Portrait of a Lady:

The Ideal Gentlewoman in Georgian England

By

Monica Power

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Genteel Georgian English society was shaped by multitudes of different guidelines. Not least of these were a conception of ideal genteel womanhood and a code of etiquette which were meant to shape the behaviour and interaction of both men and women. In particular, sensibility appears as the hallmark virtue for each sex and a concept which was itself idealized. Historian G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* and separate essay on sensibility in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* examine in-depth the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and suggests that sensibility was a highly useful trait for gentlewomen. It allowed them to elevate their place in society and negotiate issues of gender equality and education. However, it also needed to be contained and formulated in a way that avoided the dangers of falseness, silliness and excess. Sensibility, and indeed most ideal genteel female traits, behaviour and social interaction, required moderation above all, and a constant effort on the part of a woman to maintain a delicate, precarious balance between various extremes.

Such extremes can be illustrated through Fanny Burney's 'voluble' and 'supercilious' ladies, both examples of how a gentlewoman should not behave. The voluble woman conversed much too often and too freely, while the supercilious one kept a disdainful silence around all but her chosen circle. In contrast to this, modesty, politeness, pleasant amiability, moderate intelligence, the ability to engage in polite, informed conversations, conformity to social standards, a desire to blend in rather than to stand out, skills to run a household efficiently, silently and unremarkably and a modest talent in the area of genteel female 'accomplishments' were all facets characteristic of the ideal Georgian lady. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* often delivers a clever satire of

ideal females, particularly the subject of ladylike 'accomplishments,' which also infers the importance of moderation, and toeing the precarious line between extremes.

Literary sources such as Fanny Burney's *Cecilia* and *Evelina* also contain characters from which useful female ideals, as well as anti-ideals, can be inferred, as it would be hard to frame ideal behaviour without an idea of what constitutes the opposite. Moreover, both genteel women and men were expected to behave according to certain standards of etiquette and politeness, which can be seen in women's handbooks, prescriptive literature, and contemporary diaries and journals, such as that of the author Fanny Burney, written during the 1770s and 1780s. Philip Carter's *Man and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660*-1800 is also useful for understanding the intricacies of etiquette and the growing disdain in the eighteenth century for symbols of excess such as ceremonious conduct, as well as the balance needed between careful study of correct polite behaviour and natural, easy social interaction. Other academic studies, such as Amanda Vickery's work on female household management, as well as contemporary prescriptive literature can shed light on women's life within the home. Such sources emphasize the importance of conformity and a distaste for drawing undue attention towards one's talents or achievements, in addition to efficiency, duty and maintaining the ever-important balance between extremes of behaviour. Indeed, this attention to negotiating a fine balancing act and the way it influences the ideals of genteel women is echoed in this whole range of sources, from literary, to personal, to prescriptive, to modern day history. A central focus of this paper will be on the arenas of household life and management, and female talents and accomplishments, not so much

that ideals were discernable only in these arenas, but because they were both very important facets of most ladies' lives .

I: Sensibility

Cecilia, the eponymous heroine of Fanny Burney's *Memoirs of an Heiress*, arguably represents the Georgian genteel female ideal. She is beautiful, modest, polite, affectionate, amiable, complaisant, intelligent, conversational, benevolent and dedicated to using her fortune for the amelioration of social ills. Her "disposition [was one in which] sweetness was tempered with dignity, and gentleness with fortitude" and "in whose heart glowed the warmest affections and most generous virtue."[1] A novel such as this, while perhaps of more limited utility in depicting the reality of genteel women like Cecilia, can be very useful for illuminating various societal ideals and expectations. Another of Burney's famous heroines, Evelina, although similar in some ways to Cecilia, is a less polished ideal heroine, as she at first has little social experience and a very tenuous grasp on fashionable etiquette or behaviour, and therefore embarrasses herself and gets into comedic mishaps. Still, her character is notably sweet, innocent, amiable, affectionate and very obliging, all consistent with idealized female traits. Cecilia seems to be a more serious and mature character from the beginning, and may be what Burney considered the ideal genteel heiress to present to the world, reflecting also traits that general society held dear, such as affection, amiability, sociability and elegance. Her intelligence and relative independence of thought and action (although constrained by her minority and somewhat by her amiability), may be a reflection of Burney herself, whose

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[1] Fanny Burney, *Cecilia: Memoirs of an Heiress* (London: T. Payne and Son, 1782), 3; 29.

vivacious, lively and independent spirit sparkles from the pages of her early diary, which will be discussed later. She also has some other key female traits such as virtue, chastity, temperance, prudence of economy, and a strong sense of charity and mercy. These traits can all be seen lauded forcefully in works such as Professor James Bland's *The charms of women: or, a mirrour for ladies*, which categorically moves through all 'accomplishments' of women and suggests that these aforementioned traits were very important ideals of women, particularly by how many times each are mentioned in the work.[2] Also, among Cecilia's many attributes is her acute sensibility – that touchstone of gentility. She is a young woman upon whom luck has smiled bountifully, for

> though ... largely indebted to fortune, to nature she had yet greater obligations: her form was elegant, her heart was liberal, her countenance announced the intelligence of her mind, her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul, and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now glistened with sensibility.[3]

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sensibility in a number of ways, but the most fitting to the concept as an eighteenth century character trait are definitions such as "Emotional consciousness; glad or sorrowful, grateful or resentful recognition of a person's conduct, or of a fact or a condition of things," as well as, "Quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences; sensitiveness," and, perhaps most applicable to the term as it is used in *Cecilia* and other sources: "Capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in

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[2] Professor James Bland, *The charms of women: or, a mirrour for ladies: Wherein the Accomplishments of the Fair Sex are impartially Delineated* (London: E. Curll, 1736), 265-271.
[3]Burney, *Cecilia*, 6/7.

literature or art."[4] This last definition in the Oxford Dictionary is classified as particular to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and used rarely in earlier or later periods.[5] It is very much the same kind of sensibility that makes Cecilia so worthy a character – the idea of a highly refined emotional capability, and the ability to feel deeply both the sorrow and the joy of those around her. Sensibility also seems to allow a deeper appreciation of beauty all around in the natural world. Having a keen sensibility would therefore allow the possessor to engage more fully in life, both positively and negatively. It suggests that although one could better sense joy, love and beauty, one could also be more sensitive to pain, sorrow and suffering in the world. This last idea, in particular, will be further explored later in this section with reference to the musings of early nineteenth century scholars.

