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Hannah Greig

In January 1765, Yorkshire landowner Godfrey Bosville was staying in London for business and pleasure. With money, time, and inclination enough to participate in the capital's social world, Bosville made regular sojourns from his Yorkshire home, Gunthwaite Hall, to London to sample all manner of urban pleasures: sipping coffee in the coffeehouses, sauntering in the pleasure gardens, dancing at masquerades, and appraising actors and singers on the stage.[1] A prosperous squire enjoying the metropolis, Bosville appears typical of the untitled yet urbane gentlemen who reputedly characterized the century's newly polite and commercial society and its expansive middling sorts. He was an enthusiastic participant in public leisure, capitalizing on the commercialization of high culture that famously distinguished the eighteenth-century town. Yet, despite the diversity of new entertainments available, Bosville was left dissatisfied with his social adventures. As he bemoaned to his rural neighbor, John Spencer of Cannon Hall near Barnsley: "We go here to Public places but though we do it is but a public life in appearance, for everybodys conversation is in a manner confined within the compass of a few particular acquaintance. The Nobility hold themselves uncontaminated with the Commons. You seldom see a Lord and private Gentleman together. . . . An American that saw a Regiment of Footmen drawn up might think the officers and soldiers mighty sociable. Just so is the company [here], all together and all distinct."[2]

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[1] Evidence of repeated visits to London by Godfrey Bosville and his in-laws the Wentworths can be found in Papers of Bosville-MacDonald Family of Gunthwaite, in Hull University Library Archives (hereafter Hull), Thorpe and Skye Collection, DDBM/32/7–9.

[2] Letter from Godfrey Bosville, London, to John Spencer at Cannon Hall, 28 January 1765, Hull, DDBM/32/9.

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Bosville's disgruntled complaint about the limitations of his sociable interactions is arresting. The urban sociability he embraced has long been a focus of historical scholarship. The late seventeenth-century explosion of commercial leisure venues, particularly in England, but also witnessed elsewhere in Europe, has been widely emphasized as a key marker and motor of cultural change.[3] Promoting high culture and art to all for the price of a ticket, these novel venues are said to have represented a move away from court patronage and elitist principles and toward profit-making entrepreneurship and public access. As well as forging a cultural meritocracy by bringing high culture to a paying crowd, commercial venues such as assembly rooms, pleasure gardens, and even art exhibitions are presumed to have facilitated sociable mixing. High society and more of society are said to have "mingled" in the newly inclusive arena of public leisure.

Much has been written about the ideology of public sociability and the proliferation of places in which a broadly based polite society, rather than narrowly aristocratic elite, could meet. Yet, despite the emphasis placed on contemporary ideals of interaction, comparatively little attention has been paid to the practicalities of these sociable moments or the logistics of how such meetings might have happened.[4] For Bosville, the opportunities for meaningful social exchanges appear limited and public sociability generated a psychological experience of separation, not a straightforward sensation of pleasurable participation. The eighteenth century's characteristic urban public life was, in Bosville's words, merely "a public life in appearance." Preserving its "uncontaminated" hierarchy, public sociability functioned like a centrifuge that separated society into its constituent components.[5]

This article is less concerned with Bosville's specific experience than with the model he offers of a sociable society that was at the same time "all together" and "all distinct." In particular, my focus here is on the relationship between the experience of exclusivity and the appearance of inclusivity, and of the ways in which social exclusivity was performed and practiced within ostensibly "open" (inclusive) public arenas. The public was not an abstract concept for those who attended commercial leisure venues. "Public places" were sites of social encounters, where acquaintances were met, connections were made or shunned, social identities were performed, and, in consequence, where status hierarchies were potentially expressed and underlined. With a view to developing a more nuanced analysis of the processes and limitations of public sociability, the following discussion scrutinizes the actions and interactions of one status group within one type of eigh-

[3] Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1991); John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2000). For European comparisons, see James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001); and T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2003). On colonial America, see David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

[4] A number of historians have recently drawn attention to this imbalance between practice and ideology. See, e.g., Benjamin Heller, "The 'Mene Peuple' and the Polite Spectator: The Individual in the Crowd at Eighteenth-Century London Fairs," *Past and Present* 208, no. 1 (August 2010): 132. See also Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Verneys, 1660–1720* (Oxford, 1999); and Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, ca. 1754–1790* (Oxford, 2005), esp. 75–106.

[5] Letter from Godfrey Bosville, London, to John Spencer at Cannon Hall, 28 January 1765, Hull, DDBM/32/9.

teenth-century commercial leisure venue: the titled elite in the London pleasure garden.[6] In making this pairing, it purposefully focuses on those whose claims to social distinction are presumed to have been most compromised by the development of public leisure at the venues widely cited as the least segregated and most socially mixed of all the commercial resorts. Notably, the principal concern of historiographical inquiry to date has centered on addressing the implications of a new commercial culture for an emergent middling market. As a result, the question of what happened to the titled elite in the same urban maelstrom has been subject to less sustained analysis. How did the landed lord and his lady respond to this new social landscape and to opportunities for broader social interaction? The reactions of those confidently at the top of the social ladder surely offer a suggestive yardstick by which to measure the public world's interactive potential.

Tracking the practices of sociability of one social group in one environment in this way, this article follows the recent wave of revisionist literature that calls for the development of more historicized and focused analyses of sociability.[7] Revisionist studies have been emerging from other disciplines for some time, particularly with reference to eighteenth-century theatrical culture. Questioning social historians' preoccupation with a "bourgeois public," musicologists and theater historians emphasize the preponderance of aristocratic patronage and the existence of marked social divides within an eighteenth-century audience.[8] Of course, it is arguable that social restrictions are far less surprising in the context of concerts and the theater, given the widespread use of subscription systems and the distribution of auditorium seats and boxes. This article, however, examines the significant patterns of social (and status-orientated) divisions identifiable in other public leisure venues—specifically, within the grounds of the pleasure garden, where, in theory, the outdoor arena and fluidity of the promenade encouraged vibrant and mobile social interaction.

The following discussion is divided into four parts. First, by way of context, it briefly revisits the familiar historiographical discourse on commercial leisure and the attendant analytical emphasis on "mixing" and "mingling" as a preeminent explanation for the processes of public sociability. It then traces the particular application of sociable intermixing to the history of London pleasure gardens (most notably Vauxhall and Ranelagh), which have been singled out as archetypal mixed environ-

[6] Here "titled" is used to describe members of the peerage (from dukes to barons), their wives and children, including daughters and younger sons (who may not necessarily carry a hereditary title of their own). It does not include the lesser gentry such as baronets and knights.

[7] See, esp., Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge, 2007); and Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840* (Cambridge, 2002). For the relationship between ideals of sociability and social practices in the early eighteenth century, see Ingrid Tague, *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690–1760* (London, 2002), 162–93. For the theoretical traditions underpinning historians' analysis of public sociability, see Brian Cowan, "Public Spaces, Knowledge and Sociability," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford, 2012). I am grateful to Cowan for sharing this paper with me.

[8] Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge, 1993), 11–27. Also see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780–1880* (Lebanon, NH, 2007), 118. See also Blanning on concert culture in Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 161–81.

ments. The remainder of the article develops a detailed case study of elite attendance at Vauxhall and Ranelagh, initially considering the ways in which the titled elite were invoked by contemporary commentators as something distinctive from the rest of those present and then examining the experiences of the gardens' titled clientele, drawn from first-person manuscript accounts. Focusing on the 1740s to the early 1800s (the period when both Vauxhall and Ranelagh were operating), this study argues that the opportunities for the types of sociable interactions on which history has placed so much weight were far more constrained in practice than in theory. Notwithstanding their reputation for "openness," hierarchies were carefully maintained and promoted in the associational environment of the pleasure garden. Parading only with their equals, repeating visits week after week, using particular parts of the garden at particular times of day, the titled elite used the gardens in distinctive ways. A detailed study of elite social practices reveals less of a social melee and more of a master class in defended exclusivity and the stringent policing of social divisions.

