied, throughout which gossip was spreading as to the

possibility of theirs being a sexual relationship. She was his closest friend and confidante. Rumours of a marriage between them arose several times during his lifetime, and people were surprised that in his Will she was not named his wife (Mack 411). During the 1720s Pope and Martha were the subjects of persistent rumours that they "lived 2 or 3 years since in a manner that was reported to you [John Caryll, Pope's friend and Martha's godfather] as giving scandal to many" (*Corr.*, II. 353-54). In the same letter written to Caryll in 1725, Pope expressed his opinion that Teresa was the source of the rumours (Mack 412).

Caryll was a man who set great store by his family, and his preoccupation with the interests of his relations perhaps motivated him to offer Martha a dowry if that was all that prevented Pope from marrying her (Rumbold 4). Pope evidently struggled with a deeper feeling of attachment to Martha and Teresa than he was willing to acknowledge, as in an undated letter to the sisters he admitted, "I have sometimes found myself inclined to be in love with you, and as I have reason to know, from your tempter and conduct, how miserably I should be used in that circumstance, it is worth my while to avoid it" (*Corr.*, I. 456). Despite this Pope seems never to have aspired to a complete romance with either sister and increasingly abandoned the postures of courtship for the confidence of friendship. He wrote to Martha and Teresa, "You will both injure me very much, if you don't think me a truer Friend than ever any Romantic Lover, or any Imitator of their Style, could be" (*Works* 395). Insecurities tend to be exceptionally acute in all people who are set apart physically or culturally (in Pope's case, both) from the norms of those around them. Pope thus became an acute observer of the reactions of other people to him, and kept a necessary distance between himself and anyone else. Although Pope's relationship with Martha was closer than any of his other relationships, he nevertheless stopped short of marrying her.

Towards the end of the 1730s there seems to have been some sort of failed affair between Teresa and a married man. Pope was afraid that this would reflect badly on the rest

of the Blount family as it would appear that they had not sufficiently disciplined her, and that Martha might "share the shame" of her sister's indiscretions. In 1732 Martha Blount seems to have been very unwell for a period, but recovered under the care of Dr Arbuthnot, a close friend of Pope (Rumbold 256-57). A year later on June 7th, Pope's mother Edith died, and he met it with an acute sense of loss (Mack 366-67). In the years preceding her death Edith was increasingly dependent on carers as she grew physical and mentally weaker (Mack 248). Like her a partial invalid requiring constant nursing, Pope felt an acute sense of kinship with her mother, and was perhaps over-solicitous in his attentions to her, as his half-sister wrote in 1742 to Richardson that he was "perpetually teasing her with his Overfondness & Care, & pressing her to Eat this & that; & Drink another Glass of Wine; and so assiduous as never to let her be at Liberty, & Chuse for her self" (Sherburn 348-49).

Pope's health started to worsen drastically in 1740, as his spine and rib cage began to give way, leading to a shrinking lung cavity and asthmatic complaints, which he knew would be painful and fatal. By 1743 a previous urinary difficulty had returned and his eyesight began failing. Nevertheless he did not relent on his workload, and continued his active social life. By the start of 1744, however, he realised that he was in the last stages of his illness. On Wednesday 30th May, as reported by David Mallet, "about the Middle of the Night, without a Pang, or a Convulsion, unperceived of those that watched him" (qtd. in Mack 812) Pope died. Spence, who had been among the watchers wrote that he died "in the evening, but they did not know the exact time, for his departure was so easy that it was imperceptible even to the standers-by." Pope's Will reserved for Martha's life the use of his estate, and seemed to squash popular rumours that they were wed, as the Will did not name her as his wife. He asked to be buried in Twickenham church, as his mother had been, and for no monument other than for a simple inscription of his name to be added to the tablet representing his parents' lives inside the church, and for a ceremony as plain as the monument.

The context provided by the opening chapter surveying Pope's personal history is significant in approaching Pope's *Epistle* because his work is inevitably filtered through his life experiences. Much has been written on Pope's attitudes towards women. We know that he was not, by nature, a woman-hater. On the contrary, he very much enjoyed their company. Pope was marginalised from mainstream society as a result of his illness and his Catholicism. The experiences he had from his unique place in society, as a renowned poet but also as a member of a persecuted community, further alienated by his illness, means that like women he understood what it meant to be excluded.

The trend in modern criticism of Pope focuses on his biography and his circumstances, and through the lens of popular social theories. The outcome of these readings is often a negative criticism of Pope's ideology. What I propose through this thesis is that by contextualising Pope's treatment of women *Epistle* against three tracts advising women of the long eighteenth century, tracts which are symptoms of their age, what emerges in Pope's *Epistle* is that he is far more sympathetic, and his work more nuanced, than the authors of the tracts.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN IN AUGUSTAN SOCIETY

There was once a consensus among historians that the period between 1660 and 1800 saw the fruition of an ideological construction of gender that established masculinity and femininity, and the concepts of manhood and the so-called 'weaker vessel' (Fletcher 283). It is uncertain precisely how accurate modern historians can be when representing the situation of women in the eighteenth century. What a survey of twentieth- and twenty first-century scholarship shows is that over time, historians have gone from supporting the distinct stereotype of man-versus-woman to more sophisticated models of thinking about eighteenth-century conceptions of gender.

It is generally agreed that the establishment of the 'middle class' occurred in the early eighteenth century, (see for example Shoemaker, and Davidoff and Hall), the creation of which resulted in a shift in the female object of desire from the unattainable aristocrat, who was untouchable and luxurious, to the middle-class, virtuous, domestic woman¹. Writing on

¹ Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse discuss the shift in 'desirable' women in the introduction to their collection of essays, *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in literature and the history of sexuality* Methuen: New York (1987). They claim that in keeping with the interests of middle-class society the production of the ideal woman as an object of desire represented a paradigmatic shift. The aristocratic woman, who was previously praised as the object of desire, represented idle sensuality rather than industry and tireless concern for others. The desirability shifted from luxury to industry, from an outer beauty to inner beauty. They noted that "[a]s books for, about, and often by women came to dominate the field, it was also true that those books upholding the aristocratic ideal of behaviour suddenly fell off in popularity" (11). Armstrong and Tennenhouse suggest that conduct literature "rather single-mindedly" represented the social world as strictly divided into public (male) and private (female) (12).

the literature of conduct in 1987, Nancy Armstrong claims that the British Enlightenment gave way to the image of a woman who is naturally inclined to household management, and caring for the sick and the young (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 97). This woman would complement the man's role as earner and provider.

Class consciousness characterised the way of life for the new middle class, and expected behaviour was strictly gendered. Rather than the middle class finding shared characteristics among themselves, they defined themselves by the ways they differed from those above and below them on the social hierarchy. The middle class was further divided into any number of sub-levels. The rules for maintaining this elaborate construction of class and gender were laid down in the expanding genre of prescriptive literature directed specifically at men and women. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) Armstrong explains that the popularity of conduct books for women of the aristocracy waned and was surpassed by that for women of the middle class (97). The aristocratic woman, who was encouraged in these conduct books to remain unsullied by the vulgarity of work, and whose life of luxury was a subject of pride for the husbands who could keep them this way, was portrayed instead as the embodiment of corrupted desire, namely "desire that sought its gratification in economic and political terms. [The conduct books] all took care to explain how this form of desire destroyed the very virtues essential to a wife and mother" (Armstrong 97). Conduct books began to define the practices of secular morality as a woman's natural duty, producing a culture divided into "the respective domains of domestic woman and economic man" (Armstrong 97).

Associated with the construction of feminine and masculine identities is the concurrent growth of the wage economy, solely the domain of the public man, while the woman would stay in private and attend to domestic life. Isser Woloch (1982) associates the change in the social and economic position of men and women between around 1700 and the

mid-nineteenth century with the rise of consumerism, as women were economically marginalised in the growing wage economy (191). These economic changes are thought to be related to the emergence of the separate spheres model for thinking about the public and private roles of men and women. As economic historian Colin Campbell attests, one consequence of the rise in consumerism was the development of the modern novel and the emergence of a fiction-reading public (26). During the eighteenth century the annual publication of new works quadrupled, and economic historians generally agree that a large part of this demand came from the growing literate public of the middle class (Woloch 183)². The popularity of conduct manuals can in part be attributed to the perceived immorality of romance novels. A possible result of the rise of the novel was the literary reinforcement of the notion of romantic love. Although subject matter diversified in the later parts of the century, the theme was near-universal and was one of the principal reasons for the moral objections against novels, and against literacy for women (Campbell 26-27).

The reaction against the notion of romantic love affected not only women readers but also women writers. Paula Backscheider discerns a mid-eighteenth century narrowing of acceptable topics and models for women writers, pointing out that "legislating every aspect of women's behaviour became a national preoccupation [of men]" precisely because women were publishing their works (213). Novels were not the only reading matter published for women: improvements of printing techniques, and the subsequent ease with which any writer could be published, resulted in the publication of a wide variety of texts. Conduct manuals aimed to steer women away from the perceived immorality of romance novels and prescribe

² Woloch observes three distinctive levels of culture in eighteenth-century society: the learned culture, which is predominantly distinguished from the middle class by the former's knowledge of Latin; and the popular masses, amongst whom literacy levels were low, but illiteracy was by no means universal.

the behaviour of women as feminine figures. Conduct manuals of the period recommend good manners with the implicit purpose of covering up a woman's base impulses. They also betray an anxiety about the perception that manners may provide "an impenetrable screen for unacceptable thoughts, feelings, and intentions" (Spacks 12). To summarise, the historical consensus until very recently was that economic developments tended to marginalise women. This marginalisation was, as we shall see, reflected in the conduct manuals which encouraged and praised a woman's domestic roles as essential to the male public economy.³

More recently historians have done away with a mutually exclusive distinction between private and public spheres by acknowledging that the diversity of experiences among women was more complicated than this theory allowed. Indeed, as early as 1996, Lawrence Klein demonstrated the contemporary movement for dividing the eighteenth-century social sphere into "public" and "private" was anachronistic, as the words themselves did not necessarily align to "home" and "not-home" (105). Klein draws attention to the complexity of definition of "public" and "private." The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for "public" recognises that the word denotes many semantic distinctions. Klein is reluctant to define the concepts simply as binary oppositions and instead provides preliminary lexical investigations to demonstrate a number of nuances for public/private. These include the economic associations, which in eighteenth-century discussions recognised the inextricability of the public from the private aspects of economic activity and the associative public sphere, in which people in the eighteenth century used "public" to mean sociable as opposed to solitary, which was "private." The key specifications, as Klein sees them, to this sort of 'publicness' were perceptibility, and the question of accessibility (103). Klein acknowledges that dichotomies such as male/female, nature/culture, matter/spirit, mind/body, and

³ Of the conduct manuals discussed in this thesis, this idea is most prevalent in *An Essay in Praise of Women*, by James Bland.

private/public are frequent and powerful tools with which people "attempt to tidy up their mental and discursive worlds" and that gender is an, "especially dichotomy-prone area of human reflection" (98).

Six years before Klein's article, Vivien Jones wrote that for women to write and publish in the eighteenth century was a "transgressive and potentially liberating act as they penetrated the forbidden public sphere" (12). For Klein, this is refuted by the very fact that there is literature that proves that women did operate within what we now consider to be the public sphere of eighteenth-century society, and there was language to talk about it. Klein insists that, "unless all women who appeared 'in public' were self-acknowledged transgressors, we would need to find ways to investigate what it was all these women thought they were doing when they were 'in public'" (101). Jones presents women operating "in public" as a subversive, infrequent occurrence, yet other feminist scholars have also noted that although women were theoretically excluded from public space, in practice their experiences were more diverse than previously acknowledged. Although women faced heavy legal oppression and social prejudice in general, those that did write and publish successfully managed to permeate the so-called public sphere. Klein's thesis is prophetic, and it took a long time for other academics to catch up with him. Although he was writing in the mid-nineties, it is not until Barbara Benedict's 2002 survey, "Recent Studies in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century" that this more complex treatment of public and private was given greater attention. Benedict claims that "the separation between public and private spheres in the long eighteenth century is dead. This is a truth universally acknowledged in Restoration and eighteenth-century studies this year" (619). While this is perhaps overstated, the trend among contemporary historians has been a move away from the domestic spheres thesis and the rigid distinction between public and private.

