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BEAUTY OR BEAST, OR MONSTROUS REGIMENTS? ROBERTSON AND BURKE ON WOMEN AND THE PUBLIC SCENE

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The Enlightenment can usefully be conceived as a confrontation with eroding Christian and classical republican ethics. It was permeated with assumptions about women and the gendered dichotomy between public and private spheres. While William Robertson and Edmund Burke, along with many of their contemporaries, remained committed to Christian- and republican-based conceptions of virtue, they were working within a new Enlightenment paradigm. Its political agenda has to be understood by way of its configurations of beauty, taste, and morality as these relate to the imperatives and needs of modern societies of a high level of sophistication and differentiation. An examination of two themes in the work of Robertson and Burke—the nature of women in "savage" and "civilized" societies, and "beauty in distress"—reveals how long-held convictions about the character of women, especially with regard to their capacity and right to appear in the public domain, were modified and adjusted to the idea of progress, and became central to an enlightened affirmation of modern European civilization. The result had its ironies. On the one hand, a positive public and indeed political role was invented for women that is central to understanding the overall thrust of a political discourse based on politeness, civility, refinement and similar values specifically associated with modern commercial societies. On the other hand, though the complexity of this model of society gave ample scope to informal and spontaneous vehicles of social disciplining, whatever room was left for the more traditional ways of governing polities through the direct exertion of political power remained closed to women: the very features that opened for them the opportunity to play political roles through sociability in the public sphere also circumscribed them.

When the disorders incident to the Gothic system had subsided, the women began to be valued upon account of their useful talents and accomplishments; and their consideration and rank, making allowance for some remains of that romantic spirit which had prevailed in the former period, came to be chiefly determined by the importance of those departments which they occupied, in carrying on the business and maintaining the intercourse of society . . . . Thus we may observe, that in refined and polished nations there is the same free communication between the sexes as in the ages of rudeness and barbarism. In the latter, women enjoy the most unbounded liberty, because it is thought of no consequence what use they shall make of it. In the former, they are entitled to the

same freedom, upon account of those agreeable qualities which they possess, and the rank and dignity which they hold as members of society.[1]

These sentences are from the concluding sections of the lengthy first chapter in the *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society*, and offer a faithful summary of it. The *Observations* was published in 1771 by the Glasgow lawyer and professor of civil law John Millar (republished in 1773 and further expanded in 1779 as *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*). The work established Millar's reputation in his native Scotland and in Europe and is generally regarded as a pioneering text on the distribution and exercises of power and influence in society, though it fell into near-oblivion shortly after 1800 and was only rediscovered fairly recently. Its first chapter, comprising more than one-third of the entire book, also contains one of the first systematic discussions of the status of women in different societies. Millar's indebtedness to authorities such as Samuel Pufendorf, and to his fellow Scottish philosophers Hutcheson, Lord Kames, Hume, and Smith for their views on moral philosophy, psychology, and property relations, has received considerable scholarly attention. The inspiration he drew from the contemporary efforts to reform Scots law has also been pointed out.[2] On the issue of women, however, it is equally important to expand the context of Millar's and others' views to include other "neighbour disciplines", such as narrative history, aesthetics, and political ideology. Particularly striking cases in point, lending themselves readily to such an exercise, are texts by two slightly older contemporaries of Millar, the Edinburgh historian William Robertson (1721–1793) and Edmund Burke (1729–1797). An expanded contextual reading of these texts promises to enhance our understanding of the ways in which otherwise widely diverging preoccupations and opinions were united, through the choice of topic and approach, within the intellectual movement that is still widely recognized as the Enlightenment despite an emerging tendency to use this noun with a lower case letter and in the plural.[3]

For the argument developed here, several features of Millar's work provide salient background for a reading of Robertson and Burke. First, Millar retains the idea, dominant in earlier paradigms that addressed gender roles, that there is a specific "female character" based on psychological and somatic properties. Second, this does not, however, lead him to argue that the status of women in

1 John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: or an Inquiry into the Circumstances which Give Rise to Influence and Authority, in the Different Members of Society* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1990), 98–9, 101.

2 Richard Olson, "Sex and Status in Scottish Enlightenment Social Science: John Millar and the Sociology of Gender Roles", *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998), 73–100.

3 Most notably, John Pocock in the "Introduction" and "Epilogue" of his *Barbarism and Religion. Vol. I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

either the private or the public realm, or both, is eternally "given" in human societies. On the contrary, he introduces a dynamic element into the study of the problem by setting it firmly within the framework of humanity's progress through different stages, defined in terms of the dominant "mode of subsistence" (hunting-gathering, herding, agriculture and commerce). On the other hand, for Millar as for several contemporary authors of "philosophical history", the status of women was an indicator of the "manners" prevailing in each of these stages, which, in turn, were widely regarded as a kind of scientific measure of the progress of society.[4] This aspect of Millar's thought, perhaps most typically and readily associated with the preoccupation with the idea of progress in the Enlightenment, is also a suitable starting point to expand his "context" to include contemporary narrative history and political ideology. To both of these fields the kind of evolutionary sociology Millar pursued was highly relevant; and in both of them, statements not unlike his about women's social roles—inevitably concerned with their influence in the public domain through peaceful *or* violent means, their aptitude for rulership, command, coercion, and domination—often had a quite central importance.

These ideas assumed especially interesting and revealing variations in the thought of Robertson, who has emerged in recent historiography as a central figure in a moderate or "conservative" Enlightenment,[5] and Burke, who still remains a conservative founding father. Part of a larger project that aims to study both the views of these two authors on the civilization of the European old regime and their continental reception, this essay will focus on the role each of

4 See Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chap. 6, where several eighteenth-century women's histories are discussed; and Sylvana Tomaselli, "Woman in Enlightenment Conjectural Histories", in Hans Erich Bödeker and Liselotte Steinbrugge, eds., *Conceptualising Woman in Enlightenment Thought* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2001), 7–22. See also Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1760–1860* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 24–6, 30, for specific references to the status of women among the Amerindians; and her "Tacitus Engendered: 'Gothic Feminism' and British Histories, c. 1750–1800", in Geoffrey Cubitt, ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 57–74 for eighteenth-century assessments of relevant passages in Tacitus's *Germania*.