"MIXED" SOCIABILITY AS A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL MODEL

Attempts to locate critical moments and innovative modes of social interaction are long-established academic projects. Of course, one of the most widely cited, and also most widely criticized, models of early modern sociability is that outlined by Jürgen Habermas. Famously, for Habermas, a change in sociability was one element in the fundamental structural transformation of the public sphere. In his now very familiar account, the "authentic bourgeois public sphere" was an ideal in which private individuals "came together to form a new public." It operated independently of state control, separately from the "inauthentic public sphere" of the court, and ultimately, if briefly, produced rational-critical discussion. Habermas singled out exemplary institutions that facilitated the formation of this public culture: the coffeehouses in England, the salons in France, and the *tischgesellschaften* (table societies) in Germany.[9] It was, however, more the sociable activities engendered by these associations and the principles on which they were founded, rather than the sites per se, that were elevated in the Habermasian model. In essence, their systems and ideals depended upon and stimulated freer social exchanges. Access to these social spaces and to the idealized public sphere was not determined by hereditary rank but by alternative, more cultural assessments of

[9] These essential elements of Habermas's model are widely referenced across early modern political, social, and intellectual histories. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 28–35. Appraisals and reappraisals of Habermas followed swiftly after the publication of his work in translation. See Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Conal Condren, "Public, Private and the Idea of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 1 (2009): 15–28; and James Alan Downie, "Public and Private: the Myth of the Bourgeois Public Sphere, " in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cynthia Wall (Oxford, 2004), 58–79.

social position. New types of company were brought together in new places and to new ends.[10]

Extensive interest in the types of sociability that concerned Habermas—namely, sociability that functioned on newly inclusive terms and brought otherwise divergent social groups face to face—is echoed in broader historical scholarship. It did not require the 1989 English translation of *Structural Transformation* for historians to isolate the urban coffeehouse culture of early modern England as a nursery for social contact and a potential agent of sociopolitical change. Related patterns of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century social transformation have been tackled in a massive interdisciplinary literature examining the repercussions of rapid urbanization, the attendant growth of commercial leisure venues, the development of a vibrant associational culture that spawned all manner of clubs and societies, and the pronounced ideological shift that praised sociability, politeness, and pleasure. Certainly, many historians analyzing eighteenth-century British urban culture contest elements of Habermas's framework and resist direct comparisons to his public sphere model or at least refute particular details.[11] Nonetheless, generally speaking, most current histories purposefully draw attention to eighteenth-century gregariousness and the associational opportunities engendered within expanding towns. In John Brewer's influential account of eighteenth-century culture, for example, the commercialization of the arts is revealed to have generated a more broadly based group of cultural consumers—a "cultivated public of sociable men"—whose status was defined by personal qualities and cultural knowledge, not by hereditary title and aristocratic lineage.[12] It is now widely accepted that the predominant discourse of politeness provided ideological support for the emerging forms of sociable interaction. If properly enacted, politeness smoothed the social encounters of strangers, acting as a salve that reduced rigid differentiations of rank to allow all who interacted to present themselves as equally polite and genteel. From this perspective, gentility was increasingly understood by contemporaries as a quality that could be cultivated rather than a characteristic that was genetically inscribed.[13]

Furthermore, it is widely asserted that, in tandem with such ideological shifts, the

[10] Habermas's emphasis on newly egalitarian associations is highlighted in Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*, 7; Downie, "Public and Private," 62; and John Brewer, "This, That and the Other: Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Shifting the Boundaries: The Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter, 1995), 1–21.

[11] Key criticisms rapidly focused on gender and whether or not women were incorporated in Habermas's public. See, e.g., Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1988). For subsequent and recent reappraisals, see Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31, no. 1 (February 1992): 1–20; and Brian Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England," *History Workshop Journal* 51 (2001): 127–57. Historical studies that argue for the ongoing significance of the Habermasian model include Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680–1780* (London, 1998), esp. chap. 3, "The Street"; van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public*; and Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre.*

[12] Brewer, *Pleasures*, xvii–xviii.

[13] Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (December 2002): 869–98, and *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

growth of commercial leisure venues stimulated critical sociological changes by bringing different social groups into closer contact to forge a sociable "public." As Peter Borsay concludes in his landmark study of the urban renaissance, commercial leisure "provided attractive contexts in which the traditional elite and growing middling ranks could freely mix."[14] The phenomenon of more inclusive sociable interaction is routinely reiterated. Roy Porter, for example, noted that "opening events to all who could pay produced a very mixed company. Foreigners were astonished to find the petty bourgeois rubbing shoulders with peers at the ridotto or regatta."[15] Reflecting on the rise of urban assemblies, Paul Langford explains that "behind the barriers erected by subscription all aspiring to gentility were expected to mix freely, without the crippling respect for rank and hierarchy."[16] Borsay also highlights assemblies as exemplars of this social culture, arguing that "the activities of assemblies—cards, dancing, conversation—were less important than the forum which they created for social and sexual mixing."[17] Similarly, in her influential study of the commercial masquerade culture, Terry Castle draws attention to social hybridity, concluding that the masquerade "did in fact 'promiscuously' mingle the classes, bringing together men and women from all social ranks."[18]

To a considerable extent there is a clear consensus. It is agreed that, by virtue of their ticketed access, commercial venues were accessible to a public that was not defined solely by inherited rank. Moreover, there is general acceptance that this new social landscape was partnered by emergent social mores that stressed the necessity of sociable exchange and free interactions within a modern, civilized, and polite society. "Mixing" appears to have been ideologically and sociologically elevated in the eighteenth-century town. However, as betrayed by the verbs and analogies we depend upon—mixing, mingling, and, occasionally, "rubbing shoulders"—our understanding of the encounters that took place in commercial venues is only loosely defined and vaguely suggested. Reliance on such murky constructions leaves key elements of the eighteenth-century social experience unresolved and lacking critical examination. The oft-deployed concepts of mingling and mixing are particularly vulnerable to divergent interpretation. On the one hand, it might be presumed that mingling suggests a common experience, a coming together of different groups to create a new body and/or the circumstances of meaningful exchange. On the other hand, it might more simply imply a momentary co-presence of different types of people, a short-term encounter during which the original separateness of those involved was either retained or easily restored once the moment of mingling has passed. One suggests a cohesive experience and permanent alteration, whereas the other involves a less substantive encounter with little meaningful exchange. These different inflections are not merely matters of pedantic linguistic definition: our conception of how people were potentially brought together lies at the heart of analyses of eighteenth-century leisure venues.

To a certain extent this historiographical irresolution is purposeful. For some historians the interactive sociability privileged in the eighteenth-century town is

[14] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 277–79.

[15] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1990), 232.

[16] Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1992), 102.

[17] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 278.

[18] Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Palo Alto, CA, 1986), 28.

best understood as an ideal rather than a reality.[19] It is the potential of commercial public venues to facilitate new sociable interactions and their rhetorical reputation for openness, not the specific practices they facilitated, that has preoccupied a significant proportion of the scholarship to date. Nonetheless, the use of such flexible terminology has left the interpretation of social mixing susceptible to varied applications. Peter Borsay, for example, flags numerous incidences of "positive segregation" within urban leisure sites that imposed limits on social inclusion. At both Bath and Tunbridge Wells, Borsay finds that separate parades were constructed for different social cohorts, with a lower promenade reserved for the "common sort of people" and an upper promenade constructed to receive the "better sort." This, he suggests, was a way of subdividing and segregating the public, to defend "the polite" from incursions by the "the vulgar."[20] For Lawrence Klein, however, the existence of distinct walks does not necessarily detract from their role in creating a shared social experience. In his reading, although different urban parties strolled along different *allées*, what is more important is the fact that all constituents were participating in similar forms of social display in similar locations. This common experience—even if pursued on separate walks—exerted a "coordinating effect" that granted all promenaders a sense of belonging to a wider public.[21] More generally, and most markedly in subsequent applications of this influential literature, there has been a tendency to place far greater emphasis on the ideals a more broadly based public appeared to share than on the circumstances that may have subdivided that social world.[22] But how similar do experiences need to be in order to be regarded as common or cohesive? And, at what point, if ever, can "the public" be judged a single unit?

Ascertaining how contemporaries interpreted their social encounters offers one route to a more robust analysis that would help qualify these rather elastic characterizations. Godfrey Bosville certainly found the metropolitan public riddled with distinctions. The inability, he noted, for the "private gentleman" to appear in company with the "noble lord" brings into sharp relief the status-orientated nature of the divisions experienced within ostensibly shared arenas. Although he successfully gained entrance to public venues, it was the processes of sociability that happened therein that frustrated Bosville's interactions. Without such personalized

[19] Steven Pincus, "The State and Civil Society in Early Modern England: Capitalism, Causation and Habermas's Bourgeois Public Sphere," in *The Politics of the Public Sphere*, ed. Steven Pincus and Peter Lake (Manchester, 2007), 215. Condren makes the same point, warning that "taking space as its syndedoche rather than as contingent condition can create confusion"; see Condren, "Public, Private and the Idea of the Public Sphere," 16. In the context of this discussion, Cowan offers a distinction between the normative and the practical public sphere as one way to negotiate the distinctions between physical space and abstract ideals; see Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere?" 133–34.

[20] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 293.

[21] Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Object, Image and Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London, 1995), 362–82.

[22] Examples of recent recitations of the mixing model, which tend toward a more uncritical application in different disciplinary contexts, include Ben Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789–1837* (London, 2007), 58; and, with particular reference to pleasure garden mixing, Guiliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London, 2002), 196; and Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg, PA, 2005), 205.

experiences, we depend on a model of a broadly inclusive social scene but lack insight into what that might mean for participants. With this problem in view, the pleasure garden case study developed in the remainder of this article has two aims. First, it illustrates how the historiographical model of "mixed" sociability has been specifically and, arguably, uncritically applied to the history of the pleasure garden. Second, it endeavors to demonstrate how a close analysis of the social practices that happened within the gardens helps to clarify our perception of what it meant to mix or mingle at such sites. In so doing, its intention is to refocus attention on the role that the recognition of social distinction continued to play in public venues and public sociability. Of course, a model of a divided public and a model of a mixed public are not necessarily incompatible. On the contrary, they might be said to be closely linked. Eighteenth-century metropolitan elite identity was largely constructed on a public stage, and, as will be seen, the performance and appraisal of social difference demanded the presence of a wider community of spectators. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to nuance rather than countermand our conception of leisure venues. Nonetheless, it argues that a greater sensitivity to contemporary expressions of exclusivity reveals the experiences of eighteenth-century sociability in a different light, illustrating how this public world was at the same time "all together" and "all distinct."

