Magnificence in Miniature:
Considerations of Public and Private, Class and Gender in Miniature and Full-
Size Portraits of Women in the Amherst Family, c. 1760-1810

by

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Abstract

This case study of eighteenth-century full-size and miniature portraits from the British Amherst family demonstrates that while the portrayed women fulfilled established gender roles within the upper class, they were not powerless. Rather than a paternalistic model that categorized gender roles according to a binary of domination and subordination, this study shows that gender relations could be subject to women's negotiations. This comparative analysis of the two formats of Amherst portraits explores how full-size and miniature portraits were used to represent upper class women both privately and publicly. The understanding of portrait miniatures as private became a strategic fiction when they were circulated and displayed publicly allowing the Amherst women to negotiate – without disturbing – established gender roles. This study proposes that portraiture participated in the Amherst women's experiences and negotiations of their socio-economic contexts as part of the social language.

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Introduction: *Little Pictures and Shadows*

“Kiss the little Picture – for my part I envy my own Shadow.”¹

On July 15th 1767 Elizabeth Paterson Amherst wrote this tender line as a postscript to a letter to her husband William Amherst who was in Scotland on a military mission. This small poetic request for her husband to kiss the portrait miniature (or her “Shadow”) he kept with him captures my imagination in a way no work of fiction can. (This is not to say, however, that fiction does not play a part in this history.) Knowing the characters were real people and that images of them are available today inspired my further exploration. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s use of the word “shadow,” for instance, opens several interpretive possibilities. While she could have simply employed it in the seventeenth-century sense, referring to the indexical nature of portraiture, the word’s rich connotations suggest a deeper meaning.² For example, “shadow” was used by writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the eighteenth century as a synonym for a reflected image – did Elizabeth Paterson Amherst see her portrait as a mirror-like reflection of herself?³ Also, shadows interact with human flesh and light to create manifestations that are colourless and shapeless versions of the original. Does her use of this word indicate that she considers the miniature a poor substitute for her physical presence? In Plato’s cave, the prisoners were convinced of the “reality” of the shadows that were cast on the wall, referencing the human

¹ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, July 15th 1769, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July - 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “shadow.”

³ *Ibid.*

propensity to take illusion, or masquerades, as reality. Did portraiture present a masquerade of identity as reality?

One also wants to know Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's story in more detail. What type of love did she have for her husband – was it a companionship that arose from a politically arranged marriage or did she feel real passion and compassion for her mate? What was her experience as an upper class woman? Did she feel restrained by gender norms, internalizing and believing paternalistic social structures, or had she found a way – perhaps subconsciously – to negotiate the expectations for a woman of her class in a way that worked to her advantage? What can portrait miniatures reveal about the Amherst women's stories?

Amherst Family Portraits

In 2007, as a student intern at the Portrait Gallery of Canada (PGC), I researched the exhibition possibilities of its newly conserved collection of over one hundred portrait miniatures. The collection includes miniatures of women assumed to be Elizabeth Paterson Amherst, Elizabeth Carey Amherst and Sarah Hickman Amherst. Further research revealed an abundance of primary material such as letters, inventories, and records available from Amherst family archives. In addition to the primary material and portrait miniatures, the Mead Art Museum of Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts has full-size portraits of all three women: Elizabeth Carey Amherst by Joshua Reynolds (1767) (Figure 1), Elizabeth Paterson Amherst by Allan Ramsay (1766) (Figure 2) and Sarah

Hickman Amherst by Thomas Lawrence (1802) (Figure 3).⁴ By comparing the full-size portraiture with the miniatures, I could benefit from the substantial literature on the former to make observations about the less-researched miniatures.

The Amhersts were a newly ennobled family in England in the late eighteenth century (Figure 4). Lord Jeffery Amherst (1717-1797), First Baron Amherst was a field marshal and commander-in-chief of the British Army during the Seven Years' War.⁵ Capturing Montreal in 1760, Amherst was a key figure in Britain's victory in North America. His first wife, Jane Dalyson, died in 1765 after battling mental illness for years.⁶ He married Elizabeth Carey (c. 1740-1830) in 1767, which was to be his second childless marriage. Jeffery's brother William Amherst (1732?-1781) married Elizabeth Paterson in 1766 who died in 1776 leaving two young children: William Pitt and Elizabeth Frances. William Pitt Amherst (1773-1857) succeeded to the title 2nd Baron Amherst of Montreal, Kent after the death of Lord Jeffery, his uncle in 1797. In 1800, William Pitt Amherst married Sarah Archer Hickman (1762-1838). From her first marriage to the 5th Earl of Plymouth, she was styled as Dowager Countess of Plymouth. William Pitt Amherst had a distinguished career and died as First Earl Amherst of Arracan.

The full-size oil portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 1) by Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) shows the sitter from the bust level seated with her left

⁴ The spelling of names can be inconsistent in the eighteenth century. While some sources spell Paterson with an extra "t," an inscription on her portrait suggests the proper spelling is the one I use in this thesis.

⁵ His name is spelled a number of different ways, but I will use his own spelling of his name "Jeffery" in this thesis.

⁶ John Cuthbert Long, *Lord Jeffery Amherst, a Soldier of the King*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 193.

arm resting so her hand hangs loosely from the wrist. Pinkish clouds that gather over a blue sky behind her head and the tree seen over her left shoulder suggest she is outdoors. The background's muted colours help make Elizabeth Carey Amherst's white and salmon dress and ivory skin stand out. She wears a loosely wrapped bodice that is tied at her waist with a pink sash and is embellished at the bust with a rose; a lace trim is hinted at around her collar. Over the dress she wears pink drapery that resembles a mantle with ermine fur lining the inside. The low neckline accentuates a long, lean neck which is further emphasized by the simple hair style that is swept up and piled in a knot on her head. Her body is square to the viewer but she gazes to the side of the canvas creating a three-quarter view of her facial features. Her eyes are dark and her mouth is small; her expression is so subdued the viewer gets the impression she is in a deep reverie.

The oil portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 2) by Allan Ramsay (1713-1784) shows the sitter against a dark background with some hints of vegetation over her left shoulder. Like in the portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst, the pink and white costume worn by Elizabeth Paterson Amherst is contrasted against the dark background. The skin on her décolletage and left arm is a pale ivory while her cheeks mirror the rosy hue of her shawl, giving the impression of a blush or flushed face. Her shoulders face straight ahead while she looks off to the left of the canvas, avoiding the gaze of the viewer. She has dark hair pulled back from her forehead and large, doe-like eyes. Her costume is painted in such a way that the intricacies of the lace and chiffon fabric are shown in detail. Over a stiff white bodice she has a pink gauzy shawl wrapped around her shoulders and

tied with pearls at her chest which match the pearl choker she wears around her neck. On the left side of the canvas is inscribed "Elizabeth Paterson Wife of Lieutenant General William Amherst d. 1776."⁷

Thomas Lawrence's portrait of Sarah Hickman Amherst (Figure 3) differs from the diverted gaze of the other two oil portraits; here, the sitter looks over the viewer's left shoulder. Her gaze and general countenance are softened by the sideways tilt of her head. The low neckline of her dress and the tilt of her head give her neck a slightly serpentine shape, creating an elegant yet relaxed impression. She has large, dark eyes which are heavily hooded and a flushed complexion. Her location is difficult to ascertain due to the dark background; however, the rich velvet fabric upon which she rests her arm and the hint of a wall suggest a plush interior. Her dark hair blends into its surroundings creating a marked contrast with her ivory skin and white empire-waist gown. Gold necklaces, bracelet, rings and broach stand out against her pale skin and costume. The collar of her dress is made from a soft chiffon fabric that is referenced again in the hint of a shawl around her left arm.

There are two portrait miniatures thought to be of Elizabeth Carey Amherst. One (Figure 5) shows an older sitter with white hair who carries extra weight in her face and especially around her neck and chin. Her skin is smooth and pale with blushing cheeks, and she stares directly as though smiling at the viewer. Her curly hair is piled on her head with strands falling over her brow and a bandeau for decoration. Subtle shading suggests that she is wearing a simple

⁷ Alastair Smart's catalogue indicates this portrait was painted in 1766, making the inscription posthumous. Alastair Smart and John Ingamells, *Allan Ramsay: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 372.

white gauzy costume that is wrapped over in the front. Her pale skin seems to take on the ivory quality of the material on which it was painted. A close look at the brush strokes shows the image consists of a multitude of small dots or stippling. Elizabeth Carey Amherst's figure fills most of the frame and is set against a plain olive background. The second miniature thought to be of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 6) shows a younger sitter; it is painted in watercolour on ivory and fits into a gold-toned locket that is six by eight centimetres with a piece of brown silk under glass on the verso of the locket. She gazes directly out at the viewer with the corners of her mouth turned up, and engaged eyes that suggest a full smile.

The miniature thought to be of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 7) may be the least masterful of the miniatures in draftsmanship. The face is rendered two-dimensional by a lack of subtle shading and awkward placement of the features. The feather decorating the sitter's hair and the position of her head mirror that of the full-size portrait by Ramsay. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst wears a chiffon top with a large white collar. The verso of the 4.5 x 5.7 centimetre object shows a beaded monogram of the initials "EA" on a purple background (Figure 7.1).⁸

Finally, a 5.7 x 7.0 centimetre tortoiseshell locket holds the portrait miniature believed to be of Sarah Hickman Amherst (Figure 8). With a slight turn of the head, the sitter gazes directly out at the viewer. Her skin is very pale which contrasts with the dark curly hair that frames her face. Amherst wears a lace cap

⁸ The crack down the centre of the miniature exemplifies the fragility of these objects.

and a kerchief around her neck. Her rosy lips – slightly upturned at the corners – give life to the image while the pearl ear-ring seems to catch some light.

Assumptions and Limitations

Certain assumptions will be made in the course of this research programme. The identities of the sitters in the portrait miniatures have been identified tentatively by Library and Archives Canada, as they are in my paper; however, portrait miniatures are notorious for being difficult to identify as they are usually not signed, dated or given a title. A conclusive identification of the sitters in the portrait miniatures is therefore impossible. In referring to them in the way I do in my thesis, I am not conclusively attributing them but putting forth plausible identifications.

My identifications begin with a close comparison of the identified sitters in the full-size portraits with their alleged miniatures. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's portrait miniature was likely copied directly from Allan Ramsay's full-size portrait of her. The feathers in her hair are identical in both images: four strands sweep toward the forehead, one arches up and three form a pitchfork/fleur-de-lis shape. The position of her head and shading on the neck are identical in both images. Sarah Hickman Amherst's raven-coloured curls and dark grey eyes are visible in both the full-size portrait and her portrait miniature. There are marked similarities in the shape of her long, straight nose and thin upper lip. The miniature of a white-haired Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5) displays certain facial features that could represent an older version of the sitter in the Reynolds full-size portrait.

The facial features are fair in both images and Elizabeth Carey Amherst's distinctively small mouth and long nose are likewise repeated. Letters from Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband indicate that Elizabeth Carey Amherst had "grown fatt" after her marriage to Jeffery, supporting the idea that the heavier frame of the woman in the miniature is that of Elizabeth Carey Amherst.⁹

The provenance of the fonds that include the Amherst miniatures is stated as being through family descent.¹⁰ Elizabeth Frances Amherst, daughter of Elizabeth Paterson and William Amherst, married John Hale in 1799 and the miniatures are part of the Hale/Hensley family fonds at Library and Archives Canada. As miniatures were often passed down through families as heirlooms accompanied by a "family story", we can assume the identification of the images relied somewhat on family knowledge.

Finally, fashion history can be looked to for additional support in dating the Amherst portrait miniatures; however, as the miniatures only show a bust-length view of the sitter and not their whole costume, this is not an indisputable means of dating. It is my opinion that the Library and Archives Canada date of c. 1740-50 for the portrait miniature of Sarah Hickman Amherst is mistakenly based on the fashion for kerchiefs and caps from the 1740s. The fonds records her marriage into the Amherst family – which resulted in a number of pregnancies – as occurring in 1800, which, if one is to accept the current dating of this

⁹ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, August 17, 1767, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July-17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

¹⁰ Library and Archives Canada, "Hale and Hensley family fonds [graphic material, object]," January 14, 2009, <http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca>, (accessed August 30, 2009).

miniature, would have taken place when she was more than sixty years old and therefore highly unlikely. Her attire in the miniature was actually a common, but not cutting edge, fashion from the turn of the century and not immediately obvious as such, as the bust-length format blocks more telling signs such as the waistline of her dress. The lace fringe of her headdress might indicate the trim of the bonnets that were popular at this time.¹¹ The kerchief around her neck could be a “habit-shirt” or “chemisette” which was used to mask the décolleté revealed by the low-necked dresses of the late 1790s and early 1800s.¹²

The repetition of facial features in Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s two portraits delivers strong evidence that the sitter is the same person, painted before her death in 1776. The change of costume to a more exaggerated ruffled neckline reflects the trend of déshabillé, casual clothes for the home, where a “négligé du matin” may include a jacket with a similar ruffle.¹³ Alternatively, it could have been inspired by the “chemise gown” that Marie-Antoinette made popular in the 1770s and wore for comfort during her pregnancies.¹⁴

The costume in the portrait miniature of an older Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5) suggests a date of the 1780s or 90s when she would have been close to fifty years old. Around her neck she appears to don a “buffon neckerchief” which was made of a sheer, light material and wrapped around the shoulder and neck and tucked into the corsage in the front. These buffon neckerchiefs were

¹¹ C. Willett Cunnington, and Phillis Emily Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, (Boston: Plays, 1972), 365.

¹² C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Emily Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century*, 3rd ed., (London: Faber, 1970), 360.

¹³ Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750 to 1820*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 70.

¹⁴ Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 71.

bunched up in the front provoking this remark from 1786: "Ladies with neckerchiefs puffed up so high their noses were scarcely visible."¹⁵ The blue sash around Elizabeth Carey Amherst's waist indicates the rising waistlines of the end of the eighteenth-century.¹⁶ Although white-powdered wigs were fashionable in the eighteenth-century, by the time this image was painted they began to be synonymous with artifice and were largely discarded when the waistlines began to rise, giving further reason to believe the white hair was the sitter's own indicating an older woman.¹⁷

The miniature that is identified by Library and Archives Canada as being of Elizabeth Carey Amherst from around 1767 (Figure 6) is therefore problematic when compared to the miniature of the older sitter discussed previously. A close look at the costume reveals a similar high waistline and what might be described as the Grecian-inspired hairstyle of loose curls adorned with a bandeau, strongly suggesting the portrait was actually painted at the end of the century.

Unfortunately, the sitter in this image does not seem to match the age that Elizabeth Carey Amherst would have been at the time of these fashions. There are a number of possibilities for this, the first being that it might not be an image of Elizabeth Carey Amherst. A close examination of both miniatures reveals many similarities in the rendering of the sitters: the exact position of the head, the folds of the neckerchief, the placement of the bandeau, the hairstyles as well as the facial features suggest either that the two miniatures were of different people,

¹⁵ Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 326.

¹⁶ Iris Brooke, *Dress and Undress: the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 134.

¹⁷ Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 19.

but painted at the same time following a popular convention or the sitter is the same person. It is also possible that the portrait of an older Elizabeth Carey Amherst was copied from the “younger Elizabeth Carey Amherst” miniature. As the miniature does not show the full costume of the sitter, it is possible that the portrait was from the 1760s and shows the *déshabillé* of the time and not the neo-classical trends from the end of the century. Nevertheless, the “younger Elizabeth Carey Amherst” miniature poses problems for identification that I cannot confidently reconcile, so I will henceforth refer to this miniature as “possibly” Elizabeth Carey Amherst.

Based on close visual analysis of facial features, archival provenance and costume history, I believe I have a plausible position for my identification of the portrait miniatures of Sarah Hickman Amherst, Elizabeth Paterson Amherst and the portrait miniature of an older Elizabeth Carey Amherst. My identification of the second Carey miniature is less certain and I will therefore refer to it as a possibility. While my discussion in this thesis presumes certain identifications given to the miniatures, my argument suffers little from the tentative attributions. The family provenance places the miniatures within the social and familial context of my research; the specific data on the Amherst women would more closely situate the portraits, but alter little of the discussion of portraiture engaged here.

An overview of the genre of portrait miniatures is beyond the scope of this paper; I have decided to concentrate on three case studies and explore what questions or new interpretations they might raise. As I am focusing solely on the

portraits and portrait miniatures of these Amherst women, I am not aiming to come to conclusions about male portraiture, royal portraiture or portraiture of the middle class. Furthermore, although I touch on it with my suspicion that Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's miniature was painted by a female amateur, a comprehensive look at female professional and amateur miniaturists – while ripe for new discoveries – is impossible in the space allotted.

Statement of Problem

The abundance of supporting primary material such as letters, detailed inventories of the family home, solid provenance for the full-size portraits as well as writings by the artists themselves on topics such as beauty and portraiture can help answer a number of questions raised by this case study of the Amherst women's portrait miniatures. Returning to the issues raised by the letter Elizabeth Paterson Amherst wrote to her husband quoted at the outset, we can further investigate how the portrait miniatures reflected, portrayed and participated in the women's lives. In other words, do the portrait miniatures tell the Amherst women's stories in an alternative way to the full-size portraits by reframing their interactions with their social and economic contexts?

When I first saw these tiny objects, their precious nature immediately struck me. Generally small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, their materiality encourages one to cradle and support each object. The sensation of direct physical contact with the re-presentation of a human being intensifies the experience. The small scale of the portraits creates the need to bring the portrait

close to one's eyes to see the image more clearly, thus increasing the intimate interaction. These impressions of the portrait miniatures made me assume they functioned in an exclusively intimate way. From "miniature as private" I quickly presumed a corresponding binary of "full-size as public" and saw the portrait pairs in the Amherst case study as an example of what I thought were the distinct public and private aspects of upper class women's portraiture.

These categories proved to be problematic however, as evidence suggested that portrait miniatures moved from being intimate tokens of affection to portrayed public identities and back again – sometimes occupying both at the same time. The fluid locations, audiences, functions and meanings of eighteenth-century portrait miniatures imply a more complex and nuanced role than I had originally assumed. In fact, the nuanced role of the portrait miniatures in the women's lives may prove to be more enlightening than a simplistic categorization of public and private. What can the Amherst portrait miniatures tell us about the display of wealth, class and gender norms in these women's lives, and can they shed additional light on the full-size portraits?

Review of Literature

Until recently much work on portrait miniatures has consisted of monographs covering attribution and technique, as well as exhibition catalogues. One of the first works on portrait miniatures, Nicholas Hilliard's *Art of Limning* (ca. 1600), was an instructional guide covering practical and technical aspects but also revealing early attitudes of artists and patrons. Since 1950, Daphne

Foskett's *British Portrait Miniatures – a History* (1968) and *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (1999), and J.J. Foster's *A Dictionary of Painters of Miniatures: 1525-1850* (1926) focused on monetary value, collecting, and artist attribution.

Katherine Coombs wrote *The Portrait Miniature in England* (1998) for the Victoria and Albert Museum, an invaluable survey of the genre's history. Stephen Lloyd has written thorough introductions to two catalogues on portrait miniature exhibitions: *The Intimate Portrait: Drawings, Miniatures and Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence* (2009) and *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum* (2006).

Of late, authors have begun to examine the social and historical significance of the portrait miniature genre. In the exhibition catalogue, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (2000), Robin Jaffee Frank puts forth the argument that the popularity of the portrait miniature in North America was due to a thriving economy and a significant shift in attitudes towards personal relationships which were more emotional and based less on pragmatic or political matches. The social aspect of portrait miniatures has been investigated by examinations of their intricate casing, conventions of wear and use, and their place in gift exchanges in Marcia Pointon's article "'Surrounded with Brilliants': Portrait Miniatures in Eighteenth Century England" (2001).

Pointon's argument for more public uses of portrait miniatures parallels that of Anne Verplanck who argues in her article "The Social Meanings of Portrait Miniatures in Philadelphia, 1760-1820" (1997) that the occupations of members of Philadelphia's social elite played a major role in how they were portrayed in

miniatures. These occupationally conditioned portrait conventions, according to Verplanck, were a way for people to recognize peers and feel they belonged to a certain class.

Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) is relevant for my study of the eighteenth century as his notion of "conspicuous consumption" is basic to an understanding of the commissioning of luxury items such as portraiture. In 2000, Anne Wichstrøm invoked Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption in her analysis of how nineteenth-century female portraiture participated in the construction of the identity of the sitter. Wichstrøm's methodology, situating portraiture of women as luxury items that are conspicuously consumed, informs my own approach to the Amherst women's portraits.

The importance of the English country estate as the site of the display of wealth through art is the subject of Francis Russell's article "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850" (1989) as well as in Christopher Christie's *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (2000) which argues that stately homes were often "temples to the arts." Extensive inventories of Montreal House, the Amherst family estate, suggest that it fits a similar description. These two studies guide my consideration of how the Amherst portraits interacted with their surroundings in Montreal House.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) discusses notions of "cultural capital" which highlight the importance of taste and the understanding of beauty that go beyond the mere amassing of luxury goods.