Sensibility, at the time Fanny Burney was writing, can be seen as part of the broader emphasis on sentimentality, sensitivity and empathy during the mid-to-late eighteenth century, marked by the publication of works such as Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* and *Sentimental Beauties from the Writings of Dr. Blair: Selected with a View to Refine the Taste, Rectify the Judgement, and Mould the Heart to Virtue*. The ability to empathize with the misfortune of others and to feel deeply the movements of daily life, intellectual pursuits and human interaction rendered those "of delicate feelings alone susceptible of the highest happiness of human nature."[6] Such sensibility gave

> a feeling heart a source of pleasure, not only in the walks of study, but in the daily intercourse of life – it gives true relish to prosperity, and comfort to adversity – it renders a public figure truly great, - and affords to a private one delight and

[4] Oxford English Dictionary
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] W.L. Brown, D.D., *An Essay on Sensibility: A Poem in Six Parts* (London: C. Dilly, 1791), 4.

> dignity – The happy effects of sensibility are particularly conspicuous in the satisfactions of friendship – and in those springing from domestic relations.[7]

G. J. Barker-Benfield suggests that the eighteenth century a cult of sensibility had a formidable impact upon the ways in which gentlewomen were idealized, as well as how they viewed themselves and their role in society. She argues that sensibility emerged as a way in which to elevate the place of women in society, especially in relation to men, through the popular idealization of sensibility and its feminine virtues, a process which was forwarded by sentimental literature such as that by Frances Burney and Jane Austen.[8] Ideally, possessing sensibility cultivated a gentlewoman's "powers of intellect, imagination, the pursuit of pleasure [and] the exercise of moral superiority," among other things.[9] Women, Barker-Benfield, suggests could also use their sensibility, and its celebration as a highly desirable trait, to "publicize the fact that they were conscious human beings, equal in that respect to men," and in this sense they could attempt to raise their social position in relation to men.[10] However, sensibility also had to be handled with caution, for if taken to excess "it betokened physical and mental inferiority, sickness, and inevitable victimization, circumstances throwing severe doubt on the effectiveness of the female will."[11]

Other damaging stereotypes of sensibility emerged as cautionary tales for women, including the "false, merely fashionable sensibility, and [the] sofa-lying, excessive

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[7] *Ibid.*
[8] G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, xvii/xix; G.J. Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility," in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 110-112.
[9] Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 36.
[10] *Ibid.*, xxviii.
[11] *Ibid.*, 36.

sensibility."[12] Therefore, while sensibility was a useful, desirable trait in a genteel woman, she would need to exercise careful control to keep her sensibility within moderate bounds, lest she lapse into silliness or, worse, affectation, a danger which will be discussed further below. Some contemporary women, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, suggested ways to remedy the dangers of unchecked sensibility and so adjust the ideals surrounding it to better serve gentlewomen. According to Wollstonecraft, while sensibility was a very valuable virtue, it could do women a great deal of damage because it lacked a simultaneous cultivation of reason. This could only be remedied by a better access to education for gentlewomen, in order for them to cultivate the faculties of reason and better control their feminine sensibility.[13]

Writing in 1791 as a 'Professor of Moral Philosophy and of the Law of Nature,' as well as 'Minister of the English Church at Utrecht,' W.L. Brown focussed largely on the benefits of sensibility.[14] In this work, sensibility appeared as possibly the most important characteristic that a genteel person could display – it facilitates friendship, love, affection, empathy, public and private distinction and, particularly, the most fruitful happiness. Dr. Hugh Blair, in his previously mentioned *Sentimental Beauties*, also waxed eloquent on the numerous benefits of sensibility to both the possessor and the wider world. He spoke of its importance in no uncertain terms, suggesting that "the discovery of the heart is very frequently of greater consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How often will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden the humble, and raise the

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[12] Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility," 112.
[13] *Ibid.*, xxx/xxxi.
[14] Brown, *Essay on Sensibility*, 2.

dejected!"[15] This particular line could be applied to what is certainly part of the character of our literary ideal woman, Cecilia; the role of empathetic patroness – the tenderly condescending benefactress of the poor, the "humble," and the "dejected."[16] In this way, sensibility can be seen as a particularly important genteel female characteristic, for it helps encourage and stimulate the bearer into sympathetic action, and potentially provides a more honest, organic response to instances of suffering around her. A good example would be Cecilia's emotional encounter with the very worthy and unfortunate wife of one of her guardian Mr. Harrell's injured tradesmen, and her subsequent determination to relieve the family's suffering.[17] Blair seems to touch upon this idea further by exclaiming that "by the means of this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties which we owe to one another are both performed to more advantage, and endeared in the performance. From true sensibility flow a thousand good offices, apparently small in themselves, but of high importance to the felicity of others."[18] His use of the phrase 'true sensibility,' as opposed to 'false sensibility,' is quite interesting, and will be discussed later on; nonetheless, he is certainly an advocate of genuine sensibility devoid of artifice or affectation.

Sensibility in a genteel woman could also enhance her appeal to men. In her diary Fanny Burney recorded a conversation between two of her acquaintances, Mr. Bruce, "King of Abyssinia," and a Mrs. Strange:

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[15] Hugh, Blair, *Sentimental Beauties from the Writings of Dr. Blair: Selected With a View to Refine the Taste, Rectify the Judgement, and Mould the Heart to Virtue* (London: John Wallis, 1798), 109.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Burney, *Cecilia*, 113-117.
[18] Blair, *Sentimental Beauties,* 109..

> 'Well,' said Mrs. Strange, 'I knew a young lady who was at a concert for the first time, and she sat and sighed and groaned ... and at last she said, 'Well, I can't help it!' and burst into tears.' 'There's a woman,' cried Mr. Bruce, with some emotion, 'who could never make a man unhappy! Her soul must be all harmony!'[19]

Later in her diary Fanny also transcribed a rather passionate, sentimental love letter sent to her by a Mr. Barlow's "ardorous Pen."[20] He was young man of her recent acquaintance, with whom she had not conversed much, but who had obviously been greatly struck by "the Affability, Sweetness, and Sensibility, which shone in [her] every action, [and which] lead [him] to Admire the Mistress of them;" unfortunately, such an 'ardorous' address did not move the object of his attention, who "took not a moment to deliberate - [feeling that her] heart was totally insensible – and ... that [she] could never consent to unite [herself] with a man who [she] did not v*ery* highly value."[21] Although this was a failed courtship, it and the previous exclamation by Mr. Bruce suggest that sensibility, and, indeed, other ideal female traits such as affability, sincerity and sweetness, could rate highly in the marriage market.