5 Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985); for the concept of "conservative Enlightenment", see several studies by J. G. A. Pocock, especially "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England", in Raffaele Ajello, ed., *L'Età dei Lumi: Studi Storici sul Settecento Europeo in onore di Franco Venturi* (Naples: Jovene Editore, 1985), and "Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective", *Government and Opposition* 24 (1989); for Robertson's place in it, see Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion. Vol. II: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Chap. 4.

arguments offered by it for purposes more central to his thought. Second, it also has some significance for this essay that Knox, along with one of his chief political opponents, Mary, Queen of Scots, was a protagonist in Robertson's *History of Scotland*.

Early in 1558, as an exile on the continent, Knox published *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, a classic diatribe against the very principle of female government. Three years later, when Mary Stuart returned to Scotland and Knox preached a series of sermons inveighing against her idolatry, he was summoned to the queen's presence for hearings, at which one of the charges was that "he had written a book against her just authority". Knox replied that "that book was written most especially against that wicked Jezebel of England", Mary Tudor, but the queen certainly had a point in retorting that "ye speak of women in general".[12] Indeed, the *First Blast* proved to be a source of embarrassment to Knox and his fellow Scottish Protestants when, just a few months after its publication, they looked to Queen Elizabeth for aid; it stated in generic terms that "it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire over men"; that "this monstriferous empire of women" is "amongst all enormities . . . most detestable and damnable", "a thing repugnant to nature", and "the subversion of good order, equity and justice".[13] Even though it was only the English who were explicitly assured that "if God raise up any noble heart to vindicate the liberty of his country" their opponents would be lifting "their hands against God",[14] most of what Knox had to say could be given general application.

Knox based his argument primarily on the prejudice, common among his contemporaries, that "a woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him".[15] This, in turn, was embedded in a framework of beliefs about the female character also widely held at the time, and supported by an array of authorities from the Scripture through Aristotle and the *Digests* to the Church Fathers. Some of these concerned women's moral, others their intellectual, "inferiority".

The most common of the former category, quoted by Knox from Tertullian's *De habitu mulieri*, was to the effect that woman was "the port and gate of the Devil" and "the first transgressor of God's law", a circumstance that only further justified her subordination, originally arising from "the order of His creation".[16] Indeed,

12 John Knox, *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, in John Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 175, 177.

13 John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, 4, 6, 8, 22.

14 Ibid., 45.

15 Ibid., 12.

16 Ibid., 11, 15.

Knox employed the virtually Manichean dualism of the early Christians, which was later only attenuated but not at all abandoned in scholasticism, suggesting that in the active/passive, virtue/vice, good/evil dichotomy woman always represented the latter, because by her very nature she was impatient, inconstant, and variable, and more exposed to the temptations of pride and ambition than man.

These moral blemishes in women were accompanied by the inferiority of their natural talents, at least in regard to leadership and initiative. In Knox's view it was unnatural for the blind to lead the seer, for the weak to nourish the strong, and for the "foolish, mad and frenetic" to govern "the discreet and give counsel to such as be sober of mind". He claimed that women's "sight in civil government is but blindness, their strength weakness, their counsel foolishness, and judgement frenzy".[17] To him these female qualities were just as immutable as "the law moral" which proceeded from the order of Creation (of which they were part): "the constant and unchangeable will of God to which the Gentile is no less bound than was the Jew".[18] The plethora of biblical exempla which Knox deployed thus served not merely as so many convenient parallels but as quasi-legal precedents whose binding force was universal and eternal, without regard to time and place.

Besides Christian–scholastic thought, another tradition of early modern moral philosophy, also highly relevant to the context in which both Robertson and Burke would work, was republican or civic humanism. The contribution of civic humanists to the *querelle des sexes* was rather ambivalent. On the one hand, they regarded the human being as an *animal civile*, one of the implications, as pointed out by the great Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni, being that "the primary union . . . is that between man and woman, and without it there is no perfection". Similarly, Marsilio Ficino spoke about marriage as "a domestic *res publica*". Statements like these represented a challenge to the earlier misogamous and, by implication, misogynistic tradition.[19]

However, such conclusions were in a peculiar tension with certain tenets equally fundamental to early modern republicanism. For the civic humanists, whose intellectual and political heroes were Cicero, Cato, and other champions of late republican Rome, the condition and indeed the very survival of the *res publica* (the classical *polis* as well as the Renaissance city state) depended on the virtue of the citizens: their dedication to the cause of the public and their willingness to put it before their private interest, even at the cost of taking up arms in defence of the *patria*. Not only because of this ideal of the arms-bearing citizen, but also because civic humanists in fact preserved much of the

17 Ibid., 8.

18 Ibid., 30.

19 Bock, *Women in European History*, 19.

conventional view of the sexes as dichotomous opposites (especially in regard to the supposed inconstancy and corruptibility of women), *virtù* was for them a quality masculine by definition (further emphasized by its putative etymological association with *vir*, "man", through the notion of virility, still influential in the eighteenth century).[20] The internal logic of the whole paradigm suggested that private and domestic pursuits, such as the sexual bond, had an effeminating effect; they undermined the commitment of the *vir virtutis* (man of virtue) and thus tended to disrupt the public domain. Indeed, corruption, a constant nightmare of civic humanists, was often rendered by them in terms of "effeminacy", and even the chief agent whereby the way to introduce changes in the affairs of the republic through corruption was opened, *fortuna*, was generally represented as a female figure.[21] The early modern classical revival thus tended to invest public action—exercising judgement and powers of persuasion (peaceful or violent), and making decisions—with a decidedly masculinist ethos.[22] It also assumed that there was a distinct cleavage and opposition between the domestic and the public domain, that women were by their nature unfit for the latter and therefore ought to be confined to the former.