"MIXING" IN THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Of all the commercial venues that burgeoned in eighteenth-century London, none were reputedly more "public" and conducive to social "mixing" than the pleasure garden. Open to anyone for an affordably priced ticket, the enclosed and landscaped grounds of the most sophisticated pleasure gardens boasted promenades, sculptures, water features, illuminations, and painted transparencies and offered multisensual al fresco entertainments that could be enjoyed on apparently equal terms by all visitors. Multiple pleasure gardens and tea gardens of various sizes opened in and around London before 1800, but the most famous were Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and it is these two venues that are considered here.[23]

Vauxhall Gardens set the trend that many others followed. Located in Kennington on the south bank of the Thames, there is ample evidence that public gardens had existed on the site since the 1660s (and most likely earlier) when it was a comparatively seedy park frequented by Samuel Pepys.[24] However, it is the redesign and reopening of the gardens in the late 1720s, by the ambitious entre-

[23] For Vauxhall, see David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (London, 2011). For the London gardens in general, see Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens* (London, 1896); and James Stevens Curl, *Spas, Wells and Pleasure Gardens of London* (London, 2010). For English pleasure gardens more broadly, see Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 170. European cities boasted similar commercial grounds and, tellingly, in Paris and Bath, many were named Vauxhall or Ranelagh in homage to London's famous trendsetters. For the Paris example, see Jonathan Conlin, "Vauxhall on the Boulevard: Pleasure Gardens in Paris and London, 1764–1784," *Urban History* 35, no. 1 (May 2008): 24–47.

[24] Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 20–23.

preneur Jonathan Tyers, that marks the turning point historians scrutinize.[25] Carefully laid walks embellished with curiosities transformed the gardens into a space of theatrical illusion. Musicians were accommodated nightly in a central bandstand, a statue of Handel was erected in the heart of the garden, and the supper boxes showcased work by the period's most illustrious artists. A fantasy world, an exhibition space, and a site for music, the garden was a shrine to the arts. Vauxhall's subsequent and best-known competitor, Ranelagh, shared many of the same features, although as the mimic rather than the trendsetter it has been subject to less sustained historiographical attention.[26] Situated in Chelsea on the north side of the Thames, Ranelagh Gardens opened in 1742 and battled for a market share of pleasure seekers. Although it replicated certain of Vauxhall's attractions, such as tree-lined promenades and live music, a majestic Romanesque rotunda dominated the gardens and was promoted as the principal innovation distinguishing the new resort from its established rival.

In his interdisciplinary study of eighteenth-century commercial art, David Solkin applies a Habermasian definition of the bourgeois public sphere to the history of Vauxhall.[27] In Solkin's reading, the role of Vauxhall in showcasing high art, combined with the wide circulation of visual images of Vauxhall beyond the gardens, demonstrates how "the elegant pleasures enabled by commercial wealth" were successfully "legitimized."[28] In this regard, Tyers's reinvention of Vauxhall, from a bawdy resort to a location of respectable pleasure, exemplifies the complicated emergence of a new public sphere. Rather than being castigated as a disreputable participant in popular leisure, the visitor to the pleasure garden was successfully reimagined as a polite spectator engaged in cultural edification. Although not quite the republic of letters that was Habermas's main concern, the pleasure gardens are essentially presented by Solkin as part of a republic of taste—one defined by commercial and public principles as opposed to aristocratic and private prejudices.

[25] Early studies include James Granville Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens: A Chapter in Social History* (New York, 1941); and Walter Sidney Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661–1859* (London, 1955). More recent studies include T. J. Edelstein, ed., *Vauxhall Gardens* (New Haven, CT, 1983); David Solkin, "Vauxhall Gardens or the Politics of Pleasure," in *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1993); Ogborn, "The Pleasure Garden," in *Spaces of Modernity*; Peter de Bolla, "Vauxhall Gardens: The Visibility of Visuality," in *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape and Architecture* (Palo Alto, CA, 2003); Jonathan Conlin, "Vauxhall Revisited: The Afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 4 (October 2006): 718–43; Penelope Corfield, *Vauxhall and the Invention of the Urban Pleasure Garden* (London, 2008); and, the most substantial work on Vauxhall to date, Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*. New work in progress on Vauxhall Gardens was showcased at the 2008 Tate Britain conference "Vauxhall Revisited: Pleasure Gardens and Their Publics, 1660–1880," convened by Jonathan Conlin. For a review of the conference, see William Weber, "Vauxhall Revisited: Pleasure Gardens and Their Publics, 1660–1880, Tate Britain, London, 14–16 July 2008," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 1 (2009): 151–53. A selection of papers from the conference will be published in Jonathan Conlin, ed., *Grounds for Pleasure: Pleasure Gardens in England and the United States, 1660–1914* (Philadelphia, forthcoming).

[26] Ranelagh is dealt with in Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*; and also in John Timbs, *Clubs and Club Life in London* (London, 1899). One of the few volumes to focus exclusively on Ranelagh is Mollie Sands, *Invitation to Ranelagh, 1742–1803* (London, 1946).

[27] Solkin, "Vauxhall Gardens or the Politics of Pleasure." Solkin's direct linkage to the concept of a public sphere has not gone without criticism. See, e.g., Susan Gallagher's review of Solkin's *Painting for Money*, titled "Portraying the Public," *Oxford Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (1994): 96–98.

[28] Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 106.

As well as contributing to the emergence of a rationalizing "public sphere" of culture, the pleasure gardens are categorized as public by virtue of the way in which they were accessed and the social behavior they encouraged. Tickets, not title, bought entrance to both gardens. At a shilling a go (comparable to cheap seats in the theater), Vauxhall was theoretically accessible to those of modest means; indeed, its relative affordability ensured that it would be cast by historians as the more socially mixed resort. Ranelagh's higher entry fee, at around two shillings, is seen as commensurate with its claims to being the more genteel resort, catering to a slightly more affluent (but nonetheless still varied) public.[29] The basic fact of the gardens' outdoor settings is also cited as confirmation that these were venues where stifling codes of social stratification and decorum did not apply. Gridlike walks and surprising curiosities encouraged perambulation and chance encounters and seemed to command visitors to become part of a mobile, throbbing crowd. Cultural historians have thus emphasized the gardens' significance as stages for role-play and social inversion.[30] Vauxhall's opening was marked by a boisterous masquerade, Ranelagh hosted masked events as part of its regular series of entertainments, and fancy-dressed guests were routinely depicted in engravings of both sites. The gardens' dependence on illusion also went further, for deception and artifice were at the heart of many of their entertainments. Innovative mechanical trickery at Vauxhall (including simultaneously triggered lighting, trompe l'oeil paintings at the end of the walks, and artificial birdsong) was designed to blur the line between reality and art. As Miles Ogborn has argued, these illusory schemes generated not only new pleasures but also unique tensions. In the changeable world of the pleasure garden, the personages present were unknowable and complicit in a world of falsified appearances.[31] Here, if anywhere, it was believed that the prostitute could present herself as a peeress and the rake as a respectable man. Playing on the gardens' notoriety for mixed society, it was at Vauxhall that novelist Fanny Burney situated one of the many scrapes endured by her socially naive heroine, Evelina. Lured to the "dark walks" by the crass Miss Branghtons, Evelina is first mistaken for a prostitute and then, once rescued by the flamboyant Sir Clement Willoughby (one of a party of drunken rakes terrorizing the walks), subjected to his inappropriate and impassioned courting. In *Evelina* (1778), Vauxhall was therefore portrayed as licentious and host to a disorientating social muddle.[32]

Contemporary satirists made much of the reputed diversity of the pleasure garden crowd. A poem, *A Trip to Vauxhall* (1737), describes the melee as follows:

[29] Wroth, for example, asserts that "although Ranelagh fairly maintained its position as a fashionable resort . . . at all periods the company was a good deal mixed." See Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, 206.

[30] Castle's study remains the principal cultural history of the masquerade: Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*; see 6, 21, and 98 for references to masquerades at Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Both Ogborn and Solkin apply Castle's work to their detailed studies of Vauxhall, exploring the pleasure garden's culture of masquerade. See Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, 128–33; and Solkin, *Painting for Money*, esp. 135–39.

[31] Ogborn, "The Pleasure Garden," 116–55.

[32] Fanny Burney, *Evelina: Or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, letter 15 (Oxford, 1982), 193–206.