Bourdieu's theories are especially pertinent to the eighteenth century when debates about taste and beauty preoccupied philosophers and theorists. Bourdieu's assertion that taste and pleasure were functions of one's social status challenges the Enlightenment ideal of the triumph of reason in issues of taste. Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1726) claims pleasure in beauty is inherent and universal and therefore independent of class. The painter of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's full-size portrait, Allan Ramsay, professed in his work *A Dialogue on Taste* (1755) that human reasoning allowed the lowliest members of society to grasp principles of beauty which is important as it signifies the Enlightenment thought that dominated in the first half of the eighteenth century. Some Enlightenment thinkers, however, considered experience and exposure integral to an appreciation of beauty in a way similar to Bourdieu. In his paper "On the Standard of Taste," (1757) David Hume argues that it is possible to come to an agreement about what constitutes value in art but this standard is achieved most easily through a comprehensive familiarity with art.

The significance of feminine beauty in eighteenth-century thought raises questions about how portraits of women participated in the construction of the sitter's identity. In his chapter on Joshua Reynolds' portraits of women, "Such Strange Unwonted Softness': Joshua Reynolds and the painting of beauty," (1998) Robert W. Jones notes that female beauty in art points to the importance of women abstracted as ideas of beauty to the discourses surrounding taste; feminine beauty connected the appreciation of art with the judgement of women.

Patricia Simons' article, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, The Eye and the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," (1992) focuses on the Italian Renaissance but explores notions that survive in Georgian England. Simons notes that, because a woman's beauty in her portrait was commonly considered a symbol of her virtue, female beauty was an important signifier of her husband or family's wealth and reputation.

Changes in society and women's positions in it since the Renaissance also raise questions about whether beauty allowed for more female agency and power. Simons' argument that women's beauty was a signifier of men's reputations provides insight into how women were objectified in order to display dynastic and socio-political power. It has been argued that women were able to forge more powerful representations in the eighteenth century. In "Sculpting her Image: Sarah Siddons and the Art of Self-Fashioning," (2008) Heather McPherson notes that the famous actress Sarah Siddons controlled her public image through art. Phillip Hicks notes in "The Roman Matron in Britain: Female Political Influence and Republican Response, ca. 1750-1800" (2005) that the classicizing trend in female portraiture during this time was advantageous to politically-minded women. In *Discourses on Art* (1769-90), the first president of the Royal Academy of London, Joshua Reynolds (portraitist of Elizabeth Carey Amherst), discusses how portraiture can be elevated to the same academic level as history painting through the use of allegory, classicizing poses and costume.

Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) and Thomas Laqueur's *Making*

Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (1990) are critical sources for understanding the mechanics of sex and gender as constructed categories that are historical and not eternal. Butler argues for the performativity of gender and Laqueur's observations that the two-sex model was only fully adopted in the late eighteenth century is critical in understanding the new gender possibilities – and threats – that informed eighteenth-century gender imaging.

The performance of one's identity is not confined to gender but applies to all aspects of subjectivity. Postmodern theories of subjectivity such as Jacques Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage (1936) and Jürgen Habermas' concept of audience-oriented subjectivity in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989) argue for the exogenous development of identity. The exogenous sense of self is foundational to Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) which argues for the fashioning of "self" rather than the unmediated development of identity. Greenblatt's thesis has informed works such as Kate Retford's *The Art of Domestic Life* (2006) and Marcia Pointon's *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (1993).

One of the consequences of Habermas' identification of a public sphere separate from the intimate, domestic sphere of the home in which unmediated political conversation occurred was the gendering of the public sphere as male and the private sphere as female supported by prescriptive literature of the eighteenth century. Nancy Fraser, however, questions this assumption. In her

article “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1992) she posits the notion of “counter-publics,” where women creatively used the private sphere of domesticity as a springboard to actively join a more public sphere. In his article “Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure,” (1996) Lawrence E. Klein calls the tendency to categorize social spheres by gender the “domestic thesis” and criticizes its accuracy by putting into question the impermeability of the boundaries between public and private.

In her article “American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures,” (2001) Frank argues for the applicability of clear distinctions by categorizing miniatures as private and inward in distinction to the public and outward-facing full-size format. Following Fraser and Klein, I challenge the binary model of public and private and its applicability to portrait genres. A good model for my discussion of the portrait miniatures’ mobility across public and private distinctions is Malcolm Baker’s “Public Images for Private Spaces? The Place of Sculpture in the Georgian Domestic Interior” (2007) in which he challenges the “public” nature of sculpture by examining its function in private domestic interiors.

Scholars such as Pointon, Retford and Verplanck have discussed portrait miniatures as both intimate objects and actors on a public stage. Building on their work, I make observations on the *permeability* and *interdependence* of public and private in both formats of portraiture; in doing so, I hope to contribute to new

ways of thinking of and talking about portraiture's roles in the construction of upper-class identity in the eighteenth century.

Methodology

To fully understand how the Amherst portraits contribute to the construction of identity through gender and class imagery of the eighteenth century, an interdisciplinary approach is taken. As I seek to understand how both formats of portraiture functioned in the Amherst women's experience I explore the public and private aspects of their portraits. Understanding the economic climate of the eighteenth-century and the Amhersts' specific situation situates the portraits as both reflections of and players in the construction of an upper-class identity. The constitution of femininity in the Amherst portraits is considered from a number of angles: in addition to theories on the performativity of gender and femininity, the Amherst women's actual experiences will be compared to the prescriptive literature on gender from the eighteenth century.

Eighteenth-century sources will help identify contemporary attitudes and views of women, wealth, taste, and beauty in art. The prescriptive writings from the eighteenth century can be compared to the Amherst family archival material – housed at Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Amherst College, Massachusetts and Kent County Archives, England – which provides insight, through personal correspondence, into the Amherst women's experiences of their context. Detailed inventories of the Amherst family estate Montreal House in Kent are remarkable documents as they list all the artwork in the house and their

locations and their valuations further elucidating the Amherst women's economic experience.

Chapter Overviews

The first chapter includes a survey of art historical work on portrait miniatures and reveals that the prominent discourse surrounding portraiture formats focuses on their public or private nature. Questions about the boundaries and definitions of each category necessitate a closer look at the viability of the public/private discourse in accurately describing the Amherst portraits and their contextual functions. This chapter explores the idea that as portraiture culturally constitutes subjectivity it is an exogenous construct.

The second chapter begins by considering the social meaning of the family investment in the full-size portraits of the women by top artists, taking into account the struggle for and subsequent instability of the Amherst title. I examine the Amherst women's social position and background within the larger socioeconomic context and ways in which the full-size portraits worked publicly and privately to construct and solidify their position.

Once I have examined how the Amherst full-size portraits functioned and participated in the economic and social status of the sitters and their families, I discuss how the portrait miniatures can be situated in this context. Did they convey the same messages of status and wealth as the full-size portraits?

In Chapter Three, I ask how femininity was constructed and performed in full-size and miniature portraits of the Amherst women and how these

constructions affected their lives. As members of the wealthy and upper class, the Amherst women encountered changes that necessitated the negotiation of new gender dynamics. Conventions employed in the Amherst portraits such as the coding of beauty as virtue and the figuring of a generalized femininity and passivity in the depicted sitters (as pendants to a husband's professional identity) can be seen as performances of an idealized femininity encouraged by prescriptive literature and likely rewarded by society.

Primary material such as letters from the women to their husbands or from friends suggests how the Amherst women actually experienced their gender. I compare the full-size and miniature formats of portraiture to understand how established gender roles may have been negotiated by the Amherst women through the permeability of public and private aspects of their identity in the portraits.

Contribution to the Field

In my exploration of the function of portrait miniatures in the socially constructed identities of the Amherst women, a number of issues are raised. I dispute a restrictive reading of portrait miniatures as intimate and personal by examining the permeability of the private functions of the miniatures to public roles and messages.

My study highlights how portraits can create a public subjectivity of women in a society where both class and gender were being renegotiated in changing power structures. A reconsideration of public and private categories has proven

useful for issues beyond the functions of portrait miniatures; in particular, it is helpful in understanding the construction of identity in the eighteenth century. For example, recognizing public and private as permeable categories opens up new perspectives on the place of portraiture in the construction of an upper class identity. The inception of phenomena such as conspicuous consumption and cultural capital in the eighteenth century means identity could be oriented *towards an audience through portraiture as part of the new consumerist society.*

The Amherst portraits exemplify typical conventions of female representations as seen in their adherence to eighteenth-century gender ideals. However, the multiple functions – both public and private – of female portraiture that I posit in this thesis encourage a reading of women’s experiences and identities that goes beyond prescriptive literature and conventional ideals of femininity in the eighteenth century. The “domestic thesis” of women’s private and passive existence that can be initially assumed through their portraits is complicated by my examination of female portrait miniatures – and their full-size counterparts – which establishes these images as functioning more actively in the complex construction of social identities.

More specifically, I establish an historically rich context for the portrait miniatures of three Amherst women in the Library and Archives Canada’s collection and for the full-size portraits of the Amherst women in the Mead Art Museum in Massachusetts.

Chapter One: “Public” and “Private” in Portraiture and Identity

In the Kentish countryside, an oil painting hung in “Montreal House,” the estate owned by Jeffery Amherst, General of the British Army. On the wall of the dining room, among other portraits of family members and royalty was a full-size portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 1) who sat in a dignified pose draped in luxurious fabrics.¹⁸ The dignity came, perhaps, from knowing she was sitting for the foremost portrait painter of the day: Joshua Reynolds. Miniature portraits of three women from the same family were painted on small pieces of ivory no more than a couple of inches in diameter (Elizabeth Carey Amherst Figure 5; Elizabeth Paterson Amherst, Figure 7 and Sarah Hickman Amherst, Figure 8). Miniature portraits were often gifts from wives for their husbands who carried them on their persons as reminders of their love. A letter to William Amherst from his wife Elizabeth Paterson Amherst indicates she had one such miniature painted for his travels in Scotland.¹⁹

A common misconception about portrait miniatures is that their name comes from their small size; in fact, “miniature” derives from the Latin “miniare” meaning to colour with red lead. Portrait miniatures can be traced to the Middle Ages when sacred books and manuscripts were embellished with small watercolour paintings, often using red lead, on vellum pages; these were called illuminations or limnings. In the sixteenth century, Nicholas Hilliard’s *The Art of*

¹⁸ The location of this portrait is described in inventories of Montreal House, List of Pictures and Jewels; Estate Papers, Inventories and Valuations, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/E14/9, Centre for Kentish Studies.

¹⁹ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, July 15th 1769, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July- 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

Limning outlined how this painting technique could be used for portraiture. The word miniature then came to refer to the minuteness of many paintings in illuminations and later to small stature in general.²⁰

Although portrait miniatures can be found throughout European history, the genre was especially popular in England. The tradition of portrait miniature painting began in England in the sixteenth century with Hans Holbein, Lucas Hornebolte and Nicholas Hilliard. The first miniatures were painted by Holbein and Hornebolte at the court of King Henry VIII. It was, however, in the ritualistic court of Elizabeth I that portrait miniatures became especially popular as they were often given as gifts and came to represent loyalty and royal favour.²¹ In the seventeenth century, Samuel Cooper was the court miniaturist and often produced copies of Van Dyck's portraiture in miniature form. Cooper's talent was widely acknowledged; the eighteenth-century miniature collector Horace Walpole said "If a glass could expand Cooper's pictures to the size of Vandyck's [sic] they would appear to have been painted for that proportion [...] I don't know but Vandyck would appear less great by comparison."²²

The early eighteenth century saw a major turning point in the history of portrait miniatures. Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757) introduced the technique of watercolour painting on ivory which was adapted by the miniaturist Bernard Lens (1682-1740). Lens painted the first miniature on ivory in 1707 initiating the

²⁰ Katherine Coombs, *The Portrait Miniature in England*, (London: V&A Publications, 1998), 7.

²¹ Stephen Lloyd, " 'Perfect Likeness': An Introduction to the Portrait Miniature," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, eds. Julie Aronson, et al., 17-31 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Cincinnati Art Museum, 2006), 19.

²² As quoted in Lloyd, " 'Perfect Likeness': An Introduction to the Portrait Miniature," 19.

widespread replacement of vellum with ivory by miniaturists.²³ While ivory miniatures were popular, alternative materials such as plumbago (black lead or graphite) and enamel surfaces were also used. Enamel was popular as it was an easier working surface than ivory and made coloured paints more vibrant. By the mid-eighteenth century, technical developments had precipitated major changes in the genre. Miniaturists were able to improve the surface upon which they worked by cutting the ivory more thinly, polishing it and pressing it in paper to absorb excess grease. The improvements to the ivory allowed for easier handling as well as the ability to work with the luminescent quality of the surface. Still a difficult and painstaking genre, miniature painting had become significantly easier to execute and therefore more widely available.²⁴

The extraordinary rise in popularity of miniature portraits in 1760s' Britain can be associated with Richard Cosway's career in the genre. Also a painter of erotic miniatures for snuffboxes, Cosway was known for devising new compositions that worked with the constricted space of the miniature. During this time there was a plethora of miniaturists in England, many of whom displayed their work at Academy exhibitions alongside full-size oil paintings.²⁵

Portrait miniatures were most often painted to mark major life milestones such as births, engagements, marriages and deaths.²⁶ Usually small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, they were popular among the upper classes and were often encased in locket or other jewellery so people could keep images of their

²³ Coombs, 76.

²⁴ See Coombs, especially 85-87.

²⁵ Coombs, 97-99.

²⁶ Robin Jaffee Frank, et. al., *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 2000), 150.

family and loved ones near. They were regularly given as gifts frequently between lovers as tokens of affection.²⁷ Laurence Sterne's *Journal to Eliza* (1767) demonstrates the intimate role these objects often had: "I verily think my Eliza I shall get this Picture set, so as to wear it, as I first purposed – about my neck – I do not like the place tis in – it shall be nearer my heart – Thou art ever in its centre[...]"²⁸ Sometimes hair was used as either decoration on the back of the casing or cut up and mixed in with the paint to enhance the intimacy of the object.²⁹ Portrait miniatures were also an important part of mourning rituals for upper class Britons of the eighteenth century; it was not uncommon for a portrait to be drawn of the deceased on his or her deathbed for the family as a remembrance. It has been argued that the popularity of miniatures coincides with a marked shift in attitudes toward love, marriage and family in the eighteenth century. Earlier, marriage in the upper social strata was a political tool dominated by "distance, difference and patriarchy."³⁰ As marriages became based more on companionship the rise in popularity of portrait miniatures followed because they were the ideal tokens of affection.

Art historian Robin Jaffee Frank has contrasted the two formats of portraiture – full-size and portrait miniatures – such as those owned by the Amhersts:

²⁷ Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *Portraits En Miniature: De La Collection Du Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Montréal - Portrait Miniatures : From the Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts*, (Montreal: Le Musée - The Museum, 1989), 18.

²⁸ As quoted in Lloyd, "Perfect Likeness": An Introduction to the Portrait Miniature," 23.

²⁹ Marcia Pointon, "Surrounded with Brilliants: Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England," *The Art Bulletin* 83 no. 1 (2001): 62.

³⁰ Robin Jaffee Frank, "American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures," *American Art Review* 13 no. 3, 191 (2001):152-154.

The portrait miniature stands apart from any other art form in its highly personal associations. Whereas easel [full-size] portraits present a public self meant to face outward, portrait miniatures reveal a private self meant to face inward [...]. The larger portrait was intended to be displayed on the wall while the smaller version was meant to be worn or cherished in private.³¹

When I first embarked on this project it seemed self-evident to analyze the Amherst portraits in accord with Frank's distinction of portrait miniatures as private and full-size portraits as public. One can easily imagine a tender moment between husband and wife exchanging miniatures of each other to keep for when they were apart; just as a full-size portrait hung proudly in a country estate seems to be directed to the public gaze of visitors and friends of the family. Indeed, numerous instances demonstrate the intimate nature of portrait miniatures; for instance, in his will, George IV insisted that he be buried with a miniature of his wife Maria Fitzherbert.³²

However, if the portrait miniature revealed a private self meant to face inwards, does that mean it was completely without public exposure? Furthermore, what exactly do "public," "private," "inward," and "outward" mean? Who was the intended audience for these portraits, what was the latter's function; can we make any statements about public or private roles? The location in the dining room of Elizabeth Carey Amherst's full-size portrait is indicative of the permeability of public and private as it was both the site of family meals and fond memories, and where important guests would have been entertained. The high-

³¹ Frank, "American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures," 150.

³² Stephen Lloyd, "Intimate Viewing: The Private Face and Public Display of Portraits in Miniature and on Paper," in *The Intimate Portrait: Drawing, Miniatures and Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence*, eds. Stephen Lloyd and Kim Sloan, 13-24 (London: Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland and the British Museum, 2009), 17.

profile artists commissioned to paint the full-size Amherst portraits and the sitters' formal clothing and postures indicate that the full-size portraits of the Amherst women were meant to make an impression on people outside the family circle and as such they belonged to the category of the "family portrait" which asserted ancestral narratives and political statements in the public sphere.³³ They were nonetheless likenesses of loved family members and therefore also had a private purpose. Conversely, while portrait miniatures were presumably kept as personal tokens by the husbands, can one convey a "private self" that is independent of the public or shared conventions of social norms?

Royal portraits of Queen Charlotte in this period showing her wearing a portrait miniature of her husband further complicate Frank's view of portrait miniatures as strictly intimate and private. A portrait from 1766 by Johann Zoffany (Figure 9) shows the young Queen seated resting an ungloved hand on the table and a gloved hand in her lap. The bare wrist shows a bracelet with four strands of pearls attached to a portrait miniature of King George III surrounded by gems. The outline of another piece of jewellery indicates a second bracelet under her glove. The same miniature or a very similar one is discernable in a second portrait of the Queen by the same artist from 1771 (Figure 9). It was not just Zoffany who included Queen Charlotte's miniature of her husband in his likenesses of her: a print by Charles Spooner after Mary Benwell (1767) also shows a miniature on her wrist (Figure 10). These portraits, as part of the crown's visual propaganda, were public in intended audience. The nature of the print

³³ See Chapter Five, "Family History and the Politics of Dynasty" in Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2006), 149-186.

medium — widely disseminated and affordable for most classes — supports the intended public function of these portraits. Indeed, the sumptuousness of the jewelled casing in which the portrait is held also indicates it was meant to be viewed by other people.³⁴

The interplay between formats seen in a large-scale royal portrait of the Queen that contained a second royal portrait of her husband in miniature raises questions about the designations of the formats as either entirely public or private. While the portrait miniature of George III certainly points to their intimate relationship as husband and wife, other symbolism was also at play. After her husband's retirement from royal duties due to mental illness, the Queen continued to wear his portrait in public as well as in official portraits, reminding viewers of her proximity to the power of his office. The portrait miniatures signalled much more than just conjugal love, as they also referred to political power:

These images of George III and Queen Charlotte can be seen, therefore to belong within two discourses of public circulation. On the one hand, the miniature of the king was connected to the coinage and thence to the idea of substitution and exchange value. On the other hand, royal miniatures enter the field of reproductive engraving and are thus part of the mass circulation of portrait and caricature images.³⁵

Fashionable women followed Charlotte's lead as it became popular to wear a miniature of one's husband in plain view as jewellery.³⁶ Kate Retford argues: "The inclusion of the husband in the form of a [...] miniature within the [full-size] picture emphasised his ultimate power within the household, even if he

³⁴ Pointon, "'Surrounded with Brilliants': Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England," 49.

³⁵ Ibid, 59.

³⁶ Ibid, 51.

had died and left her a widow.”³⁷ For example, portraits of women and their children such as Reynolds’ *Sarah Otway* (c.1775) and Joseph Wright of Derby’s *Sarah Carver* (c. 1769-1770) include images of their husbands as miniatures set in jewellery to indicate a patriarchal presence. Examples of portrait miniatures in full-size portraits that could certainly be considered public further question assumptions about the “privacy” of one format and “publicness” of another.

Portrait miniatures were made public in other ways as a scene in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* shows. The protagonist, Elizabeth Bennett, tours Pemberly Woods, the stately home of her love-interest, Mr. Darcy. The housekeeper, Mrs Reynolds (an allusion to Joshua Reynolds?) points out a miniature of Mr Darcy hanging above the mantelpiece:³⁸

‘And that,’ said Mrs Reynolds, pointing to another of the miniatures, ‘is my master—and very like him...I am sure I know none so handsome; but in the gallery up stairs you will see a finer, larger picture of him than this. This room was my late master’s favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. He was very fond of them.’³⁹

The portrait miniatures in this scene are displayed for public visitors who tour the home. At the same time, they represent intimate family connections and reminders of Darcy’s father in addition to signalling to the reader a moment when Elizabeth’s feelings softened for Mr. Darcy. It seems portrait miniatures could be legitimate, and even significant, public images raising problems with making assumptions about the duality of the two formats of portraiture. This chapter will first discuss how categorizations of “public” and “private” function in the literature

³⁷ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 114.

³⁸ James Kinsley, “Explanatory Notes,” in Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) ed. James Kinsley, 311-333 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 328.

³⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 186-187.

on portraiture, consider the questions raised, address the usefulness of these terms in my analysis of the Amherst portraits and suggest an alternative way of viewing the objects. As Mrs Reynolds suggests in *Pride and Prejudice*, a comparison between full-size and miniature portraits might be revealing.