There were, of course, dissenting voices raised against this concert of anti-female polemics. Christine de Pizan in the early fifteenth century argued not only that the female soul was equivalent to the male soul, but also that women had a natural sense for government. A century later, Baldassare Castiglione suggested that women wanted to be men not to be "more perfect", but to have freedom. Later contributors to the *querelle* simply blamed male tyranny for whatever inferiority women exhibited. However, it was not until the eighteenth century that new perspectives were introduced into the discussion of the status and roles of women and threw new light on it.

Two developments, evident despite the persistence of earlier patterns, are worth mention. Owing to the discovery of progress, the earlier tendency to investigate the subject with the exclusive aim of identifying the supposedly immutable female character could be abandoned in favour of an approach that held the unfolding assertion of all human (male and female) qualities to be relative to social environment. At the same time, as the public sphere was posited as a domain wedged between the political and the private, a space for discussion

20 See Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, *A Discourse of Government with Relation to Militias*, in *idem*, *Political Works*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 196.

21 J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 168–9.

22 Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3 and *passim*.

and exchange removed from the sway of the state and critical of its acts or foundations,[23] it became possible to hypothesize ways in which qualities and types of conduct normally not associated with the political could gain some sort of public significance. Especially in situations where the direct exercise of civic virtue through participation in processes of political decision making was unrealistic even for most men, it was a reassuring idea that various forms of sociability ("commerce", in the sense of the exchange of goods as well as of ideas and sentiments) still offered powerful cements of the social bond and thus alternative ways of asserting one's patriotic commitment.[24] David Hume, for instance, made a forceful case for his claim that "beside the improvements which [people] receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment"; and he added that these features are "peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages".[25]

Viewed from this angle, luxury—long assumed to pose a threat to the civic commitment—no longer seemed as pernicious as in the republican tradition. Hume was reluctant to follow Bernard Mandeville down the path of the latter's unreserved eulogy of commercial society in his *Fable of the Bees*, in which, for instance, the proverbial addiction of women to fashionable clothes and other tokens of conspicuous consumption sets economic actors into motion in ways that result in social benefit.[26] Hume was careful to distinguish between "innocent" and "blameable" types of luxury and maintained that the latter might have harmful effects on political society (although he was much more specific in describing the former kind and was at pains to point out that most instances of

23 The terms used in Roger Chartier's succinct summary of Habermas's concept of *Öffentlichkeit* in *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press, 1991), 20.

24 Cases in point are Scotland after the Union of 1707, where the removal of Parliament as the main venue of political debate caused a reconsideration of the civic humanist paradigm, and France under the *ancien régime*. See John Robertson, "The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition", in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 137–78; Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

25 David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts", in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), 271. This essay was first published as "Of Luxury" in 1754, the title being changed in 1760.

26 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1988), 1:88.

"corruption" usually ascribed to luxury occurred for different reasons). As regards women, rather than stressing the stimuli that commerce and industry received from their vanity, he chose to focus on the qualities commonly associated with their domesticity. Hume employs an interesting paradox here. On the one hand, he takes women's "inferiority" for granted (and presents it as a phenomenon only intelligible through a materialistic world view).[27] At the same time, this assumption is developed into an argument for alleviating "that superiority [of mind and body in man] . . . by the generosity of his behaviour, and a studied deference and complaisance for all her inclinations and opinions"—a disposition absent among "barbarous nations" that "display this superiority, by reducing their females to the most abject slavery", but characteristic of the "male sex, among a polite people".[28] What is more, under civilized conditions the same qualities that had doomed women to being suppressed into the domestic sphere—that is, feebleness of mind and body—are "redescribed" as natural softness, tenderness, and grace capable of making them proper "Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation"—in other words, such venues of enlightened sociability as the salons of Paris which Hume later came to know so well, where women indeed wielded considerable authority.[29]

We can now turn to Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, one of the most influential eighteenth-century treatises on aesthetics, and a book introduced (albeit only in its second edition) by an "Essay on Taste" inserted in an attempt to respond to Hume's

27 Female inferiority is explained by the fact that "[t]heir domestic life requires no higher faculties either of mind or body", a circumstance that "vanishes and becomes absolutely insignificant, on the religious theory", according to which the two sexes have equal tasks to perform and therefore ought to have been endowed with equal powers of resolution and reason. Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (1755, unpublished until the posthumous edition of the *Essays*), in *Essays*, 593.

28 Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences" (1742), in *Essays*, 133.

29 Hume, "Of Essay-Writing", in *Essays*, 535. Published in 1742, this essay does not appear in later editions. It must be added that Hume himself quite clearly knew that it was not exactly their domestic virtues that earned significance for the *salonnières*, and that in a slightly later period it was precisely the combination of traditionally "male" qualities like wit and learning with "female" frivolity, licence, and luxury in influential aristocratic women that led clandestine writers to expose the maladies of political despotism in France in misogynous terms. See Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, Chap. 2. Also, Hume kept the distinction between the "conversible" and the "learned" world, and, whereas he had nothing against women's dominant role in the former, he was worried by the merger between the two domains under their governance which he experienced in France. Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 124–5. Goodman's entire reconstruction of the role of the *salonnières* is highly relevant to my subject.

position on the question whether a "standard of taste" can be fixed.[30] Burke's *Enquiry* is a systematic analysis of the human aesthetic experience, proceeding from an overview of the psychological factors that evoke reactions to sensation in general, to an investigation of the things "that cause in us the affections of the sublime and the beautiful".[31] Burke's identification of the "leading passions" as those of self-preservation and of society is crucial. About the former, Burke asserts that "they are the most powerful of all the passions" because they do not merely consist in the "positive pleasure" arising from the simple enjoyment of life and health, but in awesome and astonishing delight caused by the removal of pain or danger or its observation from a distance.[32] Awe and astonishment, "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror", accompanied by "the inferior effects [of] admiration, reverence and respect", are the emotions normally caused by the experience of the sublime. And Burke hastens to identify the source of the sublime: "I know nothing sublime which is not some modification of power . . . strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together."[33] The sublime appears as a dynamic, active force; applied to the public domain, its most obvious association is with sovereignty, statesmanship, or even revolt: legitimate or illegitimate uses of power which, in extraordinary circumstances, might still be essential for the preservation of society.