In 1998, Robert Shoemaker suggested that the concept of "separate spheres" be replaced by one allowing for "a loose division of responsibilities between men and women within both public life and private life," founded on a recognition that "the ideological prescriptions on day-to-day practice were limited" (310). His ideas were a departure from those of Amanda Vickery, who arrived at the same conclusion but for different reasons: Vickery saw few significant changes in ideology or practice in England before and during industrialisation (403).

The implicit distinction between private and public spheres of activity became conceptually important to historians of gender due to the theories of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who argued in his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that a new public sphere of influential political discourse was constructed in the eighteenth century, separate from the private spheres of market transaction and family life on the one hand, and the formal public authority of the state on the other. Habermas's theories are not dependent on gender, but Shoemaker argues that they have "injected new life into the arguments of gender historians based on public/private dichotomies" (306). The problems of definition articulated by this new theory highlight the imperfect correlations between the public/private contrasts and actual gender role differences.

Critical theorist Nancy Fraser grants that the general idea of the public sphere as a conceptual resource for understanding the (masculine) arena of public discourse, separate from political or economic dealings, is indispensable to critical social theory and any attempts to understand democracy will rely on it (56). At the same time, however, she stresses the specific temporal location of Habermas's theory: subtitled "An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society," it stops short of developing a post-bourgeois model of the public sphere (Fraser 58). Contemporary feminists have used this concept to refer to everything that is

outside the domestic or familial sphere.⁴ Thus its usage conflates at least three analytically distinct things: the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and the arena of public discourse. Habermas's intended use of the term "public sphere" was the site at which public discussion enables political engagement, conceptually distinct from the state and official-economy. Habermas's definitions of public and private are not bound in definitions of sex and gender, thus their usage does not help the feminist revisioning of history.

As intimated previously, the concerns that Klein raises about the use of 'public' and 'private' spheres as a way of explaining the position of women in the eighteenth century have been echoed by many historians since. Patricia Meyers Spacks, like Benedict, agrees with Klein's thesis, but contrary to Benedict's categorical rejection of the public/private theory, Spacks argues that associating the "domestic sphere" with the binaries of "public" and "private" as exclusively the domains of men and women respectively is problematic. This is due partly to the multiplicity of definitions as touched on by Klein but also because:

[t]he debate over privacy in eighteenth-century Britain often took covert forms. Psychological privacy, rather than its physical counterpart, attracted the most insistent attention. Discussion did not begin from the premise that privacy was at least theoretically good; its social disadvantages arguably outweighed its individual attraction. In the eighteenth century privacy presented, many thought, clear and present dangers both

⁴ In *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* Johanna Meehan has compiled an anthology of authors who row against the mainstream feminists who have rejected Habermasian theory. Meehan illustrates in the introduction that although Habermas' discussion of gender is limited, his discourse theory is a persuasive reflection of social and political norms (1).

to the social order and to vulnerable persons (women, the young) within that order. (5)

Women's privacy prevented total control or transparency of their behaviour. Spacks articulates that "[w]hat we assume our due, our forebears considered a danger" (2). They were able to hide their true thoughts generated fears of uncontrolled fantasies and anxiety that women were insincere. If women were able to control their own characters by being architects of their own public images they were not malleable domestic creatures, as the ability to make personal choices of their own free will indicates their control over their bodies and their public images. This power would threaten the accepted notion that women's subordination was a sign of stability in any social group. The concern with fashioning the physical appearance of a woman as well as maintaining control over her thoughts and expectations that Spacks investigates but which we have also seen in Armstrong's discussion of conduct books and the construction of the ideology of desire. Spacks suggests that the desire to control women sprang from fear of the possibility of women being allowed to control their own images and therefore have control of their own minds, whereas Armstrong links the desire to control a woman's inner thoughts to the changing values of a society.

This historical survey shows is the difficulty faced by contemporary historians in accurately representing the situation of women in the eighteenth century. Despite these challenges, such a survey enables us to identify the culture from which the prescriptive conduct literature arose. The contemporary historians surveyed here agree that the roles of women in the eighteenth century cannot be defined through binaries. This is because the notions of "public" and "private" are found to have far more depth of meaning than such binaries will allow. In practice, women could move with far more fluidity, which is more clearly expressed with understanding the nuanced meanings of "public" and "private."

CHAPTER 3: 'A LADY,' BLAND, AND PLANTE-AMOUR: AN INTRODUCTION

The conduct book was intended to model acceptable behaviours, values and thoughts for its female readers. By defining the ideals to which female readers should aspire, the conduct manual had a part in creating, reproducing and reinforcing the ideologies of the society in which it was made, and for which it was intended. In the analysis that follows, I discuss three very different examples of the conduct manual, all written within forty years of each other. The first was produced seventeen years before the earliest version of *The Rape of the Lock*; the second and third appeared in the decade immediately preceding the publication of the *Epistle to a Lady*.

The two later works, *The Art of Knowing Women* and *An Essay in Praise of Women*, both explicitly reference Pope. The author of *The Art* describes Pope as "an universal back-biter" (146), and the text strongly opposes the sentiments expressed in the *Epistle*. The author of *An Essay*, in contrast, positions himself as sympathetic to Pope's ideals – he even takes a section of the *Epistle* and integrates it as the epigraph of later editions of the work. The connection between Pope and *The Whole Duty of a Woman* is less obvious. Despite a lack of evidence to support the claim that the manual was written by a woman, the distinguished authorial attribution to "a Lady" suggests the book was intended for a female audience. The book fairly represents the ideal roles and virtues for women of the middle- and upper- classes. It was a commonly held belief that women were the weaker sex, physically and psychologically, and prone to irrationality. Related to these qualities, however, were the 'feminine' traits of softness and gentleness, which indicated a sense of moral equality, if not superiority to men. The woman praised in Pope's *Epistle* is an "exception to all gen'ral rules" (275) – rules such as those expressed in *The Whole Duty*. Although the three tracts are more notable for their differences than their similarities, each work is a symptom of its age, and

together they provide a multi-faceted approach to the genre and culture of conduct literature.

What follows is an introduction to each of these manuals.

The Whole Duty of a Woman: Or a Guide to the Female Sex, by A Lady

The Whole Duty of a Woman by 'A Lady' was originally published in London in 1695 and ran to eight editions, with the last published in 1735. The earliest available edition of *The Whole Duty* in Early English Books Online (EEBO) is the second edition, published in 1696 (as printed on the title page). The Schoenberg Centre for Electronic Text & Image at the University of Pennsylvania has an electronic copy of the original text, published in 1695 by J. Gwillim (as was the second edition). The first and second editions are identical, with one exception: the moral section of the second edition contains a transitory paragraph before the practical recipes and remedies. It concludes, "And thus having shewed what relates to Education, and a prospect of Happiness here and hereafter, I now proceed to Treat such things as may be useful, tho' some what in a lower degree, and may be advantageous to you in Household Affaires" (95). The work served as inspiration for hack writer William Kenrick's *The Whole Duty of a Woman: or a guide to the female sex, from the age of sixteen to sixty, &c.*, first published anonymously from the perspective of a fallen woman in 1753. As projected on the title page, *The Whole Duty of a Woman* by A Lady is a guide for women that covers firstly their moral obligations and then the practical duties of womanhood, specifically between the ages of sixteen and sixty. It is between these ages that "there is found the Truest Portion of Good, in this Life" (preface). The author identifies three main stages in the life of a woman: the virgin state, marriage, and widowhood. The treatise is constructed of four sections and concerns itself with portraying and explaining the author's ideas of morality from the outset and throughout. The first section is advice on how to live a moral and virtuous life. The next three sections address in turn the three stages of a woman's life. The author writes from her perspective as a woman who has lived through the stages she

discusses. This allows her a dimension not available to the male conduct writers, that she can speak from experience and impart information that perhaps men were not privy to. As she approaches the end of her life she is compelled to share the lessons she has collected with other women. Although her guidance is first and foremost moral, she supplies practical advice about the day-to-day duties of a woman, mother, widow: to restrain "all excessive Talkativeness" as it is not becoming of young women (9); that old maids should feign piety so as to have the respect of their wedded counterparts (38); as well as guiding girls in distinguishing "designs of Counterfeit Pretences, that are too often used to ensnare their Affections" by would-be suitors (53). The advice veers towards but falls short of cynicism, thanks to the moral virtue emphasised from the outset of the book. The foremost concern is the way that a woman's actions reflect on her: her marriage prospects, the state of her marriage, her reputation, and the way that she represents her family and acquaintances. As a woman writing from her own experience (although I would hesitate to identify the author as a lady with any certainty) the author (presumably) intimately understands the mental position of a woman, and so women do not pose an air of mystery or potential for malevolence, as particularly represented in Plante-Amour's later conduct manual.

The moral lessons of the first chapter emphasise the need for pious behaviour to stem from pious thought (2). A woman needs to control her anger and passion and should be, above all else, meek, so as to avoid falling prey to its opposites: conceitedness, obstinacy, and inordinate passions (7). A woman's time must be first occupied with "Offices of Piety" (33) and after that suitable occupations include reading, needlework, music and languages, which the author describes as "Ornamental Improvements" (33-34). Like Bland in *The Charms of Women*, the author suggests pastimes for women that are decidedly ornamental, and firmly place them within the household. They are artistic, domestic activities, suited for the housebound woman.

'The whole Art of Love' stresses the importance of marriage based on the person rather than any title or state that would be gained upon union (63). In order for a woman to be "Happy all [her] Days" she must be modest and discreet (63). It cautions women against men with immoral intentions during courtship, as well as describing the qualities a man looks for in a wife. For the most part, any disruptive influences upon the women are intruding from the outside. The author addresses the practical steps that ladies can take to avoid them, particularly the devastating effects of, for example, unscrupulous men, in which case it is wise to "Keep your Eyes and Tongue within Command" so as not to encourage men (53). The author has clearly read other conduct books, as her description of an undesirable woman who "eats her Breakfast half an hour before Dinner, to be at a greater Liberty to afflict the company with her Discourse, and then calls for a coach" (61) is a direct copy from an earlier conduct manual by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax.⁵ The author is on-side with the women she addresses. The tone is direct, from her vantage point of having been through the same state of life herself.

The third chapter, on the marriage-state, directs women how to behave towards their husbands, children, servants and relations. The duty of a wife has four aspects: to her husband, his reputation, his fortune, and his friends and relations (65-66). The author stresses

⁵ *A Lady's New Year's Gift, Or, Advice to a Daughter* was first published in 1692 and ran through at least seventeen editions over the next century. In it, Halifax describes a woman who, "eats her Breakfast half an hour before Dinner, to be at greater liberty to afflict the Company with her Discourse; then calleth for her coach, that she may trouble her Acquaintance who are already cloy'd with her" (72-73).

the importance of the duty of love⁶ as the essential element of the marriage vows, without which marriage is slavery (66). She then provides practical advice on how to deal with a bad-tempered and ill-humoured husband. Rather than portray women as naturally inferior to men, she emphasises the ways in which the different qualities associated with each gender in fact create a kind of balance: men have reason and strength, women have gentleness and looks. She suggests that the female sex is "the better prepared for the Compliance" because "the greater share of Reason is bestowed on Man" (68).

The chapter on widowhood, at only eight pages, is relatively short, echoing the distaste for, or perhaps fear of, widowhood that recurs throughout these treatises. The chapter emphasizes a widow's duty to her husband's body, his memory, and his children. It urges modest mourning and good management of her husband's estate. The author suggests that widows can transfer the time previously spent devoted to her husband to devotion to God, "who promises, To be a Husband to the Widow, and a Father to the Fatherless, so that Love which was Humane, may by the changing of it's [sic] Object, acquire a Sublimity, being exalted to that which is Divine" (94-95).

The treatise ends with a final section of recipes and remedies. The jump between the main section and the appendix is sudden but is in keeping with the mix between practical and moral advice of *The Whole Duty*, as part of the useful, autobiographical dimension. From the advice presented in this manual we can (presumably) see how this anonymous woman ran her own home, in a way that was successful enough that other women should seek to imitate it.