While the various beneficial effects, as opined by W.L. Brown and Dr. Blair, of possessing sensibility would seem to suggest that this should be a trait desired in abundance, Brown's work suggests otherwise. In fact, he stated that his poetic essay instead sought to discover whether sensibility's path to ensuring happiness and felicity of life outweighed its rather notable drawbacks, a point which will be discussed shortly. This was, at least, according to Brown, a most important philosophical question of the period for "Whether sensibility, or the want of it, is, upon the whole, most productive of

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[19] Anne Raine Ellis, ed, *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768-1778* (London: G Bell, 1913), 20.
[20] *Ibid.*, 49.
[21] *Ibid.*, 49;50.

comfort and happiness in the course of life, comes home to every feeling mind."[22] Indeed, Brown suggests,

> Whoever is endowed with any degree of tender, delicate, and elevated sentiment, perceive, when he recollects the train of his experience, that it contains almost as much pain as pleasure. The distresses and calamities to which human nature is continually exposed, the various pictures of woe and misery which are presented on every side, afford continual exercise to the sympathetic and tender feelings, and demand the sigh and tear, with unremitting importunity ... [they] supply daily matter of indignation or contempt, and ... establish an aversion to that nature, the love of which constitutes the predominant feature of a noble and generous mind.[23]

If, W.L. Brown wondered, acute sensibility to the many pains of the world caused undue suffering, was sensibility then so highly desirable a trait? Perhaps, in light of such suffering, 'indifference' would have been better adopted by those who wished to avoid excessive tribulation.[24] However, Brown suggested that this too was an undesirable characteristic to cultivate, for "upon examining the nature of this temper, it is evident, that, if it endures little pain, it enjoys as little pleasure. Such a disposition can ... never afford a refuge to the mind ... employed in the discovery of happiness."[25] Brown's conclusion was, therefore, that to gain the felicity of sensibility and escape the bulk of its pains, one had to cultivate it with moderation and avoid the extremes of hyper-sensibility and indifference; in other words, one had to feel with just the right intensity and needed to avoid feeling both too much and too little. This idea of moderation runs through Brown's argument. The ideal genteel woman would, therefore, presumably have within herself a deep well of sensibility, but would also have sense enough to limit its expression within the bounds of moderation, in order to guard the nerves from fraying and the heart

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[22] Brown, *Sensibility*, 5.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*, 8.
[25] *Ibid.*

from feeling undue misery, not to mention said woman being a less pleasant companion for any prospective husband.

While W.L. Brown emphasized the importance of feeling in moderation, Dr. Hugh Blair wrote about the importance of moderation and sensibility in appearance. He warned the reader to be on the utmost lookout against "false sensibility," for "softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility," and although when unmistakably the product of "native affection, it was valuable and amiable," Blair cautioned that

> the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of the heart. Professions of sensibility on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language, afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character.[26]

Therefore, not only did excessive sensibility supposedly create unhappiness and undue stress, its excessive demonstration in one's outward appearance and behaviour could breed distrust and suspicion, thus reflecting poorly on one's character and reputation. The balance between behaving naturally but still within the bounds of moderation and normalcy is interesting, as artifice certainly offended, but natural excessive sensibility or lack thereof were also both decried.

An excellent literary example of excessive character traits, the problems which arise from such excess, and the necessity of emotional balance, is Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Published in 1811, it was Austen's first novel, depicting the lives of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, two very different sisters who, with their mother, are left initially almost penniless when their father dies, and are forced to move into the home of distant relatives and continue their lives in very new settings. Each of the sisters is

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[26]Dr. Hugh Blair, *Sentimental Beauties,* 111.

depicted as embodying the two title characteristics to a high extent; Elinor is all that is sense, while Marianne is ruled almost entirely by a passionate sensibility. The extremes of each sister's characters hinder them and create difficult situations for them to face, especially where romance is concerned. Elinor is rational, restrained, reserved and keeps her emotions at bay, while Marianne is impulsive, impetuous, passionate, spontaneous and emotional, feeling everything and seeing the world with ecstatic fervour. Elinor's rational, reserved, sensible demeanour restrains her from admitting or showing her feelings for her half-brother's brother-in-law, Edward Ferrars. Marianne, on the other hand, becomes wildly, passionately devoted to the roguish Jonathan Willoughby after he rescues her when she turns her ankle on an impulsive nature walk, even though he eventually jilts her for a richer woman.[27] Throughout the novel, the events which unfold serve to lead each sister to balance her own character, thereby underlining the importance of creating equilibrium, as opposed to extremes, and of appearing to negotiate the line between two different ends of the spectrum of behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Singularity of action, behaviour, or thought would likely be noticed and commented upon by genteel society in a negative way, and both sisters learn, whether explicitly or not, that the ideal woman, among other things, should not behave in a way likely to attract attention of this sort.

II: 'Supercilious and Voluble'

In order for a womanly ideal to exist, it follows logically that there should be an anti-ideal as well. As with the ideal, concepts of how a woman should certainly not be also dwell within the pages of Fanny Burney's *Cecilia,* as well as within many revealing

[27] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Thomas Egerton, 1811).

passages of Fanny's own diary, in which her private thoughts, and remarks by members of the society around her have been recorded. Such works say a lot about how society prescribed genteel women's ideal lives. Two particular types of decidedly non-ideal women are described within Cecilia's social circle by a delightfully wise and slightly cynical older gentleman who explains to the naive heiress why such women behave how they do:

> 'The *Ton* misses, as they are called, who now infest the town, are in two divisions, the *supercilious* and the *voluble.* The *supercilious*, like Miss Leeson, are silent, scornful, languid and affected and disdain all converse but with those of their own set: the *voluble*, like Miss Larolles, are flirting, communicative, restless and familiar, and attack, without the smallest ceremony, every one they think worthy of their notice. But this they have in common, that at home they think of nothing but dress, abroad, of nothing but admiration, and that every where they hold in supreme contempt all but themselves.[28]