The masculine overtones in Burke's theory of the sublime emerge even more clearly when it is examined in conjunction with its dialectical counterpart, the beautiful. In his refutation of the traditional notion of beauty as "usefulness", sublimity and beauty are both linked with gender stereotypes: "if beauty in our species were annexed to use, men would be much more lovely than women; and strength and agility would be considered the only beauties. But to call strength by the name of beauty, to have but one denomination for the qualities of a Venus and Hercules, so totally different in almost all respects, is surely a strange confusion of ideas, or abuse of words."[34] Beauty was for Burke "a name I shall apply to all

30 Hume's text was published early in 1757 in his *Four Dissertations* and was included in later editions of the *Essays* as "Of the Standard of Taste". Hume, just like Burke, anchored judgements of taste in ordinary social practice, and shared the same criteria of "objectivity"; and both men were indebted to Jean-Baptiste Dubos's views advanced in *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719–33), translated as *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music* (1748).

31 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 54.

32 Ibid., 38–40.

33 Ibid., 57, 64–5.

34 Ibid., 106. Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Eye and Ear: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Sensibility", in *idem, Iconology: Text, Image, Ideology* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 129ff.

such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness, or some other passion the most nearly resembling these". Littleness, smoothness, and delicacy are specifically mentioned among these qualities: ones associated with femininity, and inducing a sense of pleasure and affectionate superiority in a male-dominated society.

The passions to which Burke refers here are positive pleasures arising from social intercourse, in contrast to the thrilling delight resulting from the removal of pain or danger or its observation from a distance. He explicitly calls beauty "a social quality". Of the two main sorts of society, one is that of sex, the dominant passion here being love, having the beauty of women as its object. Significantly, a notion of the civilizing process as understood in Enlightenment conjectural histories is discernible in the background. "The passion which belongs to generation, merely as such, is lust only; this is evident in brutes, whose passions are more unmixed . . . The only distinction they observe with regard to their mates, is that of sex . . . Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*." As men (i.e., male humans) advanced from rudeness towards refinement, they became progressively divested of the character of lustful brutes that sought the gratification of their instinct by forcing *any* specimen of the other sex to submission, and developed the desire to win the approbation of *one particular* woman, to whom they, now gallant suitors, were attracted by her individual qualities.[35] However, Burke suggested that the social appetite was also asserted within the "great society" or "society in general," where the characteristic sentiment evoked by the experience of beauty was "likewise love, but it has no mixture of lust"—sympathy, "a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man".[36] The beautiful, extrapolated from the association of sexes, where it is indissolubly linked to femininity, to human society at large, is indispensable for the perpetuation of the entire social bond, and especially its foundations in the peaceful, ordinary intercourse of everyday life.

True, "this quality, where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, even sickness." As beauty in effect becomes a social practice liable to

35 Again, these were aspects of larger processes perceived by many eighteenth-century thinkers—civilization as the growth of individualism, as well as the tendency to value the self increasingly in terms of the approval or disapproval of others—which some of them applauded, others accepted with qualifications, and yet others abhorred. Mandeville, Adam Smith and Rousseau would perhaps be suitable representatives of these three positions.

36 Burke, *Enquiry*, 42–4, 51.

manipulation, so it easily lends itself to abuse and deception, especially in view of the fact that "beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty".[37] It is also true that the calm diffused by beauty entails a certain passivity, a state in which "the nerves are more liable to the most horrid convulsions . . . Melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder" result from this languor, the only antidote being "labour . . . an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles".[38]

Passages like these have been used in a highly suggestive recent interpretation to show that Burke's *Enquiry* is a piece of bourgeois ideology in which the author reveals his preferences for the sublime force of initiative and vigour, associated with the middle class, as against aristocratic effeminacy and langour, identified with the aesthetic beautiful (while the tensions in the *Reflections* arise from Burke's difficulties in consistently applying his aesthetic categories to "a revolution against the bourgeois revolution").[39] I am drawing the outlines of an alternative explanation. Even if it is possible roughly to identify the sublime and the beautiful with collective agents and processes in eighteenth-century society, the perceived relationship between those social groups is one of mutuality rather than antagonism: they are seen to contribute, in different, even opposite and sometimes conflicting, but mutually reinforcing, ways to maintaining a sound social and political order, rather than representing irreconcilable alternatives that ought to prevail at the expense of one another. Consequently, the contradiction between the *Enquiry* and the *Reflections* is not as dramatic as it may at first appear to be. Just as, on the testimony of the previous paragraphs, the beautiful appears to produce a soothing effect on the turbulent energy of the sublime by generating sympathy, so its own excesses are corrected by the operation of the active powers of the latter. This mutually counterpoising role of the two qualities resembles the system of checks and balances available in the British constitution, or the equilibrium of the social forces commonly supposed to underlie it—a modern old regime whose preservation crucially depended on the just proportion of aristocratic and middle-class values. If in the *Reflections* Burke seems to be shifting his allegiances and appealing to "chivalry", so forcefully married to the principle of the beautiful in the text, this neatly dovetails with his avowed general strategy as "one who . . . would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end, and, when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be

37 Ibid., 110.

38 Ibid., 135.

39 The need for brevity may make this an unfairly simplistic presentation of the argument of the most recent monographic treatment of the subject, Tom Furniss's powerful and challenging *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

chose to follow a different path. True to his moderate Whig convictions, he acted upon his belief that anti-Jacobitism, which he certainly embraced, was more effectively served by marginalizing Mary as a political emblem than by railing against her. His main device to divest Mary of her character as a potent symbol of an independent *and Stuart* Scotland was to feminize her in ways that can be associated with contemporary aesthetic standards, rather than with the old Christian or the civic humanist paradigms.