Art historians such as Robin Jaffee Frank, Kate Retford and Marcia Pointon invoke private and public as useful categories to situate portraits and distinguish formats within a context of intended audience, social relations and identity. Other historians, however, have pointed to the indistinctness of these categories in the eighteenth century. Jürgen Habermas' theory of society and politics in the eighteenth century, outlined in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, while it identifies the rise of the public sphere in this period, also provides a useful framework that demonstrates the interdependence of public and private in his concept of "audience-oriented subjectivity."⁴⁰ This outward looking notion of the self that is socially formed rather than an autonomous entity is consonant with postmodern theories of identity evoked by other art historians studying portraiture. Rather than focus primarily on issues of public and private, I look to these postmodern exogenous theories of subjectivity in my analysis of the Amherst portraits in order to examine the interpenetration of public and private spheres evident in their use. My proposal that, when displayed and circulated, portrait miniatures functioned under a feigned privacy that allowed an image of a sitter – understood as intimate – to convey messages in a public space illustrates

⁴⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 49.

the permeability of public and private in these objects and in the identities of the sitters.

Art Historical Discourses Surrounding Public and Private in Portraiture

“Public” and “private” (and their synonyms like intimate, inward, and outward) play a principle role in portraiture vocabulary. This section is concerned with unpacking these terms and examining how well they describe the social and political framework in which portraiture functioned in the eighteenth century. Is “private versus public” (intimate versus political, inward versus outward or any other similar pairing) as a binary a viable model for understanding the functions of miniature and full-size portraits? Even if a binary of public/private is not used and the argument is more nuanced, how useful are these terms for describing portraiture? In what ways do they enhance our understanding and in what ways do they confuse it? Do these terms take into account the varied contexts of eighteenth-century society in the formation of identity (self, group, familial, religious, national, racial, social)?

Lawrence E. Klein notes that “binary oppositions are a frequent, important and powerful tool with which people, past and present, attempt to tidy up their mental and discursive worlds.” Although binaries such as miniature/full-size and private/public are convenient descriptors, Klein argues that they may not be the best reflection of reality.⁴¹ For example, what was understood as private was not

⁴¹ Lawrence E. Klein, “Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure,” in *Eighteenth Century Studies* 29 no. 1 (1996), 98.

necessarily exclusively so, as seen in the public uses of the so-called “private” miniatures.

Like Robin Jaffee Frank above, Christopher Kent Rovee’s work on portraiture draws clear boundaries. He argues that the “realism” of portrait miniatures (as opposed to idealized history paintings, for example) indicated that they were private objects “meant to be kissed in private.”⁴² Their emphasis on exact likeness meant they were perceived as more truthful to their subjects and therefore closer to representing that person’s authentic self. The full-size portraits, being consumed in public, on the other hand, were prestigious, idealized and distant.⁴³ Rovee’s concept of “realism” in portraiture creating an unmediated portrayal is troublesome as it does not acknowledge the affectation inherent in all representations of individuals. Furthermore, the erotic and intimate nature that he assigns to miniatures – kissing the object in private – is not adequate for interpreting the public function of miniatures as seen in the portraits of Queen Charlotte discussed above.

Scholars such as Steven J. Gores, Kate Retford, Catherine Coombs, Steven Lloyd, Marcia Pointon and Anne Verplanck have recognized that portraits may be situated both in private and public spheres. These authors’ well-nuanced understandings of portraiture are useful for my examination of the Amherst portraits. For example, historian Steven J. Gores claims that portrait miniatures

⁴² Christopher Kent Rovee, *Imagining the Gallery: The Social Body of British Romanticism*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 131.

⁴³ Rovee, 130-131.

represent an erotic space that has a “private nature,”⁴⁴ while describing them when in “public view” as jewellery.⁴⁵ The portraits are thus multivalent and they can shift between modes, meaning and functions. In her study of family portraiture in the eighteenth century, Kate Retford points out that the full-size portraits which were designed to be scrutinized in public life also recalled intimate relationships such as family.⁴⁶

In their studies, Katherine Coombs and Stephen Lloyd describe the shift of portrait miniatures – from political court symbols used only in the most elite diplomatic and royal circles of the sixteenth century to their function as love tokens in the eighteenth century – largely in terms of general shifts from public to private. Portrait miniatures started out as symbols of royal patronage or favour and gradually became ensconced in private life. Lloyd, for example, notes that the surge in popularity of miniatures in the second half of the eighteenth century was due, in part, to their private uses, citing the trend in the 1760s of wearing the object on one’s person, close to the heart.⁴⁷ Coombs remarks on how some of the portrait miniatures used in Elizabeth I’s court were “particularly intimate, even secret, image[s].”⁴⁸ Tracing portrait miniatures through history, Coombs and Lloyd emphasize the objects’ functions in terms of political/public and intimate/private. Questions remain, however, about the portrait miniature as a public object (visible jewellery) in the eighteenth century, the possibility of a non-

⁴⁴ Steven J. Gores, *Psychosocial Spaces: Verbal and Visual Readings of British Culture, 1750-1820*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 141.

⁴⁵ Gores, 146.

⁴⁶ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 11.

⁴⁷ Lloyd, “‘Perfect Likeness’: An Introduction to the Portrait Miniature,” 20-23.

⁴⁸ Coombs, 34.

intimate miniature (for example as a gift between disinterested husband and wife in a political marriage) and the public aspect of following a popular trend such as miniatures. That is, how were these objects understood in the eighteenth century and what were they used to convey? For example, how did they signify wealth or reinforce gender ideals of the time? If miniatures are ambiguously private, is it possible that focusing on their public or private aspects is not the best way to describe them?

For Marcia Pointon, the portrait miniature is “essentially a private object” until it is mounted in a bejewelled case where it “enters social and economic exchange systems, thereby participating in, and contributing to, public life.”⁴⁹ She allows for a convergence of public and private in her discussion of portrait miniatures when she notes that they are “half private, half public.”⁵⁰ However, describing these objects as such elides the real permeability and interdependence of the two categories as they are functions of other factors such as wealth, class and gender.

Anne Verplanck touches on a crucial issue in her essay on the localized uses and functions of portrait miniatures in Philadelphia in the post-revolutionary era:

As devices of internal communication among distinct sectors of the elite population, these artists' miniatures were not solely tokens of affection, which is how they traditionally have been seen by art historians. They were also material possessions whose commissioning, embellishment, exchange and recognition helped

⁴⁹ Pointon, "Surrounded with Brilliants," 49.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 68.

mediate or reinforce self, family, and group identity in Philadelphia.⁵¹

By stressing the object's role in reinforcing a social or group identity Verplanck is questioning the categorization of portrait miniatures as inherently private. Instead, she notes that these objects could be associated with the public or private "realm" or both.⁵² To her, portrait miniatures were certainly private objects: "The demand for portrait miniatures in Philadelphia was closely linked to their traditional [private] uses [...]. These [small] formats demanded proximity for viewing and reinforced the miniature's role as a statement of private sentiment."⁵³ At the same time, she acknowledges that: "The internal role assigned to miniatures within each social group was intertwined with the external circumstances that affected the sitter's social, political, and economic milieu."⁵⁴

Verplanck's definition of private is confined to the family: "The provenance of many surviving portraits makes it clear that most miniatures were indeed intended for private consumption, for they remained in the family of the sitter."⁵⁵ She contrasts the private family audience for miniatures with that of their public audience for whom miniatures served as an emblem of group identity based on politics and status. For her, the public audience of a public miniature consisted of the sitter's peers, and therefore was a restricted public: "[c]ontrol over who saw an image could contribute to the fashioning of self-identity and group identity

⁵¹ Anne Verplanck, "The Social Meanings of Portrait Miniatures in Philadelphia 1760-1820," in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, eds. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison 195-223 (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 196.

⁵² I use quotation marks here to distinguish from the very specific notion of realm used by Habermas. Verplanck is using the word as a synonym for area. Verplanck, 197.

⁵³ Ibid, 202-201.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 210.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 203.

through the exposure and viewing of miniature portraits to a select audience, presumably those within one's kinship and social circle."⁵⁶

Gores, Retford, Coombs, Lloyd, Pointon and Verplanck recognize the complex circulation and situations of viewing portrait miniatures and allow for simultaneous functions of public and private in their analyses. Like Pointon, however, other authors seem to leave the categories of public and private undefined. A close look at how the terms are used in the literature indicates ambiguous definitions and boundaries. For example, Gores' usage of private indicates a sexual/affective bond while Retford's use of private (she also complicates matters by using intimate as a synonym) is more familial. Verplanck positions private in the family realm; however, her "public realm" includes only the sitter's friends and political allies rather than other members of the public such as those from different classes, political opponents and publications. These examples serve to demonstrate the ambiguity of the exact nature of "privacy" – is it a sexual state, one of intense emotion, one of familial duty or even one of introspection?

Setting up a binary of public and private as distinct orientations of social interaction does not allow for the fluid reality of these categories. Furthermore, the terms themselves are problematic in their breadth. As we have seen, there seem to be almost as many variations in the definitions of public and private as there are scholars who use them. Private has meant an emotional, erotic, or familial connection and has been used interchangeably with inner and intimate. Public, in turn, has referred to an audience outside one's family, an audience

⁵⁶ Verplanck, 209.

outside one's circle of friends and the political arena – a variety of publics of different sizes and breadths. Moreover, the threshold between public and private is not clearly established.

Ultimately, the terms public and private seem to be used to describe facets of social interaction, aspects of an individual's identities and the functions of the portraits. As the literature on portraiture shows, the terms have many different connotations. This makes situating portraiture in terms of public or private helpful but at the same time misleading; rather, I suggest that theories of subjectivity and specifically Habermas' "audience-oriented subjectivity" which assume the permeability of "private" by "public" defined as the social construction of the self – can better guide my interpretation of the images.

Social Formation of Identity

Habermas' model describes the formation of identity in the eighteenth century in terms of public and private spheres; it also establishes the public sphere as an innovation of the time (see Figure 11). Habermas thought the identity of the private individual was formed vis-à-vis social surroundings, a concept he called "audience-oriented subjectivity." This sense of self grew out of the "intimate sphere" (i.e., for Habermas, the inner core of the private sphere – quite simply, the family) which, through outward-oriented or audience-directed self-exploration via media such as letters, ultimately led to the creation of the public sphere.⁵⁷ Habermas' bourgeois "public sphere" refers to the coming together of private individuals in a public setting to form public opinion through

⁵⁷ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 43.

rational discourse, eventually challenging the monopoly of the ruling authority. Habermas thus complicates a strict separation of the “public” and “private” aspects of identity, as they are in fact interdependent in his model. For Habermas “[s]ubjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience.”⁵⁸ This outwardly oriented sense of identity was manifest in the major literary achievement of the eighteenth century, the “epistolary novel,” which was based on fictional letters. The extra time and education afforded by the industrial revolution coupled with the self-reflexive subjectivity that originated in the intimate sphere created the circumstances from which the public sphere emerged.⁵⁹ Letter writing eventually allowed the “individual [to unfold] himself in his subjectivity.”⁶⁰ Literature, as well as art and music, were subsequently discussed openly and “[i]nasmuch as culture became a commodity [...], it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself.”⁶¹ Habermas’ audience-oriented subjectivity is comparable to other theories of identity that emphasize the social formation of self.

In her introduction to *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Joanna Woodall notes that postmodern theories of subjectivity consider the body as part of the individual’s identity, not as a separate entity. According to Woodall, this makes it possible to analyze historically how portraits (portrayed bodies) articulated ideas and beliefs. Marxist thought, for instance, argues the self is constructed by its

⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 49.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

socio-economic context, a useful consideration in the interpretation of portraits especially within the economic revolution of the eighteenth century. Woodall also points to Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in human development wherein a child has no concept of "self" until he or she perceives his or her own image in a mirror and perceives the reflection as an ideal, autonomous "I." This self is distinct from, and actually constructed through, what is "other." The development of a secondary mirror stage is a turn outward from his mother to others to construct a notion of wholeness. Woodall remarks on the significance of Lacan's theory for the study of portraiture: "Lacan's account of the 'mirror stage' begs comparison with the 'aristocratic' understanding of portraiture as both truthful representation and virtuous exemplar."⁶² Just as the child perceives his reflection to be an ideal, autonomous self, the aristocratic understanding of portraiture also perceives the sitter's image as autonomous and therefore truthful (i.e. unmediated), when it is, in fact, constructed. The portrayed identity on the canvas (or ivory) is a function of a combination of the meanings attributed by the viewer, the intentions of the artist, and the sitter's own intended self-presentation.

Historians and art historians such as Greenblatt, Woods-Marsden, Pointon, and Retford, also embrace and articulate postmodern notions of identity as exogenously constructed in terms relevant to eighteenth-century portraiture. Stephen Greenblatt's description of "self-fashioning" in his study of Renaissance literature suggests that "[cultural representation] crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the

⁶² Joanna Woodall, "Introduction: facing the subject," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall, 1-28 (New York: Manchester University Press, St. Martin's Press, 1997), 12.

experience of being moulded by forces outside one's control, [and] the attempt to fashion other selves."⁶³ His demonstration that the fashioning of identity in Elizabethan literature was a manipulative, artful process and inseparable from both writer and culture can also be seen in the societal and cultural influences on the identities that were fashioned in Georgian portraiture.

Joanna Woods-Marsden opens her study of Renaissance self-portraiture with a quote by Erasmus: "Men are not born, but fashioned," articulating identity's dependence on external forces. She cites the classic reference for Renaissance elites, *The Courtier* by Castiglione to support her argument that the way a person relates his or her world to his or her identity is "the crucial factor in self-presentation" in art.⁶⁴ Castiglione describes the courtier's cultivation of attitudes such as *sprezzatura* (the illusion of spontaneity) to successfully present himself in public. Woods-Marsden stresses Castiglione's conception of the self as "something to be fashioned and created rather than discovered."⁶⁵

Kate Retford and Marcia Pointon are art historians specializing in the eighteenth century who situate portraiture as a performance.⁶⁶ Retford argues that portraiture in the eighteenth century was also an act of self-fashioning: the sitter strives to show him or herself as reflecting popularly understood norms (e.g., clothing to reflect fashion and wealth); by appealing to the expectations of

⁶³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

⁶⁴ Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13.

⁶⁵ Woods-Marsden, 15-16.

⁶⁶ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 10 and Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 41.

others, this act of self-fashioning is a ploy for approbation.⁶⁷ Pointon also states that “portrait painting in the eighteenth century, once we look at the process rather than simply the products, turns out to have been more a performance art than the deeply psychological dialogue that it is often presented as.”⁶⁸ By taking into account the social nature of the portrait creation process, she notes identity in portraiture is not autonomously developed but is displayed as a reflection of a “genuine” presentation of the sitter. Art historian Shearer West cites Erving Goffman’s concept of the theatricality of presenting oneself in society as a helpful concept for understanding portraiture. The “front” of an individual, as Goffman calls the projected self, is present in portraiture in the external signs of the sitter’s socialized self such as behaviour, dress and deportment.⁶⁹

Exogenous theories of identity including Habermas’ audience-oriented subjectivity complicate a reading of portrait miniatures as private representations of interiority, and full-size portraits as public presentations of the socialized self. Indeed, these theories allow us to consider both formats of portraiture in terms of a self that is constructed through external factors such as social interactions, economic contexts and political situations. This sense of self, however, is not just a superficial performance of identity but is internalized by the individual and colluded with the artist who paints the portrait. Although identity is a function of social factors, it is the core of an individual’s beliefs about him or herself. In

⁶⁷ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 10.

⁶⁸ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 41.

⁶⁹ Shearer West, *Portraiture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29. Also see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Anchor, 1959), 22-30 and 70-76.

capturing the sitter's likeness, the artist also tries to capture what he or she perceives as the person's subjectivity.

Letters and Subjectivity

For Habermas, audience-oriented subjectivity functioned in close relationships and conversations within the family in the intimate sphere and was often explored through letter writing.⁷⁰ A letter from Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband affirms her identity not only as a wife, but a genuine lover: "My Dearest Billy, I have not one word of news to send you, and yett [sic] I must write, because it is the only conversation we can have at this monstrous distance from each other, when we meet I shall talk you to death, there will be no end to my pratter."⁷¹ This letter demonstrates a sentimentality that would not have been shown earlier in the century by women of a similar class. The familiar language sustains Habermas' argument that a shift occurred in this period: "In the age of sentimentality letters were containers for the 'outpourings of the heart' more than for 'cold reports' which, if they get mentioned at all, require an excuse."⁷²

In another letter to her husband, Elizabeth Paterson Amherst writes: "[...] My heart exults so much whenever I think of You, that I can not feel dejected, thank God, my name is Amherst, and I am proud of it."⁷³ Her emphasis by underlining the last name conveys awareness of its social importance and status

⁷⁰ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 49.

⁷¹ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, August 3rd, 1769, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July- 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

⁷² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 49.

⁷³ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, July 25th 1769, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July- 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

as he was a member of the famous military general's family. At the same time, she could be conveying her joy in joining his family through marriage, further emphasizing her identity as a loving wife. Her identification as an individual with her husband and his family name can be seen as a function of the social formation of identity as has been explored in the theories of subjectivity discussed above.

The Amherst family reputation, titles and social status, for example, were as much a part of their sense of self as it was part of their public projections. Much of the public identity of the Amherst family came to rest on Jeffery Amherst's military victories and his later admission into the peerage following a lengthy struggle (discussed in Chapter Two). As Jeffery did not have any children, and therefore no heir, he made a special plea to the King to have his nephew, William Pitt Amherst inherit his title. In a letter to the King, Jeffery explains his request: "[...] Your Majesty may be graciously pleased to continue the honour of the Peerage in the Family, by granting a remainder to my nephew [...]"⁷⁴ This special request indicates that belonging to the peerage was not just an honour bestowed upon an individual, but was an important symbol of status for the whole family. The public face of the family as members of the peerage was dependent on the family itself, and was groomed in an intimate sphere.

Even among the most intimate letters from Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband William Amherst, official titles were used. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst recalls a dinner she had with her brother-in-law Jeffery Amherst and his

⁷⁴ Copy of petition from Jeffrey Amherst to grant the remainder of his peerage to his nephew, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350 F31/1.

wife Elizabeth Carey Amherst: “Sir Jeffery and Lady Amherst dined & sup’d with me yesterday, they go back to Riverhead this morning, I think they both look well & grow fatt, this was unnecessary for our Sister, but I think our Brother is much improved by it, [...]”⁷⁵ The juxtaposition of a personal subject matter – disparaging comments about a sister-in-law’s weight – and the emphatically formal use of titles such as Sir Jeffery and Lady Amherst, demonstrates the permeability of public and private selves in the internalization of social status.

Letter-writing for the Amherst women was not confined to conjugal relationships as Elizabeth Carey Amherst’s extended correspondence on a range of religious and political issues with Hannah More, the famous Bluestocking, can attest. The Bluestocking Society, of which More was a second generation member, was a group of upper class women who discussed and influenced serious issues in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁷⁶ More was a writer and became the foremost female evangelical thinker and philanthropist at the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, in her correspondence with More, Elizabeth Carey Amherst was participating in what Habermas called the public sphere. As I will discuss in more detail in my chapter on gender, upper class women’s participation in the public sphere allowed an identity as political beings in addition to their wifely traits. By participating in a public forum, these women – including Elizabeth Carey Amherst – were forming their identities in relation to an audience far larger than the family circle.

⁷⁵ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, August 17, 1769, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July- 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

⁷⁶ For more information on the Bluestocking circle see Gary Kelly, ed. *Bluestocking Feminism Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004).

The sense of identity expressed in the Amherst women's letters shows that these women saw themselves and their domestic and social roles as moving across public and private spheres. The letters suggest that the women were well aware of their status and duty to the family reputation; they had and expressed private feelings such as love and longing that were interdependent with feelings such as pride in status; they contemplated social dilemmas; and, they participated in "counter-publics" that included women such as the *Bluestockings* (the concept of counter-publics will be described below). Their personal feelings were inseparable from their "public" selves (loving wife, for example).

Amherst Portraits and Subjectivity

While the full-size portraits may convey politically-oriented characteristics, their function in capturing a human face, that of a mother or wife, as well as their position within the family home means they were also intensely familial and conjugal in function. The miniatures, acting as love tokens but also conveying social conventions, similarly straddled the public and private spheres. Malcolm Baker's noteworthy analysis of how the notions of public and private affect our understanding of eighteenth-century sculpture (i.e., statues, reliefs and portrait busts) emphasizes the provisionality of the terms. He questions the traditional understanding of Georgian sculpture as public by examining its function in private domestic interiors. He asks: "In what way was the 'publicness' of sculpture constituted? To what degree is it legitimate to read this mode of representation in terms of its role within the emergent public sphere, as this has been outlined by

Jürgen Habermas and others?”⁷⁷ Baker, who ultimately finds Habermas’ model useful, stresses the importance of seeing the relationship between public and private as complex and ambiguous. Ultimately, he concludes that “Just as [...] interiors involved a slippage between the very notions of public and private, so the portrait busts that were placed within them could likewise conflate public and private in their functions and expressive means.”⁷⁸ In his analysis of sculpture, Baker’s emphasis on the ambiguity of public and private in Habermas’ model provides some guidelines for interpreting the Amherst portraits. Additionally, Baker’s argument serves as a reminder that Montreal House, the physical location for the full-size portraits and sitters, was itself both public and private. As the function and intended audience of the portraits slip between public and private, so did the identities they portrayed. In particular, the identity in the portrait miniatures was always a function of social formation, and therefore always had a public element regardless of the impression given that they were autonomous (i.e., internal) manifestations of identity and therefore more private.