According to this passage, women such as these are clearly not what any genteel lady should aspire to be. They both represent an extreme, although are fundamentally alike in their frivolity and self-indulgence, all of which is inherently disagreeable to those around them. Again, this is an example of privileging moderation over extremes. Viewed in this context, volubility or superciliousness were likely to be noticed, but indubitably the attention would be censorious rather than praising, and would perhaps result in these women being surreptitiously avoided in company. It is interesting how Mr. Gosport, Cecilia's worldly companion, frames his observations about the "Ton misses, who now infest the town" – suggesting that this habit of becoming either voluble or supercilious might have been in vogue for a large number of young ladies, some of whom were

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[28] Burney, *Cecilia*, 63.

perhaps making their very first debut season in London.[29] The juxtaposition between fashion, ideals and etiquette would make a very interesting study and one wonders how often the three diverged on the one hand or corresponded on the other. Mr. Gosport continues by suggesting that there are three causes of silence in young ladies, and three remedies to induce them to talk: silence may stem from sorrow, affectation or stupidity, but not modesty, as "for that sullen silence which resists all encouragement, modesty is a mere pretence, not a cause." To guarantee volubility from the supercilious, dress, public places and love are the three sure-fire subjects to discuss. Both types, then, are seen as vain and superficial.[30]

The characters in *Cecilia* are not the only ones who place a high value on conversation – or lack thereof. The *New Academy of Compliments, or, The Lover's Secretary*, one of the many prescriptive pamphlets published during this time period, suggests that "without dispute, eloquence is a qualification highly necessary to adorn both sexes, especially the female, whose tongues often prove as attractive as their beauty."[31] Moreover, "to see quick and active wit Foil'd for Want of Words, makes a Man or Woman seem a Statue, as one dumb."[32] As these passages suggest, this particular pamphlet puts a high value on conversation and the importance of perfectly cultivated eloquence and wit. The second quotation seems to suggest that a "quick and active wit" could lie hidden, desperately struggling beneath a supercilious surface. Seemingly, the *Secretary* holds the educational key to correcting this shortcoming. This is interesting in

[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*, 65.
[31] *A New Academy of Compliments*: *or, the Lovers' Secretary* (London: J. Bew, 1784) , 3.
[32] *Ibid.*

that it seems to suggest that valuable conversation is a practiced art, rather than a naturally acquired ability, which can be honed and altered by, perhaps, affectation – that bugbear of Hugh Blair. This particular pamphlet certainly seems more concerned, at least in this section of it, about a want of words, rather than a proliferation of them.

Fanny's own diary also speaks volumes about both her own opinions and those of the people around her on a variety of subjects, including etiquette, conduct and some rather non-ideal women encountered by the vivacious authoress. One particular passage seems to touch rather comically upon the subject of the voluble lady, and the ill effects one could have upon her fellow company, particularly the visiting Mr. Bruce, "King of Abyssinia", who "was extremely *out of sorts*, because there was some company in the room ... who did not please him. How Dr. Smith offended him I know not, but as to the lady Miss Strange told me that she had *too much tongue*, and had fatigued his Majesty."[33] Although one can appreciate the humour behind Fanny's words, they do reflect the idea that a woman who has too much to say, especially if it is superficial or gossiping in nature, is not one that anyone but her 'own set,' the fellow volubles, would choose as a frequent companion. Fanny compares two famous female singers she meets, one the Italian 'Bastardini,' and the other the English Miss Davies, musing that

> modesty and unassuming carriage in people of talent and fame, are irresistible. How much I do prefer for acquaintance the well-bred and obliging Miss Davies to the self-sufficient and imperious Bastardini, though I doubt not the superiority of her powers as a singer.[34]

This passage is important for underlining both certain feminine ideals and the importance of the concept of balance, avoiding extremes and/or singularity and the importance of

[33] *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, 43.
[34] *Ibid.*, 7.

modesty, a notion centered on not drawing undue attention to oneself. Miss Davies represents a much more ideal woman – she is amiable, obliging (that all important feminine virtue) and modest about her talents, something which will be discussed further later in this paper, but all of which were necessary to the 'well-bred' genteel lady. The Bastardini, one learns through additional description by Fanny, is arrogant, proud, impetuous, commanding – indeed, a modern day 'diva,' characteristics which are often today expected of celebrity performers, but all of which serve in this case to diminish greatly Fanny's opinion of the notorious singer. The fact that the Bastardini flaunts her talents and uses them to assert superiority seems to be especially rankling to Fanny, who opines that insolence of this sort is a most heinous offence; upon meeting a man who lacked it, she notes that

> Mr. Twining was excessively agreeable; he assumed no manner of superiority; nor yet, - as is often the case with people of learning as with persons of distinction, affected a certain *put-on* equality; - a condescendsion (sic) which mortifies a thousand times more than insolence itself.[35]

Therefore, neither prideful superiority nor affected equality was, according to Fanny, an acceptable or desirable behaviour. Instead, there should have been a natural, unaffected sincerity of action which neither drew excess attention to oneself nor shunned society.

Manners and etiquette were also important to shaping the ideal gentlewoman. As Fanny Burney notes in regard to an esteemed acquaintance's daughter, "she is sensible and reserved, yet by no means seems worthy of such a father as she has to boast of, for her manners are unformed and rather uncouth."[36] Upon stopping in at the home of a long-time acquaintance, she excuses the poor etiquette of her friend as the result of what might

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[35] *Ibid.*, 13.
[36] *Ibid.*, 40.

be affectionately termed as being a 'scatter-brain' today, observing as she and her father walked in that "she did not stop her employment, or even lift up her head, though she very civilly enquired after our healths, was very glad to *see* us &c.; for her inattention is the effect of absence, not of *wilful ill-breeding* (my emphasis)."[37] Apparently the standards of polite conduct were rigorous if not getting up and coming forward to greet guests – even if making all the right polite inquiries – could be seen as ill-bred and rude. Cecilia, our ideal heiress, learns the hard way just how rigid the rules of politeness could be, when her voluble, usually over-enthusiastic new acquaintance, Miss Larolles, suddenly becomes supercilious with an icy intensity. When her friend Mr. Gosport does some sleuthing, he discovers that the cause of Miss Larolles's extreme indignation is an etiquette *faux pas* on the part of Cecilia, who, unaware that London politeness dictated a prompt reply to the courtesy of someone calling upon her, had not yet returned Miss Larolles' numerous visits. [38]