The motley Croud we next with Care survey,
The young, the Old, the Splenetic and Gay
The fop emasculate, the rugged Brave,
All jumbled here, as in the common Grave.
Here sat a Group of 'Prentices and there
The awkward [*sic*] Daughters of a late Lord Mayor.[33]

The cast featured in *Ranelagh House: A Satire* (1747) was similarly assorted, extending from a debt-ridden nobleman to a highwayman, by way of a bluff sea captain, a smart-suited tailor, a haughty lawyer, a prostitute, and a pickpocket.[34] Commentators retained the allusion to social diversity into the 1800s. "There are few places in which so exact and complete an epitome of English society is to be met as here," noted one article on Vauxhall from 1824. "All the various ranks of life from the noble to the tradesman, may be observed mingled," it declared.[35]

Citing precisely this type of material with its ready assertions of social variety, historians have characterized the pleasure garden in comparable terms. "Eighteenth-century London," David Solkin writes, "offered very few other places [than Vauxhall] where the different classes could mix more freely at such close quarters."[36] These were the sites, Paul Langford notes, "not merely of high society but of pickpockets, rakes and whores."[37] "The mingling of classes at Vauxhall," suggested Dorothy Marshall in her earlier study of Georgian London, "was characteristic of London as a whole."[38] T. J. Edelstein declares that Vauxhall "attracted the entire range of English society . . . its politicians, householders, aristocrats, literati, musicians, labourers, artists, merchants, prostitutes and thieves"; and in James van Horn Melton's account, continental pleasure gardens as well as London's gardens formed centers for a "heterogeneous public" where "people of all ranks congregated."[39] Penelope Corfield cautions against taking such claims for interaction too far: "Vauxhall neither sought nor managed to subvert class differences in any permanent ways," she notes, but she suggests instead that the pleasure garden's historical significance lies in the fact that it nonetheless offered a "temporary common ground, with a shared conviviality" for the "princes and aristocrats, tradesmen, shopkeepers and lowly 'gin-drinking bunters.'"[40] A "common ground" for all ranks is also how Pierre Dubois describes London's pleasure gardens in one of the most recent overviews of the field. "The English eighteenth-century pleasure gardens," he concludes, "were a locus of rep-

[33] *A Trip to Vauxhall or a General Satyr on the Times by Hercules MacSturdy of the County of Tiperary* (London, 1737). See also Solkin's discussion of this poem in *Painting for Money*, 121–24.

[34] Anon. [attributed to Joseph Warton], *Ranelagh House: A Satire in Prose in the Manner of Monsieur Le Sage* (London, 1747).

[35] Anonymous cutting from July 1824, "Vauxhall Scrapbook," Bodleian Library, Oxford, G A Surrey, c. 21. Both Jonathan Conlin and Pierre Dubois cite this article to illustrate the gardens' potential for facilitating "mingling." See Conlin, "Vauxhall Revisited," 722; and Pierre Dubois, "Resorts of Ambiguity: The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens, a Bewitching Assemblage of Provocatives," *Revue française de civilisation britannique* 14, no. 2 (June 2007): 66.

[36] Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 123.

[37] Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 101.

[38] Dorothy Marshall, *Dr Johnson's London* (London, 1968), 161.

[39] T. J. Edelstein, "Vauxhall Gardens," in *18th Century Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History*, ed. Boris Ford, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 1992), 5:203; Van Horn Melton, *Rise of the Public*, 169.

[40] Corfield, *Vauxhall*, 15.

resentations where a new compact between the social classes was articulated and projected in terms of a loosely defined ideal of harmony."[41] It is quickly evident, then, how a largely uncontested picture of social diversity and "mixing" underpins historians' interpretations of the pleasure garden. The details, however, remain sketchy. Were all visitors equally adept at embracing the gardens' "shared conviviality" or its reputed "ideal of harmony"? Were some social groups more or less likely to socialize outside their rank than others? Were such social freedoms more accessible to men rather than to women, to the rich rather than to the poor, or to the young rather than to the old? Generally speaking, our broad-brush historiographical characterizations have relied on published contemporary rhetoric, which vividly illuminates the principles of pleasure garden sociability but is less forthcoming on its actual practice. In consequence, we know comparatively little about how individuals experienced these shared spaces and the potential limitations imposed on their interactions.

This neglect is partly a consequence of the availability of appropriate sources. With the exception of the occasional verbose travel writer, it can be difficult to isolate substantial first-person accounts relating to a specific venue. In this regard, though, the records of titled visitors to the gardens plug a notable gap. Retrieving the firsthand reflections of the eighteenth-century nobility is no challenge in itself, given that their personal papers survive in well-documented abundance. Within their voluminous private letters and diaries, however, specific details of social activities are typically brief, functional, and easily missed. George, second earl Spencer's hasty reminder that he was "now to the concert in Hanover Square"— added midway through a letter to his mother in 1785—is characteristically succinct.[42] "To the opera in box," was the duchess of Grafton's preferred turn of phrase for her twice-weekly forays to the King's Theatre in the 1780s.[43] The Honorable Frederick Robinson's mention of a visit to Ranelagh in 1778 as "at Ranelagh last night with Lord Pelham and Tom it was very full" verges on the effusive for its reference of place, company, and atmosphere.[44]

This material poses particular methodological challenges. Traces of social calendars have to be chiseled out and broad trends extrapolated from fractured references scattered throughout an individual's lifetime of letters. Yet the value of such reports lies precisely in their brevity. They are characteristically concise because, for the titled elite, excursions to public venues were unremarkably routine. Whereas a tourist might transcribe lengthy accounts of excursions to gardens, theaters, and exhibitions, filling page after page of a travel journal purchased specifically for the purpose, the regular visitor did not. Certainly, if examined in isolation, the quotidian reports jotted down by the elite would bear little fruit.

[41] Dubois "Resorts of Ambiguity," 52–66.

[42] Letter from George John Spencer, second earl Spencer to his mother, Margaret, dowager countess Spencer, April 1785, British Library (BL), Althorp Papers, Add. MSS 75581 f. 12.

[43] Diaries of Elizabeth, duchess of Grafton, second wife of Augustus Henry, third duke of Grafton, covering period 1787–812, Suffolk Record Office (Bury St. Edmunds Branch), Grafton Papers, HA 513/4/121–130. See, e.g., HA 513/4/122, diary for 1789, entries every Tuesday and Saturday in March 1789.

[44] Letter from the Hon. Frederick (Fritz) Robinson, Whitehall, to his brother Thomas Robinson, second baron Grantham, ambassador to Madrid, 4 May 1778, Bedfordshire Record Office, Wrest Park (Lucas) Papers (hereafter BRO, WPP), L30/14/333/91.

But collectively they form a much richer resource. In this case, twenty collections of personal papers form the main body of material cited here. These consist largely of unpublished sets of letters, supplemented by a small number of unpublished diaries and published sets of correspondence.[45]

These accounts demonstrate that London's social spaces resonated with a new significance in the lives of the nobility. After the Glorious Revolution, the development of an unprecedented political timetable and a blossoming social scene ensured that an annual march to the metropolis became the norm for the elite. The change was so pronounced that a new phrase was coined from the 1690s to capture the shift. Contemporary commentators designated this vibrant metropolitan elite the "beau monde"—the high-profile, fashionable cadre resident in London for the season.[46] The presence of noble grandees within the pleasure gardens' public is implied in the majority of contemporary rhetorical reflections and in the majority of historiographical accounts. The fact that the gardens embraced a full social range, from aristocrats to apprentices and prostitutes, is presumed to be one of their greatest fascinations. However, the manner in which the titled were incorporated, and the repercussions of that inclusion, have gone largely unexplored. Closer interrogation of the ways in which the elite visitor was identified in contemporary representations creates something of a paradox. At the same time as being presented as sites of unprecedented social mobility, the gardens were also construed as a place to behold the spectacle of glamorous elite exclusivity. Critically, such a construction rested on a widely held conviction that the elite were identifiable and different from the rest of the social muddle. Before establishing what the elite thought of the pleasure gardens and their mixed company, it is therefore necessary to briefly consider how their attendance was regarded and presented in wider contemporary reflections.

LOCATING THE ELITE IN THE PLEASURE GARDEN'S CROWD

Throughout the century, and contemporaneous with satirical jibes about their promiscuous diversity, the gardens were zealously promoted as venues to encounter the elite. From the outset, Vauxhall was patronized by Frederick, Prince of Wales, and, through him, associated with the opposition political elite. For over a decade, newspapers logged the prince's attendance. "Their Royal Highnesses the Prince

[45] By "collection" I refer to extensive sets of personal papers attributed to a prominent aristocratic individual or, more often, the collected papers of multiple members of an aristocratic family. I consider, for example, the Wrest Park Papers of the Grey family at Bedfordshire Record Office or the Chatham Papers at The National Archives as single collections, but they encompass many hundreds of letters and include the personal records of numerous family members.