We can begin to explore this theme by referring to the translator's preface in one of the German editions of Robertson's *History of Scotland*. According to Theodor Christoph Mittelstedt, Robertson "shows [Mary] for what she truly was, lovable in youth, rash and despicable in mature years, but worthy of admiration and sympathy in her death", which was meted out to her by the rage of God for falling prey to characteristically female frailties.[46] It has recently been suggested that Robertson relied on the aesthetic of the Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson in intimating that Mary's femininity was a source of her moral weakness, simultaneously inviting empathy from female readers and indulgent yet belittling sentiments of chivalry from men; and that as this morally incompetent femininity demonstrates, stemming as it did from her French and Catholic connections, Scotland's destiny was with England and Protestantism rather than with anything represented by Mary.[47] Yet Hutcheson's directly relevant text, the *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), makes no explicit reference to femininity. Claiming that "the Ideas of Beauty and Harmony . . . are necessarily pleasant to us", and that "some Objects are immediately the Occasions of this Pleasure of Beauty", the book is mainly about the "Senses fitted for perceiving it".[48] To the extent that this sense of beauty consists in the ability to estimate and appreciate the proportion and harmony, especially the balance between uniformity and variety, in objects, it is a counterpart of the moral sense (explored in Treatise Two of the *Inquiry*) whose function is also to make judgements about good measure, thus ensuring tranquillity and stability. The sense of beauty—that is, taste—does indeed serve as an analogue for the other senses, including the moral sense: each of them is a faculty operating in a disinterested manner, i.e., without any prospect of advantage accruing to the subject.[49] But this is perhaps

46 *Herrn William Robertsons Geschichte von Schottland*, trans. Theodor C. Mittelstedt (Braunschweig, 1762), vol. 1, "Vorrede".

47 O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, 118–19.

48 Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, in *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson*, ed. Bernhard Fabian (reprint of the 2nd edn of 1725; Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990), 10–11.

49 "Nay, do we not often see Conveniency and Use neglected to obtain Beauty, without any other prospect of Advantage in the Beautiful Form, than the suggesting the pleasant Ideas of Beauty?" (ibid., 11). Cf. the definition of the moral goodness as "our idea of some Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation, and Love toward the Actor, from those who receive no Advantage by the Action" (ibid., 101).

even less explicit in Hutcheson than in Shaftesbury, who gives the beauty of the socially human clearer emphasis as a cement of the communal bond by directly subsuming taste and morality into one another.[50] From either author it was in fact possible for Robertson to borrow the resulting idea of sympathy, crucial for him in the attempt to effect "a recuperation of national unity".[51]

However, even in Shaftesbury women tend to figure more for their physical and moral frailty than for their beauty, let alone for the combination of beauty with possibly positive effects of frailty[52]—a combination that certainly appears in Robertson's presentation of Mary Stuart. Robertson took great pains to point out the positive effects that Mary's feminine character, combined with the values of refinement with which it was associated (note the contrast with the combination of masculinity and simplicity in civic humanism), wrought, or at least promised, in Scotland after she had returned there from France. "The amusements and gaiety of her court . . . began to soften and polish the rude manners of the nation . . . . The beauty and gracefulness of her person drew universal admiration, the elegance and politeness of her manners commanded general respect." She displayed a "corteous affability . . . without lessening the dignity of a Prince".[53] The problem was that Scotland was not yet quite ripe for appreciating such refinements and for absorbing their soothing effects. "The inhabitants, strangers to industry, averse from labour, and unacquainted with the arts of peace, subsisted intirely by spoil and pillage", and "the nature of the Scottish constitution, the impotence of regal authority, the exorbitant power of the nobles, the violence of faction, and the fierce manners of the people, rendered the execution of the laws feeble, irregular, and partial". Therefore, the attempts of the young queen to exercise a moderating influence, by policy as well as by example and simply by character,

50 Any number of quotations from Shaftesbury might illustrate his point that our sense of judgement operates alternately as moral sense and as sense of beauty, depending on what is observed (actions or objects). "No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledge. No sooner are actions viewed, . . . than straight an inward eye distinguishes, and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious, or the despicable." Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.*, ed. John M. Robertson (reprint of the 1900 edn; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997), 2:137.

51 O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, 119.

52 Cf. the reference to the "weak, womanish, and impotent part of our nature", or the claim that "what is done in fury or anger can never be placed to the account of courage. Were it otherwise, womankind might claim to be the stoutest sex" (Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 20, 80).

53 Robertson, *History of Scotland*, 265–6.

were doomed to failure or could be but temporarily successful.[54] Robertson's portrayal of Mary is not devoid of the idea of physical and moral feebleness, capable of simultaneously evoking disesteem and empathy. And yet by way of the peculiar rhetorical device of redescription, the very same feebleness appears as fragility, and ultimately grace and beauty, capable of exerting a moderating effect on sentiments and interpersonal relations. However, since this potential was inseparable from circumstances only available in a sufficiently improved physical, moral, and intellectual environment, it is no wonder that it was not realized in sixteenth-century Scotland and remained unappreciated until the times of commerce, rule of law, and Enlightenment when Robertson was writing.