The Art of Knowing Women, or the Female Sex Dissected, by Le Chevalier Plante-Amour

The Art of Knowing Women, or the Female Sex Dissected by Le Chevalier Plant Amour was

⁶ The "duty of love" is used here to refer to equality of affection between husband and wife, rather than its other accepted meaning as the responsibility of a sexual relationship between man and wife.

originally published under its French title, *L'Art de Connoitre les Femmes, avec une Dissertation sur L'Adultere*, in 1730. The first English translation "with improvements" (titlepage) appeared the same year, carried out by Spring Macky. A second edition was published in 1732. Plante-Amour has been identified by several sources as François Bruys, 1708-1738, a journalist from the Maconnais region of France. His father's family were Protestant although his father returned to Catholicism. He studied theology in Geneva before moving to The Hague in 1728, where he worked as an editor, translator, grammar teacher and journalist. He returned to Burgundy and remained there until his death (Courperus).

In *The Art of Knowing Women* the (probably pseudonymous) Le Chevalier Plante-Amour makes "war upon Vice in general" (iv), and as the title suggests, provides a guide of the female sex that is free from the gallant adoration of similar conduct books (for example *The Charms of Ladies*) that praise and exalt women as perfect objects free from vice. Plante-Amour celebrates virtues, of which he recognises two varieties, moral and Christian, although only infrequently recognizes "some Ladies [...] who are shining Patterns of the most sublime Virtue Human Nature can attain to" (preface). Plante-Amour establishes his intention as making a "War on Vice" to encourage women to prune their behaviour of the unnecessary levities to which they are, unfortunately, inclined.

The treatise is divided into twenty chapters, although the final chapter, a dissertation concerning adultery, is structurally independent of the rest of the work. The book begins with general ideas concerning women, and moving through other aspects of womankind, including their self-love, state of life, religion and devotion, through to chastity and continence, marriage, learning and wit. The chapter "Wit and Learning" includes a poem wrongly attributed to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu entitled "The Progress of Poetry (1721)." (It was in fact written by Judith Cowper, another of Pope's close correspondents). Chapters Ten through Nineteen are mostly concerned with more loaded subjects: secrecy, beauty, and

dress. Then follow falsehood and deceit, calumny and detraction, flattery and dissimulation, friendship and hatred, envy, avarice and prodigality, pride and ostentation, choler and passion, and the aforementioned dissertation on adultery. From the titles of each chapter Plante-Amour firmly establishes his position on women, and his role as the expounder of the dark truth about their nature. He makes it very clear that, although ostensibly his book is for the improvement of women, his actual intended audience is male, and this work is a warning to men not to be fooled by the artifices of women, who are "an Evil which is become absolutely necessary to [men]" (1). Plante-Amour consistently addresses men throughout the treatise, rather than women. The gallantry of the preface, which does address women, only highlights the male orientation and misogyny of the rest of the text.

As if to demonstrate the universality of the "woman problem,"⁷ Plante-Amour employs a series of portraits of unworthy women in order to condemn the sex as a whole. The portrait technique is employed by Pope in the *Epistle*. He describes a series of portraits, and against them sets the muse he constructs and praises. Plante-Amour's portraits come from across the social spectrum, from throughout history and from distant countries, and serve to reinforce his own image as a man of the world.

Plante-Amour is very firm in his position that women are the weaker sex. He believes that the reason for their restricted opportunities for education is because they are incapable of learning. It is better that they remain ignorant than embarrass themselves by displaying their "own dim Light" and the "the Weakness of their Constitution" (97, 95). Despite this broad

⁷ The 'woman problem' is a hypothesis created by experimental psychologist Edwin Boring, who used the term to describe the disadvantages women in psychology face as a result of society which affects their professional development. The catchy phrase has come to be used by scholars discussing the problems faced by women as a result of their marginalised places in various fields.

assessment of women's intellectual capacity (or incapacity), Plante-Amour acknowledges that there are ladies who are exceptions to this rule. It was necessary for him to acknowledge Mrs Elizabeth Pratt, to whom the treatise is dedicated in acknowledgement of her "particular Virtues," and, as he also admires Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose poem is included at chapter Nine (although as mentioned previously misattributed to her).

Plante-Amour's lesson on self-love serves as an example of his misogyny. Plante-Amour's use of the term "self-love" has a distinctly opprobrious implication: he regards self-love as akin to pride, the capital vice which he holds to be the beginning of all sin. Plante-Amour considers self-love as a vice "irradicably grafted to the female sex" (22). His 'proof' is a portrait of 'Clelia' who behaves as she does not because of her virtuous character but because she is concerned with how she is perceived by those around her. Plante-Amour is concerned with the thoughts and value systems of women, as well as how these manifest themselves in their conduct and appearance: a woman's good thoughts will shine through her appearance and control her conduct in a way that it will not for less honourable women. The impermanence of physical beauty is, he argues, the reason that women should focus on the "transcendent Joys of the next World" rather than the temporary pleasure of physical possessions, such as jewellery and clothing (129).

Plante-Amour's extended dissertation on adultery, which serves as the final chapter of *The Art*, is a remarkable chapter in that it is a departure in technique from the rest of the book, so much so that it functions as a separate essay. His treatment of the topic of this chapter differs to the previous chapters because the examples upon which he draws are actual historical figures, not the usual fictional portraits. As well as this change in portraiture technique, the lessons are more universal: although it begins with the characteristic misogyny of the earlier parts of the treatise, it gradually turns to an assessment of adultery and sexual immorality in general. Plante-Amour provides details of international punishments for men

and women who commit adultery: punishment of Guinean women is "very mild. [...] She pays a Fine of some Ounces of Gold to her Husband" (242). In contrast, "A great many other savage Nations make Death the Punishment" (242). The dissertation has an altogether religious tone and closes by quoting from Psalm 139, connecting the entire tract to this final chapter.

An Essay in Praise of Women: or, a Looking-glass for Ladies to see their Perfections in, by J. Bland, Professor of Physic ⁸

An Essay in Praise of Women was written by the otherwise unknown (and possibly pseudonymous) James Bland, Professor of Physic. It was published in London in 1733. Two further editions were published in 1735 and 1767. It was also republished under the title *The Charms of Women* in 1736 by Edmund Curll. Despite the different titles, the works themselves were identical.

In his preface James Bland establishes his intended audience as "fashionable ladies," to whom he denies "no fashionable thing [...] Sin only excepted" (i). He offers up his treatise as a way for women to "see the Beauty of their Souls" (vii), and is full of praises for women. He represents himself as defender against "nonsensical" satires against women (15). Bland's attitude is that women are the superior sex, and he is but a lowly and, by his own admission, under-qualified man who feels compelled to offer up a tribute to the female sex. Within the work he praises women but condemns the vices of both women and men. His standard for virtuous behaviour is the Holy Scripture. Bland quotes extensively from the Bible, and uses examples of Biblical history to illustrate his points, most notably the parable of Lemuel's

⁸ A 'Professor of Physic' is a doctor of medicine.

mother (King James Version, Proverbs 31:1)⁹ to whom he frequently refers as a beacon of virtuous Christian living - especially during challenging times.

The preface of *An Essay in Praise of Women* is followed by some "observations on the creation of women" (13), stressing the religious concerns of the book at an early stage. After these observations the tract is divided into nine further chapters, under the following headings: Of a woman's Industry; Frugality; Chastity; Temperance; Charity; Justice; Education; Religion, and Marriage. Despite the chapter headings, Bland very rarely manages to stick to the confines of the individual topics; instead the chapter divisions are mere nuisances in an extended essay. The exception to this is the final chapter on marriage, which operates as a bookend with the opening "Observations on the Creation" and provides a platform for Bland to offer his closing remarks on women.

The status of women as complementary and necessary partners to men is stressed throughout Bland's text. Industry and Frugality, the first two chapters, are especially important virtues, for women supervise the daily running of a household, and complement their husbands' roles as financial providers. In exchange for the financial security of the husband, it is the duty of the wife to ensure the money is not misspent and that the house is kept tidy and well-managed. A virtuous woman "is always casting her watchful Eye about her

⁹ Lemuel's mother is directly mentioned only once in the Bible when her advice to her son is used to frame the moral lessons of Proverbs 31: "The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him" (Proverbs 31:1). The rest of the chapter is a list of lessons that his mother has taught him, many of which mirror the lessons that Bland imparts to his reader, for example: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgement of any of the afflicted" (Prov 31:4-5). This sentiment is echoed in Bland's chapter on Temperance, when he states: "'Tis highly improper ... for a King or Prince of Wisdom, ever to be in Drink, or overcome with Wine" (92).

Domestick Affairs" and cares not only for her own family but also extends charity to "the industrious Poor" (31-32).

Bland's commendations of the qualities possessed by the 'ideal' virtuous woman align, although he makes no mention of this, with the seven Catholic virtues of chastity, temperance, charity, humility, diligence, patience and kindness. Chastity, temperance and charity are afforded entire chapters, and humility, diligence, patience, and kindness are referred to multiple times. This is very much in keeping with the deeply religious tone of the treatise.

Consistent throughout Bland's treatise is the assertion that women must not only be 'good' in their actions but be inherently good as well. The heavy insistence on (Christian) 'virtue' and virtuous women implies that there is more required of women than just good behaviour. As well as this, they need to live a life of virtue defined by moral laws and principles. For women, especially, to be 'virtuous' is in part to be chaste, and Bland emphasises the importance of chastity specifically for women.

Bland's benevolent attitude towards women can be seen in contrast to Plante-Amour's. This opposition is evident in their differing attitudes towards women's education. While Plante-Amour, as discussed, considers women incapable of learning, Bland believes women deserve equal access to education, stating that women are only barred from it due to "an ill custom" (203). Bland clearly structures his own treatise in opposition to *The Art of Knowing Women* (213-17), his criticism of which Bland condemns as a "monstrous Piece of Rallery" (214). His attack is a function of his religious inclinations, as he criticises the author of *The Art* for his perceived irreligion. Plante-Amour seems, as Bland claims, "to find fault with both the Church of Rome, the Church of England, and those that dissent from it" (227). Bland uses the author of *The Art* to represent all those men whose self-conceit prevents them from being excellent scholars (like, presumably, himself). He refers to three writers who have expressed

congenial sentiments on the topic of religion. These are William Beveridge, Bishop of St Asaph, Dr. John Kettlewell and (by implication) Richard Allestree. Beveridge was considered a great reviver of primitive piety because of his sermons' focus on the early centuries of the Church (Cowie). Dr Kettlewell was a seventeenth-century consistent non-juror clergyman (Burns). Richard Allestree (unnamed in *An Essay in Praise of Women* but thought to be the author of *The Whole Duty of Man*) was the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University and provost of Eton College between 1663-1680 (Spurr). Bland sets up a dichotomy between himself as a member of this distinguished group, and the blasphemous (in Bland's mind) author of *The Art*.

Bland's criticism of sinful women remains tactfully implicit in his elevated praise of virtuous women. By celebrating the virtuous woman Bland is prescribing a set of expectations for women to live up to, embodied by Lemuel's Mother and the Duchess of Portland, to whom the work is dedicated. Woman should be the embodiment of all the virtues that he 'praises' in the treatise. As for vices, Bland focuses on the dastardly man who may lead the innocent young woman astray and ruin her.

The end of the treatise returns to the elevated and lavishly complimentary language of the dedication and preface. Bland concludes by praising, the woman of "superlative Character," her reward for which will be "a happy Eternity of Joy [...] with Divine Acclamations of Joy for evermore" (263, 264). The emphasis remains on Heavenly rewards for earthly behaviours, as well as the insistence that virtuous women are so great a treasure that no words can sufficiently praise them ("Tis impossible to say a thousandth Part of what she deserves" [263]). The virtuous woman has no blemishes on her character.

Within thee three manuals exists three very different approaches to the regulation of women's behaviour. While only one of the authors purports to be female, all three authors share a common concern with women's conduct and all express the belief that it should be in

some way regulated. Even though Bland and Plante-Amour are both men, it would be folly to ascribe either as representative of men in general, as their ideas are so at odds with one another. Despite the easily discernible differences between these three texts, they are demonstrative of a culture of conduct literature that cumulatively represents eighteenth-century social attitudes towards and about women.