[46] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "beau monde" as "fashionable world" and cites its common usage between 1714 and 1823. Largely obsolete by the mid-1800s, it was a peculiarly eighteenth-century designation for London elite culture. The earliest use I have found is Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), 406, who noted that the death of Katherine Philips was "to the regret of all the beau monde in general." Also predating the *OED*'s suggested first use, in 1705 Lord Raby, later earl of Strafford, referred to the beau monde when describing the London society based abroad: *The Wentworth Papers, 1705–1739: Selected from the private and family correspondence of Thomas Wentworth, Lord Raby (later Earl of Strafford)*, ed. J. J. Cartwright, 2 vols. (London, 1883), 2:137. Here I use "beau monde" to refer to culture and society of the titled elite when in London for the season.

and Princess of Wales, with their Royal Highness the Duke, were last Saturday at the Spring Garden Vauxhall," trumpeted the *Daily Post* on 21 June 1742.[47] On 23 May 1743, it was announced, "Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by several Persons of Distinction, [were] last Saturday evening at the Spring Gardens Vauxhall."[48] Almost a year to the day the royals were there again: "On Saturday evening last, their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales came from their seat at Epsom to the Spring Gardens, Vauxhall."[49] Once Ranelagh opened in the 1740s, the prince's allegiance to Vauxhall wavered, and he went to both. "On Monday night their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales were at the Spring Gardens, Vauxhall," reported the *Westminster Journal or New Weekly Miscellany* on 31 August 1745, and "last Tuesday Night their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales were at Ranelagh Gardens."[50]

Alongside royal patrons, both Vauxhall and Ranelagh were advertised as the rendezvous for the beau monde. Newspapers routinely judged the seasonal success of the gardens on the basis of elite attendance. In the 1750s commentators noted with relish that Vauxhall was still "mostly frequented by the Nobility and Gentry."[51] At Ranelagh, titled patrons orchestrated special events in the 1780s (such as the gala held by Boodle's club in 1789 to celebrate George III's return to good health). When these were then reported in the press, it was only elite attendance that the journalists mapped. Leading figures were listed by name: William Pitt, Lady Duncannon, the duke and duchess of Devonshire, and Lady Haggerston were all seen supping in 1780s Ranelagh.[52] Vauxhall, too, retained a lengthy association with titled individuals who were registered in the press. For example, a "Grand Rural Festival" at Vauxhall was advertised in 1805 as being patronized by the Prince of Wales, the marchioness of Hertford, "and many other high and very distinguished personages."[53] In early June 1810, the *Morning Post* enthused about the brilliance of a Vauxhall night: "The fine evening of Friday last . . . attracted a very numerous assemblage, a great proportion of whom were of the first rank and fashion." Again, the presence of specific figures was reported: "Among the company we observed . . . the Duchesses of Richmond, Dorset, and Rutland; Dukes of Norfolk, Rutland, and Grafton; Marquis Cornwallis; Ladies Palmerston, Aberdeen, Carrington, Barrington, Paget, Castlereagh, and Marsham; Lords Whitworth, Palmerston, C. Somerset, Aberdeen, Forbes, Seymour, Portalington, and Barrymore; Sir T. Turton and a great many Members of Parliament . . . and several other Ladies and Gentlemen of distinction."[54]

The widespread reporting of elite attendance is widely acknowledged in existing

[47] *Daily Post*, London, 21 June 1742.

[48] *Daily Advertiser*, 23 May 1743.

[49] *Daily Post*, 21 May 1744.

[50] *Westminster Journal or New Weekley Miscellany*, 31 August 1745. In the same report, it is noted that Their Royal Highnesses also attended the lesser-known Cuper's Gardens.

[51] Press cuttings, 1732–1823, dated 1759 [unknown publication], Vauxhall Gardens Archive (VGA), fiche 36. The VGA microfilm collection comprises the Vauxhall collection held by Lambeth Palace Archive and covers the period 1660–1859.

[52] Ibid; and also "Collection of images and adverts relating to Ranelagh," BL, 74/LR 282.b.7.

[53] Press cuttings, 1732–1823, and unknown newspaper clipping, 1805, VGA, fiche 2.

[54] *Morning Post*, 10 June 1810.

analyses of the pleasure gardens, but it is most often classified as a promotional strategy to advertise the gardens as respectable sites of entertainment.[55] Rarely considered in much detail beyond this, such newspaper lists are presumed to be best approached as puffs rather than as accurate accounts of attendance.[56] Undoubtedly, it would be difficult to ascertain the veracity of the reports, and they must have functioned in some promotional capacity, but they can also be read as portraying the elite as an identifiable set. By singling out and naming elite individuals in this way, the newspapers presented them as an alluring spectacle, a newsworthy troupe prominent amid an otherwise nondescript public.

Significantly, an explicit linkage between elite company and the gardens (and an implicit suggestion that the elite were somehow knowable and identifiable) was not unique to press coverage. The chance to catch a glimpse of the glitterati was demonstrably a major draw for other cohorts of the pleasure gardens' clientele. When gentlewoman Dorothy Richardson left her Midlands home to see the sights of the capital in 1775, her hectic itinerary included Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Her subsequent descriptions reveal that, for Richardson, their pleasures depended almost entirely on the quality of those who frequented them. Although Vauxhall offered a more varied aesthetic experience, she was disappointed by the class of visitor she found on the night of her visit. The gardens themselves were "certainly pretty," she conceded, but the company was "too numerous and too blackguard" to be attractive. "Curiosity tempted me once to Vauxhall," Richardson acknowledged, "but I shall scarce venture there again." "The Gardens must formerly have made a fine appearance," she mused, "when they were the resort of the People of Fashion."[57] In contrast, she found Ranelagh more appealing. The company delighted her. Both "numerous" and "brilliant" were the other guests, Richardson noted in her journal with glee.[58] Not only did Richardson hope to share the gardens with a genteel crowd, she also expected the "brilliant" company to be visible— a discrete company who would, and should, be seen.

Such a preoccupation with witnessing company is not in itself remarkable. The contemporary adage famously declared the function of public sociability was largely "to see and be seen," and a cultural preoccupation with social visibility has been widely noted. Peter de Bolla suggests that Vauxhall was a major locus of an emergent "public visual culture" that encouraged visitors to reflect on the process of looking and seeing.[59] As a resort of artifice and visual trickery, Vauxhall, he argues, encouraged self-reflexive viewing—visitors were stimulated to reflect on their own act of looking while looking about them in the gardens. These self-reflections were encouraged not only by the multiplicity of images on show at the gardens (vistas, paintings, illuminations, sculptures, etc.) but also because the audience became aware that much of the material environment they were viewing was fabricated

[55] Castle makes a similar point with regard to the commercial masquerade, suggesting that the emphasis on elite company was a marketing strategy. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 27.

[56] Gillian Russell has recently offered an alternative reading of these puffs, suggesting that they might be approached as an attempt to commercialize the systems of patronage associated with elite sociability. Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*, 11 and 17–37.

[57] Travel journals of Dorothy Richardson, III, diary of visit to London, 1775, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, GB 133 Eng. MSS 1124. See journal entry for 14 July 1775.

[58] Ibid., entry for 17 July 1775.

[59] Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, 102.

and unnatural. Not least, the presence of other people added a further layer to the sociovisual experience engendered at Vauxhall. Visitors to the garden became aware of themselves as spectators and at the same time became aware of themselves as the objects of other people's spectatorship.[60]

Extrapolating from de Bolla's account, one reading of this contemporary viewing culture might be that, in being so drawn together, the pleasure garden's public participated equally in a shared spectatorial realm. In this way, the gardens' complex visual culture can, theoretically, be yoked to the general historiographical conviction that the gardens offered a "common ground" for a broad public. This is indeed how de Bolla's account has been utilized and referenced in some subsequent studies (although it should be noted that such an explicit linkage is not foregrounded to the same extent by de Bolla himself).[61] Equally, however, it is arguable that this culture of viewing encouraged the appraisal of social difference and that it was the perception of social distance that made the presence of certain types of company alluring.[62] Although all visitors might have participated in the pleasure garden's visual culture, the elite were, in essence, seen differently. As a one-off visitor to the gardens, Dorothy Richardson anticipated and desired the spectacle of elite company alongside the gardens' other spectacles of art and artifice. Within the newspapers, rather than simply puffing the respectability of the company, the very act of reporting the presence of named elite individuals involved the process of recognizing and thereby distinguishing them while also helping to publicize that distinction. As *The Times* noted in 1809, in commendation of ongoing elite patronage of public venues, "the crowds of beauty and fashion which still continue to embellish London afford a brilliant *coup d'oeil* at all our varied public spectacles."[63] As an embellishment, the elite participated in the gardens' displays but in a way that also required them to be separate from the rest of the company present.

Notably, it is precisely this process of distinction within the crowd that Thomas Rowlandson delineates in his famous sketch of Vauxhall (fig. 1). Highlighted in the center foreground are two elegantly dressed women engaged in their own conversation and surrounded by a cluster of staring spectators. The women, it is widely agreed, are portrait sketches of the duchess of Devonshire and her sister, Lady Duncannon. Among their oglers, it has been suggested that Rowlandson depicts Edward Topham, proprietor of the *World* (shown quizzing the women through a glass pressed to his eye), William Jackson of the *Morning Post* (peering out from behind a tree), and, beside him, James Perry, editor of the *Morning Chronicle* (in highland dress).[64] In this image then—which is surely the century's

[60] Ibid., 72–103.

[61] Gregory Nosan, "Pavilions, Power and Patriotism: Garden Architecture at Vauxhall," in *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art , 1550–1850*, ed. Michael Conan (Washington, DC, 2002). For additional and different applications of de Bolla, see Conlin, "Vauxhall Revisited," 719; and Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*, 104–5.