Identity and Cultural Representations of the Self

What can the portraits, both full-size and miniature, tell us about the subjectivity of the Amherst women? Gores notes that visual media was a means of cultural representation of subjectivity in the eighteenth century and that “identity is constructed out of cultural representations of the self.”⁷⁹ In creating

⁷⁷ Malcolm Baker, “Public Images for Private Spaces? The Place of Sculpture in the Georgian Domestic Interior,” *Journal of Design History* 20 no. 4 (2007): 309.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 316.

⁷⁹ Gores, 19.

identity through culture, the formation of the self is social, that is, a function of exterior factors. Identity formed through a cultural medium such as portraiture was primarily exogenous, or in Habermas' terms audience-oriented, which allowed for movement between public and private in both formats.

The individual's subjectivity that emerged through conversations in the public sphere was audience-oriented in that "by communicating with itself, [the public sphere] attained clarity about itself."⁸⁰ Self-knowledge was acquired through conversations witnessed and participated in by an audience, the public sphere, which often took place in discussions around art, music and culture. The Amhersts' self-exploration extended to the public sphere as their art collection – specifically portrait commissions – adhered to contemporary artistic theories. For instance, the full-size portraits, painted by Reynolds, Ramsay and Lawrence, who were also the leading art theorists and collectors of the time, demonstrated fashionable techniques as seen in the Grand Style portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst by Reynolds. By participating in the public sphere, the Amhersts' portraits were able to demonstrate taste, class, wealth and politics to a wider audience.

The full-size portraits were not solely political and social tools of advancement but also helped to construct other aspects of the women's identities. The soft pinks and ivories and milky skin tones in the full-size paintings lend a delicacy and a sense of approachability that situates the women in the conjugal unit, as well as in political power. The concepts of beauty embraced in the portraits represent the ideal femininity – virtuous, passive and delicate – as

⁸⁰ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 51.

measured by standards of beauty. In addition to their place in conversations within the public sphere about art theory, the full-size portraits that hung in Montreal House symbolically establish the women in their role at the core of the private sphere, in the domesticity of the patriarchal family structure.

As discussed above, although the miniatures often functioned in private settings, they also indicate an audience-oriented subjectivity. In a letter to her husband, Elizabeth Paterson Amherst added a postscript about a portrait miniature of her he had taken on a journey: “Kiss the little Picture – for my part I envy my own Shadow.”⁸¹ As discussed in the introduction, the word “Shadow” refers to the miniature, her image; in asking her husband to kiss the object she demonstrates how one role of portrait miniatures was as a stand-in for the individual. Just as one’s shadow is inseparable from the human body, as it is the physical body that casts the shaded outline, for Elizabeth Paterson Amherst the miniature was a true “re-presentation” making herself present again to her loved one.⁸² Her subjectivity here is based on her role as wife to the viewer of the miniature. While the frank and direct gazes in the miniature of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5), the miniature that is possibly Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 6) and the miniature of Sarah Hickman Amherst (Figure 8) create a familiarity with the viewer that recalls the easy interaction among family members, miniatures presuppose an audience and therefore establish an exogenous subjectivity that, in this role, is oriented both to their own and their husbands’ conceptions of ideal femininity.

⁸¹ Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, July 15th 1769 , Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July- 17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

⁸² Woodall, 8.

As Verplanck argues, portrait miniatures could be used to build a group identity through circulation among friends or display in the home, and therefore, participated in the public construction of identity. In establishing identity among a peer group, while understood as “intimate” portrayals of the sitter, they created slippage between public and private functions. An extreme example of the false privacy of the objects was seen with Horace Walpole, a famous dilettante of the eighteenth century, who kept a cabinet of miniatures in his “Tribune” room. Only the most special visitors to his home, Strawberry Hill, were granted access to this private room. The restricted access to the “Tribune” and thus the miniatures, created a fictitious sense of privacy for objects clearly meant for public consumption (hence the display cabinet). The consumption of these miniatures by select visitors was made public through inevitable relaying of information by visitors to their noble and reputable circles.⁸³ A role of portrait miniatures, such as the Amhersts’, functioned under a feigned privacy that maintained the function of intimacy while allowing the “intimate” identity of the sitter to be established publicly. Due to the popular understanding of portrait miniatures as intimate and private, the representation of the sitter was more easily legitimized as “truthful.”

Amherst Portraits – Avenues for Further examination

If, as Gores argues, the visual medium was a means of cultural representation of subjectivity, how exactly did this work in the case of the Amherst portraits? Theories of subjectivity that emphasize the social formation of

⁸³ Lloyd, “Intimate Viewing: The Private Face and Public Display of Portraits in Miniature and on Paper,” 15.

identity encourage us to look at such highly constructed contexts as status and gender in the interpretation of the self that is represented in these portraits. How were status and gender constituted in the portraiture of the Amherst family? What role did the cultivation of “high” culture play in achieving social and economic legitimization for the Amhersts? What was the economic context that created the need to demonstrate wealth through art? Jeffery Amherst’s struggle to be granted a title in the 1760s and 1770s meant the family was in a liminal space between the gentry and the nobility. How is this struggle played out in the portraits? Were women’s portraits representations of the whole family’s wealth; if so, how did they do this?

The portraits also raise questions concerning the representation of gender and the Amherst women’s experience, as wealthy women, of their social context. The letters of Hannah More to Elizabeth Carey Amherst indicate that the women were involved in the public sphere. In writing these letters, were the women expressing their own subjectivity or that of the property-owning men in their lives? How did women’s negotiations of patriarchal society affect their portraits? Is there a difference in the identity that is explored in the miniatures and full-size portraits? Chapter Two will focus on how wealth was represented in the Amherst portraits, and Chapter Three will investigate how women adopted and adapted to wealth and gender norms to negotiate their patriarchal society.

My approach is influenced by recent scholars who nuance a strict categorization of portrait miniatures as private and full-size portraits as public, while acknowledging the public/private model on its own is not viable for

interpreting the portraits as reflections of the identity of the Amherst women.

Habermas' model of the public and private aspects of human relations in the eighteenth century is helpful in providing a sense of how public and private are permeable and interdependent, especially in reference to subjectivity. In this chapter I have suggested that portrait miniatures participated in the construction of "fictitious" or feigned privacy aimed, like the circulation of private letters, at the creation of new social identities. The following chapter discusses the social contexts of class that the Amherst portraits addressed.

Chapter Two: Female Portraiture as a Carrier of Wealth and Status

After marrying William Amherst, Jeffery's brother, in 1766 Elizabeth Paterson sat for her portrait (Figure 2) as was customary for new brides of her class. Having her portrait painted by Allan Ramsay, the same man who, five years earlier, had painted the royal coronation paintings of King George III and Queen Charlotte, would have certainly been impressive to her friends and associates.⁸⁴ As was the procedure for most busy portraitists, her sitting was likely one of three or so appointments that day. Once she arrived at Ramsay's studio in fashionable Soho Square, London, he likely offered her a portfolio containing prints of his previous portraits from which she could choose a pose and costume that appealed to her.⁸⁵ The striking similarities between Elizabeth Paterson's portrait and those of Mrs Ann Howard (1768-69) (Figure 12) and Maria, Countess Waldegrave (c. 1765-66) (Figure 13) show that the repetition of pose, costume and drapery in portraits took place in Ramsay's studio to facilitate increased output.

While she sat as Ramsay recorded her features, she may have brought friends and family to keep her company.⁸⁶ Indeed, a sitting for a portrait, especially by Ramsay – who was not only one of His Majesty's Principal Painters but was also known for his superior education and genteel reputation – was surely an appropriate social event for Elizabeth Paterson Amherst and her

⁸⁴ John Ingamells, "Introduction," in Alastair Smart and John Ingamells, *Allan Ramsay: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, 5-11 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 9.

⁸⁵ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 41-42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

circle.⁸⁷ Once the facial features were painted and general composition arranged (which usually took multiple sessions), Ramsay completed his portraits in an “assembly-line” fashion, meaning he had assistants, apprentices, copyists and drapery painters complete the painting.⁸⁸ The precise repetition of the folds in the fabric in Elizabeth Paterson’s shawl in the portraits of Mrs Ann Howard and Maria, Countess Waldegrave indicate that the drapery painter (likely Alexander Van Haecken⁸⁹ or Ramsay’s studio assistant, Eikhart, “a German, well acquainted with draperies”⁹⁰) relied on a prototype for the costume.

A portrait by Ramsay, one of the premier portrait painters in England in the 1760s, was an expensive undertaking. Although there is no receipt for this particular half-length portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst, an estimate is possible. Ramsay charged 50 guineas for a three-quarter length portrait of the Princess Dowager of Wales in 1769 and 20 guineas for a copy of Rousseau’s portrait in 1767.⁹¹ Ramsay’s prices were always less than Reynolds’, and knowing that Elizabeth Carey Amherst’s half-length portrait cost £36.15s in 1767, the price of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s portrait was plausibly in the neighbourhood of 30 guineas.⁹² There is also evidence of a copy which may have been completed by Ramsay’s studio assistants (possibly by David Martin,

⁸⁷ Ingamells, 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁰ Alastair Smart and Allan Ramsay, *Allan Ramsay : Painter, Essayist and Man of the Enlightenment*, (New Haven CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1992), 217.

⁹¹ Ibid, 281.

⁹² David Mannings and Martin Postle. *Sir Joshua Reynolds : A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 60.

Ramsay's principle draftsman and copyist during the 1760s) for an additional fee.⁹³

While it was completed with care and skill, her portrait was nonetheless an assembly-line product with modest originality. It is possible that artistic innovation was sacrificed for the prestige associated with the artist's reputation: Did the Amherst family value Ramsay's reputation over a personalized and unique portrait painted by a lesser-known artist? How important was wealth in the identity that Elizabeth Paterson Amherst portrayed in her portrait? The expense of the portrait and its copy, the reputation of the artist and the dignified pose and costume all suggest that the display of wealth, class and status was an important goal for this portrait. Questions regarding the larger group of Amherst portraits are then raised: How did the other Amherst portraits demonstrate class and status, and what were the historical circumstances that made this display important? How were public and private negotiated in the portrayal of wealth and status? Finally, did the Amherst portrait miniatures also participate in this display of an identity meant to convey upper-class membership?

In 1763, upon his return from military victories in North America where he captured Montreal for the British in the Seven Years' War, Jeffery Amherst razed Brooks Place, the traditional Amherst family home and built a more impressive country estate, Montreal House (Figure 14) so-named as a tribute to his success.⁹⁴ The new Palladian-style house was relatively small but built on a

⁹³ Eva Major-Marothy, Curator at the Portrait Gallery of Canada, Conversation, August 2008.

⁹⁴ Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the Amherst family lived in a Tudor house called Brooks Place, Riverhead (near Sevenoaks, Kent) which was described as a "timber-framed hall

natural rise in the land so that it seemed to preside over its surroundings.⁹⁵

Amherst's tumultuous rise to the peerage was concomitant with a major change in the composition of the nobility in England, when hereditary titles were being outnumbered by titles granted for service to the crown, instigating much debate and anxiety. Amherst's behaviour in the 1760s and 1770s suggests claims to status and nobility could be enhanced through consumption of cultural goods, and can thus influence our reading of the Amherst women's portraits as displays of a status-consciousness.

This chapter investigates how and why wealth and class were portrayed in the portraits of the Amherst women in both full-sized and miniature formats. In my analysis of the Amherst portraits, I rely on Habermas' definition of audience-oriented subjectivity and the general notion of the self 'performed' as described by Judith Butler and others informed by Lacanian theory. Within this theoretical framework, I will investigate how subjectivity is conveyed in these portraits in relation to social status by looking at the changing economy, class anxieties, social distinction through consumption of cultural commodities, and contemporary notions of taste and beauty.

Class Anxieties and Conspicuous Consumption

In their book, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb argue that one consequence of the industrial revolution (generally considered to

house." Christopher Rayner, *Sevenoaks Past*, (Gloucestershire, England: Phillimore and Co Ltd, 1997), 42. Also see Long.

⁹⁵ Rayner, 63.

span from 1760 to 1820) was a “consumer revolution,” or the emergence of a consumer society in which the middle classes had unprecedented purchasing power.⁹⁶

Before the turn of the eighteenth century, English society and economy were largely rural. Generally, the economy showed signs of underdevelopment, with a non-market economy (unspecialized and based on agriculture and basic goods), inelastic demand, famine and disease, high death rates and low population growth. This economic climate meant that the purchase of non-necessities was an indicator of high social status. Social structures were seen as fixed and social aspirations (including non-elite consumption of luxury goods) were considered immoral and overly ambitious by some.⁹⁷ Economic theorists also argued against consumerism on somewhat different grounds than moralists as economic thought, dominated since 1500 by Mercantilists, maintained that thrift and savings were key to national economic prosperity.⁹⁸

The industrial revolution brought along with its new machinery, a new class of workers and merchants. This new class had an unprecedented amount of purchasing power to consume the plethora of new goods that were appearing on the market. Key motivations for spending shifted from survival needs to the “wants” that were deliberately created by fashion and advertising.⁹⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century consumerism was widespread as attitudes towards

⁹⁶ See Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 13-19.

⁹⁷ Colin Campbell, "Romanticism and the Consumer Ethic: Intimations of a Weber-Style Thesis," *Sociological Analysis* 44 no. 4 (1983): 281.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 280.

consumption changed. As Adam Smith noted in *The Wealth of Nations*, “consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production [...]”¹⁰⁰

Colin Campbell associates this change of consuming habits, in part, with the concurrent rise of Romanticism. He describes what he calls the spirit of modern consumerism which began during the Romantic era (mid-eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century) as one of raised expectations, interclass mobility, and the acceptance and celebration of “the desire to desire.”¹⁰¹ These new attitudes, argues Campbell, were in some measure a result of the Romantics’ emphasis on the self and the importance of having a variety of experiences.¹⁰² With an increase in consumer goods came increased access to quality, fashion and variety – all of which were seen to embody individualization, self-expression and varied experiences.¹⁰³

The consumer revolution affected elite spending habits just as much as those of the middle class. While the elite had previously been the sole consumers of luxury goods, by the end of the eighteenth century most levels of society were participating in commercialized lifestyles. Indeed, those who possessed little purchased more and those who had inherited plenty still bought new and varied goods.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ As quoted from McKendrick et al., 15.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, 281-2.

¹⁰² Ibid, 287.

¹⁰³ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁰⁴ McKendrick et al., 27.

Development of Class Anxieties

The availability and accessibility of luxury goods afforded by the consumer revolution meant that lavish lifestyles were no longer a guaranteed indicator of status. This created anxiety among the upper classes as this complaint from *British Magazine* in 1763 indicates: "The present rage of imitating the manners of high life hath spread itself so far among the gentle folks of lower life, that in a few years we shall probably have no common folk at all."¹⁰⁵ The gradual acceptance of consumerism among the middle class created a need for new distinguishing traits between the upper and middle classes. By the late eighteenth century, anxieties about class distinction created an environment where the sharp rise in the purchase of luxury goods was not only acceptable, but virtually required for the nobility and upper classes.

A dramatic increase in the number of peerages that were created from non-landed gentry at the end of the eighteenth century led to uncertainty among the nobility about the distinction and definition of their class. By the end of the eighteenth century peers were created much more quickly than in the first three quarters of the century. From 1700 to around 1776 on average two peers were created every year and the House of Lords consisted of 199 members; but from 1776 (the same year Amherst was awarded the honour) onwards peers were created at such a rate that by 1830 there were 358 members in the House of Lords.¹⁰⁶ Not only was there a remarkable influx of new peers, many of them were civil servants, military men or important politicians who did not necessarily

¹⁰⁵ As quoted from Mckendrick et al., 25.

¹⁰⁶ Michael W. McCahill, "Peerage Creations and the Changing Character of the British Nobility, 1750-1830," *The English Historical Review* 96. no. 379 (April 1981): 259.

have the land or wealth that characterized the older members of the nobility. Indeed, forty percent of men who were raised to the peerage between 1750 and 1830 were not from noble or landowning backgrounds.¹⁰⁷ The changing characteristics of the nobility meant that the boundary between them and commoners was starting to blur.

The Amherst family's social status was not stable in the second half of the eighteenth century as their position at this time was marked by aspirations to the nobility. Ambition and subsequent uncertainty of their position may have precipitated a desire to emphasize an upper class identity. Jeffery Amherst was born at Brooks Place in Kent to a wealthy family of lawyers and clergymen. As a young man, Jeffery was a page for Lord Sackville, First Duke of Dorset. Later, while living in London, Amherst participated in society and befriended aristocrats such as Lord Chancellor Hardwicke and some of the members of the King's household. Amherst's military success in North America earned him some recognition and a comfortable salary. In 1765 Amherst was made Lieutenant Colonel of the 15th Regiment with an annual income of £600, Governor of Virginia at £1, 500 pounds, and Colonel of 16th Regiment at £600. In addition to his military income, Amherst received £800 annually from his lands making his total annual income £3 100, under the median of £4 000 for a peer at this time.¹⁰⁸ However, for the man who secured Canada for the crown, there was the feeling

¹⁰⁷ McCahill, 269.

¹⁰⁸ Long, 197-8.

among his supporters that his return was met with indifference by the King, and more disappointingly, by the future Prime Minister William Pitt, an old friend.¹⁰⁹

Already a “country gentleman,” Amherst’s second marriage to Elizabeth Carey in 1767 greatly improved his wealth and social standing.¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Carey was the daughter of General George Carey and the niece of Viscount Falkland and brought with her lands and a dowry of £10 000. However, shortly after Amherst’s marriage the King demanded his return to Virginia to fulfill duties as Governor or relinquish the position. Amherst was offended as governorships were generally only symbolic and the situation deteriorated when he found out that Baron Boteourt was granted the position even before Amherst was consulted. Amherst felt publicly disgraced and thought that he should be granted a peerage to redeem his honour. In a letter to the Duke of Grafton, Amherst argues his case:

[Sir Jeffery Amherst] hopes it will not appear too great presumption in him, at this time, to request a distinguished mark of honour for his Services in No. America, where sixteen French Battalions were taken Prisoners, he hopes, much to the honour of His Majesty’s arms, and a greater Extent of Country was conquered, than has been gained by any subject, and he is of an antient [sic] & good family he hopes the King may think him worthy of being created a Peer of England, the Intail [sic] on Colonel Amherst for his Services at Newfoundland; and equivalent to the Income as Governor of Virginia [...]¹¹¹

A decade-long struggle followed which resulted in Amherst resigning all military positions amid an ensuing public outcry against injustices done to him. Newspapers such as *The Public Advisor* also circulated the (false) rumour that

¹⁰⁹ Long, 192.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 222.

¹¹¹ Letter from Amherst to Duke of Grafton asking for peerage request to be presented to George III, in Long, 204.

Prime Minister Grafton had told Amherst his finances were insufficient to support a peerage.¹¹²

Finally, in 1775 growing discontent in the American colonies and a seemingly incompetent Colonial Secretary at the helm caused the House of Peers to take action and convince the King to bolster the Administration vote by the creation of a dozen new Lords.¹¹³ It was under these circumstances that Lord Jeffery Amherst was finally granted the title, First Baron of Holmesdale in 1776, although it was closely followed by another struggle to grant the remainder of his peerage to his nephew William Pitt Amherst. Even though Amherst claimed in his personal memoirs that it was the recognition, rather than the title he sought, his sense of honour seemed to be only fulfilled by a title: "I should be forced by a mark of disgrace being thrown on me to request a Peerage in defense of my honour."¹¹⁴ Indeed, the lengthy battle and effort on Amherst's part indicates that he was adamant about the issue.

New membership in the peerage would have been a great honour (at the time there were only 214 peers in the entire kingdom), but it could also have caused a certain amount of social anxiety. That is, unlike a family with a long history of nobility, Jeffery Amherst had been (rather grudgingly) granted the honour based on merit and political considerations. To make matters worse, the conflict between Lord Amherst and the King meant his position was not entirely

¹¹² In the publication *Junius*, as quoted in Long, 208.

¹¹³ Long, 227.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 211.

secure; however; it seemed to have improved by October 1778 when the King and Queen visited his house in Kent.¹¹⁵

In this context, the commissioning of the Amherst family portraits can be understood as an attempt by the family to identify with the peers whose ranks they were struggling to join. Kate Retford and Marcia Pointon argue that portraiture in the eighteenth century was an act of self-fashioning, a “performance art.”¹¹⁶ These concepts of the self as presented in portraiture are useful in my interpretation of the Amherst portraits.

Purchasing luxury goods was one way for the established nobility to maintain their superiority over the new influx of less financially able or less ancestrally established members of their class. As many new peers were of modest means and needed financial support from the government, there was concern that a poor noble was unable to maintain the image of a properly functioning social order.¹¹⁷ This pressure to spend on luxury goods was so great that some people who were offered peerages declined them fearing it would lead to their financial ruin.¹¹⁸ As a result, a form of what M.L. Bush called “social demotion” (i.e., rejection) occurred against nobles who were unable to keep up the image of a wealthy ruling class.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Long, 252.

¹¹⁶ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 10 and Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 275 and Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59.

¹¹⁸ McCahill, 271.

¹¹⁹ M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis*, (Dover, N.H.: Manchester University Press, 1984), 61.