The aforementioned *Academy of Compliments* also gives a good idea of how important manners and etiquette could be to genteel society. It purports to be a highly important tool for navigating society, for

> 'tis true, there have been divers Treatises published of this Kind; but I can assure the courteous Reader, few or none have arrived to the Perfection of this, for good Language and Diversion; and without Dispute he'll find great Satisfaction in the Perusal of it.[39]

Countless categories for conduct instruction are contained in the Table of Contents, and the first section alone deals with almost any polite social setting and the most well-

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[37] *Ibid.*, 12.
[38] Burney, *Cecilia*, 99-101.
[39] *Lovers' Secretary*, 3.

mannered ways to behave oneself in each of these situations. In each scenario, the utmost courtesy is used: the language stresses a vocabulary of 'service' and 'honour,' which also plays into the emphasis of the pamphlet on achieving eloquence of speech. Although most of these initial scenarios seem to involve male to male contact, they are still useful for showing the formality and specific requirements of polite social interaction. For example, here is a transcribed conversation between theoretical Gentleman 'A' and Gentleman 'B' to instruct what one might say to make a new acquaintance:

> A: Sir, I esteem it a singular Happiness to have met with such good company, seeing I have by this Means obtained the Favour of being acquainted with you.
> B: Sir, if the same Chance which brought us together in this place did likewise render me capable of making my Friendship as useful to you as your Goodness is pleased to esteem it acceptable, I should think myself doubly happy; but till Opportunity presents itself, I shall pray you to accept of the good Will.
> A: Sir, Your Merits oblige me highly to esteem your Acquaintance, and desire your Love. And my Intent was to make tender of my Service to you. But now I am doubly indebted to you, for preventing my Purpose, by proffering your affection. I humbly thank you for it, and desire you reciprocally to accept of mine.[40]

This is only a section of this particular scenario; the conversation continues for a few more lines, with more passionate declarations of duty and affection for each new acquaintance. This conversation is extremely formal, and it almost seems like each gentleman is trying to outdo the other in the humble offering of devoted service. It also seems like a certain level of affectation would be practically required to engage in conversations like these, unless one happened to be a particularly friendly and enthusiastic individual. Therefore, it appears that this is another matter of walking a fine tightrope – one must act according to a very formal, outlined code, but try to keep the

[40] *Ibid.*, 5.

appearance that it is entirely natural. A 'Mrs. Hester Chapone', who will be discussed further below, writes a long and dedicated treatise on the importance of politeness; she also particularly singles out affectation as shameful, advising that "people of sense will never despise you, whilst you act naturally; but, the moment you attempt to step out of your own character, you make yourself an object of just ridicule."[41] Writers such as Hugh Blair rail against falseness and affectation, yet, according to the *Lovers' Secretary*, the code of etiquette seems to require the skilful manipulation of artifice to engage in its prescribed behaviour.

In his *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* Philip Carter discusses the changing perceptions of ceremony versus ease of conduct, as well as the paradox existing between the education of politeness and the ideal of natural, unstudied behaviour. He notices a movement throughout the eighteenth century towards moderation and the celebration of ease, naturalness, and a lack of affectation in polite society. One example he cites of a cautionary extreme was excessively ceremonious conduct, which, he suggests, was increasingly disdained throughout the eighteenth century. The ceremonious man became almost a social pariah, whose "predominant characteristic remained his capacity to irritate and weary companions of a more polite disposition."[42]

Affectation, Carter argues, was an even greater social *faux pas*, for it could disguise inner evil and become a tool for manipulating the unsuspecting – particularly the young, and "as a show of external refinements devoid of accompanying inner civility,

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[41] Mrs. Hester Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind, addressed to a young lady. By Mrs. Chapone* (London: J. Walter, 1778), 164.
[42] Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), 126.

affectation directly challenged polite theorists's claims to morality."[43] Therefore, it was highly dangerous and to be avoided wherever possible. 'False refinement,' as opposed to a natural, easy sociability, was regarded largely as either suspicious or vain behaviour, and if unchecked could lead to 'social treachery,' or the manipulative ruin of the unsuspecting by 'smooth-talkers.'[44] According to Carter,

> Many ... saw affectation less in terms of corruption than as an unregulated attempt to cultivate a reputation for refined feeling. In such cases, the fashion for refinement pushed men towards ever more elaborate displays of delicate, polished or sensitive behaviour.[45]

Seemingly, those who strove for polite refinement and did not remain on their guard, or perhaps who tried any shortcuts, could be caught in the trap of affectation, if that refinement did not come naturally enough for sharp observers.

As the aforementioned *Lovers' Secretary* suggests, advice literature on the subject of proper polite interaction abounded. Ideally, however, polite behaviour should show not appear as the result of vigorous study when practiced: as Carter notes, the authors of this literature "regularly advocated actual social engagement as, ultimately, the only means of achieving true refinement ... readers of guides like *The Polite Academy* ... were encouraged to 'betray no Air of Study' in company; 'for such will very ill suit the Ease that charms to so great a Degree in the polite Gentleman.'"[46] Again, ease is favoured over ceremony, and although it was accepted that polite behaviour should be studied and learned from advice literature, when practised it was to appear as natural as possible and stay within the bounds of appropriate moderation.

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[43] *Ibid.*, 126/127.
[44] *Ibid.*, 127.
[45] *Ibid.*, 128.
[46] *Ibid.*, 35/36.