CHAPTER 4: *THE WHOLE DUTY OF A WOMAN AND THE EPISTLE TO A LADY*: A COMPARATIVE READING

The Whole Duty of a Woman (by "A Lady") was first published in 1695. It was reprinted many times, running through to eight editions between its original publication date and 1735. The original treatise is now recognised mainly for its final chapter, which provides practical recipes for housewives. This chapter was copied many times in the eighteenth century, and may well have itself been taken from an earlier source. As projected on its title page, it is concerned with the moral and practical duties of womanhood, specifically between the ages of sixteen and sixty, the ages between which the author considers "there is found the Truest Portion of Good, in this Life" (Preface).

Many ideas within *The Whole Duty* are picked up by Pope, and manipulated to fit his agenda, which is ultimately very different from that of *The Whole Duty*. I will take each of the ideas from *The Whole Duty* in turn as they apply to Pope, and explore the ways each author treats that idea within their respective text.

The Whole Duty is organised into distinct sections according to the stages of a woman's life, so that she may turn to the relevant section for guidance. The intentions for each section are laid out at its commencement, like a set of ingredients in a recipe, and are numbered off and treated in turn. They are (as it were) the moral recipes, and the final section provides practical recipes, which together allow a woman to shape herself into a virtuous, industrious, and frugal housewife. *The Whole Duty* is a step-by-step guide for women. The clear-cut instructions contrast to the *Epistle*, the intention of which is not to moralise or provide moral guidance for women. The portrait-gallery image allows the poet to remain a step detached from the women at the heart of his 'tour'. Instead, he confronts the phenomenon of female inconstancy.

In the preface of *The Whole Duty*, the author takes up one of her major concerns, the amount of time that women, as creatures of the domestic sphere, have for leisure (2). The author is insistent that the primary use of this time should be dedicated to religious observance and performing good deeds. The three things for which women are chiefly born are explained in the preface as "1. To Serve God. 2. Our Country. And Lastly Our Selves." The three purposes of women are thus prioritised, with piety colouring the treatise as a whole. The author reasons that women have the advantage (over men) of being more able to engage in religious activity because of their abundance of leisure time (which men, presumably as participants in the public domain, do not have). Pope mentions religious duties in the course of the *Epistle*, (Narcissa who "give alms at Easter, in a Christian trim" [57]) but he does not emphasise piety as much as does the author of the *Whole Duty*.

One topic which the author visits more than once is the idea that anger and passion must be resisted. The first time this is addressed is in the above-mentioned context of religious devotion ("Let not Anger nor Passion prevail over you, but be Humble and Meek; and so shall you prosper in all your ways. [...] For the Lord shall be [...] your exceeding great Reward" [p. 4]). The author later returns to this subject in the context of motherhood, addressing "the strength of Feminine passion," and the notion that passions and an "excess of love" are female foibles (72). In the *Epistle*, Pope's most condemning portrait, that of Atossa, is a woman whose life is "one warfare upon earth" (118). As a result of this violent and unrestrained anger she is doomed to be always unhappy or dissatisfied. She is criticised for (and set up as a demonstration of) moral inconsistency: she "[y]et is, whate'er she hates and ridicules" (120). She attacks others for her own faults. The repercussions of her unbridled passions are that she is "By Spirit robb'd of Pow'r, by Warmth of Friends" (144). In contrast to Atossa is the portrayal of Martha, who is praised for her "Temper, whose unclouded ray / can make to morrow as chearful as to day" (257-58). Martha's temperament means she has

the ideal qualities of a wife and mother (although we know that the real-life Martha never fulfilled either of these roles), unlike the temperamentally inconsistent Atossa.

The author of *The Whole Duty* is meticulous in ordering qualities or listing items in order of importance. The higher up the list they appear, the more weight attached to them. When discussing the virtues of women, the first (and therefore most important) is meekness, which "is not only Recommended to all, as a Christian Vertue, but particularly to Women, as a peculiar Accomplishment of the Sex" (5-6). Meekness, understood as a gentle, courteous and kind demeanour (rather than mere submissiveness) is expressed in the *Epistle* in two contrasting portraits: first in Silia, who appears to be courteous and kind, as "[t]he Frail one's advocate, the Weak one's friend" (30), as advised by the manuals. And yet despite this (apparent) gentleness, Silia also completely loses control of herself to the extent that anyone who sees her may think that she is drunk, at the sight of a pimple (36). Her contradiction is that she seems serene or meek when it comes to other people's problems, yet is unable to maintain this demeanour when there is something flawed in her own life. Meekness is demonstrated in a more full and positive light in the portrait of a Martha-like (though married) woman who "never answers til a Husband cools" (261) and "Has her Humour most when she obeys" (264). By not responding to a husband in the heat of an argument, Martha remains patient and unresentful under injury or reproach.

Modesty, in the specific sense of sexual modesty, is the next virtue addressed in *The Whole Duty*. The chaste woman is compared with the pleasure-loving, and "Uncleanness" is "of all Vices the most Shameful" (14). Sexual propriety concerns women in different ways in all stages of their lives: "Chastity is consistent in either Abstinency or Continency. Abstinency is properly attributed to Virgins or Widows, Continency to Married Women" (12). Pope too presents chastity as a virtue. "Sin in State," blatantly promiscuous, is "Proud as a Peeress, prouder as a Punk" (70). "Sin" is undiscerning, "chaste to her Husband, frank to all

beside, / A teeming Mistress, but a barren Bride" (71). Pope compliments the spinster Martha, "Serene in Virgin Modesty," (255), by opposing her to Sin, the corrupt wife and mistress.

The Whole Duty then turns to humility, which involves the resistance of personal vanity, and the acceptance of low social status and poverty. Physical bodies, which are "but Dust and Ashes" are "weak and impure, subject to Diseases, Decays, to Die, Corrupt in a Grave, and turn to Rottenness" (19). The author of *The Whole Duty* visualises the physical body as repulsive. In much the same way, Sappho at her "toilet's greazy task" is like "morning Insects that in muck begun, / Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting-sun" (25, 27-28). Sappho in her adornment is compared to the daily metamorphosis of a fly, which begins in the muck in the morning and buzzes and lays its eggs by sunset. The diamonds that make her dress sparkle are incongruous given the "dirty smock" that they cover (24).

Both authors are concerned with the impermanence of physical beauty, especially that which requires regular maintenance such as Sappho's "greazy task." The only beauty that is celebrated in the *Epistle* is the natural, effortless beauty of Martha. Even then, her beauty is only briefly acknowledged, and the only physical description is of her blue eyes (284) and the beauty Phoebus granted her, in response to her parents' prayer (287). Pope implies that natural qualities have a permanence that cosmetically enhanced beauty does not.

The concept of humility plays a pivotal role in the *Epistle*. The poet exhorts Martha, "To dazzle let the Vain design" (249). She is encouraged to reach for higher thought, because the brighter light of the dazzling women which eclipses her serene light will set, and her "more sober light" will shine (254).

Compassion, according to *The Whole Duty*, is a virtue natural to women "whose soft Breasts were made to entertain tenderness and Pitty" (21). The willingness to forgive, and courtesy to all ranks, are included as part of compassion. This virtue (as opposed to self-

obsession) in *The Whole Duty* is the foundation of generosity and alms-giving. Each element of this definition of compassion is depicted in the *Epistle* in various different portraits. Pope's Cloé offers a counter-example. Cloé lacks all compassion, and is "content to dwell in Decencies forever" (164). She is locked in observation of form, and is prudent, but "never, never, reach'd one gen'rous Thought" (162). Almsgiving as a compassionate act is exemplified by Pope in the portrait of Narcissa, whose occasional benevolence makes her likeable. Her name is a giveaway of her ruling personality trait, but amidst the more deplorable things she has done in the name of vanity, she also "Gave alms at Easter, in a Christian trim, / And made a Widow happy, for a whim" (57-58). It is for these reasons that people cannot declare "Good Nature is her scorn" (59) because her impulses can be positive. The portrait of Narcissa, which starts with her negative qualities, progresses towards an acknowledgement that she is "[y]et still a sad, good Christian at her heart" (68). Ending on this sober and sympathetic note, she is redeemed by her ultimately good nature. Atossa, the subject of the most negative portrait, lacks the willingness to forgive, as well as lacking courtesy to all ranks: "Superiors? death! and Equals? what a curse! / But an Inferior not dependant? worse" (135-36). Pope implies that her behaviour stems from her deep-seated self-dissatisfaction.

Having concluded the first section of *The Whole Duty*, on the direction of moral and religious virtues explicated above, the author then turns to the three stages of a woman's life, and the duties contingent upon each of them. The first of these is the duty of virgins, "what they ought to Do, and what to Avoid, for gaining all the Accomplishments Required in that State" (31). The first point the author raises is the danger of immodesty, "For she that Listens to any Wanton Discourse, has Violated her Ears; she that Speaks any, her Tongue; and every Immodest Glance Vitiates her Eyes; and every the lightest act of Dalliance leaves something of a stain behind it" (32). Every indecent curiosity or impure fancy is "a Deflowering of the

Mind," and virginity is a "Pure Unspotted" state, "Clean and White," and "the least Soil or Spot is the more Discernible" (31-32). The vocabulary used here invokes flower imagery, the significant of which I will expand upon later in the chapter.

The author launches an attack on those who are preoccupied with "the Comb, the Toylets, and the Glass" (35) rather than more worthy activities, which are involved with "Notions of Modesty and Honour" which should be "deeply Impressed in your Minds" (35-36). As discussed earlier, Pope celebrates the natural beauty of Martha, rather than the transient and manufactured beauty of Sappho or Narcissa whose beautification procedures are macabre, the antithesis of their intended purpose.

Marriage, the author acknowledges, is not the only life of value available to women. The alternative is a single life marked by piety, whether or not formally embraced (as by nuns with sincere vocations- although very few are "so far Transported with the Zeal of a Voluntary Virginity" [38]). Women who do forego the state of marriage voluntarily ("espoused to the spiritual bridegroom" [39]) earn themselves "The Reverence and Esteem of Matron" (39). Although this path of life is noble, fitting with the religious backbone of the treatise, the author chooses not to dwell on the topic of "Superannuated Virgins," because "one main end of Creation was to Increase the World, without which it would soon become a silent Desart [sic] or Wilderness" (39).

In the *Epistle*, Martha, too, is "deny'd the Pelf,"¹⁰ / That buys your sex a Tyrant o'er itself" (287-88). Instead, she was granted, "Sense, Good-humour, and a Poet" (and, perhaps, the Poet is offered as a lover [292]) an altogether more felicitous outcome, firstly because the poet is Pope himself, and secondly, (and more seriously,) because to have a husband who had married his wife for her fortune could be to have a ruling tyrant, an oppressive master. By the time the *Epistle* was first published, the real Martha Blount was already in her mid-thirties,

¹⁰ Ill-gotten gains, material wealth

and, as a result of her reduced fortunes, her marriage prospects had all but disappeared. The *Epistle* is addressed to her, and credits her with the status of a 'lady'. This poem is Pope's legacy to her, and the greatest compliment that Pope paid to Martha.

The author of *The Whole Duty* cautions against malicious women who publicly tarnish another woman's reputation in order to set off their own superiority. The author stresses the importance of a woman taking sufficient care to guard her behaviour and actions so that she may control her public reputation, and avoid the traps of these spiteful women. She counsels women to:

[s]hun Ill-bred Affected Shiness, nor use an unsuitable Roughness to
your own; for these are unnecessary [sic] to your Vertue. But you must
take up a way of Living, that may prevent all course Raileries, or
Unmannerly Freedoms, carry Looks that may forbid without Invitation:
But this is *so very Nice*, that it must Engage you to have a perpetual
watch upon your Eyes, That no careless Glances give more Advantage
than Words, for those may be thrown out at random, and bear doubtful
meanings (45-46, my italics).