[62] This is also suggested by Simon McVeigh, who notes, with reference to Vauxhall, that "one of the main objects of visiting the gardens was in fact to relish social distinctions." See McVeigh, *Concert Life*, 43.

[63] Press cutting (anon.), 1809, VGA, fiche 36.

[64] These attributions (taken from contemporary references) are widely cited but also, more recently, disputed. These particular attributions are given in John Riely, *Rowlandson's Drawings from the Paul Mellon Collection* (New Haven, CT, 1978), 5. Diana Donald has questioned the likenesses and argues that they might be better regarded as "types" rather than portraits. See Diana Donald, *The Age of*

Figure 1—"Vauxhall Gardens: Mme Weischel Singing," by Thomas Rowlandson, ca. 1785, aquatint print, 483 mm × 746 mm, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

best-known visual representation of Vauxhall's "mixed" crowd—the distinctiveness of the fashionable elite company and the role of the press and public in promoting that distinction are explicitly realized.

But how did the elite respond to and experience these public conditions? The remainder of this article explores the potential visibility and exclusivity of titled company in the gardens in more detail. Moving away from rhetorical and printed representations, it uses first-person accounts written by elite visitors to capture the social experience of pleasure garden attendance as recorded by the elite. Analyzing such manuscript material is not without its limitations. Nonetheless, these accounts can be found to corroborate the separateness of elite company implied by the printed reports published in contemporary newspapers. Close reading of elite-authored personal reflections demonstrates how their social practices rendered elite company distinctive.

ELITE SOCIABILITY AND PUBLIC EXCLUSIVITY

Surviving manuscript accounts vividly demonstrate that visits to the pleasure garden were fully incorporated in the routine social schedules of the elite. For example, on 11 June 1765, Elizabeth Herbert, countess of Pembroke, totted up her planned excursions in a letter to Lady Susan Stewart. In self-mocking acknowledgement of her comparative restraint, on Saturday, she declared, "I went *only* to the Opera."

Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III (London, 1996), 137. David Coke and Alan Borg have recently reaffirmed the attributions in Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall*, 238.

Expanding on the schedule that awaited her, the countess explained she was to "meet the Bedfords at Vauxhall on Wednesday. . . . On Friday I think it would be best to go to Ranelagh and walk in the gardens . . . and perhaps to Vauxhall on Saturday after the Opera."[65] Ranelagh once, Vauxhall twice, the pleasure gardens scored highly in the countess's seven-day regime. Such repeated visits were the norm. Jemima, marchioness Grey, favored Ranelagh over Vauxhall in the early 1740s, but her schedule involved similarly sequential attendance at the resort: "I have been twice to Ranelagh, once to the opera & last night to the play wince I came to town, which is pretty well for a fortnight."[66] The pattern was repeated a generation later by her daughter who "came to Town on Monday, the Pantheon on Tuesday, Ranelagh on Wednesday and Almacks till past two [on Thursday]."[67] Over seven days in May 1752 the marquess of Carnarvon ventured to a commercial leisure venue on five occasions: once to the theater, once to Vauxhall, and no less than three times to Ranelagh.[68] In 1756, his father, Henry Brydges, second duke of Chandos, went to Ranelagh twice a week in May.[69] Later in the century, future prime minister William Pitt went regularly to both gardens. When, in 1781, a busy political week and long debates in the Commons meant he missed a trip to Vauxhall, he nonetheless managed to squeeze in a visit to Ranelagh.[70] In the 1790s the Honorable Maria Josepha Holroyd never missed a visit to the gardens on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout May, sandwiching Ranelagh excursions between two trips to the opera, two assemblies, two balls, and two concerts a week.[71] All visits to the gardens were restricted to the closing months of the London season and clustered in May and June. The gardens routinely opened in late April or early May, when parliamentary business and the other metropolitan calls on elite time were beginning to wind down. Compared to the theater or opera then, which ran from late autumn until the start of the summer, the pleasure gardens were only a small component of a broader round of elite public sociability. Nevertheless, for the last two months of their London stays the elite flocked to the gardens again and again, week after week, season after season.

The calendar of repeated visits and ritualized attendance evident in such accounts is significant. Not least, this pattern had financial implications. Vauxhall's cheap entry has been much celebrated in existing histories: for only a shilling anyone could enter. Two shillings bought a single visit to Ranelagh. No doubt a single visit was comparatively affordable, but what proportion of the pleasure gardens' public could stretch to a twice or even a thrice weekly visit? How many of the

[65] Letter from Elizabeth Herbert, countess of Pembroke, Whitehall, to Lady Susan Stewart, 11 June [1765], The National Archives (hereafter TNA), PRO 30/29/4/1, f. 12.

[66] From Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey, to Lady Gregory, 21 June 1740, BRO, WPP, L30/9a/1/106.

[67] Mary Grey to Amabel Polwarth, 20 May 177, BRO, WPP, L30/11/123/214.

[68] Memorandum book of marquess of Carnarvon, BL, Add. MSS 70964; see entries for 22–29 May 1752.

[69] Private Diary of Henry Brydges, second duke of Chandos, Huntington Library, Stowe Papers, ST 108 v.2.

[70] Letter from William Pitt, London, to his mother, Lady Chatham, 13 June 1781, TNA, PRO/30/8/12, f. 227.

[71] See, e.g., letter from Maria Josepha Holroyd, baroness Stanley of Alderley, Portland Place, to Ann First, 14 May 1794, reprinted in *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Lady Stanley of Alderley, recorded in the letters of a hundred years ago from 1776 to 1796*, ed. Jane Henrietta Adeane (London, 1896), 281.

crowd were provincial visitors on a single visit or metropolitan visitors on a regular jaunt? Elite levels of attendance imply the widespread use of subscription tickets. In 1741, subscriptions to Vauxhall cost twenty-five shillings, a substantial fee that narrowed the market.[72] Furthermore, the marquess of Carnarvon for one routinely spent between five and eight shillings per night at Ranelagh, and he spent that twice a week in May 1752.[73] His monthly spend of over three pounds required deep pockets. Of course, the potential purchasing power of the middling sorts and extraordinary wealth of the century's nouveaux riches ensures that this expense was not insurmountable. The titled elite, though, dropped those sums for repeated visits in the short term. By mid-June most had fled the capital for their country seats. In this regard, the changing nature of the pleasure gardens' public also needs to be considered. Far from static, it seems probable that the gardens' visitor profile changed markedly over the course of the summer. The titled elite frequented the gardens in May and June and, occasionally, in early July. By the end of July they were gone. Who then moved in to the grounds and comprised the late summer public? It was not the beau monde.

Beyond the base rate figure of entrance fees, little more is known about the economics of Vauxhall or Ranelagh or the standard expenditure of those who went there. Despite the lower ticket price, Vauxhall's famously overpriced refreshments may have quickly racked up the bill for the unwary, and further layers of financial division may well have operated within the grounds distancing, for example, those who supped from those who did not. In general terms, elite records confirm the supposition that Ranelagh asserted itself as the more genteel resort, revealing a proportionately higher rate of attendance by the elite at Ranelagh than at Vauxhall. Importantly, however, both gardens were retained within the majority of elite social routines (and few other gardens were visited).

The accounts of pleasure garden attendance written by the elite reveal some other striking patterns. Unsurprisingly, given the regularity with which they attended, the artistic and material novelties showcased at the gardens received barely any mention. Dramatic illuminations and installations generated little excitement for the routine visitor. Instead, social company alone predominates in elite accounts. The popular characterization of the pleasure garden as a site for elite society was shared by the elite themselves. It was expressly "good" company that the elite sought and recorded. In the 1760s, the Duchess of Sutherland, for example, delighted in the "very genteel company" at Ranelagh, citing Lady Cardiff among those she encountered.[74] "I think I never saw so much great company tighter," mused Lady Mary Coke in 1767, "I make use of that expression instead of good, for great and good are not always the same [but] there was ten Duchesses, Countesses in plenty and I believe I may say hundreds of nobility."[75] "Good and not too much company" was what Frederick Robinson was relieved to find in 1779.[76] No medley or jumble of sorts was feared by the elite visitor. Tellingly, so predictable

[72] A fee of twenty-five shillings was advertised in *Daily Post*, 14 April 1741.

[73] Memorandum book of the Marquess of Carnarvon (1752), BL, Add. MSS 70964.

[74] Letter from Lady Sutherland to Lady Elgin, London, 17 September [no date], National Library of Scotland, Sutherland Papers Dep. 313/716, f. 58.

[75] Diary entry for May 1767, in *Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke*, ed. David Douglas, 4 vols. (London, 1886), 2:6.