Conspicuous Consumption, Distinction and Politeness

Thorstein Veblen's theory of "conspicuous consumption," outlined in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) provides a framework from which to understand the upper classes' increased spending due to class anxieties and a desire for differentiation from those of lesser status. The birth of the consumer society in eighteenth-century England was the foundation of the late Victorian economic habits that Veblen characterized as conspicuous consumption, a concept that has also been applied to the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century.¹²⁰ Veblen states that the consumption of unproductive goods that are superfluous to survival has been used as a marker of status since pre-history.¹²¹ The instinct to consume in order to impress one's peers, according to Veblen, continued in contemporary industrialized societies:

The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and conspicuous consumption of goods.¹²²

Veblen does not allow for social validity based on consumption alone; social status was achieved through the *discriminatory choice* of goods and their consumption in a "seemly" manner.¹²³ Andrew B. Trigg notes that transforming wealth into social status depended on the social performance of people in

¹²⁰ Neil McKendrick et al., 2.

¹²¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institution* (1899), (Franklin Center, Pa.: Franklin Library, 1979), 75.

¹²² Ibid, 84.

¹²³ Ibid, 75.

keeping with the judgements of the leisure class.¹²⁴ Veblen states that the “instinct of taste” is integral to the proper or “seemly” consumption of goods, and good taste is evidence of gentility because of the time and money needed to foster it.¹²⁵ “Punctilious discrimination,” according to Veblen, “affects not only the manner of life but also the training and intellectual activity of a gentleman of leisure.”¹²⁶

In an article defending Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* against criticisms, Trigg uses Pierre Bourdieu’s development of Veblen’s model in *Distinction* to highlight its inherent subtleties. In response to criticisms that Veblen’s theory relies too heavily on consumption of luxury items, Trigg points out the role of conspicuously consuming *cultural* goods in Veblen’s work, comparing it to Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital”: “[a] key point of Veblen’s analysis of different sections of the leisure class is that established members of the upper class use their accumulated culture to distinguish themselves from those of so called ‘new money’ [thus providing] a barrier to entering the top echelons of the leisure class.”¹²⁷ This concept is comparable to Bourdieu’s “cultural capital” which is the accumulation of knowledge about culture and its products that is learned through education and social upbringing. Citing the power of social distinction according to cultural commodity accumulation in both Bourdieu and Veblen’s theories, Trigg notes: “The aesthetic taste of individuals

¹²⁴ Andrew B. Trigg, “Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 35 no. 1 (2001): 100.

¹²⁵ Veblen, 48.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 74.

¹²⁷ Trigg, 104. Also see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

with high cultural capital is used to secure positions of status in the social hierarchy through exercising a mark of distinction.”¹²⁸

Veblen acknowledges that the connection between culture, consumption and status might not be present in one’s consciousness but rather a product of one’s social surroundings.¹²⁹ This subconscious desire to consume conspicuously is seen in the propensity to buy expensive items not seen by others; for example, underclothes or kitchen utensils.¹³⁰ Bourdieu’s notion of habitus – the unconscious forces developed through social upbringing that guide behaviour – also describes the unconscious aspect of Veblen’s theory. Trigg notes: “Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” can be seen as a formalization of the insights provided in Veblen’s conspicuous consumption.”¹³¹

Compounding cultural capital as a status symbol was the emergent notion of “politeness” in the eighteenth century – allowing a broader membership in what became known as “polite society.” “Politeness,” according to Paul Langford, “meant that an individual had a distinguishing vision of wider social concerns and adhered to less constricted cultural tastes than earlier centuries.”¹³² Eighteenth-century commentators, Addison and Steele of the *Spectator* magazine presented the notion of “politeness” as a looser, simplified code of manners so that people who lacked the traditional traits of status (titles and family history, for example) could achieve it. The third Earl of Shaftsbury

¹²⁸ Trigg, 105.

¹²⁹ Veblen, 149.

¹³⁰ Trigg, 108.

¹³¹ Ibid, 109.

¹³² Paul Langford, “The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 311.

argued for notions of virtue and taste that allowed for an accessible form of gentility.¹³³ Even though wealth and leisure could ease one's transition into polite society, according to contemporary writers and philosophers, politeness was attainable by all. As possessions and manners were becoming less reliable indicators of status, taste took on a new importance in the desire for distinction. As Maxine Berg has noted: "[...] with wider access to consumer valuables, the pursuit of fashion altered the social role of luxuries. Taste took over from luxuries as markers of stable status structures."¹³⁴

Art in the Service of Wealth, Distinction and Taste

The social contexts of art and its market in eighteenth-century society are well-accounted for by Veblen, and later by Bourdieu's notions of culture as a commodity that influences social status, also called "cultural capital." The commercialization of purchasing, collecting and dealing in art establishes it as a commodity in a market economy. Commissioning works, sitting for portraits and displaying them lavishly in one's home exemplify Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption. At the same time, the association of art objects with the habits and interests of the nobility as a reflection of taste signal their importance for distinction in social hierarchies.

By the late seventeenth century a specialized, professional and profitable art market had evolved in Britain in which both upper and middle classes

¹³³ Langford, 312.

¹³⁴ Berg, 114 and 29.

participated.¹³⁵ From the great collections of King Charles I in the late seventeenth century to the modest middle class collectors of the late eighteenth century, many who could afford it purchased art. The British nobility participated in this cultural world as patrons and collectors; their considerable investment in art helped to shape British culture of the eighteenth century.¹³⁶ Valuable collections were amassed by nobles such as Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel whose impressive collection left him with an astronomical debt at his death.¹³⁷ Aristocrats such as George O'Brian Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont and James Brydges, Duke of Chandos were both serious collectors: every year the former spent around one-fifth of his £100 000 salary on art.¹³⁸ Notable art collections were just as easily found among the untitled. A sale of Sir William Hamilton's whole collection in 1761 consisting of 132 paintings of value including a pair of religious paintings by Veronese sold for £52 10s to a Duke, a Carracci sold for £105 to a wine merchant and a Rubens was bought by an unnamed customer for £95 11s.¹³⁹

The consumer revolution and the emergence of a sophisticated and professional art market in London made art a fashionable luxury. As art collecting was expected behaviour of the upper classes, commissioning portraits was de rigueur. Portraits, often gifts from family and sometimes friends, were

¹³⁵ Ian Pears, *The Discovery of Painting : The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1768*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 51.

¹³⁶ Dewald, 157.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 99.

¹³⁸ See Susan Jenkins, "Power Play: James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos, and Sir Robert Walpole: The Politics of Collecting in the Early Eighteenth Century," *British Art Journal* 4 no. 2 (2003): 80-82.

¹³⁹ See Kim Sloan, "Sir William Hamilton's Insuperable Taste for Painting'," *Journal of the History of Collections* 9 no. 2 (1997): 209.

increasingly in demand creating a booming market in London in the eighteenth century. The city was full of portraitists, with at one point at least 111 portraitists recorded as doing business in the metropolis.¹⁴⁰ Although the middle classes were part of the increasing demand for portraiture, the peerage and elite still looked to portraiture to distinguish themselves by employing famous artists and commissioning works with grand themes.

Portraiture was attractive because of the opportunities it afforded for participation in noble society. In fact two ways portraitists could advertise their services to the upper classes were when a customer saw an artist's painting of a friend (the original, a copy or engraving) or noticed the artist's work at the Academy's annual exhibitions.¹⁴¹ Included in the Royal Academy exhibitions where many portraits were on loan from private collectors, portraiture in the art collection of the elite was just as valuable and socially impressive as other genres of art. While certainly not sufficient in itself, portraiture was a significant means of reinforcing membership or achieving acceptance in the upper classes, especially the peerage. Not only was portraiture a practice long used by royal families and great rulers, it also helped create a family tradition and dynasty. Indeed, it was common practice for noble classes in England to keep a veritable portrait museum of their ancestors as a visual reminder of the greatness of that family.¹⁴²

The impressive sums paid by the elite for portraits by top artists indicate that these works were not mere afterthoughts for their collectors. Portraits were

¹⁴⁰ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴² Ibid.

priced by size of canvas. In 1793 Thomas Lawrence, by then well established, charged 40 guineas for a three-quarter length and 160 guineas for a full-length portrait and Reynolds charged 35 guineas for a three-quarter length in the 1760s.¹⁴³ To put these prices in perspective, Sir John Fleming Leicester's butler made £52 10s per year.¹⁴⁴ The prices charged by two of the top portrait painters indicate that the nobility was willing to spend on portraiture as much as they did on other types of art. Portrait miniatures, on the other hand, ranged from five guineas charged by Charles Wilson Peale in the early 1770s to 30 guineas apiece in the 1780s. Although not in the same price range as full-size portraits, the high-quality miniatures consumed by the elite were nonetheless luxury goods.¹⁴⁵

Louise Lippincott has suggested that while much was made *theoretically* about the "decline" of taste in art in the eighteenth century due to the replacement of history painting by portraiture in popularity, in practice portraiture took on the role that was once occupied by history painting as a means of social distinction. Many critics during the eighteenth century lamented the rise in popularity of portraiture claiming that it was a symptom of an increasingly consumer-driven society with declining taste. History painting, claimed these critics, represented public virtue in its didactic, historical and imaginative characteristics. However, citing artists like Reynolds who brought these features

¹⁴³ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 44.

¹⁴⁴ Dongho Chun, "Patriotism on Display: Sir John Fleming Leicester's Patronage of British Art," *British Art Journal* 4 no. 2 (2003): 24.

¹⁴⁵ Verplanck, 201.

to portraiture, Lippincott argues that portraiture began to display taste and education previously found only in history painting.¹⁴⁶

Price and Choice of Artist in Amherst Portraits

Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption has been persuasively invoked by Anne Wichstrøm in her analysis of the construction of gender and class imagery in the nineteenth-century portraiture of Norwegian artist Asta Nørregaard.¹⁴⁷ Wichstrøm argues that the portraits of women in fashionable clothing and luxurious surroundings pictured at leisure (as opposed to portraits of men reading, writing or riding horses) were deliberately meant to construct an image of upper class women whose function was to demonstrate their husband's wealth. She associates the conspicuous display of leisure and wealth in portraits with Veblen's theory on how women's conspicuous consumption and leisure supported their husbands' reputations.¹⁴⁸ The full-sized portraits of the Amherst women can be similarly interpreted. Each woman is draped in luxurious fabric, gold jewellery and pearls and adopts a leisurely pose. Sarah Hickman Amherst's clothing (Figure 3) was fashionable for the turn of the century while Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 1) and Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's (Figure 2) costumes (classical and fancy-dress) were the fashion for women's clothing in portraiture in

¹⁴⁶ Louise Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public and the hierarchy of genres in eighteenth-century Britain," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, eds., Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, 75-88 (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ See Anne Wichstrøm, "Gendered representation: Asta Nørregaard's upper-class portraiture 1890-1905," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* LXIX no. 1 (2000):19-32.

¹⁴⁸ Wichstrøm, 24.

the 1760s.¹⁴⁹ In addition to leisure and fashionable clothing, I propose that the reputation of the artist was also a mark of luxury which displayed taste and knowledge of contemporary theories on beauty in art suggesting cultural capital.

A telling anomaly is present in Elizabeth Carey Amherst's full-size portrait (Figure 1): although it was painted in 1767, she wears ermine fur which was a symbol of nobility, nine years before Amherst became a Peer of England.¹⁵⁰ Why include ermine in a portrait of a woman who at the time of her sitting was not a member of the nobility? Although ermine was used by Reynolds chiefly for the nobility, there are examples in his oeuvre of non-titled women in this type of fur.¹⁵¹ Another explanation is that the fur might have been added to the portrait after the Amhersts' rise to the nobility in 1776. Revising portraits after they were painted was not uncommon, and in fact, it seems that Elizabeth Carey Amherst's portrait had already been altered. Photographs of the portrait from the 1930s show a woman with a lock of hair cascading down her neck; however a cleaning of the portrait in the 1960s found this to be a later addition and was subsequently removed.¹⁵² Regardless of when the ermine was painted, it remains a significant symbol of status, or aspired status.

¹⁴⁹ The gendered aspect of conspicuous consumption, including the importance of dress will be examined in Chapter Three in more detail.

¹⁵⁰ Ribeiro notes that since the Middle Ages, ermine was reserved for the aristocracy and that peeresses in the eighteenth century chose to be painted in their coronation costume which included an ermine mantle, *The Art of Dress*, 173-174.

¹⁵¹ For example Mrs Edward Goddard 1756 and Mrs Luther 1763/66 by Reynolds. Ribeiro notes that ermine was part of some historical costumes of the eighteenth century, *The Art of Dress*, 223 and states "Ermine, in particular, which had once been reserved just for royalty, was a popular trimming in 1740." in *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe: 1715-1789*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 151.

¹⁵² Letter, November 4, 1993, from Ross Fox, Curator of European Art, Amherst College to Sandra L. Webber, Williamstown Regional Art Conservation Laboratory, Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA.

All three full-sized portraits of the Amherst women were commissioned by famous artists and were thus expensive. Elizabeth Carey Amherst's portrait cost £36.15,¹⁵³ as mentioned above Elizabeth Paterson's portrait cost around 30 guineas and Sarah Hickman's portrait was in the neighbourhood of almost 40 guineas.¹⁵⁴ However, these portraits were half length and relatively simple in motif, indicating that they were created "assembly-line style" with studio assistants painting such standard fittings as drapery. As argued above, the portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst was almost certainly completed in this manner as was the portrait of Sarah Hickman Amherst by Thomas Lawrence which bears a resemblance to many other portraits by his studio in its use of crimson velvet drapery. The portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst, while painted by Joshua Reynolds, shows nothing of the originality and imagination and less of the Grand Style present in his other celebrated portraits such as *Lady Sarah Bunbury sacrificing to the Graces* exhibited for the Society of Arts in 1765.¹⁵⁵ Opting for a less original portrait by a famous artist indicates that the artists' reputations were alone significant for the family; while they were the less expensive versions, they were nonetheless major purchases.

Employing such renowned portraitists did more than just prove the family's financial status; it also spoke to the Amherst family's sense of fashion and taste as each artist, in his turn, has been described as the preeminent portraitist of his day. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's portrait, painted in 1766, was completed

¹⁵³ Mannings, 60.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah's portrait was completed in 1802 for which there is no information regarding prices, but in 1793 Thomas Lawrence was charging 40 guineas for a three-quarter length portrait. Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 29.

during the height of Allan Ramsay's career. In 1761 he was appointed "one of His Majesty's Principal Painters" and he was elected Vice-President of the Society of Artists in 1766. In 1767, the year of Elizabeth Carey Amherst's portrait, Reynolds was a rising artist, member of the Society of Dillitanti and very soon after would be named the first president of the Royal Academy. In 1802, the time of Sarah Hickman Amherst's portrait, Thomas Lawrence was already a Royal Academician and had been appointed principal painter to King George III. The honours and prestige of these portrait artists legitimized the Amhersts' taste in art thus benefiting the family's reputation through increased cultural capital.

The British Country House and the Exhibition of Wealth and Social Status

Jeffery Amherst built his new more imposing family home, Montreal House, in 1763 upon his return from military victories in North America, amidst his efforts to be inducted into the peerage.¹⁵⁶ Not only was Montreal House a declaration of status, two inventories suggest that its impressive art collection was also symbolic of social standing. Although they functioned as family dwellings, English country houses and the objects they contained also expressed the owner's identity to the wider community; as Veblen wrote, "esteem is awarded only on evidence."¹⁵⁷ These houses hosted countless important guests, were open to genteel tourists, and images of them were often reproduced in "books of views."¹⁵⁸ Christopher Christie argues that eighteenth-century British

¹⁵⁶ Rayner, 42.

¹⁵⁷ As quoted in Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 4.

country houses were often “temples to the arts.” Paintings, frames, sculptures and decorative wall-hangings were integrated into the structure of the home to convey specific messages of power, political sympathies, pedigree and taste.¹⁵⁹ Paintings and pictures were hung with care: Montreal House was built in the Palladian style which called for organizing the household artworks by creating “picture plans” for rooms.¹⁶⁰ Few of these picture plans survive and inventories of the time are notoriously vague which makes the existing Amherst maps and detailed lists of paintings especially valuable. Drawings of the Billiard Room, “Lady A’s Room,” an unnamed bedroom and another unnamed room (probably Lord Amherst’s Sitting Room, Figure 16) map out the exact location of artwork on the walls at Montreal House and corresponding legends identify the title and sometimes the artist.¹⁶¹ The two inventories can be pieced together to get a sense of the whole art collection at Montreal House.

In the older of the two lists of pictures in the house dating from the early nineteenth century, 95 works are identified and valued at a total of £2,030.¹⁶² Perhaps not as astonishing as some of England’s grandest homes such as Montagu House, Whitehall which in 1817 boasted 395 paintings, the collection at Montreal House was nonetheless impressive. Among the works at the Amherst

¹⁵⁹ Christie, 4.

¹⁶⁰ These picture plans are possibly much like the ones created for the Montreal House inventory. Christie, 215.

¹⁶¹ After 1811, and probably closer to 1830 at the death of Elizabeth Carey Amherst. Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Pictures and jewels.

¹⁶² This inventory notes the titles, artists and worth of paintings and was presumably taken earlier than the former as some of the paintings known to be later (for example the painting titled *Sarah and Jeff, painted at Palermo* by W. Fagen, 1811) are not found in this second inventory. Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Inventory of furniture at Montreal House.

home were paintings attributed to artists such as Rubens, Hals, Kneller, Kauffman, Singleton, Copley, West, Lely, Titian and Poussin in addition to the full-sized portraits of Jeffery and Elizabeth Carey Amherst by Joshua Reynolds, and Sarah Hickman Amherst by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Amidst rumours of Amherst's inability to financially support a title, the commissioning and purchase of major works of art was a significant example of his need to keep up with the spending habits of his peers.

Although both Pointon and Russell have tried to identify trends in what type of art was hung in which rooms, they have admitted that the decor of the eighteenth-century country house was "always in a state of flux" and "organic."¹⁶³ Generally, impressive paintings were frequently hung in "public" rooms for an outwardly display of taste. At Montague House, for example, the drawing room and breakfast room contained works attributed to Rembrandt, Rubens and da Vinci as well as four full-length Van Dyck paintings in the "Great Dining Room."¹⁶⁴ If a house was large enough, the "Gallery" often showcased the most important works as seen in Hammer Hall, Sandbeck Park and Sir Venneck's Villa.¹⁶⁵ Portraits were also hung around the house but as Pointon suggests, were usually a reflection of the hegemony of the family who owned it, therefore the most important portraits were hung in public spaces, with portraits of servants relegated "below stairs."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 13, and Francis Russell, "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850," in *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*, eds Gervase Jackson-Stops et al., 133-143 (Washington: The Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, 1989), 133.

¹⁶⁴ Russell, 134.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 145.

¹⁶⁶ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 16.

According to records, 50 of the 95 works in Montreal House are portraits of the Amherst family, ancestors and other gentry, demonstrating that portraiture was a significant part of the decor. Pointon argues that “hung portraits were components in a perambulatory experience in which light, space, reflection, and image all contributed to the pervasive and cumulative effect of ancestry,” and that the whole effect of a house’s collection was meant to be greater than the experience of a single work.¹⁶⁷ The dining room contained only portraits, all of family members or ancestors dating back as far as 1667 – a poignant reminder of the Amhersts’ lineage and status. For example, the portrait by Reynolds of Jeffery Amherst (Figure 15) in uniform would serve to remind the family and visitors of his military accomplishments. Likewise, Jeffery’s pendant portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst by Reynolds refers not only to her position as a wife but – via the Grand Style and ermine mantle – also her significance to the family line and wealth in addition to her family connection to the Viscount of Faulkland which further strengthened their ties with the nobility.¹⁶⁸ The deliberate grouping of family portraits in the dining room would have emphasized the Amhersts’ power and importance to both outside visitors and those living in the house. In particular, the King and Queen’s visit to Montreal House in 1778, after the

¹⁶⁷ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 14-16.

¹⁶⁸ A portrait titled *Elizabeth Lady Amherst* by Sir Joshua Reynolds hung in the dining room. Beside this portrait is written the sum of £60 which must refer to its estimated worth sometime after its completion, as Reynolds’ books show that a single payment of £36 15s was entered on 17 November 1767 for this work. Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Inventory of furniture at Montreal House. Reynolds’ catalogue raisonné shows that he only painted one portrait of an Elizabeth Amherst, thus it is certain that the portrait mentioned in the inventories is the same work investigated in this thesis. Mannings, 60.

decade-long struggle between the two men, was an occasion when Amherst would have wanted to reinforce his status, lineage and worth.

The other portraits in the house are of important nobles, aristocrats and even of royalty creating a further visual link between the family and noble society. For example, there was a painting of Henry VII by an unknown artist in the billiard room while life-size portraits of King George III and Queen Charlotte and King George II and Queen Caroline hung in the hall and ballroom. The latter two pairs of portraits were hung in visitors' rooms and thus conveyed political, status-related messages as did portraits of high-ranking aristocrats such as the Duke of Cumberland, the Earl of Bedford, the Earl of Southampton, the Duke of Dorset and Lord and Lady Windsor which were distributed around the house.

Mark Hallett notes that the paintings at the Academy Exhibitions in the 1780s would pictorially engage each other across the room: "[...] while maintaining their status as distinct individual objects bounded by their frames, [the paintings] were also structurally defined in intimate relation to their neighbours on the wall, and to the display as a whole."¹⁶⁹ Paintings and especially portraits interact with each other in country houses in the same manner. The placement of portraits and their interaction with surroundings in Montreal House contributed to an overall message and construction of a sense of identity which indicate that social status was integral to the Amhersts' self-fashioning.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Mark Hallett, "Reading the Walls: Pictorial Dialogue at the British Royal Academy," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 no. 4 (2004): 586.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 586.