Through Fanny Burney's observations one might also surmise that intelligence played a role in good conduct and attractiveness as a companion. Being able to hold a decent level of conversation and social interaction would certainly be an attractive quality, and perhaps a lack of intelligence, or 'absence' could also be interpreted as rudeness or ill-breeding. Although Fanny praises Mr. Twining, as was discussed earlier, she notes rather dryly about his wife, "as to Mrs. Twining, she seems a very stupid woman. I marvel that Mr. Twining could choose her! She may, however, have virtues unknown to me; - perhaps, too, she was *rich*."[47] In passing, she also mentions that "the first day of this month I drank tea and spent the evening at Mr. Burney's, at the request of my sister, to meet a very stupid family, which she told me it would be charity to herself to give my time to."[48] These judgements could be influenced by Fanny's position as both the daughter of a well-known intellectual and an author herself, but they certainly reflect a distinct disdain for what she deems as insensibility within her circle. She believes that stupidity should have been a major detractor for marriage, as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Twining, although as she remarks, sometimes wealth may outweigh any other qualification, no matter how ideal. If it is 'charity' to spend time with a 'very stupid family,' then this would not be the family to seek out for frequent visitation.

Clearly, therefore, there were several different ways in which a woman could be satirised. The 'voluble' and 'supercilious' are two of the more odious female types which Fanny Burney's characters gently satirize. Fanny's own diary contains descriptions of rather non-ideal women with whom the authoress came into contact and judged

[47] *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, 22.
[48] *Ibid.*, 46.

accordingly. Politeness, good breeding and an intricate code of manners also play an important role in the creation of female ideals, and the *Academy of Compliments* helps show just how formal and demanding this code could be. It seems to have required genteel society to walk a fine line between politeness, and the much- maligned artifice which would likely be required to produce the behaviour outlined in etiquette guidelines like that of the aforementioned *Academy*. Educated intellect, or lack thereof, also seems to play a role in the creation of female ideals and anti-ideals, according to Fanny's diary. Understanding the kinds of traits that make a woman non-ideal is essential to understanding how female ideals were shaped.

III: Households and Accomplishments

Ideals and cautionary examples prescribed for genteel ladies were frequently invoked in regard to female accomplishments, such as singing, dancing, painting, needlework, etc., and the orderly, efficient running of a household. Through both also runs that now familiar thread of moderation, balance, scrutiny and censure so prominent in shaping ideals and the ways they were expressed in both these female arenas. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* contains a very useful, rather satirical discussion of the ideal accomplished lady between Elizabeth Bennet, the vivacious heroine, Mr. Darcy, the seemingly proud and judgemental eventual love interest, his best friend Charles Bingley, and Caroline Bingley, Charles's spiteful and conceited sister. They are speaking of Darcy's sister Georgiana, when Miss Bingley praises her piano-forte playing, exclaiming, "Such a countenance, such manners, and so extremely accomplished for her age!"[49] Charles Bingley expresses his amazement at how accomplished young ladies have

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[49] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Thomas Egerton Press, 1813), 26.

become, and how they could possibly have the patience for such accomplishment, for they all paint, net purses and so forth – in fact, he "never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished."[50] Both Darcy and Caroline Bingley, however, feel such praise hardly merited. Darcy argues, rather, that

> Your list of the common extent of accomplishments ... has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse, or covering a skreen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished.[51]

While Caroline Bingley agrees with this estimation, Elizabeth Bennet wonders aloud at how extensive the requirements must thus be for such accomplishment. Miss Bingley acquiesces grandly with a most descriptive roster of requirements for accomplishment:

> No one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.[52]

To this, Darcy adds that an accomplished woman must also improve "her mind by extensive reading," while Miss Bennett retorts that she is "no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women," and "rather wonder[s] now at your knowing any."[53] When questioned as to why she has so little faith in her own sex, she maintains, "I never saw such a woman, I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united."[54] Miss Bennett seems to make the point that such high

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[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*, 26/27.
[52] *Ibid.*, 27.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*

expectations for extreme accomplishment are unnatural, and highly unlikely to be found anywhere in society. These expectations would also likely require an inordinate amount of time and effort to fulfill. The lady who spent all this time and effort on her own accomplishments, for the purpose of showing those off to others so they would deem her such, would not be ideal – she could be accused of vanity and excessive pride, and of singling herself out for attention, something which in this society obsessed by codes, morals, and moderation would likely be deemed offensive.

One "Mrs. Hester Chapone" offers instructions on accomplishments and muses upon the purpose of cultivating talents, which plays directly on this idea of accomplishments serving to improve women – but not for their own vanity, and not for the purpose of singling them out or showing off. She instead suggests instead that cultivating accomplishments serves to improve the self unselfishly for God and for society and emphasises that this is a *duty,* not simply a pleasurable recreation:

> I would not have my dear child neglect to pursue those graces and acquirements, which may set her virtue in the most advantageous light, adorn her manners, and enlarge her understanding: and this, not in the spirit of vanity, but in the innocent and laudable view of rendering herself more useful, and pleasing to her fellow-creatures, and consequently more acceptable to God ... such arts and accomplishments ... will make you so desirable a companion, that the neglect of them may reasonably be deemed a neglect of duty, since it is undoubtedly our duty to cultivate the powers entrusted to us, and to render ourselves as perfect as we can.[55]

She goes on to give advice about which accomplishments are most suitable to a young lady to develop as well as how best to go about such development. Dance, French, handwriting and simple arithmetic are skills which Mrs. Chapone finds indispensible,

[55] Mrs. Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind*, 159-160.

whether for improvement of the body or mind, or for the aid of household tasks, and polite, educated conversation.[56] She also muses upon music and drawing, which she suggests are more suited to private enjoyment, since few could cultivate enough talent to truly please anyone other than their obliging families, but which she still lauds as appropriate and laudable ways to fill leisure time as well as important for a personal and social enjoyment of the arts in general: "the taste must be improved before it can be susceptible of an exquisite relish."[57] There is also an emphasis on moderation running throughout all her advice, which shows in her approval of accomplished pursuits within a reasonable limit, and so long as they do not become all-consuming or ill-used in an immodest or inappropriate way or, perhaps even worse, they could lead to vanity, luxury and dissipation.[58] The idea seems to be that all pursuits must be kept in check, for fear of such results, and that no woman is fully exempt from this worry – she must constantly regulate and guard herself against these possibilities, and adjust her behaviour and cultivation of talents accordingly.

The Reverend John Bennett, in his four-part *Strictures on Education*, muses on the abilities of women in the area of talent and accomplishments. In fact, he positively waxes eloquent upon the subject, rather in the manner of Charles Bingley:

> Women ... have a more brilliant fancy, a quicker apprehension, and a more exquisite taste. When they apply these faculties to their proper studies, how wonderfully do they charm and how poignantly do they delight! In works, that require the efforts of Imagination only, how animated and descriptive is a

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[56] *Ibid.*, 172.
[57] *Ibid.*, 173.
[58] *Ibid.*, 174.