[76] Frederick Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 20 April 1779, BRO, WPP, L30/14/333/199.

was the crowd encountered that, in 1784, Lady Louisa Stuart met precisely the same titled troupe in the gardens as had been entertained at a private assembly at Bolton House some hours before.[77]

In a similar vein to the newspaper reports, elite commentators registered their companions and the privileged company by name. In 1765 Elizabeth, countess of Pembroke, and her sister had set out to Vauxhall specifically to meet the duke and duchess of Bedford.[78] Lady Mary Coke was variously accompanied to the gardens by Mrs. Pitt, Mrs. Howe, and Lady Jane Scott, and they met Lady Litchfield, Lady Dalkeith, Lord March, and other named nobles in the grounds. Among the "sprinkling of good company" that Lady Amabel Grey enjoyed at Ranelagh in the 1770s were Lady Buckley and Lady Carlisle, Lady Beauchamp, and Lord and Lady Pelham, and the Honorable Frederick Robinson (Amabel's future brother-in-law) also promenaded with the Pelhams at Ranelagh.[79] Similarly well acquainted with the titled crowd, Lady Harriot Pitt, sister of politician William, ventured to Vauxhall with Lady St. John and to Ranelagh with Lady Monson and Lord and Lady Clarendon.[80]

Rather than heading to the gardens to gaze upon a confusing mob, it was the precise configuration of clusters of titled personnel present at the gardens (and, indeed, a desire to showcase those connections to a wider audience) that emerges as the principal preoccupation of the elite. Parades of acquaintance were noted and read as strategic displays of alliance and association. When Lady Mary Coke was spotted visiting Vauxhall regularly in the company of Miss Pelham and Charles Townshend in 1758, their public parades fueled speculation about the possibility of a future marriage.[81] Finding company of similar rank was so vital that visits were cancelled if it was thought elite companions might not be found. A late sitting of Parliament, for example, kept titled men from their social engagements and ensured attendance at the gardens would be thin. In June 1781, Lady Harriot Pitt found "a good Ranelagh" on a night when the Commons was up, but in May 1783, a late sitting at the house made her decide "it will not be any means worthwhile to attend Ranelagh."[82] Parties to Vauxhall were similarly disturbed: "I cannot say ye Vauxhall party was as propitious . . . for ye House of Commons set late," she reported dejectedly that same year.[83]

At those times when public attendance at the gardens peaked and the congested

[77] Letter from Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, countess of Portarlington, 24 June 1784, in *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio: Containing some correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and her sister Caroline, Countess of Portalington*, ed. Alice Clark, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1895), 1:254.

[78] Letter from Elizabeth Herbert, countess of Pembroke, Whitehall, to Lady Susan Stewart, 11 June [1765], TNA, PRO 30/29/4/1, f. 12. See also letter from same to same, May 23 [1763], Wilton House, PRO 30/29/4/1. f. 5.

[79] Letter from Lady Mary Grey to Amabel, Countess Polwarth, 28 June 1777, BRO, WPP, L30/11/123/56; Letter from Frederick Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 19 May 1778, BRO, WPP, L30/14/333/96.

[80] Letters from Lady Harriot Pitt to her mother Hester, Lady Chatham 1 June 1781 and 13 June 1781, reprinted in *The Letters of Lady Harriot Eliot, 1766–1786*, ed. Cuthbert Headlam (Edinburgh, 1914), 59 and 61.

[81] Henry Seymour Conway to Horace Walpole, 1 August 1758, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1974), 37:557.

[82] Letters from Lady Harriot Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, written on 1 June 1781 and 6 May 1783, reprinted in Headlam, *Letters of Lady Harriot Eliot*, 59.

[83] Ibid., 61.

walks threatened to prevent opportunities to meet with eminent acquaintances, elite visitors strategically delayed their excursions until the throng had dispersed. Different types of company were reputedly found at the gardens on different days and at different times. Vauxhall on Sundays, noted one late eighteenth-century commentator, was "more a bear garden than a rational place of resort" when "it was then crowded from four to six with gentry, girls of the town, apprentices and shop boys [and] crowds of citizens could be seen trudging home with their wives and children." Weekdays, in contrast, were more select with "many of the nobility—particularly the Duchess of Devonshire etc" supping in the grounds.[84] Eschewing both citizens and the mob, the duchess picked her days to venture to the gardens. Notably, Ranelagh offered a selection of entertainments at varying prices, including ridottos at one guinea per ticket, masquerades priced between half a guinea to two guineas, and fireworks displays at the more affordable three shillings.[85] The latter, it appeared, were usually avoided by the genteel. "Vulgar and disagreeable" was the damning description of fireworks night at Ranelagh penned by one gentry visitor who had been hoping to find more elegant figures promenading on the walks.[86] Timing was everything. As Frederick Robinson explained of Ranelagh in 1778, "it is not until after twelve [midnight] that it begins to be tolerable."[87] It was standard practice among the elite to attend the pleasure gardens after other entertainments, such as the opera, had finished. Being fashionably late was ever a trusted strategy for flaunting distinction.

Mingling hardly mattered to the titled elite; if anything, it was purposefully avoided. While the grid-like walks and interconnected spaces of the gardens painstakingly detailed in topographical perspectives seem designed to encourage spontaneous encounters, the textual perspectives penned by the elite hint at more carefully choreographed uses of the space, which thwarted the randomizing potential enshrined in the geography. Opportunities for chance encounters appear to have been rare. At Vauxhall, for instance, instead of roaming the grounds at whim, the beau monde more often remained sequestered for lengthy stretches in the supper boxes. When the duchess of Devonshire was spotted at the gardens in the 1790s, it was with a large party, noisily supping and facing the orchestra "french horns playing to them all the time."[88] Oliver Goldsmith riffed on the divisive potential of supper box seating in his satirical, but wryly observant, novel, *The Citizen of the World* (1762): "Mr and Mrs Tibbs would sit in none but a genteel box [at Vauxhall]—a box where they might see and be seen—one, as they expressed it, in the very focus of public view; but such a box was not easy to be obtained for though we were perfectly convinced of our own gentility, and the gentility of our appearance, yet we found it a difficult matter to persuade the keepers of the

[84] Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo with Memoirs of his late father and friends*, 2 vols. (London, 1828), 2:1. Quoted in VGA, fiche 1.

[85] Edwin Beresford Chancellor, *The 18th Century in London: An Account of Its Social Life and Arts* (London, 1920), 103.

[86] M. Gresley at Brighton to Rev. William Gresley, Netherseale, 11 June 1790, Derbyshire Record Office, Gresley of Drakelow Papers, D 803 M/F 64.

[87] Hon. Frederick (Fritz) Robinson, Whitehall, to his brother Thomas Robinson, second baron Grantham, ambassador to Madrid, 22 May 1778, BRO, WPP, L30/14/333/97.

[88] Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo with Memoirs of his late father and friends*, 2:1. Quoted in VGA, fiche 1.

boxes to be of our opinion; they chose to reserve genteel boxes for what they judged more genteel company."[89]

Goldsmith's aspirant Tibbs family found themselves unable to jockey to the center of the "public view," but those boasting titled connections met with more success. Horace Walpole, for example, gives a ready account of supper box showmanship. Heading to Vauxhall in 1757 with Lady Caroline Petersham, a high-profile fashionable hostess, Walpole recorded the wider impact of their exuberance and activity. "The whole air of our party was sufficient . . . to take up the whole attention of the garden," he declared, "so much so, that from eleven o'clock till half an hour after one, we had the whole concourse round our booth."[90] By eleven, of course, all other attractions, like the tin water mill and night time illuminations, would have long gone off, leaving the pranks and posturing of Petersham's set uncontested in their command of public attention.

Walpole's report is perhaps unusual on a number of counts, not least for its length and, though powerful in its exposition, such quotable text can only be cautiously cited as an exemplar of contemporary elite practice.[91] Significantly, Walpole's experience has been widely referenced to illuminate the inclusive nature of the pleasure garden's public and the presence of "Betty the fruit seller" in the Petersham set cited as evidence of the elite's willing engagement with a broad mix.[92] It is important to note, however, that Walpole presents Betty's participation as one of service. She is employed by Lady Caroline Petersham to wait on her party. Furthermore, and particularly significantly, once the party were ready to eat, Petersham made Betty dine at a separate table. "[Lady Caroline Petersham] had brought Betty the fruit girl with hampers of strawberries and cherries from Roger's, and made her wait upon us," wrote Walpole, "and then made her sup by us at a little table."[93] If anything, Betty's participation in the Vauxhall jaunt was an additional dramatization of the group's manifest exclusivity.

The spartan form of other elite accounts furnishes little that is as lively as Wapole's tale, but a handful of brief references shed further light on broader systems of advertised distinction and strategic social separation. At Ranelagh in May 1767, for example, Lady Mary Coke remained an entire evening in seats in the Rotunda, taking the seats previously occupied by Lady Litchfield and Lady Dalkeith ("Lady Litchfield and Lady Dalkeith gave us their places; where we stayed till we came away").[94] Of course, we cannot be sure of Lady Mary Coke's motivation. Inclement weather may have been as much the cause of her incarceration in the rotunda as anything else. But her nonchalant reference to apparent place-keeping, seat-swapping, and the suggested immobility of her visit to the gardens is arguably reminiscent of Lady Caroline Petersham's noisy commandeering of supper boxes at Vauxhall, or of the place holding and management of box seating that was standard practice in the more stratified London theaters.[95]

[89] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World* (London, 1762), 203.

[90] Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 27 May 1757, in Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, 9:207.

[91] It is widely accepted that Walpole is in many ways atypical of his aristocratic generation. See Michael Snodin, *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill* (London, 2009).