The diagram of paintings in the unnamed room (Figure 16) most likely referred to Lord William Pitt Amherst, 2nd Baron of Holmesdale's (son of William Amherst and Elizabeth Paterson Amherst, 1773-1857) sitting room.¹⁷¹ In it is the portrait of Lady Sarah Hickman by Sir Thomas Lawrence which occupies a place of honour above the fireplace. Other works such as drawings by Sarah Hickman Amherst and various family portraits suggest this room reflects what Habermas would call the intimate sphere. However, paintings of Quebec, Montreal and Newfoundland as well as portraits of non-related nobles such as Lord and Lady Windsor reflect the political identity that was as crucial to the man's sense of self as were his wife and children. Habermas' notion of audience-oriented subjectivity can help explain William Pitt Amherst's conception of himself that, while genuine, was always constructed in reference to an audience, either his family, his social circle or his own public identity.

The fact that political portraits were hung in more intimate rooms, such as the bust of the Duke of Wellington in the dressing room, the portraits of peers such as Lady Clive in Lady Amherst's dressing room and the portrait of Lady Selby in the unnamed bedroom while possibly friends of the Amhersts, nonetheless suggest that social (if not political) signification of these portraits was internalized as part of the Amherst family's identity as upper class. While Pointon argues that portraiture "marked out the most intimate and familiar spaces of the great houses [...] of the eighteenth century," a portrait of a public figure in an intimate space could also signal the complexity of the owner's subjectivity,

¹⁷¹ As this diagram was drawn in the early nineteenth century it cannot refer to Jeffery Amherst, but probably to his nephew and heir William Pitt Amherst, 2nd Baron of Holmesdale. U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Pictures and Jewels.

suggesting that public themes were part of the owner's sense of self. Likewise, the miniatures displayed on the wall at Montreal House (and in cases in the picture closet at Montagu House) show it was common for these objects to participate in the construction of a public-directed "intimacy." Public and private permeate not just within Montreal House, but – as seen in the political portraits in dressing rooms and miniatures on display – within the very identities of its inhabitants. Just as the most intimate rooms contained public (in this case political) imagery, the Amhersts internalized their public personas and did not necessarily distinguish their public and private selves.

There is no indication that the portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst by Allan Ramsay was hung in Montreal House during her lifetime because it was likely hung in the home she shared with William Amherst.¹⁷² While their residence might not have been as grand as Montreal House, the archival documentation of the context of the portraits in the latter gives at least a comparable example for the situation of this third Amherst portrait.

Eighteenth-Century Concepts of Taste and Beauty and the Amherst Portraits

As increased consumerism threatened to unsettle the established orders of class, the notions of taste and beauty became major preoccupations among

¹⁷² Letters indicate that they lived at a place called "Argyle Street" (it is unclear if this address was in London or Sevenoaks) Letters from Mrs Elizabeth Paterson Amherst to her husband, Amherst Manuscripts, U1350/C82 13 July-17 August 1769, Centre for Kentish Studies.

those who wished to maintain aristocratic privilege.¹⁷³ What was to become aesthetic theory in the nineteenth century began in the eighteenth with a preoccupation with taste and beauty among philosophers and social critics.¹⁷⁴ A point of contention was the notion of a universal understanding of beauty. In different ways, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and William Hogarth argued that there were universal rules of beauty that could be objectively determined. Conversely, Allan Ramsay thought the search for a standard of beauty was futile, but that human rationality allowed for the comprehension of artistic rules creating the potential for the universal experience of finding pleasure in beauty. A second issue debated at this time was the universality of taste: could good taste be had by all? Hume believed it was accessible only under the proper circumstances: upbringing and education. Hutcheson and Ramsay like many of their Enlightenment contemporaries believed in the triumph of reason, and that rules of beauty could be comprehensible to all people. Indeed the appreciation of the beautiful was seen by the Earl of Shaftesbury as the entrance into the humanist world of the public sphere and true citizenship.¹⁷⁵ However, as Jones notes, the supposedly "disinterested" philosophic debates on beauty in reality served a political and social end. Taste was structured on class beliefs and behaviours and "could grant its user, if successful, a prestige and licence in other areas of

¹⁷³ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

¹⁷⁴ George Dickie, *The Century of Taste*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

¹⁷⁵ Dickie, 17.

social life, most notably political and cultural debate. The question of taste becomes, therefore, a means of distinction.”¹⁷⁶

In the early years of the eighteenth century the possibility of establishing objective notions of beauty was examined by Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson concluded that an internal sense (sensual awareness) of beauty is triggered universally in all human beings by the trait of “uniformity amidst variety in nature” which can be interpreted as meaning balance or proportion. He believed that the pleasure taken in beautiful objects does not derive from custom, education and/or example but from the sense of beauty itself and was therefore open to all.¹⁷⁷ Hutcheson believed that the rule of beauty – uniformity amidst variety in nature as in the equally shaped and spaced eyes of a woman – meant that there was an objective description of taste and that by following the rule, everyone regardless of upbringing could learn to appreciate “true” beauty.

Hume was more concerned with the possible existence of a standard, subjective *response* to beauty, rather than an objective *description* of it. Was there a “correct” taste? If so, who can establish it and on what authority? In his 1757 essay “Of the Standard of Taste”, Hume wrote that while most people’s reactions to works of art differ widely, it has been shown that we have come to some general agreement as to what constitutes value in art. Unlike Hutcheson’s singular rule, Hume implies that there is a plurality of principles that contribute to making an object beautiful which included “variety and clearness of expression, natural pictures of the gay and amorous passions, luster [sic] of colour,

¹⁷⁶ Dickie, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1971; 1726), 86.

exactness of imitation, harmony, tenderness, the sublime, rich expression, simplicity and ornament.”¹⁷⁸ In order to identify value, or a standard of taste, Hume states that one must have a wide experience of art and be free from prejudice but he notes that under the correct circumstances, these principles are universally understood. “Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.”¹⁷⁹ Additionally, for Hume, time removes all the obstacles to correct judgment and for that reason, one should look to “great” works that have survived since Antiquity such as Homer. Although Hume argues the universality of the principles of taste, the circumstances under which this is achieved – experience and exposure for comparison – are most viable for the upper classes.

Noted for his intellectual talents as well as artistic achievements, Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s portraitist Allan Ramsay believed that a search for an ideal standard of taste was futile. His work, *Dialogue on Taste* (1755) set out his ideas on taste through a dialogue between the fictitious Colonel Freeman (Ramsay’s views) and Lord Modish (conventional taste).¹⁸⁰ In criticizing Hogarth’s assertion of an objective standard of beauty (exemplified in the “grace and beauty” of the perfect serpentine-shaped line), Freeman/Ramsay also responded to his friend Hume’s ideas on the standard of taste: “Till a real something is discovered which

¹⁷⁸ Dickie, 129 and 138.

¹⁷⁹ David Hume, *Four dissertations. I. The natural history of religion. II. Of the passions. III. Of tragedy. IV. Of the standard of taste. By David Hume, esq.*, (London, 1757), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, 229.

¹⁸⁰ Smart, *Allan Ramsay: Painter, Essayist and Man of the Enlightenment*, 87.

we are sure by experience is universally the source of pleasure, any attempt to discover the universal principle of pleasure by analysis must be fruitless.”¹⁸¹

However, he adhered to the Enlightenment notion of the triumph of Reason and therefore held that the rules of art were comprehensible to the lowest illiterates who were capable of appreciating them.¹⁸²

Elizabeth Carey Amherst’s portraitist, Joshua Reynolds thought that great art strives for a beauty that is not found in nature but reflects the just idea of beautiful forms. In searching out this Ideal Beauty the painter appeals to the intellect, which according to Reynolds was a sign of genius: “it is not the eye, it is the mind, which the painter of genius desires to address.”¹⁸³ On the ranks of the arts Reynolds argued that the most mentally laborious subjects and, therefore preeminent, according to him, were history paintings dealing with the Greco-Roman world. Despite the fact that Reynolds and even the French critic Denis Diderot preached the supremacy of history painting, the records from the Royal Academy tell a different story: portraits occupied the largest percentage of works submitted between 1781 and 1785.¹⁸⁴

Reynolds considered his Grand Style of portraiture, the mixture of historical and portrait, a “rival to that style which we have fixed as the highest,” as it intellectualized what had previously been considered more of a trade than an art.¹⁸⁵ Like Hume, the President of the Royal Academy looked to the principles of

¹⁸¹ As quoted in Smart, *Allan Ramsay: Painter, Essayist and Man of the Enlightenment*, 89.

¹⁸² Ibid, 88-89.

¹⁸³ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1959), 50.

¹⁸⁴ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 38.

¹⁸⁵ Reynolds, 89 and John Hayes, “The Theory and Practice of British Eighteenth Century Portraiture,” in *The Portrait in Eighteenth-Century America*, ed. Ellen Gross Miles Newark, 19-33 (London: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 1993), 21-23.

beauty according to the Ancients who saw their art as reflecting the real simplicity of nature.¹⁸⁶ However, as seen in the portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst, he did not mindlessly transpose the sitter to the Ancient world, but worked to incorporate elements of the past and the present so that the portrait would be at once current and eternally admired.¹⁸⁷

Commissioning artwork was an ideal opportunity for social validation for the Amherst family demonstrating their wealth as well as their grasp of contemporary views on taste and beauty through “cultural capital.” The artists employed by the Amhersts were desirable for their reputation as leading theorists on beauty and taste and their success at the Royal Academy reinforced their status.

Eighteenth-century treatises by Jonathan Richardson, Hogarth, and Reynolds which specify how artworks’ beauty can be judged provide a useful point of comparison for my analysis of the Amherst portraits. Jonathan Richardson’s works, notably *Essay on Theory of Painting* (1715, 1725) and an *Essay on the Whole of Art Criticism as it Relates to Painting* (the first section of *Two Discourses*, 1719) outline seven categories of evaluation. The first two categories – invention and expression – describe how the artist demonstrates intellectual and philosophical consideration in portraying his subject. Composition, drawing, colouring and handling emphasize the importance of the mechanical aspects of art. Finally, “Grace and Greatness” in a painting describes how the artist has improved on natural form to create an ideal. In his essay on art

¹⁸⁶ Reynolds, 49.

¹⁸⁷ Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 216.

criticism Richardson provides a quantifiable “grading” system for the public to judge artworks for themselves and come closer to the truth of beauty; his reasoning, based on Lockian philosophy, was that independent thinking was the only way to obtain real knowledge.

Richardson uses Van Dyck’s portrait of *Frances Brydges, Wife of the second Earl of Exeter* (Figure 17) to exemplify his method: each of the seven categories should be scored on 18, as well as two additional categories – advantage and pleasure – which measure how the painting fulfils the larger aims of art as both a didactic and pleasurable object. In his example, Richardson deducts points for composition as the black velvet of the sitter’s dress forms “one large Spot” and contrasts awkwardly with the white cuffs and collar. The colouring is considered more favourably, scoring 17 on 18 as it is “solemn but warm, mellow clean and natural.” The face is well-drawn with clean, pronounced and symmetrical features, however points in the drawing category are deducted as the body is “Lost” in the black fabric of her dress and the hands are disproportionate. The invention and “Grace and Greatness” of the portrait are praised as Van Dyck seems to situate the sitter as a widow receiving socially inferior visitors. This setting allows for “Beauty and Propriety” while exposing the interiority of the mind in a way that shows “Sorrow, Humility and Benevolence.” The Grace and Greatness of the portrait charm and command respect from the viewer earning it full points. Further admiration is given for its didactic and pleasurable aspects: “Throughout this whole Picture one sees Instances of an

Accurate Hand, and Fine Thought, These must give proportionable [sic] Pleasure...A better Master for Portrait-Painting never was."¹⁸⁸

For Hogarth beauty resided in serpentine lines that gave interest and movement to great works of art; in his chapter "Of the Face" he cites the faces in Raphael's works as examples. The serpentine lines, however, cannot be exaggerated: "the lines that form a pleasing smile about the corners of the mouth have gentle windings [...] but lose their beauty in the full length."¹⁸⁹ The serpentine line was also essential in creating a beautiful human form, as Hogarth's example of the Samaritan woman by Annibale Carracci shows (Figure 18).¹⁹⁰

Much of Reynolds' Discourses follow the premise of Richardson's Grace and Greatness which privileges idealized forms.¹⁹¹ In his fourteenth discourse, Reynolds looks to his rival Gainsborough's work which up close resembles nothing more than "scratches and marks" which seem to "by a kind of magick [sic], at a certain distance assumes form, and all the parts seem to drop into their proper places[...]"¹⁹² Gainsborough's unusual manner of cross hatching and talented use of colour that was "every thing [sic] short of perfection" created a

¹⁸⁸ Jonathan Richardson, *The works of Jonathan Richardson. Containing I. The theory of painting. ... A new edition, corrected, with the additions of An essay on the knowledge of prints, and cautions to collectors. Ornamented with portraits ...* (London, 1792), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, 57-68.

¹⁸⁹ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), ed. Richard Woodfield (Menston, Yorkshire, England: The Scholar Press, 1971), 130.

¹⁹⁰ Hogarth, 137.

¹⁹¹ Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 149-168.

¹⁹² Reynolds, 258.

beautiful lightness that is exemplified for Reynolds in the portrait of Lady Petre.”¹⁹³

It would be extremely difficult if not impossible to posit an authoritative definition of what was considered beautiful or tasteful in art in the eighteenth-century, even with the above texts as guides. Debates surrounding beauty and art existed before and continued after this period. However, the above descriptions and references to specific works are tangible starting points from which to consider the artistic beauty present in the Amherst portraits. Elizabeth Carey Amherst’s full-size portrait boasts many of the elements admired by theorists and her drapery displays Reynolds’ Grand Style in its reference to the Ancients, thus achieving what Richardson would call “invention.” Her well-drawn features are symmetrical and her hands proportional, while the serpentine line starting at her fingertips culminating with the tilt of her head give an expression of liveliness but also reflection. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s portrait also shows inventiveness in its Van Dyckian costume which creates a sense of history while avoiding the frivolity of fashion. The soft pink of her shawl matches the blush of her cheek creating a warm, tender expression. The detail in the drafting of her features and costume demonstrate the mechanical talent of the artist. The composition of the portrait – similar to the other two – with the sitter’s arm resting at an angle creates a triangular balance in the figure between the head and two hands. Sarah Hickman Amherst’s portrait may be the finest example of the Amherst portraits of Hogarth’s theory of beauty found in serpentine shaped lines: the tilt of her head and the half-smile on her lips allows her dignity and warmth

¹⁹³ Reynolds, 260.

simultaneously. All three portraits are weak in innovation as they are products of the artists' studio and seem to be made in a factory-style which is especially clear in the repetition of pose and costume of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's portrait in two others. It could be said that while none of the portraits show the height of genius known for each artist, they nonetheless seem to adhere to certain accepted rules of beauty and may have had additional, yet different value as references to great portraiture prototypes.

Portrait Miniatures and Class Distinction

Using Bourdieu's vocabulary, portrait miniatures at first glance may not be as easily designated "cultural capital" as history paintings or even full-size portraits. In the 1760s, Ozias Humphry, himself a miniature painter, did not feel it was an honourable pursuit: "I feel very little disposed to adopt miniature painting for life. I could not live under the disgrace of it."¹⁹⁴ Oil painting was considered more masculine and history painting (or even Reynolds' Grand Style) was more intellectual, for inventiveness was impossible when the artist was "wholly confined [...] to the circumference of a head."¹⁹⁵ However, portrait miniatures were undoubtedly successful and occupied the heart of the main exhibition space at the Royal Academy in the second half of the eighteenth century; an engraving of the 1787 exhibition shows miniatures at eye level on the walls among the oil paintings.¹⁹⁶ In supporting this medium, the socially influential Royal Academy gave it legitimacy despite concerns, such as those of Humphry, that it was not a

¹⁹⁴ Coombs, 99.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 107.

worthy art form. The popularity of portrait miniatures among the elite also benefited tremendously from the miniatures of George III that Queen Charlotte wore after their marriage in 1760 (Figures 9 and 10).¹⁹⁷

The Amherst portrait miniatures contributed to the women's self-fashioning as members of the upper class with proper taste. While the head and shoulder pose did not give much liberty for inventiveness, the portrait miniature of Sarah Hickman Amherst (Figure 8), the miniature of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5) and the possible miniature of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 6) demonstrate adherence to contemporary notions of beauty and taste as well as skill, indicating the hand of an experienced artist. The portrait miniatures of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figures 5 and 6) boast finely drawn features; in the possible portrait of her, large doe-eyes and a slight smile create a warm sense of connection with the viewer. Skilful use of colour gives depth to her dress and delicacy to her skin. The artist of Sarah Hickman Amherst's miniature employs a slight serpentine line (as recommended by Hogarth) giving her head and neck the impression of delicacy. A close look reveals dotted stipple that make up the image as a whole – very similar to the pointillism method of the nineteenth century – which was the technique used to control the watercolours on such a small surface.¹⁹⁸ Although the artists of Elizabeth Carey and Sarah Hickman Amherst miniatures are unknown, the quality of the images suggests they were painted by professional artists. Considering the most fashionable miniaturist Richard Cosway was charging 30 guineas per miniature in the 1780s, it can be assumed that while

¹⁹⁷ Lloyd, "‘Perfect Likeness’: An Introduction to the Portrait Miniature," 23.

¹⁹⁸ Coombs, 85.

portrait miniatures in general were affordable to all classes, the better ones were still luxury items affordable only to the rich.¹⁹⁹

The miniature of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 7), the least skilful in draftsmanship, may be another kind of status indicator. By the eighteenth century, painting miniatures was a fashionable amateur pursuit for ladies as it was a delicate, clean and virtuous pastime. Ladies were expected to have pursuits that showed their talent and taste.²⁰⁰ Emma Woodhouse, the wealthy protagonist of Jane Austen's novel *Emma* unwittingly captures the heart of a young man through her skills at portrait painting: "Emma [...] produced the portfolio containing her various attempts at portraits [...] Miniatures, half-lengths, whole lengths, pencil, crayon and water-colours [...]"²⁰¹ It is possible that the portrait miniature of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst had been completed by a female in the household, perhaps transposed from the full size years after her death by Sarah Hickman Amherst whose art appeared elsewhere in Montreal House.

In a way, portrait miniatures exemplify Veblen's argument that conspicuous consumption was not necessarily a conscious act, leading to the consumption of luxury goods even if they would not be seen by a large public. However, the "unconsciously conspicuous" consumption of luxury goods does not inevitably make them private. As objects that were ostensibly meant for a limited viewership, contemporary notions about beauty and taste – conventions sanctioned by public accord – were imbued in the miniatures and support my

¹⁹⁹ Coombs, 85.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 105.

²⁰¹ Jane Austen, *Emma* (1815), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 36.

argument in Chapter One that the portrait miniatures were private objects only if privacy is understood as a highly mediated sphere. Whether it was the beauty and taste of Elizabeth Carey Amherst and Sarah Hickman Amherst's miniatures, or the possibility of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's portrait being the work of an aristocratic lady, these objects reflect the audience-oriented subjectivity of their owners and sitters. The fictitious privacy of portrait miniatures meant that they could be understood by peers as "unconscious" consumption of luxury, but at the same time portrayed a tasteful and wealthy identity to those who saw them.

Conclusion

Habermas' notion of audience-oriented subjectivity points to other postmodern theories of the performativity of identity that provide the framework with which to understand how the Amherst portraits symbolize an identity that includes wealth and status. By contextualizing the portraits in eighteenth-century England and the Amherst family's struggle for peerage, I have further explored how the portraits contributed to the self-fashioning of an identity that was wealthy and worthy of membership in elite social circles. The framework of conspicuous consumption, cultural capital and taste can help in the interpretation of the social context in which the Amherst portraits were commissioned. While the portrait miniatures can be seen as "unconsciously conspicuous" consumption, when circulated they invoke a false privacy that gives the impression that their public message is unmediated. The notion of proper "performance" of femininity will be discussed in the next chapter which will focus on the gendered identity portrayed in the portraits of the Amherst women as members of the upper class.

Chapter Three: Women's Negotiations of Gender and the Fictions of

Privacy

A miniature of Elizabeth Carey Amherst shows a matronly woman with white hair who stares directly out to the viewer with confidence (Figure 5). Her senescent eyes and "triple-chin" would be difficult to describe as an ideal beauty, although she nonetheless possesses the ivory skin and blushing cheeks believed to be beautiful during the eighteenth century. This miniature is of a different nature than the full-size portrait of a svelte and delicate Elizabeth Carey Amherst that hung in the dining room (Figure 1), or even what is possibly a portrait miniature of her as a young woman (Figure 6). As portrait miniatures are widely believed to have been tokens of affection between husbands and wives or within families, this image of a beloved older woman does not carry the same messages as those of young brides and fertile wives. It was completed with great skill but nonetheless places less emphasis on popular conventions of femininity like innocence, nubility and youth. As a likeness of the woman in her later years, was it a demonstration of an upper class woman's ability to negotiate gender roles, or a sign that women gained respect as matrons beyond their years of youthful beauty?