> woman's pen! What pictures does she exhibit! How soft are the tints, how glowing are the colours, and how impassioned the touches of her pencil![59]

Bennett thus argues that these are the proper and fitting pursuits of women, whose dispositions and essential characteristics are suited to the accomplishments of arts rather than any *serious* pursuit of thinking. The ideals of sweetness, elegance, softness and female creativity come into play here – the aforementioned James Bland suggests that because (ideally), females are bountifully endowed with traits such as these, their proper pursuits range on the side of the accomplishment arts rather than sciences, politics, or more philosophical literature. This is a direct example of the ways in which female ideals and activities influence each other and help frame how each is viewed.

One of the major roles a gentlewoman would be expected to play sometime in her life was that of the prudent, effective housekeeper. Single women studied advice on this important topic, preparing themselves for the foreseeable future, while married women were expected to devote a large amount of time and attention to running their households and managing their families and staff. Amanda Vickery has written a chapter on genteel housekeeping, advice literature and the expectations surrounding the role of women as household managers. She suggests that "the writers of advice literature groomed genteel women for the exercise of power," and that they tutored women on many aspects of housekeeping, including economy and the careful management of servants, often a rather demanding task in itself.[60] Lady S. Pennington in her *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters*, asserts that

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[59] Rev. John Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education: Chiefly as it Relates to the Culture of the Heart, in Four Essays* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas, 1795), 141/142.
[60] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 127

> 'tis certainly not beneath the Dignity of any Lady, however high her rank, to know how to educate her children, to govern her servants, to order an elegant Table with Oeconomy, and to manage her whole family with Prudence, Regularity and method.[61]

The *Complete Letter Writer or Polite English Secretary* goes even further, suggesting that a woman house manager is the ideal, preferable even to her husband, who causes "discord and confusion" when he meddles in housekeeping. A good wife, however, keeps everything running smoothly:

> When a woman of tolerable good sense is allowed to direct her house without controul, all Things go well; she prevents even her husband's wishes, the servants know their business and the whole family live easy and happy.[62]

These sources both suggest that household management was one of the most important callings of a married genteel lady, and that women were the ideal housekeepers. The second also invokes the necessity of at least a "tolerable" level of intelligence for effective management. They also show the ways in which genteel women were groomed to control the affairs of a family at home and wield the power that this brought with it. Amanda Vickery also, however, makes the point that this was not by any means an unlimited or guaranteed power, and that there were both limitations and expectations put upon this role. Etiquette also played a large role in shaping the way a woman ran her household, including her staff. Indeed, "good mistresses ... were to exhibit that general courtesy and good breeding which generated universal respect and affection. On this depended the credit and happiness of a family."[63] Vickery argues that prudence and

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[61] Lady S. Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* (London, 1765), 27: Quoted in Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 127.
[62] *The Complete Writer or Polite English Secretary* (London, 10th Ed., 1765), 164-5: Quoted in Amanda Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter,* 127.
[63] Amanda Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 128.

economy played a significant role in the marriage market, and were also important in shaping the criteria for the 'perfect wife', and suggests that "a clear appreciation of female management skills is apparent in a host of masculine manuscripts."[64] Although the role of housekeeper brought much credit and praise to a wife when carried out well, one of its biggest limitations comes in the fact that

> its most skilful exponents self-consciously expunged any impression of laborious attention. As Hester Chapone put it, 'the best sign of a home being well governed is that nobody's attention is called to the little affairs of it.' By the mistress's sleight of hand 'all goes on so well of course that one is not led to make remarks upon anything, nor to observe any extraordinary effort that produces the general result of ease and elegance that prevails throughout.'"[65]

In other words, the mark of a good housekeeper was that one would never notice her handiwork, except in the form of a comfortable, efficient home. Or, as the famed Athenian politician Pericles said, "A woman's greatest glory is to be little talked about by men, whether for good or ill." Here is another paradox – although the role of house manager could generate much respect, praise and admiration, a woman should neither seek out praise or credit, nor go to any lengths to show off her efforts. It also seems that such women were expected to put a large amount of their time and attention to effectively running their homes and families, yet should not allow themselves to be too distracted by their duties so as to remain interesting company. Betty Fothergill illustrates this point in her 1769 journal, complaining of women who talked incessantly of their household work, making it "'their constant theme in all companies who are unfortunate to fall in their way,'" unfavourably contrasting with an acquaintance who was "'a remarkable good

[64] *Ibid.*, 129.
[65] *Ibid.*, 131; H. Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed To A Lady* (1773; 1835), 92: Quotes in Amanda Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 131.

manager of her family,'" but "'does not make that parade with it others do whose whole knowledge is centred in domestic concerns.'"[66] This again accords with the concept of not drawing undue attention to one's talents, skills, or accomplishments, including housekeeping; as with the ideal woman, the ideal mistress used intelligence, talent and good breeding without setting herself apart unnecessarily, or engaging in any behaviour outside the acceptable norms of moderation and balance. The concept of balance can be seen at work in the aforementioned paradox of devoting oneself to the running of a household, yet not seeming to occupy one's whole mindset, attention and conversation around it. From what Amanda Vickery writes, it also seems that genteel women themselves played a large role in evaluating and regulating each other as homemakers – praising one another for subtly putting a great deal of effort into a relaxed and elegant home, but mocking or deriding others when that effort becomes too obvious.

One of the mainstays of the household mistress was the pocket memorandum book. This is at least partly suggested by the sheer number of these journals that were published throughout the late eighteenth century. There are many different versions of the pocket memorandum, which was a women's housekeeping diary published annually, containing various information important to a mistress's household tasks as well as blank pages for recording all of the daily doings and important figures, including purchases, inventory and to-do lists. One particular 'brand' of pocket diary, the *Ladies Own Memorandum-Book, or Pocket Journal* was published every year between 1780 and 1800, and is an interesting source for investigating what was ideally involved in the role

[66] Betty Fothergill, 1769; quoted in Amanda Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 131.

of household manager, and what was considered appropriate and vital information for any genteel mistress.