This advice has a striking verbal echo with lines from the *Epistle*, where Pope clearly recognises the profound effect of sexism on women, with implicit recommendation that women stay home and behave as *The Whole Duty* recommends:

But grant, in Public Men sometimes are shown,
A Woman's seen in Private life alone:
Our bolder Talents in full light display'd,
Your Virtues open fairest in the shade.
Bred to disguise, in Public 'tis you hide;

There, none distinguish 'twixt your Shame or Pride,

Weakness or Delicacy, *all so nice*,

That each may seem a Virtue, or a Vice. (199-206, my italics)

This concession in the *Epistle* demonstrates an understanding of the difficult and restrictive situations of women that goes deeper than any token gentle indulgence towards the 'fairer sex.' It is a careful analysis of the different roles performed by men and women; because they are, very much, performances. Sometimes it is possible to see what a man is like in public, but a woman's true character can only be seen in private. The woman seen in public is an appearance, and women, "bred to disguise", are taught not to "be" but to "appear". The distinction between weakness and delicacy, like the distinction between affected shyness and a more restrained way of life which prevents "Unmannerly freedoms," is so fine that "each may seem a Virtue, or a Vice."

Diversion, a refreshment of both the body and the mind is allowable - as long as it is moderate and appropriate for the gentle and domestic world that women inhabit. However, the author stipulates that too eager a pursuit is dangerous, and "to catch at [the pursuit of pleasure] in Riper Years, is grasping a Shadow; for then being less Natural, it grows Indecent, and indeed though you suppose you have it, you will find your mistake, or at least cannot hold it" (47). The idea of pleasure as something just out of grasp is echoed by Pope in the *Epistle*. The tyranny of the pursuit of pleasure is that it is doomed to endless repetition. Pope points to the futility of this endeavour, especially when it comes to old age: the 'follies' that were so entertaining in youth no longer give delight, and so the 'Hags' must feign it. Their beauty, which was once a source of leverage, is finite and transient. While their youth was full of frolics and revelry, once they leave their youth the only prospect is "an old Age of Cards (244). They are "Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot!" (248). One recalls the earlier portrait of the woman who turns to "the daily Anodyne, and the nightly Draught, / To kill

those foes to Fair ones, Time and Thought" (111-12). All people have the natural capacity for thought, but if women have nothing to do with their lives then it becomes a terrible position to be in. The warnings provided by Pope and by the author of *The Whole Duty* have a common foundation in the acknowledgement that the life of women is one of relative leisure, which has its pitfalls.

The debt of love is not only "the most Essential requisite" of the marriage vows, but without it, marriage cannot be comfortable (66). It also prevents marriage from becoming tyranny on the husband's part, and slavery on the wife's. Without love, the only way for a wife to gain any sort of dominion would be through rebellion (66). As previously discussed, Pope also refers to a husband as a possible tyrant, something from which Martha has been spared because of her lack of "pelf" (287). The use of these derogatory terms – 'pelf' and 'tyrant' – displays a certain sympathy for Martha's situation. Cloe is "so unmov'd, / As never yet to love, or to be lov'd. / She, while her Lover pants upon her breast, / Can mark the figures on an Indian chest" (165-68). Cloe's relationships are damaged by her indifference – not only her romantic relationships but her friendships. The only way that Cloe's intimates can protect themselves against the resulting pain is to "never break your heart when Cloe dies" (180), because she surely will not when you die.

The most fundamental ideological difference between *The Whole Duty* and the *Epistle* relates to religion. A religious sensibility underpins every aspect of the treatise. This is evident from numerous Biblical quotations. Humility (for example) is "the Precept of the Apostle, Philip. 2.3. 'In Lowlyness of Mind let each esteem each others better than themselves'" (29). A woman must "regulate [her] love [for her children] and so do that to them which Jacob feared from his Father, Gen. 27. 'Bring a Curse upon them, and not a Blessing.'" (79). The author uses Biblical quotations to substantiate her advice - in both of these examples she concludes with the quotations before moving on to her next concern.

Pope, in contrast, focuses on balance. Nevertheless the *Epistle*, while not explicitly religious, does hint at religious values, specifically Narcissa's charitable almsgiving and "sad good Christian" heart (57, 68) which is her redeeming feature.

Flowers are a central recurring image in *The Whole Duty*, as they are in the *Epistle*. Stressing the importance of a virgin's modesty as it relates to chastity and decent behaviour, the author of *The Whole Duty* calls indecent curiosity and impure fancy "a deflowering of the Mind, and every the least Corruption of them gives some Degrees of Defilement to the Body too. For between the State of Pure Unspotted Virginitie, and Prostitution, there are not many Intermedial Steps" (32-33). In the same discussion,

nothing is more Clean and White, than Perfect Virginitie, so the least Soil or Spot is the more Discernible ... Our tender Blossoms we find our selves obliged to Skreen and Shelter, because every unkind Air nips and destroys them; and nothing can be Nice and Delicate than a Maiden Vertue, which ought not to be Exposed to any of those Malignant Airs which may Blast and Corrupt it. (33)

Later, when advising women on how to promote virtue and discourage vice in their acquaintances, the author describes censure as, "A Vertue stuck with Thorns, if too rough for this Age, and therefore it must, to make it more pleasing, be Adorned with some Flowers, or else in these particulars it will be unwillingly Entertained" (42-43). Virtuous behaviour can be like a flower, but when forced upon women is more akin to unwelcome thorns.

When trying to account for Calypso's (ie., Teresa Blount's) attractiveness to him: Pope uses floral imagery:

Ladies, like variegated Tulips, show,
'Tis to their Changes half their charms we owe;

Their happy Spots the nice admirer take,

Fine by defect, and delicately weak (41-44).

Variegated tulips were rare and much prized as a status symbol. In the height of tulip mania, a single bulb sold for the equivalent of £400,000, and it was cheaper to commission a picture of a tulip than buy an actual bulb (Crawford 11). Both authors pick up on the frailness of flowers, the conventional symbol of women as delicate, beautiful objects for admiring, but they have very little practical purpose.

Apart from the symbolism of the flowers, there is little else methodologically similar between *The Whole Duty* and the *Epistle*. *The Whole Duty* is apparently written by a woman, who positions herself as acknowledging her own impending mortality. Her one last act of service to the world is to pass on her wisdom to future generations of women who can learn from her experiences. Her intention is to provide a guide for the female sex on how they "ought to Behave themselves in the Various Circumstances of this Life, for their Obtaining not only Present, but Future Happiness," as made clear in the title. Her advice is intended for the "Good and Singular Advantage" of the women who read it. In the *Epistle*, Pope is, by contrast, the seemingly puzzled male, examining portraits of women who are such a mystery to him.

CHAPTER 5: *THE ART OF KNOWING WOMEN AND THE EPISTLE TO A LADY*: A
COMPARATIVE READING

Chevalier Plante-Amour's *The Art of Knowing Women: or, the Female Sex Dissected* (1732) and Alexander Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* (1743) are vastly different. The attitudes expressed in *The Art* characterise Plante-Amour as misogynistic, showing a complete lack of sympathy towards women. His attitude is most obvious from his treatment of divorce in the final chapter on adultery. Pope's *Epistle*, on the other hand, is an address to an intelligent woman (his friend and, possibly, mistress), which praises her implicitly and explicitly. There is, however, a certain amount of common ground between the two texts. As we shall see, Pope seems to have read Plante-Amour (probably the English translation of this text, by Spring Macky, 1730) and to have been influenced by it.

The Art has been little studied.¹¹ Spring Macky's translation ("with Improvements") of the first edition (1730) - 255-pages – was followed by a second edition, (247 pages) printed by E. Curll in the Strand in London in 1732. In my discussion of the text I quote from this second edition, which came out just three years before Pope's *Epistle*.¹² Plante-Amour presents portraits of unworthy women in order to condemn the sex as a whole. While there is enormous variety here, sometimes the same characters reappear in different contexts. Plante-Amour, on the supposed basis of his own experience, embraces the full social spectrum in its portraits in order to display the universality of the flaws of women. The portraits are also

¹¹ Although this work has been briefly referenced by Tita Chico (82, 83) and Felicity Nussbaum (*Brink* 105, 139, 148), I have not been able to find a comprehensive and focussed study of it.

¹² In my research, I used the English translation of Plante-Amour's treatise. Although a digitalised copy of the French original is available through Google Books, I have restricted my attention to the translation.

geographically and temporally diverse. Plante-Amour's expressed aim is to educate men on the characters of the sex and so release them from the power of a woman's allure.

The work is divided into twenty lessons, each concerning a different facet of female behaviour. The first chapter, "General Ideas concerning WOMEN," examines the fascination women hold for men, which lies in the "Distinction of Sex and Wit, wherein [men and women] differ" (3). Plante-Amour observes that "nothing pleases us in a Woman so much as a good Share of Fire and vivacity in her Conversation... which proceeds from the Sprightliness of their Imagination" (3). Other unique aspects of women include their obstinacy, and their "Artifices" (7). Plante-Amour claims that female beauty lies at the root of "stupendous Revolutions" (8). He suggests that their "foolish Passions" are a sort of gift, which they offer to men.

As already intimated, Plante-Amour and Pope both treat the female sex as a mystery, and Pope seems to have known Plante-Amour – or at least the English translation of his work – and to have been influenced by it. It is quite possible that it is Pope whom Plante-Amour is attacking in his chapter on Calumny and Detraction. He describes "an universal *Back-biter* [...] never at a Loss for new Matter to exercise his Tongue; tho' very often it be to the Prejudice of those whom he knows nothing of" (146). As the translator notes:

One would almost swear, that the Chevalier Plante-Amour had the Author of the DUNCIAD in his Eye when he drew this Character. For Mr. Pope has been pleased to ridicule the Shape and Make of others, tho' the Turn of his own Body, is that of a Ram's Horn; and, the Perverseness of his Mind, is excellently thus recorded (146).

This attack could have provoked Pope to respond with a counter-text in the form of his *Epistle*.¹³

Plante-Amour claims not to have particular persons in mind in his portraits: "It will doubtless be fancied that I have particular Persons in view under the fictitious Names I have made use of; but, I protest upon the Word of a Gentleman, that my Intention was only to make War upon Vice in general" (Plante Amour, A10). In the advertisement accompanying the 1735 edition of the *Epistle to a Lady*, Pope too writes that "no one Character is drawn from the Life." These disclaimers from both authors, that they are not targeting the characters of specific women, protect them from libel charges - even though clearly many of the portraits in the *Epistle* are real life women of the day. While Plante-Amour renders himself a "most Obedient Servant" to ladies in general (A11) as a further extension of his supposed courteousness, Pope's opening lines specifically address the woman who "once let fall, / 'Most Women have no Characters at all'" (1-2) – probably, as already mentioned, his close friend (and perhaps mistress) - Martha Blount.

In terms of content, Plante-Amour's tract and Pope's *Epistle* possess a number of similarities. Plante-Amour describes self-love as a vice "which renders us amiable in our own Eyes, and hateful to all the world besides" (22). It is "so irradicably grafted to the Female sex, that they seem to imagine, they have a real Might of imposing on all Mankind, an implicit Belief of their imaginary Excellencies, and pretended Merit" (22). Although he writes that

¹³ The translator quotes a verse from Leonard Welsted's *Epistle*, 'One Epistle to Mr. A. Pope, Occasioned by two epistles lately published.' Welsted is perhaps best remembered for being satirised as one of the Dunces in Pope's *Dunciad* III, and throughout his career engaged in a poetic 'war of words' with Pope (Sambrook).

men can "justly" look at Women as "infinitely our Inferiors", women "arrogate to themselves a Preference to all the Men on Earth," which is only an "empty Satisfaction" (23). Clelia is an example of a woman who "makes public Profession of Devotion and Piety" and "is pointed out as an edifying Example for the whole Town, and proposed as a Model, by all good and devout Husbands, to their Wives" (20, 21). However, her "Vertues are only the Vertues of a certain Age, and that the sole View she has in her Reformation, is only that of making some Noise in the World, in a different Manner from what she did when no older than her Daughters" (22) – daughters who, under Clelia's guidance, are educated in "Vanity, Idleness, and Passion for Gamings, Plays, &c." (21). Because her behaviour is primarily for the purpose of drawing attention to herself, seemingly pious Clelia is no better than her vain and idle daughters. Through this comparison, Plante-Amour is demonstrating that although women may vary in their outward appearances, they all share the same driving motivation, which is to draw attention to themselves.

Pope is also critical of women who are preoccupied with their appearance. The women of his opening portraits choose to be 'painted' in flattering parts irrespective of whether the parts are of virtuous women: Whether the Charmer sinner it, or saint it, / If Folly grows romantic, I must paint it. (15-16). He mocks "Sappho at her toilet's greasy task" (25) and presents Cloe as one who wants merely to appear good:

She speaks, behaves, and acts just as she ought;

But never, never, reach'd one gen'rous Thought.