These three images of the same woman bring up a number of questions regarding male-privileged gender roles, upper class women's negotiations of those roles and how portraiture reflects those negotiations. Were women restricted to gender roles advocated in contemporary prescriptive literature or

were upper class women able to negotiate those roles? How did paternalistic values of femininity influence how women were portrayed ? How does portraiture reflect these upper class women's lives, and did format (full-size or miniature) make a difference in the messages conveyed?

Beyond the male rhetoric of a patriarchal model that categorized gender roles according to a binary of domination and subordination, eighteenth-century gender relations were in fact more malleable for upper class women. This chapter will first outline the norms of femininity encouraged by prescriptive literature during the eighteenth century and examine conventions used in the Amherst portraits that support such a model. The concepts of beauty-as-virtue, generalized femininity, passivity (as contrast to a husband's professional identity) can be interpreted as performances of femininity that would have been rewarded by a society that was patriarchally structured. Finally, the differences in how femininity was portrayed in the two formats of portraiture, for example the costumes, reveals how gender, although consistently performed, could be exhibited in different ways thus allowing for movement of upper class women in their roles. This comparison will also address questions about how femininity was performed publicly and privately by the Amherst women.

Primary material suggests that the Amherst women did not necessarily follow the purely domestic lifestyle prescribed by the patriarchal model. Thomas Laqueur's theory that the understanding of sex (not just gender) changed in the eighteenth century suggests a shift in the rhetoric of difference caused by new and threatening notions of femininity. It was within this shift that women like the

Amhersts may have been able to negotiate within a patriarchal model. The question remains, if women were able to increase their influence, how was it reflected in portraiture and how did portraiture function to this end? There is evidence that upper class women were agents in the production and display of portraits of themselves and their families through commissioning, decoration of homes, and even creating portraits as amateur artists. Also, the portrait conventions that portrayed femininity may have, in fact, been useful to the Amherst women – not just male family members. Finally, a comparative analysis of the two formats of Amherst portraits reveals that the strategic fiction of portrait miniatures as discussed in Chapter One could be employed by women of upper classes to negotiate between their own experiences of femininity and those prescribed by the patriarchal model. Through the depiction of informal dress, assertive poses, and as amateur creations by women, portrait miniatures gave some women agency in negotiating between domestic/private and public spheres without disturbing established gender roles or the intimate relations that the miniatures were intended to support.

Traditional Gender Conventions Present in Portraiture

Eighteenth-century views that emphasized the morality of women's domesticity can help clarify how paternalistic gender roles were invoked in portraits of upper class women. The role of woman as wife, mother and household manager was glorified in much of the prescriptive literature of the time. These didactic works, often written by men, established gender traits as

“natural” opposites thus establishing men in the public sphere of politics and women in the domestic sphere. In two examples among many, Reverend Fordyce and Lord Kames argued that women’s decorum and gentle nature excluded them from the realms of commerce, science and politics, and that their duties were in the domestic world of child rearing and household affairs.²⁰²

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax expounded similar ideas in his *Advice to a Daughter* in 1688, a conduct guide that was so successful in the eighteenth century it was reprinted at least fourteen times before the 1770s.²⁰³ Commenting on women’s roles, Savile emphasizes their domestic duties:

[...] there is *Inequality* in the *Sexes*, and that for the better Oeconomy [sic] of the World, the *Men*, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of *Reason* bestow'd upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar'd for the *Compliance* that is necessary for the better performance of those *Duties* which seem to be most properly assigned to it [...] Your *Sex* wanteth our *Reason* for your *Conduct*, and our *Strength* for your *Protection*: *Ours* wanteth your *Gentleness* to soften, and to entertain us.²⁰⁴

Savile acknowledges the inequality of the sexes but also sees this inequality as a function of the “natural” differences between men and women. He goes on to outline how crucial the female role is for society as they are responsible for the management of the home and child rearing.

Using such didactic and instructive literature from the eighteenth century in their reconstruction of women’s lives and roles, some twentieth-century historians have separated spheres according to gender (women in private, domestic spheres while men moved in public spheres), thus greatly influencing our

²⁰² Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 36.

²⁰³ Vivian Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 14.

²⁰⁴ As quoted in Vivian Jones, *Women of the Eighteenth Century*, 17-18.

understanding of the era. Jürgen Habermas' model of public and private in eighteenth-century society has similar implications for the discussion and division of the place of women's actions and representations in that period. "Public" and "private" are divided into categories of public and private spheres and public and private realms (see Figure 11). The public realm is synonymous with the state and governance and includes the "public sphere." The public sphere, however, is in both the public realm (because it influences the governance of the state) and the private realm (because it is made up entirely of private people).²⁰⁵ The public sphere is thus seen as the bridge between the public and private realms. The industrial revolution allowed for the independence of civil society (the realm of commodity exchange and of social labour) from the state as well as the separation of economic production (previously predominated by farming and cottage industries) from the household, creating the private sphere.²⁰⁶ This separation of economic production from the household caused a second divide between public and private within the private sphere itself, and between civil society and the domestic or "intimate sphere."²⁰⁷ Men, active in a society of production outside the home, were nonetheless the paternalistic authority in the private sphere where women were subjugated through their financial dependence on men.²⁰⁸ As Habermas suggests, rising wealth dictated roles of domesticity for women that were encouraged and enforced by the contemporary iteration of female domestic virtues.

²⁰⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 30.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 19 and 30.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 28.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 47.

Vivian Jones notes that the dominant eighteenth-century ideology of femininity was the natural association between women and the private sphere, domesticity and leisure. While she acknowledges the challenges to this popular theory by proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, she maintains that the cultural assumption that Wollstonecraft fought against upheld the notion of gendered spheres.²⁰⁹

The paternalistic model that relegated women to the domestic sphere emphasized virtue, beauty and passivity in women. These traits, as seen in the artistic conventions used in the Amherst portraits, support the structures of a paternalistic society espoused by the eighteenth-century thinkers and twentieth-century historians outlined above. How artistic conventions of portraiture can support specific traits of femininity and a patriarchal gender structure can best be explained through Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender.

Butler argues that gender is not established a priori according to physiology but rather is a social construct that is repeated, performed and perpetuated according to social punishment and rewards. The performance of gender in portraiture can be seen in specific conventions present in the Amherst portraits explained below. Butler evokes phenomenological theory to explain how "social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture and all manner of symbolic social signs."²¹⁰ Phenomenology is based on the idea that reality is only what humans perceive, and thus provides a starting point for feminists to understand how physical bodies (i.e., male or female physiques) get "crafted into

²⁰⁹ Vivian Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 3-5.

²¹⁰ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 No. 4 (Dec., 1988): 519.

genders” in everyday life. Butler argues that gender is not a reflection of an a priori gendered self based on physical sex traits but that gender is a performance that constitutes (i.e., creates) gender.

[...] gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.²¹¹

In other words, gender is not a stable place from which acts originate but is an identity that comes into being through the repetition of acts. Why do we engage in this performance? Butler argues that we perform our gender to ensure cultural survival in a society in which heterosexual norms are grounded in a capitalist, patriarchal economy. Those who do not fall into categories are rejected by society. One does not act like a woman because one has a uterus, rather one acts like a woman because of a society that punishes and rewards according to one’s “acceptable” gender performance. The acts used to perform a gender have been established historically: “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time.”²¹² People are unaware of performing their genders because they *believe* their own performances and the performances of others. Quite simply, gender is real only to the extent it is performed.

²¹¹ Butler, 519.

²¹² Butler, 523.

Performance of Femininity through Portrait Conventions

The stylization of the body that for Butler is essential to gender coding is manifest in portraiture where the body is literally “styled” and constructed out of canvas and paint. Beliefs in female beauty-as-virtue, female subordination and passivity (resulting in the identification of women as an abstraction which is a balance to their husband’s professional and public identity) were translated into sanctions upon correct female gender performance. Gender conformity could be performed through popular portrait conventions such as those seen in the Amherst portraits including costume, the idealization of beauty, and the practice of exhibiting male and female portraits as paired pendants. The Amherst women, employing such conventions, gained rewards for their performance in the form of acceptance, status and praise from social peers.

Inventories indicate that along with the full-size portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (1767) by Joshua Reynolds (Figure 1) in the dining room was the portrait of Jeffery Amherst (Figure 15) by Reynolds from around the same time (1765-8).²¹³ The portrait of Jeffery shows the commander-in-chief in his red military jacket with an Order of Bath medal and the blue lapel of his regiment, the First Foot Guards, a reference to his military successes discussed in Chapter Two. Amherst, while clutching a piece of paper, has a thoughtful expression as he gazes off to the left of the frame.

²¹³ Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Inventory of furniture at Montreal House.

While inventories state that both portraits were hung in the dining room, there is no map of exactly where the portraits hung on the walls.²¹⁴ However, it is probable that to the left of this painting hung the portrait of Amherst's wife whose gaze is directed to the right of the canvas which would have met his gaze outside the frame. Paired portraits similar in size, shape, style and exhibited together, usually of a husband and wife such as the Amherst couple, were called "pendants". This popular eighteenth-century artistic genre is thought to have originated in donor portraits included on the side panels of religious diptychs. Generally, similar compositional elements created a link between the two paintings which were displayed side by side. This link was underscored by having the two figures turned to face each other as the Amhersts' most likely did.²¹⁵

The pendant portraits of Jeffery Amherst and Elizabeth Carey support eighteenth-century patriarchal male and female roles through gendered portrait conventions. Portraits of men generally evoked public personas through references to social position, status and profession as did Jeffery Amherst by his depiction in military uniform and medal. Women, on the other hand, were often portrayed as if devoid of public accomplishments or roles, as general embodiments of femininity and domesticity. Kate Retford cites the pendant portraits of Doctor Henry Peckwell and his wife by John Russell, 1774 (Figures 19 and 20) to outline how gender differences were highlighted in the pairing of these images: "Indeed the public nature and particularity of most male pendants

²¹⁴ Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Inventory of furniture at Montreal House..

²¹⁵ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 20-21.

frequently underscores the private and more general quality of the accompanying female images.”²¹⁶ In the example of the Peckwells for instance, Dr Henry sits in a library grasping a Bible which highlights his profession as a clerical scholar.²¹⁷ Despite the fact that his wife also holds a slim book to indicate her level of education (and perhaps piety if it was a book of prayers) as a sign of her being worthy of her husband, her portrait is much less an indication of specific accomplishments. Portraits of women, in other words, were often generalized, emphasizing ideas like nature and virtue and frequently contextualized in an imaginary world of mythology or allegory rather than specifics of profession, rank or title. The emphasis in Mrs Peckwell’s portrait is of leisure and passivity as she is sitting outside in nature and takes a relaxed pose. While Mrs Peckwell’s image is ostensibly more intimate, its size means it is still a publicly oriented painting (in addition to the possibility that the natural setting was a reference to family landholdings) that espouses a fictitious intimacy to emphasize her “fair” gender traits.

In the case of the Amherst-Carey pair, Jeffery’s portrait highlights his military accomplishments through his regalia. Elizabeth’s image relies on vaguely mythological and allegorical symbols of femininity such as the outdoor setting which suggests harmony with nature as well as her loose clothing reminiscent of Ancient drapery which places her in a reality outside of specific temporal references. These portraits, which were hung in the dining room and visible to

²¹⁶ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 23.

²¹⁷ He seems to be pointing to his wife, furthering the connection between the two portraits.

both family and friends, reinforced the gender roles not only to the public audience but to the sitters themselves.

The generalized portrayal of femininity and female virtue as allegories of beauty when used in pendant portraits emphasized by contrast the public role of men. Shearer West notes: "Such slippages between the portrayal of women and the embodiment of abstractions has been interpreted as denying women the kind of character and public roles emphasized so often in portraits of men."²¹⁸ The second part of this chapter discusses whether there could have been more room for female negotiation of power structures than West claims.

Beauty as Virtue

Physical beauty was regarded as a reflection of a woman's inner virtue in the eighteenth century and was often signalled in portraiture through allegory and mythology.²¹⁹ Robert W. Jones, in his work on Joshua Reynolds and the painting of beauty, argues that female beauty is a depersonalized commodity closely connected with the cultural capital of taste: "an account of beauty could be mobilised within a discourse which connected the appreciation of art with the judgement of women."²²⁰ Feminine beauty could be signalled by certain features such as ivory skin, blushing cheeks, diverted gaze and delicate and symmetrical features. Art historian Desmond Shawe-Taylor asserts that Reynolds' portrait of the Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll (Figure 21) exemplifies "Beauty" within the

²¹⁸ West, 148.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty*, 117.

Grand Style's strategies to raise the legitimacy of portraiture through beautiful women who referenced the Ancients.²²¹

The concept that physical appearance in portraiture was an indicator of internal character can be traced to the Renaissance, developing alongside a debate regarding poetry and portraiture. Renaissance thinkers looked to the Ancients' understanding of the difference between *effictio* (extrinsic) and *notatio* (intrinsic) traits of women and debated how they were represented in the arts. Elizabeth Cropper argues, much as Jones does for the eighteenth century, that in the Renaissance mimesis was less important for female portraiture than references to a generalized beauty that would have been recognized as inner virtue.²²²

One of the indications that portraits of women were understood to reflect beauty, virtue and wealth – and by extension the reputation of her family – in the eighteenth century, was that they were used in marriage negotiations, as they were in the Renaissance.²²³ Perhaps more vital than her wealth, a woman's perceived virtue was a necessity in upper class marriages. In the earlier period, a woman who appeared virtuous and chaste positively reflected her parents' guidance and control and later would speak the same of her husband.²²⁴ As a potential daughter-in-law, a woman's virtue was an important quality as it would assure the husband's family that the outsider they were taking into their homes

²²¹ As quoted in Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 120.

²²² Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance : The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, 175-191 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 179.

²²³ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 1.

²²⁴ Cropper, 42.

would not shame them.²²⁵ An eighteenth-century example of a letter written by Lady Wentworth to her son in which she recounts to him seeing the portrait of a friend's daughter suggests that the belief in physical beauty as an exteriorization of a woman's virtue still had currency: "Indeed the lady [daughter of the friend] is very pretty [sic] She [Wentworth's friend] did expect [sic] I would have wished [sic] her my daughter[-in-law]."²²⁶ Lady Wentworth's friend hoped that Lady Wentworth would consider the daughter as an appropriate match for her son on the basis of her portrait. The scrutiny of portraits in the arrangement of marriages speaks strongly to the notion that art, and especially portraiture, could act as an agent in social relations rather than just reflecting the environment in which it was produced and consumed.

In the eighteenth century portraits of women became problematic, however, as placing the onus on a woman's exterior appearance rather than her interior virtue was considered suspect and potentially a sign of the improprieties of conceit and exhibitionism. That is, the unification of exterior appearance and interior character was being questioned in a way it had not been in Renaissance Italy.²²⁷ Certain devices were used by portraitists to reconcile the need for portraiture with the danger of female exhibitionism. Kate Retford uses Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Mrs Parker (Figure 22) as an example of the successful deployment of such devices:

²²⁵ Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames," in *The Expanding Discourse : Feminism and Art History*, eds., Broude, Norma, and Mary D. Garrard, 39-58 (New York, NY: Icon Editions, 1992), 49.

²²⁶ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 1.

²²⁷ Kate Retford, "Reynolds's portrait of Mrs Theresa Parker: A Case Study in Context," *The British Art Journal* 4 no. 3 (Autumn 2003):80.

Reynolds has implied that [Mrs Parker] has been strolling through the landscape and has paused to contemplate the scenery around her, revealing herself to be a creature of sensibility...If [Mrs Parker] was to appear aware of the presence of the viewer, then she could be supposed to have constructed her expression and activity for the benefit of that viewer and the intentionality of her pose would then lessen the suggestion of her physical appearance as the index to her mind.²²⁸

A woman's virtue and modesty were protected by representing the female sitter in a personal and intimate context, unaware of the viewer, thus making her paradoxically unavailable to the viewer and conveying a public message about her character and that of her husband. The diverted gaze of the sitter allows the viewer to gaze "unseen" giving the impression of a privileged view of a candid moment in which the sitter's "true" nature was revealed.

The diverted gaze that Kate Retford argues creates a sense of distance and modesty between viewer and sitter in female portraits is employed in the full-size images of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 1) and Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 2). It can also be seen in the full-size portrait of Sarah Hickman Amherst who seems to be looking over the left shoulder of the viewer, thus averting a direct contact with him or her. Like the portrait of Mrs Parker, the Amherst women are able to showcase their beauty – coded as virtue – without being seen as exhibitionistic. On the other hand, the direct gazes of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (both Figures 5 and 6) and Sarah Hickman Amherst (Figure 8) in their miniatures suggest a more intimate viewership. In portrait miniatures' role as tokens of affection exchanged between spouses who were separated by large distances, the direct gaze of the sitter would be more precious to an absent

²²⁸ Retford, "Reynolds's portrait of Mrs Theresa Parker: A case study in context," 82.

husband as it would remind him of his conjugal love and obligations. Although the dissimilar gazes seen in full-size and miniature portraits suggest different audiences and functions, there is a consistent emphasis on the sitter's beauty. Whether the beauty supports a more public or intimate role, there was always a need for the iteration of femininity through performances.

Concepts of what is beautiful in a woman's appearance change over time and place, therefore the twenty-first century viewer cannot judge for him or herself if the sitter in an eighteenth-century portrait is "beautiful." A contemporary description of feminine beauty is helpful in this case; André Rouquet described what a beautiful woman was to the English in *The Present State of the Arts* (1755):

...the picture of a beautiful woman is this: she must have a fine white skin, a light complexion, a face rather oval than round, a nose somewhat longish, but of a fine turn, and like the antiques, her eyes large [...]; her mouth graceful, without a smile, but rather of a pouting turn, which gives it at once both grace and dignity; her hair clean and without powder [...] her shape tall and erect, her neck long and easy, her shoulders square and flat, plump rising breasts, her hands generally rather too lean[...]²²⁹

While Rouquet's description cannot be taken as an absolute rule, certain trends emerge. In the Neoclassical environment of the eighteenth century, praise of female features that are "like the antiques" is to be expected while the graceful, unsmiling mouth recounts Hogarth's standards of beauty discussed in Chapter Two.

Angela Rosenthal notes that facial features such as blushing cheeks and ivory skin were important markers of beauty that would have implied the virtue of

²²⁹ As quoted in Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 126.

the female sitter. Rosenthal cites Ramsay, Reynolds and Lawrence as examples of artists who employed blushing as a device to indicate femininity. Ramsay's use of a soft pink-beige for the backgrounds in his female portraits was intended to accentuate the blush which is discernable in the portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 2). Likewise, the alabaster skin tones in Lawrence's and Reynolds's portraits of women were meant to emphasize their rosy cheeks. Sarah Hickman Amherst's portrait (Figure 3) clearly shows a reddish hue on her cheeks which contrasts strongly with the whiteness of her skin and dress. The portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst by Reynolds does not show blushing cheeks but may be simply a result of the "fugitive organic red pigments" he used in the 1750s and 1760s which have a tendency to fade to a ghostly whitish-green over time.²³⁰ Indeed, records at the Mead Art Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts indicate that the pinks in the portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst were originally red indicating such a fading had taken place and making it difficult to ascertain if he employed the convention of blushing cheeks.²³¹ The ivory base of the Amherst portrait miniatures created luminescent skin-tones against which blushing cheeks were emphasized, a striking feature of the miniature of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (Figure 7).

Rosenthal explores the function of blushing in female portraits in detail, arguing that blushing was more than just a mark of beauty but also an expression of how the English formulated ideals of femininity and national identity. Feminine

²³⁰ Barbara A. Buckley, "Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Ladies Anabel and Mary Jemima Yorke," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 73 no.9 (Nov 1986): 355.

²³¹ Letter from Ross Fox, Curator of European Art, Amherst College to Catherine Johnston, Curator of European Art, National Gallery of Canada, April 29, 1994, Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA.

virtue was thought to be registered directly in the skin and women's capacity to blush was seen as a gendered ideal that became more popular in the 1770s as a function of the cult of sensibility, a popular literary trope that focused on the expression of emotions.²³² Blushing was material proof of emotional legibility and transparency as well as a device that simultaneously hid and revealed sexual desire, as blushing is often an indication of sexual arousal but also of embarrassment or shyness.²³³

The whiteness of the skin with which the blush was contrasted also revealed nationalistic (and frankly racist) ideals of femininity. The white skin of a woman was often evoked in reference to the story of Pygmalion, the sculptor who brought to life the beautiful lapidary woman he created from white marble. As Rosenthal reminds us, "fascination with the Pygmalion myth flourished at the moment when European interest in colonial travel and African trade intensified. The white and female body, sculpted from 'snow-white ivory' emblemizes or literally emerges from goods gained by controlling foreign lands [...]."²³⁴ Women's white skin increasingly represented an "ideal of purity with nationalistic symbolism."²³⁵

The blushes in the Amherst portraits created a fictitious intimacy that blurred the line between intimate behaviour and public persona in the images' performance of femininity. Indeed, as blushing was an indication of sexual arousal it signalled an intimacy that was intended for the woman's husband but at

²³² Angela Rosenthal, "Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (Sept. 2004): 572.

²³³ Rosenthal, 574.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 567.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 581.

the same time supported patriarchal norms of femininity that demanded modesty and virtue meant for the approval of other viewers – in other words, simultaneously fulfilling two almost opposite requirements. Likewise, the alabaster skin colour that highlighted the red cheeks allowed the portraits to move between public and private. Not only did it signal intimacy for the husband through the beauty of the sitter but also may have visually supported the imperial agenda of the men in the Amherst family, with Jeffery in British North America and Sarah Hickman Amherst's husband's political positions in India.