Although the format of this particular memorandum changes slightly in fifteen years of publication, various elements remain fairly consistent. These include a cover piece of ladies in the fashionable dress of the preceding year, a page dedicated to fashionable head-dresses, also of the preceding year, an introductory address with themes and thoughts that varied annually, "rules for finding the moveable Feasts and Holidays," the birthdays and ages of the royal family, useful market and stock information, popular songs and country dances for the new year, various riddles and other brain-teaser type exercises and, of course, plenty of space for a "perpetual diary."[67] Some years have additional sections dealing with the current events of the day; for instance, chapters six, seven and eight of the pocket journal of 1780 contain, respectively, "Remarkable foreign and domestic Occurrences in 1779," a "Journal of the American War," and "an exact Table of the Window Tax."[68] The amount of sections seems to decrease towards the end of the 1790s, with sections such as tables of significant roads and a "Table of precedency among Ladies" missing from later installments.[69] All of these sections indicate what should be deemed important to a genteel lady's life, and the variety of subjects suggests that she certainly required a fair amount of well-roundedness and knowledge in a number of different areas.

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[67] "A Lady," *Ladies Own Memorandum-Book, or Pocket Journal* (London: G. Robinson, 1780, 1785, 1796), 3.
[68] *Ladies Own Memorandum-Book* 1780, 3.
[69] *Ibid* 1780, 1785, 1796.

Overall, these pocket memoranda are somewhat akin to the ladies magazines of today, containing, among other things, useful trivia, notable calendar days, financial information, homemaking tips, fashion advice, entertainment news, and intellectual stimulation. Such magazines today can also be a powerful indicator of what is expected of women and subjects in which they should be interested and knowledgeable about, as well as how they are expected to present themselves. Judging by the information presented in the pocket memorandums, genteel mistresses of the household should not only be up to date with some of the current fashions but they should also have enough knowledge of the market, finances and stocks to run these aspects of the home, including securing provisions and furnishings, budgeting, clothing the family, acquiring finery and hosting events. They should also be informed on current events, knowledgeable of important days and birthdays, up to date on fashionable entertainment, including song and dance, and keeping their intellects sharp with literature and brain exercises. Perhaps most of all, they should find a way to delicately balance all of these things with at least a polite level of social interaction and, of course, efficiently and effectively running their household, all without letting anyone know just how much effort they might have put into appearing exactly, moderately, normally so.

IV: Conclusion

In Georgian England, a variety of different ideals existed about genteel women and the activities they undertook throughout their lives. The ways in which these ideals were formulated, and how they were expressed, can be found in a variety of contemporary media, including literary sources such as those by Fanny Burney and Jane Austen, prescriptive advice literature, diaries and journals, letters, ladies handbooks, and moral

and intellectually improving literature such as that published by Dr. Hugh Blair, W. L. Brown and Hester Chapone. The literary heroine Cecilia possesses the full range of ideal female qualities, including sweetness, a touch of naivety, affability, generosity, benevolence, amiability, virtue, chastity, charity, mercy, justice, and a special sensibility. Sensibility is an interesting characteristic to investigate, both as an idealized attribute in itself and as an example of the importance of moderation and balance, and of avoiding extremes and artifice, the latter of which could in fact be promoted by cultivating sensibility. G.J. Barker-Benfield illustrates how idealized sensibility was used by gentlewomen, particularly for negotiating their role within society, and for demanding more privileges, including better access to education for women. She also demonstrates that sensibility, if handled without caution or allowed to flourish unbridled by reason, could create unflattering stereotypes of women as possessing "false, merely fashionable sensibility" or "sofa-lying, excessive sensibility," as well as uncomplimentary perceptions of their strength of will and intellect.

This essay has demonstrated some of the ways in which Georgian society was preoccupied with avoiding extremes, the appearance of singularity, or unbalanced behaviour, as well as drawing undue attention to oneself with what was classified as vanity and prideful manners. The complex, intricate and highly important etiquette codes of the period are significant to understanding female ideals and how behaviour was viewed, for politeness was a vital part of ideal conduct which in most cases had to be learned, rather than inherited. Philip Carter's *Man and the Emergence of Polite Society* demonstrates the paradox between the ubiquity of advice literature on politeness and the requirements for an easy, unstudied manner of conduct, as well as a growing distaste for

excesses such as overly ceremonious conduct, which could render one a tiresome companion. Literary and other sources such as diaries also help illustrate what were considered non-ideal characteristics, and decidedly improper behaviour. Some of these are what could be considered extremes, such as the 'voluble' and the 'supercilious' young ladies of Burney's *Cecilia*, as well as traits Fanny herself observes within her own social circles, such as ill-breeding, stupidity, dullness, frivolity and idle, incessant conversation.

Two very important arenas in which ideal genteel behaviour could be measured were accomplishments and household management. Within these areas existed an interplay between femininity and action, and any limitations or regulations placed on either were directly connected to established female norms, or ideals. Young ladies were expected to cultivate their talents according to the traits which their sex was ideally blessed, including creativity of imagination, a lively spirit, ornamental qualities, sweetness, softness and elegance – traits which purportedly lent themselves to the arts, dance, French, writing and basic arithmetic. They were not, however, encouraged to pursue areas that fell outside of the range of their natural endowments, including the more complicated sciences and maths, unnecessary studying of the 'learned languages,' philosophical or extensively intellectual literature and so forth. They were also discouraged from spending too much time at any particular accomplishment, particularly the more leisurely such as music and drawing, or for cultivating them for the purpose of showing off or self-gratification, for fear of slipping into vanity, luxury and dissipation. Therefore, clearly the thread of moderation, balance and avoidance of extremes shaped the way women could express their qualities through their ladylike accomplishments. Household management also keenly reflects these ideals: wives were encouraged to

devote great amounts of their time and effort to running and maintaining their households, yet the results they were to strive for should reflect ease, comfort and smooth, untroubled efficiency without any obvious signs of excessive attention or effort. Wives who maintained their homes in this way were praised and respected, but those who showed the fruits of their labour off too blatantly, or who talked incessantly of the care involved in their tasks were mocked and derided as vulgar and tiresome. Such women offer a decided contrast to the moderate, affable, polite, complaisant, merciful, benevolent, idealized Georgian gentlewoman brimming with wit, intellect, sincerity, sense and sensibility.

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