[92] For the use of this same Walpole quote as evidence of "mingling," see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 124.

[93] Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 27 May 1757, in Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, 9:207.

[94] Diary entry for May 1767, in Douglas, *Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke*, 2:7.

[95] For box subscriptions and the division of the opera audience, see Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 55–81.

Although the likes of Dorothy Richardson were impressed by the chance to view the beau monde, analogous references to contact with less rarified company are extremely rare in elite records, testifying to their determined social snobbery. A letter written by Lady Sarah Bunbury to Lady Susan O'Brien offers one exceptional acknowledgment of a broader public but in so doing the parameters of social acquaintance and the restrictions on integration are laid bare. In the letter, Lady Sarah Bunbury sets out an unexpected, and unwelcome, encounter with one Mrs. Cary (possibly the wife of John Cary, a city salesman of globes and maps). "I was vastly diverted with my *friendship* with Mrs Cary," Bunbury began, underlining the word "friendship" in her original account to hint at her satirical intent: "You know she dined one day at the pay office. I saw her at Ranelagh one night this year & went up to make her a civil speech and that is *friendship*. As to her fashions, I am sorry to say they are but too true among the common run of people here, for such figures as one sees at public places are not to be described."[96]

Although Mrs. Cary may have misinterpreted her brief encounter with a noble lady at a pleasure garden as a signal of greater acquaintance, for Lady Sarah Bunbury the intercourse was incongruous. Meaningful association with the "common run" was as ridiculous as the city fashions on display. While there was clearly an exchange between the two women (for Bunbury deigned to offer a "civil speech" to Mrs. Cary), Lady Sarah Bunbury mocked the alleged promiscuity of public sociability, which in no way threatened or dissolved the reality of hierarchical distinctions.

Elite records recounting pleasure garden attendance might be frustratingly thin on descriptive detail, leaving few clues as to the gardens' entertainments, but their routine reflections are rich in other ways, evoking a more personalized social experience. Once the elite had entered the grounds, it was the company rather than the culture that the beau monde revered, and specifically the company of those of comparable rank. Both Vauxhall and Ranelagh offered London's lords and ladies a terrain that accommodated an assemblage of equals. Through repeated visits, the use of specific spaces of the gardens at specific times of day, and by effectively flaunting impenetrable circles of acquaintance, the elite commandeered these public sites in a way that reinforced rather than reduced their claims to social separation. These public advertisements of elite togetherness simultaneously confirmed their distinction. For them, engagement with London's commercial leisure did not necessarily encourage much in the way of "mixing" but rather involved the performance of their exclusivity.

"ALL TOGETHER AND ALL DISTINCT": EXCLUSIVITY AND PUBLIC SOCIABILITY

Mapping the social practices the elite deployed at Vauxhall and Ranelagh adds an additional layer to our model of public leisure that moves away from an overriding preoccupation with inclusivity to flag instead the moments and instances of on-

[96] Lady Sarah Bunbury to Lady Susan O'Brien, Barton, 9 January 1766, in *The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox, 1745–1826*, ed. Countess of Ilchester and Lord Stavordale, 2 vols. (London, 1901), 1:176.

going sociable exclusivity. This is not to suggest that the elite exercised full control over the gardens' management or over the experience of others: far from it, although the beau monde made routine use of the gardens, they did not own them. The gardens were run on commercial principles and consequently targeted the many. Moreover, a study of the social practices revealed in manuscript accounts raises no challenge to the significant satirical representation of the gardens as a site of a social muddle and a space where all ranks combined. Yet we should be wary of presuming that the caricatured emphasis on mixing, or the simple fact that different social groups were accommodated within a single public space, necessarily denoted integration. Hierarchies might be as much confirmed as contradicted in shared leisure grounds.

Within existing studies of the London pleasure gardens, Vauxhall has attracted the greatest share of attention, with Ranelagh presumed to be the more genteel venue. As noted earlier, the elite sampled here frequented Ranelagh more often than Vauxhall, and so it might reasonably be asked whether these reflections offer a "Ranelagh model" of sociability, one removed from the more vibrant potential for mixing at Vauxhall. Notably, however, although Ranelagh was the most frequented, the elite attended both sites as a matter of course. Moreover, the form and content of references to pleasure garden sociability do not differ significantly according to the two locations. For both Vauxhall and Ranelagh, the gardens themselves hardly received a mention. Instead, it was company alone that counted, and a company of equals was sought and presumed at the gardens both north and south of the river. It should be noted, though, that despite the multitude of gardens operating in the capital, the elite only habitually attended Vauxhall and Ranelagh, the two market leaders. Precisely who went to Cuper's Gardens, Marylebone Gardens, Mulberry Gardens, Dobney's Gardens, or Bagnigge Wells, or to the gardens attached to London taverns such as The Yorkshire Stingo and Jenny's Whim has yet to be determined.

Questions linger about the robustness of elite claims to distinction and their self-perceived distance from the rest. To what extent were the tactics, timetables, and strategies that are delineated in elite records replicable by those of a different social rank? Were the social practices pursued by the elite admired or admonished by the pleasure gardens' wider public? Although the reflections of the middling market are often cited in historiographical reflections, the intricacies of their social routines have not yet been catalogued in detail or with any precision.[97] Without a more thorough interrogation of non-elite experiences at the gardens, answers to such questions will remain elusive. This study, however, does suggest that the wider middling audience present at the gardens had a crucial part to play in the

[97] The remarkable diaries of gentlewoman Anna Larpent, wife of civil servant John Larpent, have been the principal resource for historians looking for evidence of gentry and middling-sort engagement with commercial leisure. For the use of Larpent's diary in this way, see Brewer, *Pleasures*, chap. 2, esp. 55–60; and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London, 1998), 231–32 and 263–34. Larpent's diaries reveal extensive, although not always consistent, participation in London's leisure venues, but without wider exploration of other non-elite papers it is hard to establish whether Larpent's routine was typical for a woman of her age and rank (and both Vickery and Brewer note her "unusual background"). As the wife of the inspector of plays, it is quite possible that Larpent's social routine was unusual, and as the daughter of Ambassador Sir James Porter, Larpent was perhaps not as far removed from aristocratic London society as her married name might imply.

elite performance of distinction, as spectators, observers and, potentially, as adjudicators of titled prestige. Scrutinizing the personal accounts of the elite can only ever offer a partial view of eighteenth-century London's vibrant social world. The titled minority was wholly unrepresentative of society as a whole. Yet, it is precisely because of their pronouncements of separateness from the broader public that the elite experience of metropolitan leisure venues is compelling.

This study began with Godfrey Bosville's eloquently damning delineation of the metropolitan hierarchy. It would be foolish to rely on his complaint alone, for Bosville's private vexation against his exile might surely be the exception rather than the norm. Perhaps for every aggravated Mr. Bosville scores of middling sorts mingled and made merry in West End leisure grounds, reveling in a fluid and inclusive social scene. Yet the words, codes, and timetables of those ranked higher in the traditional order should also give us pause here. They, too, suggest a comparatively static and subdivided view of the public social world. In this regard, the composite reflections of the social experiences of the titled elite effectively flesh out the hierarchy Bosville railed against and felt unable to breach. In the eyes of the elite, a safe social frontier separated "our acquaintance" of "good company" from the "common run" of the rest. If anything, the close and enclosed quarters of the pleasure garden may have crystallized rather than diminished the perception of social difference. Significantly, however, although the fundamental performance and defense of elite privilege may in many ways appear centuries old, it is important to emphasize that the environment in which those hierarchies were enacted was profoundly new. There is no question that the innovations and commercial objectives of venues like the pleasure gardens made unique demands on the titled elite. The coining of the new label "beau monde" to encapsulate the emergent elite culture suggests that a fundamental reconfiguration of that elite world was under way. This was a new metropolitan order played out in "public" that involved both the participation of additional social groups and the additional infrastructure of press reports and contemporary visual and textual commentary. The sheer regularity of elite attendance at Vauxhall and Ranelagh tells its own story, testifying to the critical importance of those spaces to titled sociability and to their sociocultural and (by extension, potentially their political) power and identity.

The metropolitan social tactics of the nobility have been comparatively understudied and underweighted within a literature that focuses instead on the middling and below. Yet referring too readily to a broadly inclusive public audience at social venues such as the pleasure garden, and stressing their facilitation of something vaguely referenced as "mingling," risks obscuring the potential complexities of that social experience. Revisiting London's renowned venues from the perspective of the socially privileged suggests some subtle qualifications to our longstanding presumptions. Although mixed company of different social groups may have shared a space, elite accounts demonstrate that this by no means ensured a comparable experience. Social spaces could be trafficked in distinctive ways by distinctive groups acting to confirm and consolidate divisions. In this regard, public excursions could involve the parading of exclusivity. The pleasure garden as a melting pot was a powerful metaphor deployed by satirists, but there are few traces of social mobility

and vibrant social mingling in the accounts of those who went there. Indeed, the titled made few concessions to the new cast of bourgeoisie. The appearance of public togetherness disguised a reality wherein the titled lady dismissed the wife of a city merchant and a wealthy Yorkshire gentleman rarely conversed with a lord.