Virtue she finds too painful an endeavour,

Content to dwell in Decencies for ever. (161-63)

Pope's Cloe and Plante-Amour's Clelia exhibit similar characteristics, which suggests that Pope is drawing on Plante-Amour's work. Not only do their names bear a resemblance to

each other, both behave "as they ought" but this is not because of "generous thoughts": they are both more interested in the appearance of goodness than the fact of it.

Plante-Amour attributes the "melancholly Reflections for Ladies" to the fact that the deterioration of their beauty is inevitable:

Either *Death* destroys the charming Graces of a fine Face, or reduces, in the Bloom of Youth, the most comely Body to a loathsome Feast for Worms; or, *Old Age* comes on, and then fades the rosy Cheek; the dead Eye sinks in, and all the fair Field of Beauty is laid waste (127).

He notes that "malgré all the Art and Paint in the World, the Deformities of Old Age will shew themselves" (128). Because of the impermanence of physical attraction women should turn their attention to the "transcendent Joys of the next World. [...] Beauty is no more to be relied on, than the perishable Goods of Fortune" (129).

In an echo of Plante-Amour's observations, Pope presents portraits of "Beauties grown old and friendless who dread to be alone and still seek after pleasures". There is a tone here of underlying melancholy. Pope describes a "whole Sex of Queens":

Pow'r all their end, but Beauty all the means.
In Youth they conquer, with so wild a rage,
As leaves them scarce a Subject in their Age (219)

But:

Beauties, like Tyrants, old and friendless grown,
Yet hate Repose, and dread to be alone,
Worn out in public, weary ev'ry eye,
Nor leave one sigh behind them when they die. (227-30)

The idea of learned women sits uneasily with both writers, but Plante-Amour is much less receptive to the notion that women are capable of intellect than Pope. He suggests that the capacity for wit and learning in young ladies is "depressed" (75), and "they clip its wings" (the wings of their capacity for learning) which "they should impute [...] to the slender Education which was given them" (94). He argues that women have established a custom of "utter ignorance, either thro' the Weakness of their Constitution, the Indolence of their Minds, the Preservation of their Beauty, or a certain Levity which will not permit them to pursue laborious Studies" (95). Perversely, within this wholesale condemnation Plante-Amour makes a limited effort to acknowledge some women who "are justly esteemed for their fine Taste, their delicate Turns of Wit, their Elegance of Stile, and the poignant and perspicuous Manner of expressing their Thoughts" (96). For the majority of women, knowledge "can only be learned by Halves. So to avoid being ridiculed, it is better that they should be wholly ignorant" (96). He suggests that women "no longer repine at our Superiority of Genius, wherein the Advantage is demonstrably on our Side; let them learn to make the best Use of their own dim Light, and walk more humbly before God, without running into Enthusiastic Mazes of mistaken Piety" (97). Plante-Amour scorns 'Clorinda' whose affectations of wit and learnedness are punctuated with errors, "but still more with Puerilities; and as for Depth and Solidity, there is nothing like it in her. ... Her Brain is a confused Common-Place of the finest Turns in the Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and English Poets" (98-99).

Pope does not hold back from criticising women but he also shows a greater sympathy to their circumstances. Pope's portrait of Calypso echoes Plante-Amour's portrayal of Clorinda: she is "Less Wit than Mimic, more a Wit than wise" (48), and Rufa studying Locke agrees 'ill' (23). Pope also satirises Flavia, a woman who pretends to wit and philosophical sophistication:

Flavia's a Wit, has too much sense to Pray,

To Toast our wants and wishes, is her way;
 Nor asks of God, but of her Stars to give
 The mighty blessing, "while we live, to live." (87-90)

and an unidentified woman who partakes of:

[t]he daily Anodyne, [Mirth and Opium] and nightly Draught [Ratafie and Tears],
 To kill those foes to fair ones, Time and Thought. (111-12)

Pope is stating that women, having idle time on their hands, can become victims of addiction and depression. Unlike Plante-Amour, Pope here empathises with and understands women. Pope recognises that society expects idleness from women of a certain status, and he also recognises why women might seek to escape the pain and boredom such idleness may cause.

Plante-Amour dedicates Chapter Nineteen to the topic of 'Choler, or passion', writing that "were [he] inclined to enter upon a defamatory History of Women, and to recount all the Murders, Poisonings, &c. they have brought about, the Vatican would not hold the Volumes" (186), examining the "impetuosity of Female Passion" as a "fierce fiend" (188). Similarly, Pope's *Epistle* targets the inconsistencies and fiery passions ruling women. Like Plante-Amour, Pope was writing at a time in which women were seen as the fairer sex, and as slighter creatures than men. As a result of their weaker natures it was therefore assumed that women had less control over their temperaments and were more liable to be carried away on an emotional whim. Flavia is "With too much Spirit to be e'er at ease" (96), in contrast to Martha, who:

[d]isdains all loss of Tickets, or Codille;
 Spleen, Vapours, or Small-pox, above them all,
 And Mistress of herself, tho' China fall (266-68).

Both authors identify the poor education of women as the cause of their limitations. Plante-Amour addresses this in Chapter II, quoting Madame Lambert, who says "we ourselves

deprave even those Gifts of Nature, by our early Neglect of their Education. We employ not their minds on Solidities; and of this Negligence the Heart takes Advantage. We form them purely for pleasure; and it is only from their natural Beauties, or from their Vices, that they do please" (16). Pope argues how the conditioning of women to give pleasures means that we can scarcely blame women for wanting it:

That, Nature gives; and where the lesson taught

Is but to please, can Pleasure seem a Fault? (211-12)

Plante-Amour sees this as an excuse, blaming men for valuing the fine breeding of a "young Creature" but being blind to the way such creatures compose themselves in private. He cites as an example a purported conversation he had with 'Alcion' who bragged of how "finely bred" Dorintha was, and of her modesty, when he "was an Ear-Witness to an Inundation of her Impertinence, and remarked abundance of Immodesty in her Manner of dressing herself" (14).

Both texts contrast a woman's softness with a man's strength: Plante-Amour quotes Bunce's "The Progress of Poetry" for its balancing of softness (female) with strength (male):

A Female Softness all thy Lines dispense,

Yet each with Strength abounds and *Manly* Sense:

What melting Warmth adorns thy rising Song!

How deeply clear! and how serenely strong! (115, 8-12).

In his praise of Martha Blount, Pope writes that:

Heav'n, when it strives to polish all it can

Its last best work, but forms a softer Man;

Picks from each sex, to make the Fav'rite blest,

Your love of Pleasure, our desire of Rest,

Blends, in exception to all gen'ral roles,

Your Taste of Follies, with our Scorn of Fools,
 Reserve with Frankness, Art with Truth ally'd,
 Courage with Softness, Modesty with Pride,
 Fix'd Principles, with Fancy ever new;
 Shakes all together, and produces – You. (271-80)

Importantly, Pope distinguishes Martha from the rest of the female sex. To him she represents the complete person; the synthesis of male/female antitheses; the exception to disprove the rule. She is the 'softer man' (or, by deduction, the harder woman.)

Having addressed the ideological similarities between the *Epistle* and *The Art*, I turn now to a comparison of the techniques employed by Pope and Plante-Amour.

Plante-Amour considers hatred to be "the venomous Offspring of *Self-Love*" (160). He remarks that "Women can hate, it seems, even to most terrible Excess. When once they have taken an Aversion to any one, they are seldom brought off from it" (158-59). He asserts this stems from a woman's lack of self-control and he describes their subsequent outbursts as "freakish" (161). He quotes Nicholas Rowe's 1714 play *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* which reads, "How fierce a Fiend is Passion! With what Wilderness, What Tyranny untam'd it reigns in Woman!" (188).

The idea that women are subject to passion emerges most clearly in Pope's portrait of Atossa:

Who, with herself, or others, from her birth
 Finds all her life one warfare upon earth. (116-17)

The number of lines Pope dedicates to each portrait of a character appears proportional to the gravity of their transgression. Atossa is afforded eighteen lines, the largest of any portrait, to some extent a quantitative indication that her untamed and wild fury is the gravest of sins.

Plante-Amour dedicates very little space to the topic of contrariness in women, but

where he does he employs an anecdotal tale to illustrate his point in the same way as Pope. The 'aside' at the end of Chapter Three on Self-Love details a story purportedly told to the author by a friend. When "Sylvia, sick – of nothing but the Spleen, / Refus'd her Tea, nor wou'd by Friends be seen" (35), her Doctor ensured she thought she was not permitted to eat chicken broth, which in turn resulted in her demanding chicken broth be made. "The Chicken came, and Sylvia to it fell: / She eat forbidden Food; and she was well" (36). Plante-Amour feels the story needs no further explication because it is a self-evident truth: "what Need is there of Instances, to prove a Woman's being possessed with the Spirit of Contradiction?" (36).

Pope, too, introduces Papillia's contrariness through anecdote: Papillia is so named because, like a butterfly, she is flighty and changeable:

Papillia, wedded to her am'rous spark,
Sighs for the shades – "How charming is a park!"
A Park is purchas'd but the Fair he sees
All bath'd in tears- "Oh odious, odious trees!" (38-40)

Contrariness is not a characteristic of Papillia alone, for Pope goes on to compare women to 'variegated tulips' - tulips which are delicately patterned as a result of genetic mutation or disease – and like the tulips, "'Tis to their changes half their Charms we owe" (42). As an artist he bemoans how easy it is for women to be taken by a whim:

Pictures like these, dear Madam, to design,
Asks no firm hand, and no unerring line;
Some wand'ring touches, some reflected light,
Some flying stroke alone can hit 'em right (151-54)

This changeability requires him to paint his portraits quickly, lest the woman change her appearance. Unlike Plante-Amour, however, Pope sees (or affects to see) a woman's

inconsistencies as a charming facet of her sex as opposed to another vice to which only women are prone.

Plante-Amour and Pope both use their characters to illustrate their arguments. Plante-Amour, for example, characterises Angelica as one who "deports herself with an Appearance of Modesty scarce to be paralleled" (24-25), because she is not "indifferent, with regard to the Notice taken of her for so doing" (25). Angelica epitomises the self-love of women, the subject of the chapter in which she appears. She is ironically named to emphasise that, although her behaviour seems angelic, this is for show. Pope has seized upon the portrait idea and made it much more central to his poetic strategy. Pope guides his companion on a tour of, as it were, a portrait gallery. It opens with a number of succinct portraits in quick succession, with the characters becoming more detailed and more complex as the *Epistle* continues. The early portraits found in lines 5-14 are of standard artistic subjects. Leda with a swan; pastoral beauties "by fountain side" (5); Saints, like Cecilia (who is accompanied by "simp'ring Angels, Palms and Harps divine" [14].) These descriptions, reeled off in quick succession, acknowledge that portrait painting is not for the benefit of the viewer but for the sitter. The template nature of these portraits is a result of the portrait painter having to cater to the fashions. There is also a gradation from the most benign to the most harmful of the women, concluding with the ideal woman. Plante-Amour's portraits, however, do not follow this gradation. The initial portraits highlight the inconsistency but relative harmlessness of women: Silia is "fearful to offend" (29) yet can fly into a sudden rage because "All eyes may see – a Pimple on her nose" (36). The portraits become much more complex, however, with Narcissa (described, ironically, as "tolerably mild" [53],) "To make a wash, would hardly stew a child" (54). Yet Pope's critical perspective is sustained throughout. We have seen that Narcissa "paid a Tradesman once" (55), and gave alms at Easter, but it was "in a Christian trim" (57), but we learn that she has done each of these things only once. Furthermore she

demonstrates inconsistency in being "deep in Taylor, and the Book of Martyrs" (63), two of the weightier religious tomes of the time, and "Now drinking citron with his Grace and Chartres" (64).

Although Plant-Amour shows deference to Mrs. Elizabeth Pratt, the patron of his book and acknowledges her "peculiar Virtues" (A3), this is one of the slender few occasions on which he grants womanhood any grace at all. In all other respects Plante-Amour's text is wholeheartedly condemnatory towards women and encompasses a breathtaking array of their shortcomings, from the female inability to keep a secret (Chapter Ten), to lying (Chapter Twelve), calumny (Chapter Thirteen), the incapacity to love 'friends' combined with the capacity to hate (Chapter Fifteen), envy and malice (Chapter Sixteen), anger (Chapter Nineteen) and an extended dissertation on adultery which comprises Chapter Twenty.