Robertson's presentation of the feminine as a principle especially amenable to evoking the feeling of sympathy is an uncharacteristically original contribution by a historian whose originality consists, for the most part, in his superb talent for synthesis. It would certainly be difficult to establish to what extent, if at all, Robertson was familiar with Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (the publication of the two texts is separated by two years, so he just could have been). But the pattern described in the previous paragraphs is akin to Burkean, rather than Hutchesonian (or Shaftesburian), aesthetics. The same can be said of the "beauty in distress" theme, which is quite central to Burke's exploration of the moral implications of the aesthetic beautiful, and appears in the account of Mary's final tribulations in the *History of Scotland*: "A woman, young and beautiful, and in distress, is naturally the object of compassion. The comparison of their present misery with the former splendour, usually softens us in favour of illustrious sufferers"—irrespective of our moral or political judgement of the sufferer's character.[55]

There is, finally, the developmental aspect of Robertson's treatment of femininity. On the one hand, referring to the licentiousness of the French court, which could not but have left its imprint on Mary's character, Robertson dwells on the paradox that amidst the "military character of the age" (as a rule associated with more primitive stages of progress) a "liberty of appearing in all companies . . . began to be allowed to women, who had not yet acquired that delicacy of sentiment, and those polished manners, which alone can render this liberty innocent"[56]—an observation anticipating Millar's overall treatment of the

54 Ibid., 272, 281.

55 Ibid., 431. The question why tragedy pleases was a hotly debated one in Edinburgh at the time of the writing of Robertson's *History of Scotland*, with virtually all of the literati contributing something on it. For the broader context, see Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 65–92.

56 Robertson, *History of Scotland*, 397.

subject. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that, as we have seen, in Robertson's presentation the moderating effects of femininity in social relations and the public domain only operate once a certain level of progress has been attained—a further parallel with Burke, to be discussed in the concluding section.

Burke saw the French Revolution not merely as an upheaval of the political system of France, the subversion of the government of Louis XVI and his ministers, but as "a revolution of manners"—the decomposition of the complex web of moral and aesthetic standards of intercourse that cemented the European societies of his time. I shall concentrate on the short but vivid passages of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which give the gist of Burke's interpretation of these standards. They are introduced by his recalling the "delightful vision" of Marie Antoinette from the time of his visit to France in 1773. This is followed by an account of the events of the night of 5–6 October 1789, when the march of Parisian women to Versailles forced the royal family to relocate to Paris. Underlying his account are the aesthetic principles which, as Burke expounded in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, emerge in the social sphere in the course of an historical progress peculiar to European civilization.

I have suggested that in the *Philosophical Enquiry* Burke presented both the sublime and the beautiful as essential categories for the stability of any society. The mutual counterpoising effect of the sublime and the beautiful in the civilization of the old regime finds expression in the paradoxical adjective–noun compounds and more complex phrases in Burke's summary of the standards of manners guiding this civilization. These standards consisted of "that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that *proud submission*, that *dignified obedience*, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in *servitude* itself, the spirit of an *exalted freedom* . . . which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity". It was "[t]his mixed system of opinion and sentiment" that has "distinguished [modern Europe] to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world". In other paradoxical structures, combining elements which could have sublime and beautiful connotations, Burke writes of a "*noble equality*, . . . [that] mitigated *kings into companions* . . . obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance".[57] Finally, although—as explained in *A Philosophical Enquiry*—beauty "almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection", which could be pretended and thus deceitful,[58] from the point of view of the result this does not really matter: the beautiful component of old regime civilization might consist of mere illusions,

57 Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

58 Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 110.

but they were "pleasing illusions, which made *power gentle*, and *obedience liberal*, which harmonized the different shades of life".[59]

Although he traced back the origins of this system to "antient chivalry", Burke conceived of the European old regime founded on the system as modern, enlightened and progressive.[60] To his mind this constituted a sharp contrast to the barbarous conduct of the revolutionary mob, in which women were assuming masculine roles by wielding power and perpetrating violence (attributes of the sublime). By threatening the very principle of the beautiful (represented by the queen who was forced to flee "almost naked"—a part of the story for which there is no supporting evidence), women dealt a blow to the delicate equilibrium on which the whole of Western civilization was established. The "beauty in distress" motif is clearly central to Burke's metaphor of an imminent civilizational catastrophe.[61]

At the same time, both Burke's vision of the old regime as the latest stage in a long civilizing process, whose meaning was the refinement of manners and the growth of the rule of law under strong monarchy, and his images of the revolutionaries as representing a "ruder" stage in the progress of mankind are indebted to the achievement of eighteenth-century Scottish conjectural history, especially in the works of Robertson, whom Burke greatly admired.[62] Apropos the tribulations of the royal couple and their being "led in triumph" to Paris, Burke wrote of the conduct of the revolutionaries: "it was (unless we have been strangely deceived) a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading into hovels hung round with scalps, their captives, overpowered with scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized martial nation . . . ".[63] In the previous passage the humiliating treatment of a woman (and one of very illustrious status) appeared as an assault on the aesthetic principle of the beautiful and its role in maintaining the balance

59 Burke, *Reflections*, 128. Italics throughout this paragraph are added.

60 Cf. Pocock, "Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions", 81–106, esp. 92.

61 For a relatively recent, more detailed treatment of the episode from this point of view, see Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 1996), Chap. 3.

62 For Burke's esteem for Robertson, see *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–71), 3:350–1, where the former described the latter's *History of America* (1777) as an "incomparable work", worthy of the author of the *History of Scotland* and the *History of Charles V*, and added: "The part which I read with the greatest pleasure, is the discussion of the manners and character of the inhabitants of the New World. . . . You have employed philosophy to judge on the manners, and from the manners you have drawn new resources for philosophy." See also Burke's similarly enthusiastic review of the same work in the *Annual Register* (1777), 214–34.

63 Burke, *Reflections*, 117.

of old regime civilization. Now, this kind of conduct, together with the general ferocity shown by Parisian women, places those guilty of it outside the European system of values, on a level with those primitive tribes whom Robertson, according to Burke, described so magisterially.

The Scottish historian thought that in this "state of society . . . so extremely rude, that the denomination *savage*" may be applied to it, "the condition of women was humiliating and miserable . . . To despise and degrade the female sex, is the characteristic of the savage state in every part of the globe."[64] Then he went on to describe the martial habits of native Americans:

> In carrying out their public wars, savage nations are influenced by the same ideas, and animated with the same spirit, as in prosecuting private vengeance . . . When polished nations have obtained the glory of victory, or have acquired an addition of territory, they may terminate a war with honour. But savages are not satisfied until they extirpate the community which is the object of their hatred. They fight, not to conquer, but to destroy.

And, as regards their treatment of captives:

> As soon as they approach their own frontier, some of their number are despatched to inform their countrymen with respect to the success of the expedition. Then the prisoners begin to feel the wretchedness of their condition. The women of the village, together with the youth who have not attained to the age of bearing arms, assemble, and forming themselves into two lines, through which the prisoners must pass, beat and bruise them with sticks or stones in a cruel manner.[65]

It must be added that despite the interesting textual parallels, when writing the *Reflections* Burke did not need to look up the description of "savage" manners in Robertson. He might recall, or turn back to, a work he and William Burke (usually regarded as his "kinsman") first published in 1757, the same year as the *Philosophical Enquiry* appeared. The two authors develop the same themes:

> Their motives for engaging in a war are rarely those views which excite us to it. They have no other end but the glory of the victory and the benefit of the slaves which it enables them to add to their nation, or sacrifice to their brutal fury . . . The fate of their prisoners is the most severe of all . . . . When they come to their station, they are wounded and bruised in a terrible manner. The conquerors enter the town in triumph . . . . The women, forgetting the human as well as the female nature, and transformed into something worse

64 William Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson* (London, 1835), 811, 822.

65 Ibid., 831, 833. Robertson's source for this passage is *Nouveaux voyages de M. le baron La Hontan dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (1703), an account of the author's observation of the life of the tribes around Lake Ontario, the Hurons in the area of the Jesuit mission of Onondaga mentioned by Burke being one of them.

than furies, act their part, and even outdo the men, in this scene of horror [culminating in the death of the captives by torture].[66]

The point is not whether Burke borrowed from Robertson, or even whether Robertson borrowed from Burke. They shared a discourse (with each other as well as with many British and continental contemporaries) in which the manners of native Americans, with special reference to the status of women among them, were described in disparaging terms by reference to the relatively primitive stage they had attained in the progress of different "modes of subsistence"—rather than merely to race.

This is not to say that either Robertson or Burke was unaffected by the vast and diverse eighteenth-century effort to explain the differences between races (and sexes) by reference to biological factors, physical and mental constitution as framed by "nature", be it God, climate, or geographic features. Robertson especially makes clear his allegiances in the contemporary debate between monogenists and polygenists. With the former he asserts that man is "the only living creature whose frame is at once so hardy and so flexible, that he can spread over the whole earth"—i.e., there is one, unitary human race—while also sharing the view of the "environmentalist", such as Buffon or Blumenbach, that "the human body is not entirely exempt from the operation of climate". Hence the fact that "Americans were more remarkable for agility than strength"; that "feebleness of constitution was universal among the inhabitants" of the New World; and that the "beardless countenance and smooth skin of the American seems to indicate a defect of vigour"—even of sexual appetite—in view of which he is "destitute of one sign of manhood and of strength".[67] The image of the native American as made effeminate and *on that account* inferior through a process of degeneration, championed in the eighteenth century by authors as diverse as the Jesuit Joseph François Lafiteau and his critic Cornelius de Pauw—even echoing

66 [William Burke and Edmund Burke], *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 6th edn (London, 1777), 1:191, 194–5, 198. On this rarely studied book by the Burkes, see Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland and the Fashioning of the Self* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), Chap. 4; F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, *1730–1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Chap. 5.

67 Robertson, *History of America*, 813–14. Robertson's contemporary Henry Home, Lord Kames, made much of hairlessness as a marker of insufficient masculinity and the consequent sexual frigidity and concomitant inability to enter stadial progress among the native Americans in his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), Book 2, vol. 3, "Origin and Progress of American Nations". For the relevance of the systems of Linné and Buffon to the present subject, I have benefited from Phillip Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History", in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1994), 112–51.

the taxonomy of Carl von Linné in which the beard, that ancient symbol of virility, preserved its status as the chief distinguishing feature between man and woman—is lurking in the background of such claims.[68]

With this image in mind, it may seem somewhat paradoxical that, as we have seen, in the same book of the *History of America* Robertson provided a vivid image of the warlike masculinity of the females among native Americans—a race effeminate by definition. Robertson could do so only because his dominant frame of reference was not race but civilization: manners, which essentially define patterns of behaviour in the social domain, are more powerfully shaped by the prevailing mode of subsistence than characteristics that might be peculiar to the race. Similarly, the directly political inferences of Burke could not be made within the framework of racial determinism, but only by relying on a discourse of the progress of human civilization. "Whoever studies the Americans of this day", we are told in the chapter on the manners of the Americans in the *Account of the European Settlements*, "not only studies the manners of a remote present nation, but he studies in some measure, the antiquities of all nations; from which no mean lights can be thrown upon many parts of the ancient authors, both sacred and profane."[69] The employment of this commonplace of conjectural history by the future author of the *Reflections*, when juxtaposed with the passages quoted from that book, throws light on a potential inherent in this line of eighteenth-century inquiry that has hitherto received less attention than it deserves. This was a discourse that Burke was able to put into the service of his anti-revolutionary polemic, implying that, rather than being the conquerors of hitherto unseen peaks of civilization, the revolutionaries were in fact turning the clock backwards: when they looked in the mirror, the savage stared back at them. Viewed from a slightly different angle, instead of being the instruments of linear progress (a characteristically Enlightenment idea of history) toward a higher stage, the revolutionaries were throwing mankind back into the cyclical motion of history (a characteristically pre-Enlightenment idea).