Despite the fact that the chapter themes are equally applicable to both sexes, Plante-Amour prefers to limit his analysis of these vices in relation only to women. He even supports his arguments with historical quotes and anecdotes, and by citing evidence from geographically diverse places throughout the world. This occurs as early as the title page, which quotes Juvenal's Satires as a way of demonstrating what is to come:

Whatever since the Golden Age was done
 What Woman – Kind desires, and what They shun;
 Rage, Passions, Pleasures, Impotence of Will,
 Shall this Satyrical Collection Fill (A2).

Soon after the beginning of Chapter One, Plante-Amour quotes a French poet to verify his own claim that women are an absolute evil to which men are rendered slaves (1): "De tout tems l'Homme a la Femme est livré; / Et de tout tems la Femme l'est au Diable" (2). He draws upon the anecdotal experiences of others, which reinforces his own messages, for example

citing a passage from the *Memoirs of M. Le Brantôme* in which a woman's beauty caused her to be indirectly responsible for almost bringing about the ruin of France (7-8).

Plante-Amour, unlike Pope, seems to only celebrate women who assert their talents in the dazzling light of the public sphere. Pope instead celebrates Martha as a middle-class woman who glows like the modest light of the moon (254-56). The *Epistle*, ultimately, is written in celebration of Martha, his platonic or perhaps real mistress, and so departs from the Horatian tradition because it is dedicated foremost to a woman - to a middle class one at that - and not an aristocratic male. Pope celebrates Martha not for being aristocratic, but because of her wit, humour and self-control (257-68). This contrasts with Plante-Amour who celebrates a few women of high social standing- Madame Lambert, whom he quotes extensively throughout the treatise, for example on pages four and thirty-four; and the author of "The Progress of Poetry" (supposedly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) in a "Defense of their [the British] Wit" (104).

Plante-Amour's twenty "lessons" distance the narrator from his audience. He establishes and maintains his role as the educator, with us his readers as the students. This distance is reinforced by Plante-Amour's general habit of talking about women (to men) rather than to them. We see this from the title alone, which purports to be a dissection of the female sex, and a guide to the art of knowing women. Although males may be the primary audience, Plante-Amour is open to educating women as to the flaws of their sex, and provides them with guides for correct behaviour. He suggests, with Monsieur Bayle, "Were you capable of offering any great Sacrifice to God, you would be very sensible that it ought to be your most daring Passion. ... Examine yourselves thoroughly, and be assured, that all Virtues which flow from worldly and carnal Appetites, how tempting soever they may appear to us, are yet, before the Almighty, looked upon as glaring Iniquities" (79). The nature of this advice suggests that Plante-Amour considers women to be incapable of deeper religious

insight or spiritual self-examination without the guidance of a male figure – a role he here fulfils – further emphasising the inherent superiority he sees of men over women.

Plante-Amour's discourse moves towards a final and condemning diatribe in his "Dissertation on Adultery," which is the most scathingly misogynistic section of the work. Pope, on the other hand, describes flawed women but balances these descriptions with a positive description of a good woman, and concludes with high praise of her. It is also worth noting that the narrative switches from the impersonal to the personal at line two hundred and sixty-nine at the end of the *Epistle*. Pope is now directly addressing the woman for whom the *Epistle* was written: "Your love of Pleasure, our desire of Rest, / Blends, in exception to all gen'ral rules,/ Your Taste of Follies, with our Scorn of Fools" (274-76). There is also the personal devotion implicit in the last line, that generous God "to you gave Sense, Good-humour, and a Poet" (292).

Subtle differences in the portraiture technique play a pivotal role in framing the picture the authors ultimately paint of women. Whereas Plante-Amour's portraits are consistently condemnatory, Pope's portraits unveil, subtly, the positive virtues of womanhood. Narcissa's conduct is not always callous, as we have seen. He also presents a positive effect of the contradictions which women display: the ideal woman is:

[s]he who n'e'r answers till a Husband cools,
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules;
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
Yet has her humour most, when she obeys. (261-64)

Plante-Amour's representative characters, by contrast, lack any subtlety or redeeming characteristics, and the author seems to take pleasure in deriding women just for the sake of it. The author recounts a lengthy conversation he had with Clorinda, for the purpose of demonstrating his superior intelligence which left him "fully convinced, that Learning in

Women is nothing but an extravagant Self – Conceit, upheld by a lively Imagination, which dazzles shallow Wits, who look no farther than the bare Surface of Things" (103).

Bunce's poem, "The English Sapho: Or, Verses to the Author of a Noble Poem, intituled, The Progress of Poetry" quoted in *The Art* uses the imagery of moonlight:

Our Love, no longer to the Face confin'd,
Does now obey the Beauties of the Mind.
So shines the Moon amid the Shades of Night,
While wand'ring Travellers admire her Light.
But when the Sun's unrival'd Glories rise,
And scatter Day along th'awaken'd Skies,
Her fading Beams, with conscious Shame, decay,
Sicken at his Approach, and die away. (117-18)

Pope picks up on this imagery, albeit for a different purpose. Physical appearance is to the mind's beauty as the moon is to the sun. Pope uses the sun and moon in his depiction of women as "Cynthias of this minute" – changeable women who design to "dazzle", but later in the poem Martha, "Serene in Virgin Modesty" (255) is compared with the "more sober light" of the moon (254).

There is sufficient complexity and subtlety in Pope's *Epistle* that, even today, and even as women, we can still delight in his poem in a way that is simply not possible with Plante-Amour's treatise. The *Epistle* is more appealing in both style and substance. Although it presents negative portraits of women, at no point does Pope use these portraits to condemn women outright. This results in ambiguity. We see the description of woman and her shortcomings. But we also see Pope singling out Martha, a woman who probably means everything to him, and for whom he is generous in his praise. Plante-Amour uses language as a sledgehammer to crack a nut, whereas Pope's language shows the subtlest, the deftest, the

most sensitive of touches. For all their superficial similarities, Pope's *Epistle* is more ambiguous, more ambivalent and infinitely more complex than Plante-Amour's.

CHAPTER 6: AN ESSAY IN PRAISE OF WOMEN AND THE EPISTLE TO A LADY: A COMPARATIVE READING

An Essay in Praise of Women: Or, a Looking-glass for Ladies to See their Perfections In by James Bland was first published in 1733. It was printed in London and sold by a handful of publishers: J. Roberts, in Warwick Lane; J. Batley at the Dove in Paternoster Row; J. Jackson neat St James's Gate; C. King, in Westminster Hall; T. Cox, near the Royal Exchange, and C. Corbet, near Temple Bar. A second edition was published in 1735 with the addition of nine poems at the end. It was published again in 1767 in Edinburgh by W. Darling, and the editor added what he describes as a "concise and spirited Character of a Worthy Female, extracted from an excellent little work, entitled, *The Oeconomy of Human Life*" (245).¹⁴

The sheets of the text of the 1733 edition were apparently reissued verbatim and published under the title *The Charms of women; or, a mirror for ladies. Wherein the accomplishments of the fair sex are impartially delineated*, in 1736, by E. Curll. The original edition of 1733 was written and published while Pope was writing the *Epistle*, and Bland cites Pope, although not the *Epistle to a Lady*. In its new dress as *The Charms* however, Bland quotes from the *Epistle* as an epigraph, which the original edition did not have:

Ladies, like variegated Tulips, show,
'Tis to their Changes half their charms we owe;
Their happy Spots the nice admirer take,
Fine by defect, and delicately weak. (41-44)

While the title of the tract suggests that it will praise women, the actual content only occasionally concerns itself with specifically praising women. This title, however, lends the

¹⁴ The *Oeconomy of Human Life* was also the inspiration for Kenrick's imitation of *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, the earliest manual discussed in this thesis. The connections between these books quite clearly demonstrate the existence of a sense of knowledge of the genre.

book a popular appeal, tapping into the burgeoning production of and demand for manuals and literature (including the novel) centred on female virtue, charm, and moral superiority. It is this model of woman, largely personified by Lemuel's mother the Queen from the Book of Proverbs which fills the pages of *An Essay in Praise of Women*. Bland also promises to defend women from "nonsensical Satyrs" written against them (15). Vehemently earnest, Bland assumes the prevalence of moral motives in influencing women's behaviour.

The dedication of the *Essay* is to the Duchess of Portland. In his address to her, Bland lavishes her with the sort of praise that Pope satirises in his *Epistle*. Bland celebrates her "inexpressibly Agreeable" (vii and viii) physical and intellectual qualities, suggesting that he holds these two characteristics in equal esteem. The dedication includes the standard disclaimer about "the Meanness of the Author" which he hopes is atoned for by the "Greatness of [his] Subject" (i).

Bland's task as he sees it is to pick up from the conclusion of King Lemuel's lesson, from Proverbs 31:31: "Give her the Fruits of her Hands, and let her own Works praise her in the Gates." This chapter provides the context for *An Essay in Praise of Women*. Prov. 31 is divided into two sections: verses one to nine are an exhortation to King Lemuel to take heed of sin, and to do their duties. Verses ten to thirty-one are the description of Lemuel's mother, who is elevated as the exemplary virtuous woman. Bland takes up this mantle. As well as describing the virtuous woman he lays out the moral and religious obligations of all mankind, not just those pertaining to women.

One of the most striking features of *An Essay in Praise of Women* is the emphasis on women in a religious context. The first woman invoked in the *Essay* is Eve, whose creation from the rib of Adam is described, which Bland argues shows "the Pains our Great Creator takes in perfecting this Noble Creature" (14). Women, therefore, are inextricably tied into the idea of the perfect creation. Bland represents religious duty as the highest duty, not only for

women but for all people. Bland suggests that women are more religiously virtuous because they have a better record of church attendance. These texts all imply that women had a certain amount of discretion to exercise in the management of household finances. The natural intersection of religious duty and financial management is almsgiving, "which must follow where Bowels of Mercy are concerned, and where they bear so great a Sway as they naturally do in the Female Kind" (136).

Pope does not have the same religious agenda in the *Epistle*. Nevertheless, he hints at morality founded on similar values, without being specifically religious. Criticism of Flavia points to the fact that she "lacks too much sense to pray" (87), "Nor asks of God, but of her Stars to give / The mighty blessing, "while we live, to live" (89-90). In another instance, although the portrait of Narcissa begins as criticism of her selfish traits, the stanza progresses to the point of sympathy. The centre of the stanza is the turning point in Narcissa's portrait, when the poet questions why, given her proven benevolence, others "declare Good-nature is her scorn"? (59). Narcissa is a compilation of contradictory elements, and swings between opposites:

Now Conscience chills her, and now Passion burns;
And Atheism and Religion take their turns;
A very Heathen in the carnal part,
Yet still a sad, good Christian at her heart. (65-68)

This inherent serious Christian nature, then, is the reason for her almsgiving. Not only this, but the poet demonstrates an obvious fear of atheism. Narcissa is a serious and good Christian deep down, which, as the final line of the stanza, is the final say on her character, as if to sum up that despite her faults, she is morally Christian and therefore redeemable.

From the outset of the *Essay* Bland draws on the story of Genesis to explain the role of women and why they are worthy of praise, and should not be subject to "nonsensical

Satyrs" (15). Formed from the rib of Adam, woman (so called, "because Adam gave her that Name; and because our Saviour who knew best her Deserts, most frequently called her so" [iv]) was formed because "God did not like that Adam should be alone, but intended him a Companion, yet it was such a one as might be a Help-meet for him" (166). Woman was formed after man, giving time for God to perfect his creation. As Bland recounts it, "After he has consulted with the other Persons in the Trinity about the making Man more particularly than the other Creatures, he seems still more concern'd in making this fine Creature, woman. ... Since he seem'd so particularly concern'd in creating her, doth not this plainly demonstrate her worthy of praise?" (14, 15). Woman is, to Bland, a more perfect creature than man: she is the refinement of the qualities of man, created to complement him. She is not created as an inferior, but an equal. The creation story, according to Bland, also provides the potential for woman to be superior to man: she was the final creation. She was, as Pope words it, "heav'n's last best work" (272). Pope has taken on the challenge posed by Bland, and invokes his muse after constructing her. His muse, the "last best work, " is a mixture of the principles God has selected to produce his desired outcome: Martha. She is a "softer man" (272) separated from the flawed women depicted in the fictional portraits of the first half of the poem. As a "softer man" Martha is recognised as a daughter of Eve, ("manlike, but different sex," an echo to book VII of *Paradise Lost* [Corse 423]).

Pope invokes Martha's birth, or 'creation' in mythological language, appealing to the promises made by "Phoebus" (283, 285), who seems to take a more active role in Martha's creation than her own parents, who are mentioned rather patronisingly only once, when their "simple Pray'r" (286) is only half granted by Phoebus, epithet of Apollo, Greek god of sun, truth and prophecy, music and poetry (Hornblower and Spaworth). That Phoebus is more prominent in the creation of Martha is a reinvention of the original creation story. Like Eve, Martha is elevated as an object worthy of praise because of the efforts that went into her

creation. Martha's creation is even more elevated than that of Eve, as her origins are shaped not only by Christian "Heav'n" (271) but Greek "Phoebus." Pope has playfully taken Bland's frequent evocation of Genesis and used it for his own end, so that his very genuine praise of Martha retains a good-humoured and impish gesture, epitomised by the closing of the *Epistle*, where he recounts the "gifts" that Martha has been blessed with: "Sense, Good-humour," and most importantly, "a Poet," by which he means, of course, himself (292).

A major concern of the *Essay* is the fact that women, excluded from the public domain, spend a great deal of time at leisure, or at least significantly more than men. Bland's concern is with how little guidance is available to women on how to use this time. This goes some way to explaining Bland's focus on a woman's industry and daily employment, one of the few chapters in which he manages to remain within the limits of its subject (aided, no doubt, by the fact that it is the first chapter in the book). A woman's time should be spent first and foremost for "the Good and Welfare of her Family" (20). By emphasising the efforts a woman puts into supporting her family through domestic enterprise, his concern with a woman's industry transcends mere interest pastimes and becomes a noble quest with Biblical foundations: "She does not *bind heavy Burdens, too grievous to be borne, and lay them on the Shoulders of others*" (21), the italicised words taken from Matthew 23:4. The "heavy burdens" of Matthew are the innumerable restrictions with which scribes had defaced the written Law of the Ten Commandments until the burden was insupportable for followers. The essence of the "heavy burden" in *An Essay* is eased by the mistress of the house assisting in household tasks despite employing staff, "for their own Good; and to shew them an Example of Industry, as a Mark of her Favour" (22).

Bland, unlike the other writers discussed in this thesis, argues for full and open access to education for women, something that he values highly, because "On this it is that the Happiness and Misery of most in a great Measure depend" (181). Education renders women

"less obnoxious to Temptation, and most conformable to, or most becoming the End of their Creation" (181). Educating women is also in the best interest of the woman's family.

Educated women are more valuable in their roles as wives and mothers, the ultimate "end of their creation". Children, in turn, imitate the virtues of their mothers and fathers, and grow up learning "true Wisdom and Religion, by their glorious Examples" (183). Education is a way of "not unusefully" (189) filling the vacancies in women's time. Bland recommends the typically feminine and domestic tasks of "Needle-work, Writing, Languages, Musick, and moderate Dancing, but more importantly the Art of Oeconomy, and Household Managery" (189). Knowledge of the latter two in particular enables women to run their own homes.

Bland stresses the importance of moderation in the pursuits of music and particularly dancing, because to echo the sentiment of earlier in the work, that, "Little Sins are usually Harbingers to greater" (96). It is the moderate performance of music and dance that "are in some measure, Praise-worthy" (191). Bland emphasises that these activities are not Christian Duties, but trifling innocent recreations.

In the *Epistle* Pope exhibits explicit sympathy for women who are criticised for the very behaviour which is a result of their being moulded to men's expectations: "Where the lesson taught / Is but to please, can Pleasure seem a fault?" (211-12). While to be a creature of leisure is becoming for a delicate young woman, Pope confronts what becomes of these women when they reach old age, when they are no longer appealing to men, and the time spent pursuing pleasure has come to naught: they were "Fair with no purpose, artful to no end, / Young without Lovers, old without a Friend" (245-46). He describes the world where old women, like 'Hags,' refusing to admit that the balls and parties that used to bring great pleasure no longer do, continue to "haunt the places where their Honour dy'd" (242), like "Ghosts of Beauty" (241).

Despite the similarities in attitudes towards the leisure of women, Pope does not share Bland's easy reverence for education. Instead, Pope appears to have mixed feelings about women's learning as he portrays it in the *Epistle*. He praises Martha's "sense" and "good humour" (292) over Narcissa's short attention span and display of pretend learning, who is "now deep in Taylor and the Book of Martyrs, / Now drinking citron with his Grace and Chartres" (63-64). Rufa's studies of Locke are at odds with her flirtatious behaviour when at the park (21-22). While Narcissa and Rufa pretend to pick at serious learning, Martha's gendered wisdom is entirely part of her character.

The person most central to Bland's religiously-motivated sensibilities is Lemuel's mother the Queen, who appears, unnamed, in Proverbs, chapter thirty-one. The lessons that structure Proverbs 31 are taught by the Queen to her son, and she is the virtuous woman described in the rest of the chapter. Bland frequently defers to this Queen as "proof" of his arguments, describing her as "God-like" (90), "pious" (92), "compassionate" (115), "good" (141), but most insistently and repetitively, "virtuous" (111, 113, 136, 141, 182). Despite her elevated social status, the qualities for which she is praised are those that transcend social class and characterise her as an example of virtuous womanhood. Bland frequently emphasises the equalising nature of virtue: if it is good enough for a Queen it is good enough for the common woman. A virtuous woman, "whether a Queen, a Lady, or one in a lower Degree, [knows] Idleness to be the Enemy of Virtue, as well as the Nourisher of Vice" (53). She becomes the ideal in the *Essay*, the model to which all women should strive to be like.

Despite insisting on the equalising nature of virtue, Bland's dedication, to the Duchess of Portland, contains the gushing adoration which somewhat contradicts his emphasis on equalising virtue, building her into an unimpeachable character. Pope himself satirises artists' and authors' attempts to airbrush in his description of the process of painting the portrait of the Queen. In life there is no such thing as a perfect character, and Pope satirises not the

character but the artist's (or writer's) propensity to embellish the portraits of royalty: "Poets heap Virtues, Painters Gems at will, / And show their zeal, and hide their want of skill" (186-87). Bland is ardent in his portrayal of firstly the Duchess of Portland in the dedication, whose "most excellent Virtues demand the sole Dedication thereof as a Debt most highly due to your Ladyship's own great Merit, and magnificent Character" (iv). Bland gives Lemuel's mother the Queen the same treatment, describing her at one point as an "almost Divine Creature" (90). The woman praised in the *Epistle* is a "product of the generative interaction of male and female principles" (Walls 158), so that she is not merely a "softer man" (272) but something altogether distinct.¹⁵

Pope also indicates that, in portraiture, often monarchs would have a model stand in for them because of the time commitment that sitting for a portrait involves: "'Tis from a Handmaid we must take a Helen" (194). This shows that we must not attempt to make a judgement of women from portraits of Queens (or Duchesses) who are so often the objects of flattery, when in truth, "A Woman's seen in Private life alone" (200). It is hard to express inner quality in a painting which is concerned only with external appearance, and people who view portraits of royalty value "Crown and Ball" as highly as "Truth and Goodness" (184), taking for granted that possession of the physical symbols of sovereignty necessarily endows the owner with the moral qualities as well. The "Robe of Quality" which envelops the "Queen" conceals "Th'exactest traits of Body or Mind" (189-91). While Bland takes it for granted that high social status means high moral standards, Pope shows that representing the Queen is not necessarily a truthful rendition of its subject.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the alchemy/chemistry analogy of lines 269-292 see Walls, Kathryn, "The analogy of Chemistry in Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*, 269-292."

Bland presents occasional remarks on the use of the tea-table, an object that he intends to "vindicate" (title page). The idea of the tea-table as the intersection between the woman's domestic realm and the man's business interests has an interactive ethos, promoting capitalist middle-class networking. Bland presents the tea-table as the place where the household environs of the wife complements the public role of the husband. The domesticity of the wife can improve the business relationships of the husband because it represents the respectability of the family: "the handsomer a Man and his Wife appears, they are better admitted into the better Company; and so consequently, when they Visit, are treated in the handsomer Manner, as well as bring better Customer to their Shop" (65). In this practical approach to the tea-table, Bland depicts the spheres of men and women as distinctive, but not wholly separate. Here he introduces territory that is not addressed by Pope: The tea-table, representing the mutual benefit of the industry of men and women: if a woman keeps a good tea-table for guests she can improve her husband's business prospects; in turn, a successful husband can afford to buy his wife finer things for her tea-table.

Upon the publication of the *Epistle* Bland clearly felt enough sympathy between Pope's attitudes towards women and his own. There are certainly superficial similarities: both writers, to a certain degree, elevate one woman above the others of her sex. One of the key differences lies in the relationship between the author and their muses: whereas we are aware of Pope's close personal relationship with Martha, Bland's muse is a religious figure, with whom he is connected only through his own religious fervour. In this way Pope's *Epistle* speaks as a far more personal tribute than the essentially moralistic *Essay*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pope's *Epistle* is frequently categorised amongst the misogynistic literature of the eighteenth century. Having contextualised the treatment of women in Alexander Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* against three conduct manuals from the long eighteenth century, I have proved that this categorisation is inaccurate, and an unjust assessment of the attitudes expressed in Pope's poem. *The Art of Knowing Women* by Le Chevalier Plante-Amour and *An Essay in Praise of Women* by James Bland are both texts which explicitly refer to Pope. The former criticises Pope as a "universal backbiter," and in turn Pope utilises Plante-Amour's technique of portraiture as the fundamental structure of his *Epistle*. In the latter Bland praises Pope's poetic ability, saying "And though we could raise as many Popes and Drydens, as there are Drops of Water in the Sea, [...] all these [...] would still be less than her Divine Virtue merits" (256). In editions of *An Essay* published after the publication of the *Epistle* Bland uses lines 41-44 of the *Epistle* as an epigraph for his own tract, suggesting that Bland recognised in Pope's *Epistle* something akin to the gallant praise of women that he sought to emulate.

All these three tracts function both as sources for the *Epistle to a Lady* and as objects of Pope's imaginative satire. Rather than prescribing the characters of women, as seen in the three conduct manuals, the *Epistle* is descriptive, first of the series of portraits of inconsistent women, and then of Martha (though unnamed). He constructs her as his muse, and celebrates her, separating her from the flaws of her sex. Pope is often criticised for celebrating Martha as "a softer *Man*," (272, italics mine), instead of commending her as a woman.

The three conduct manuals discussed in this thesis have three very different approaches to the common interest. *The Whole Duty of a Woman* shares practical advice from an anonymous woman. *An Essay in Praise of Women* is a heavily moralistic celebration of women's virtues celebrated on the Biblical mother of Lemuel, and *The Art of Knowing Women* is a condemnatory misogynistic denunciation of the inherent flaws of women.

Despite this, all three conduct manuals clearly demonstrate the culture of prescriptive literature present at the time that Pope was writing the *Epistle to a Lady*. As well as sharing a common goal, moreover, the authors of these three manuals also demonstrate their awareness of each other.

Pope, although he has often been regarded as (if one may be forgiven an anachronism) chauvinistic in *The Epistle*, has more in common with Bland, author of the most sympathetic of these three texts. Pope's sympathetic tone is in line with what we know about his own exclusion from full participation in society as a result of his Catholicism in a notoriously anti-Catholic era, and the increasingly debilitating effects of Potts Disease, from which he eventually died. From the standpoint of the twenty-first century, it is often tempting (and sometimes useful) to judge the quality of texts using a contemporary value system, and it is from such judgements that accusations of chauvinism may emerge. However, when viewed alongside those of his contemporaries, Pope's attitudes as expressed in the *Epistle* are revealed to be sympathetic to the predicament of women.

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