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68 Robertson relied extensively on Lafiteau's *Moeurs des sauvages amériquains* (1724) and was aware of de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou, Mémoires intéressantes pour servir a l'histoire de l'espece humaine* (1768), although he did not share the latter's more extreme statements on the inferiority of native Americans. Cf. Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), Chaps. 3–5; Londa Schiebinger, "The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23/4 (1990), 387–405. I have also benefited from Silvia Sebastiani, "Race, Women and Progress in the Scottish Enlightenment" (manuscript).

69 [Burke], *Account of the European Settlements*, 167.

As recent scholarship has shown, the view that conservatism as a political ideology and the thought of Edmund Burke as its first champion emerged as a critique of the fundamental assumptions about man and society expressed by the Enlightenment[70] is in need of reconsideration. One of the vehicles of this challenge was the drive to question the very unity of "the" Enlightenment and to contemplate a plurality of Enlightenments instead; in particular, the suggestion that "among the phenomena which 'Enlightenment' connotes for us there are some whose effect may be termed 'conservative' in the sense that it was to strengthen elites—some of them clerical—in their capacity for civil control".[71] It should be added that these phenomena also include eighteenth-century theories of history which described and approved of the contemporary European *ancien régime* as the outcome of stadial progress and refinement, and, as such, a modern and highly developed order of civilization: a view from which it was possible to conclude that the voluntary correction of this status quo is a vain attempt, with disastrous consequences, and ultimately doomed to failure. This dimension of Enlightenment may also—perhaps more appropriately—be labelled conservative in a stricter or at least more recognizably modern sense. Its commitments linked it to positions deemed politically conservative in the terminology that was introduced in the post-Revolutionary era.

I have attempted to show that a discourse on women had an important place in this trend. In my introduction I suggested that the Enlightenment as a whole can be usefully conceived as the confrontation with the erosion of Christian and classical republican ethics, which was to a considerable extent permeated by assumptions about women and the public/private dichotomy. It is evident that Robertson and Burke took this confrontation very seriously. Though both men remained committed to Christian- and republican-based conceptions of virtue, they were working within a new, Enlightenment paradigm. Understanding its political agenda requires a close reading of its ways of configuring beauty, taste, and morality as these relate to the imperatives and needs of modern societies of a high level of sophistication and differentiation. Among many other things, long-held convictions about the fundamental character of women, and especially about their capacity to appear in the public domain and the legitimacy of their presence there, were somewhat modified and adjusted to the idea of progress, thus becoming relevant to the enlightened discourse about European civilization.

It is particularly noteworthy that this new paradigm was double-edged in a very subtle way. On the one hand, in view of the aesthetic features and the directly

70 A view perhaps most forcefully advanced in Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).

71 Pocock, "Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions", 82.

resulting moral qualities attributed to women, a positive public, indeed political, role was invented for them. That role was central to the understanding of the overall thrust of a political discourse based on politeness, civility, refinement, and similar values specifically associated with modern commercial societies. It was the complexity and sophistication of this model of society that opened new possibilities for Robertson and Burke. It gave them unprecedented scope to identify and theorize hitherto unrecognized forms of social interaction and constraint, informal and spontaneous, which were shown to be critical to the preservation of commercial societies. But whatever room there was left—and this was still very considerable—for the more traditional ways of governing polities through the direct, even violent, exercise of political power, that room remained closed for women: the very features that opened for them the opportunity to play political roles through sociability in the public sphere at the same time circumscribed them. Robertson and Burke both clearly worked within a paradigm in which civil society recognized itself to be dependent on the civilizing and moral force attributed to women in view of their readily acknowledged character as sociable beings, but at the same time "rested on notions of sexual difference that could justify banishing them from the political arena"—that is, voting and governance.[72] The survival chances of the entire edifice of Europe's old regime modernity seemed to depend on both acknowledging women's civilizing roles and confining them to their proper place.

This certainly sounds conservative enough in the sense that the term is commonly understood today: a necessary and reasonable adjustment of inveterate notions of patriarchy to the requirements of a changing socio-cultural scene, calculated essentially to preserve a status quo genuinely believed to be more conducive to well-being than any alternative feasible under the given circumstances.[73] But there is also a sense in which the positions taken by Robertson and Burke may be identified as expressions of a "conservative Enlightenment". Analysing the structures of a commercial society in a recognizably "enlightened" way, both authors were able to identify the chemistry that stabilized it and provided it with the continuity Burke so famously and ironically celebrated. Burke was embraced as a predecessor and an icon by political conservatives throughout the nineteenth and (especially) the twentieth centuries, though

72 This is generalized as the Enlightenment paradigm on the subject in James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15 and Chap. 6.

73 In fact, the term "conservative Enlightenment" is used by John Pocock in a similar, soft sense, too: by reference to its general tendency to preserve the status quo—one discernible in innumerable historical situations—rather than specifically to its relationship to modern (political) conservatism.

largely for reasons other than his indebtedness to and affiliation with the Enlightenment. The use of terms like "conservative" and "conservatism" to evoke a "conservative Enlightenment" points us to an important paradox—one that the traditional model of conservatism versus Enlightenment will have to accommodate. It was because the recasting of the theme of femininity occurred in combination with tenets fundamental to a dominant mode of Enlightenment thought that it assumed a pivotal place in Burke's *Reflections*, subsequently hailed as the quintessential conservative manifesto against the Enlightenment.[74]

74 For comments I am grateful to Gisela Bock, Edward J. Hundert, Peter Jones, Anthony La Vopa and Anna Wessely.