Costume in Female Portraiture

The portrait miniature of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst was likely copied from Ramsay's full-size portrait as the position of the head, the facial expression, hair style and, most tellingly, the pink feathers in her hair are identical in both portraits. However, while she wears a Van Dyckian-style dress in the full-size portrait, she wears a white ruffled collar in the miniature. That the portrait was copied is not surprising as it was common to replicate full-size portraits in miniature format in the eighteenth century.²³⁶ What is perplexing, however, is that the clothes were deliberately changed: the low neck and pink shawl of the full-size portrait are replaced by a white ruffled collar and flower in the miniature. *Why copy a portrait into miniature form but change the dress? The change indicates that costume played an important role in the representation of femininity in portraiture. The differences in costume in the two types of portraiture reveal*

²³⁶ Pointon, "Surrounded with Brilliants," 55.

how gender, although consistently performed, was exhibited in diverse ways for different messages.

As seen in the Amherst portraits, a unique trend in eighteenth-century full-size female portraiture was the vogue for historicizing clothing. The costumes worn were usually a mix of contemporary dress and elements of older fashions such as the Van Dyck dress from the 1630s or vaguely Greco-Roman clothing. The historicizing costumes in women's portraits avoid a temporal reference, denying the depicted women's affective agency and imparting a generalized femininity not subject to changing fashions. When compared to the professional and status references found in men's portraits, the ethereal vagueness in women's costume reinforces the passive role of women espoused in eighteenth-century society.

The pink gauzy material, loosely draped scarf and pearl fastenings in the full-size portrait of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst show Ramsay's use of Van Dyckian dress, a popular historicizing costume in the eighteenth century influenced by the latter's portraits: "[Van Dyck] was the first painter in England who put women in romantic poses. His clientele [...] wear loose, low-cut gowns, often with floating gauzy scarves, tied-in sleeves and jewels as dress fastenings."²³⁷ However, as with much costume in portraiture at this time, the costumes seen in these eighteenth-century portraits that evoke this earlier period are not perfect replicas of the originals from the 1630s and would be better categorized as a "romantic" or "fancy" dress. Certain Van Dyckian aspects such as the innovative use of jewellery as fastenings and loose drapery were

²³⁷ Ribeiro, *Art of Dress*, 200.

incorporated into a contemporary dress – identifiable, for example, by the stiff stomacher in the Ramsay portrait. In fact, to the eighteenth century mind, Van Dyckian dress meant only a vague style from a hundred years earlier, inferred from certain coded elements.²³⁸ Joshua Reynolds, in his annual address to the Royal Academy encouraged Van Dyck-inspired portraits and costumes: "The great variety of excellent portraits with which Van Dyck has enriched this nation, we are not content to admire for their real excellence, but extend our approbation even to the dress which happened to be the fashion of that age."²³⁹

In a context where portraits were often part of a larger family portrait gallery that asserted ancestry and status, it was crucial that they did not reflect too strongly the fashion of their time.²⁴⁰ It has even been suggested that referencing Van Dyck dress in a portrait would ensure it blended in with portraits of ancestors by Van Dyck already on display in the home. This practice was employed primarily in portraits of women, perhaps because they were free from having to display references to profession.²⁴¹ While there is no record of a Van Dyck portrait at Montreal House, the Amhersts' art collection did include many of his contemporaries such as Rubens, Kneller and Hals. Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's portrait was not out of place with the art already in the house.²⁴²

Perhaps the most influential instance of the historicizing of portraiture in a classical theme in the eighteenth century was Joshua Reynolds' development of

²³⁸ Ribeiro, *Art of Dress*, 200.

²³⁹ Reynolds, *Discourses*, 138.

²⁴⁰ Simon, 9.

²⁴¹ Simon, 64.

²⁴² Centre for Kentish Studies, U1350/E14/2, Amherst Manuscripts, Estate Papers- Inventories and Valuations. Inventory of furniture at Montreal House.

the Grand Style. Reynolds wanted to elevate the status of portraiture and felt that by referencing the classical world, one could intellectualize this genre which had previously been more of a trade than an art.²⁴³ In his seventh Discourse he notes:

[the painter that] wishes to dignify his subject, which we will suppose to be a lady, will not paint her in modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity. He takes care that his work shall correspond to those ideas and that imagination which he knows will regulate the judgement of others; and therefore dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for the sake of likeness.²⁴⁴

Evidence of Joshua Reynolds' preference for classicizing portraits is present to a certain extent in the portrait of Elizabeth Carey Amherst. While a number of female society portraits by Reynolds are more obviously classicizing with references to specific mythological characters such as Hebe, Goddess of Youth (Mrs Musters, 1785) and Juno, Goddess of Marriage (Lady Blake, c. 1750s), others like that of Elizabeth Carey Amherst nonetheless invoke the classical guise through simple signs like the drapery of her costume and natural background.

Classicism in portraits had political and nationalistic functions especially pertinent in the case of the Amhersts. After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, many saw England as a second Golden Age Rome; England's period of imperial expansion is often referred to as its "Augustan Age."²⁴⁵ Jeffery Amherst's role in securing British North America for the crown suggests that he was invested in the imperialistic messages embedded in the vague classicism of his wife's portrait.

²⁴³ Hayes, 21-23.

²⁴⁴ See especially the Seventh Discourse in Reynolds, *Discourses*, 140.

²⁴⁵ Simon, 76.

The contrast between what is portrayed in a portrait and what was actually worn at the time, on the other hand, mimics the contemporary vogue for masquerades, or masked balls. These popular costume parties were a reflection of the increasing interest in history and antiquarian research in England. Dressing up as a historical figure from the seventeenth century for these social events has been argued as a catalyst for Van Dyckian dress in portraiture.²⁴⁶ By referencing these elite social occasions, the sitter also signals her connections to circles that attended these balls.

As historicizing costumes were most frequently employed in female rather than male portraiture, this convention is significant in the performance of femininity.²⁴⁷ Scholars have forwarded varied and sometimes contradictory interpretations of the greater meaning and consequences of women in historicizing costume. The leading expert on costume in portraiture, Aileen Ribeiro, explores two different interpretations in her book, *Art of Dress*. She notes on the one hand that mid eighteenth-century fashion and portraiture sought to present women as decorative objects.²⁴⁸ Later, she argues that dressing up for masquerades and portraits allowed women an escape from their constrictive domestic world into another role.²⁴⁹ The Amherst case studies suggest that women were masquerades of themselves, creating identities that at once

²⁴⁶ Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 183.

²⁴⁷ There are instances of men wearing historical costume but the trend seems to have been more common among female sitters. For example Ribeiro says "If the number of portraits where the sitters are depicted in Vandyck dress were to be counted [...] there would be far more women than men." Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 203-204.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 7.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 203-204.

functioned within paternalistic models of femininity, and – as will be shown – simultaneously indicated women's negotiation of that structure.

Costume in Portrait Miniatures

Dress in the portraits of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst seems to change from historicizing in the full-size to everyday in the miniature, indicating that choice of costume in portraiture was deliberate and meaningful. Costume is therefore a useful tool through which to understand these portrait formats as it provides a point of comparison from which to analyze intended meaning. While the historicizing costumes of the full-size Amherst portraits suggest that femininity was partly performed in order to display the wealth and power of her husband, the clothes of the Amherst portrait miniatures seem to suggest a more familiar function. However, as we will see, neither format can be so easily categorized, as meaning and function shift between full-size and miniature portraits.

The light, loose collar in the miniature of Elizabeth Paterson Amherst suggests that she was in “*déshabillé*” or undress, meaning in the eighteenth century that she wore clothes that were common for around the home and during casual social encounters.²⁵⁰ The domestic intimacy implied by this garment suggests scenes of Elizabeth Paterson's home life – perhaps at the breakfast table with her husband or reading to her children. Likewise, the bonnet and collar of the portrait of Sarah Hickman Amherst reflected the everyday undress of her

²⁵⁰ Brooke, vii.

time; dishabille and nightcaps “were [...] necessary for relaxed, family moments ‘en famille.’”²⁵¹

The portrait miniature of Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5) with white hair shows a fashionable high waist and bandeaux hair tie the shapes of which were influenced by the Neoclassical movement and the French Revolution’s rejection of pomp and splendour.²⁵² The simple wrap style and light muslin material were also typical of “undress” during that period.²⁵³ It should be noted that the classical influences seen in this miniature were from the latter part of the century when *everyday* “undress” was influenced by the Greco-Roman world – different from the deliberate fashion anachronisms seen in Reynolds’ classicizing portraits. The miniature that is possibly a younger Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 6) also shows the sitter in neo-classical everyday dress of the later part of the century.

The contemporary fashion seen in the Amherst miniatures was common for that genre, based on an anecdotal survey of eighteenth-century portrait miniatures in the Portrait Gallery of Canada, Victoria and Albert Museum in London as well as literature on the genre.²⁵⁴ It is this regular dress – simply, what the women’s families and close friends would have seen them in daily – that

²⁵¹ Brooke, vii.

²⁵² Melissa Leventen, *What People Wore When: A Complete Illustrated History of Costume from Ancient Times to the Nineteenth Century for Every Level of Society*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008), 174.

²⁵³ Brooke, 136.

²⁵⁴ See, among others, Victoria and Albert Museum, “British Portrait Miniatures,” <http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/paintings/miniatures/index.html>, (accessed August 30, 2009), Library and Archives Canada, “Real Stories: A Past in Miniatures,” http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/lac-bac/real_stories-ef/www.lac-bac.gc.ca/miniatures/index-e.html, (accessed August 30, 2009), Coombs, *The Portrait Miniature in England* and Lloyd and Sloan, *The Intimate Portrait*.

indicates these miniatures were meant to convey intimacy. This trend seems to support the argument that the popularity of miniatures in the eighteenth century arose from less reserved attitudes toward love, marriage and family.²⁵⁵ However, as argued in Chapters One and Two, this is not to suggest that the perceived privacy meant that portrait miniatures were pure or unmediated reflections of love, given that portrait miniatures were frequently circulated among friends or displayed in homes. Neither were they candid representations of an “autonomous” individual subjectivity – as the consistencies of certain standards of femininity attest.

The comparison between costume in full-size and miniature portraits raises questions about how the Amherst women performed femininity publicly and privately. The femininity that is performed in the full-size portraits through historicizing costumes certainly emphasizes the women’s role as supporters of their husband’s power and reputations, through their adherence to gender ideals and the dignity these dresses evoked. At the same time, however, did it allow the women to claim power and dignity in their own right? Could the historicizing costumes show that female agency was achieved through masquerade? The miniatures focus on domestic traits and intimacy but could their “privacy” also be a masquerade – or fiction – that worked to their advantage?

Alternatives and Negotiation of Gender Roles by Upper Class Women

Elizabeth Carey Amherst’s correspondence with the famous Bluestocking and evangelical activist Hannah More suggests that at least one of the Amherst

²⁵⁵ Frank, “American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures,” 152-154.

women participated in activities outside the paternalistic definition of women's roles. Indeed, letters from More indicate that Lady Elizabeth Carey Amherst was involved and influential in the politics of the late eighteenth century:

My Dear Lady Amherst

You have such a [reverence] for genuine piety & goodness that I trust you will forgive me for taking the liberty to discuss your interest for my incomparable friend Mr Grant who is now a Candidate for the India Direction. He has the full support of Administration of the India House, and of his particular friend, Lord Cornwallis, so there is little doubt of his success. To your Ladyship I believe it will [sic] be a [...] recommendation to say that he is the [?] friend of Mr. Cecil. You see so many people and have so much influence that I thought by casually naming Mr. Grant in conversation you might be of use to him without much trouble to yourself.

We have been extremely shocked at Tom Paine's new pamphlet the Age of Reason. It is one of the most poisoned arrows that ever was shot at Christianity. All the bold blasphemous of Voltaire, Hume, d'Alembert, [...] Are brought together in [...]a] Pamphlet, and brought down to the level of vulgar understandings. The Bishop of London and myself [...] concern about it.

[...]

I am my dear Lady Amherst

Your ever obliged & faithful

H. More²⁵⁶

The Mr. Grant to whom More refers is likely Charles Grant (1746-1823) a Scotsman who was appointed to the board of governors of the East India Company in 1787 by Lord Cornwallis and was later elected to Parliament in 1802. That Lady Amherst could influence the selection of the board of governors of one of the most powerful corporations in history through casual conversation speaks of her influence. More's wording, "You see so many people and have so much influence" suggests Elizabeth Carey Amherst's personal power and not merely an indirect power through her husband. Although it is impossible to tell if

²⁵⁶ Correspondence of Elizabeth Carey Amherst, CKS-U1350/C76-80, Amherst Manuscripts, Centre for Kentish Studies.

Elizabeth Carey did campaign on behalf of Grant, he was elected as Director of the East India Company in 1794.²⁵⁷

Additionally, More's discussion of current affairs and intellectual matters indicates that both women were involved in and aware of politics and philosophy. In quickly enumerating other Enlightenment philosophers without explaining their positions, it is likely that More expected Amherst to be familiar with their writings. The pamphlet, *Age of Reason*, (1793-1794) to which she refers, was written by Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a notorious radical and pamphleteer. In *Age of Reason* Paine criticizes institutionalized religions and advocates challenges to the Bible. More would later write a response to this work, *A Country Carpenter's Confession of Faith*, under the pseudonym Will Chip, which demonstrates how female masquerade could enable agency and voice in the public sphere.²⁵⁸

The correspondence between More and Amherst problematizes a face-value reading of contemporary prescriptive literature's relegation of women to the domestic sphere in a supporting role to their husbands. Lady Amherst's participation in political and philosophical conversations suggests that her world moved beyond the walls of Montreal House. Rather than a fixed binary, the Amherst primary evidence suggests that the dominance-subordination relationship between the genders veiled a network of negotiations. This raises questions about the degree of agency upper class women in the eighteenth

²⁵⁷ Penelope Carson, "Grant, Charles (1746–1823)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, Jan 2008. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11248>, accessed 30 Aug 2009].

²⁵⁸ The name Will Chip suggests that while she was involved in political discussions, a male name would nonetheless lend her argument more credence proving that she was challenging gender norms still deeply ingrained in eighteenth-century society. See Franklyn K. Prochaska, "Thomas Paine's The Age of Reason Revisited," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1972): 572.

century had, and how the latter negotiated gender roles to their advantage. Are these negotiations visible in female portraiture? Just as portraits were able to convey traditional gender roles, was it possible that women actively used portraiture as a way to establish or highlight their own influence?

An essential question is whether or not there was a difference between what didactic literature prescribed for women and how women actually led their lives. In her historiographical review of gender studies, Amanda Vickery notes that primary evidence does not prove women followed the prescriptive literature of the time. In quoting Keith Wrightson, she asks: did “theoretical adherence to the doctrine of male authority and *public* female subordination 'mask' the *private* existence of a strong complementary and companionate ethos?”²⁵⁹ A number of recent scholars have addressed this problem by questioning some scholarly efforts at gendering of Habermas’ theory of public and private spheres.

As seen in the prescriptive literature examined above, contemporary norms of women and femininity in the eighteenth century argued for women’s containment in the domestic sphere, as their “nature” was more attuned to affairs of the home and child rearing than politics and philosophy. This notion was legitimized historiographically by the gendering of Habermas’ theory of public and private spheres. However, there is evidence that women’s roles and social environments cannot be so easily defined.

Nancy Fraser critiques Habermas’ model by her observation that “counter publics” – of which women’s groups were a part – were called into existence by

²⁵⁹ Amanda Vickery, “Historiographical Review: Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history,” *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 384-5.

the hegemonic exclusions of a public sphere consisting of upper class white males.²⁶⁰ Female counter publics of the eighteenth century consisted of groups such as volunteer societies that focused on moral reform, including the Bluestocking Society in which Elizabeth Carey Amherst was involved. Thus, women creatively used the private sphere of domesticity and familial concerns as a springboard to actively join a more public sphere.²⁶¹ Craig Calhoun, in his introduction to a collection of essays on Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, also complicates the notion that women's place was restricted to the private sphere. Calhoun suggests that rather than a single hegemonic upper-class male public sphere, eighteenth-century English society consisted of multiple, overlapping public spheres.²⁶²

Habermas himself acquiesced to such critiques on the occasion of the first English translation of his work almost thirty years after the original was published. The author revisited his thesis in an article called "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." Habermas admits that his earlier concept of the public sphere was exclusionary and notes that a model different from the one in his original essay emerges if one "admits the coexistence of competing public spheres [...]," in other words entities resembling the counter publics outlined by Fraser.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, 109-142 (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1992), 116.

²⁶¹ Fraser, 115.

²⁶² Craig J. Calhoun, "Introduction," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, 1-47 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 37-8.

²⁶³ Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, 421-461 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 425.

Lawrence E. Klein criticizes the invocation of gendered spheres by feminists like Ruth Perry and Vivian Jones which he calls the “domestic thesis.”²⁶⁴ For example, Vivian Jones notes that the crux of the eighteenth-century ideology of femininity was the natural association between women and the private sphere, domesticity and leisure.²⁶⁵ In his critique of this feminist interpretation, Klein raises legitimate concerns with the separation of public and private spheres according to gender. While he admits that distinctions between the public and private are commonly made in the eighteenth century, he stresses that as each term has several meanings, “there is no one ‘public/private’ distinction to which interpretation can confidently secure itself.”²⁶⁶ Therefore, categorically establishing women in the private sphere and men in the public is difficult. Fraser likewise criticizes twentieth-century feminists for confusing the term “public sphere” by using it simply to mean everything outside the domestic or familial sphere.²⁶⁷

Working from the discipline of the history of science, Thomas Laqueur theorized that the idea of sex (not just gender) changed in the eighteenth century precipitating new definitions of gender. Laqueur’s *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* surveys the history of sex (so-called biology) and gender (social norms of femininity and masculinity) in the Western world. His thesis is that sex – the biological aspect of human bodies – is culturally understood, a conclusion also forwarded by Butler. As Laqueur had claimed, sex

²⁶⁴ Klein, 97. See Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980) and Vivian Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*.

²⁶⁵ Vivian Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 3-5.

²⁶⁶ Klein, 99.

²⁶⁷ Fraser, 110.

is no more objective than gender, “almost everything one wants to say about sex [...] already has in it a claim about gender.”²⁶⁸ According to Laqueur, prior to the eighteenth century, the prevalent understanding of sexual differentiation was based on a one-sex model. In the one-sex model, all humans were essentially the same: sex differences were merely degrees of difference in an essentially similar body. In early modern Europe, for example, female anatomy was essentially the same as male anatomy, just inside out: “In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles.”²⁶⁹ This model did not advocate equality, as a woman was considered a lesser “undeveloped” man who, under more favourable circumstances, would have continued on a path of development that exteriorized the organs that in women were “still” submerged in the body.

During the Enlightenment, the one-sex model was replaced by the two-sex model wherein men and women were two essentially different types: “In the eighteenth century [...] two fleshs, two new distinct and opposite sexes, would increasingly be read into the body. No longer would [...] women [be regarded] as a lesser version of man along a vertical axis of infinite gradations, but rather as an altogether different creature along a horizontal axis whose middle ground was largely empty.”²⁷⁰ In highlighting the major shift in how the ostensibly scientific issue of sex was conceived, Laqueur makes the significant claim that sexual difference was influenced by historical context: “[sex] is situational; it is explicable

²⁶⁸ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 11.

²⁶⁹ Laqueur, 4.

²⁷⁰ Laqueur, 148.

only within the context of battles over gender and power.”²⁷¹ It is significant for this study that Laqueur argues the invention of the two-sex model occurred in the eighteenth century: “[...] there [were] two stable incommensurable, opposite sexes and [...] the political, economic, and cultural lives of men and women, their gender roles, [were] somehow based on these ‘facts.’”²⁷²

The two-sex model that Laqueur argues emerged in the eighteenth century precipitated a reconsideration of gender differences. As women were now considered distinct and incomparable to men, they represented an unknown. Rather than “lesser” men who did not possess enough masculinity (intelligence) to participate in the public sphere, they were now essentially different beings. This posed both a potential threat to men, requiring new vigilance to maintain the status quo, and potential empowerment for women to reinvent themselves. Counter publics, such as women’s charity and volunteerism, were alternatives through which their “natural” disposition might allow them to assert power. Traces of female negotiation of the male-centred model can be seen in portraiture.

The patriarchal model of gender relations suggests that the husband or father was the driving force behind how women were portrayed in full-size portraits; as his dependant, her image would reflect his reputation. In such a context, how then did women’s portraiture demonstrate their negotiation of a paternalistic world? Andrea Pearson notes that female agency (in this context, control or influence in how they were portrayed) could be asserted through image-making, self-fashioning and art patronage. In commissioning and

²⁷¹ Laqueur, 11.

²⁷² Ibid, 6.

influencing how they were represented and in creating images themselves, women were sometimes able to wield more social power than might initially be apparent from reading eighteenth-century conduct books and general philosophy on women.²⁷³

Women of the upper classes were often actively involved in the commissioning of portraits. The literature of the time supports the assumption that the subject of a portrait had a significant say in the composition of her or his image (pose, clothing and theme). This might well have been the case for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Montagu, a celebrated beauty in her youth who later fell victim to smallpox, continued to have herself portrayed with clear skin and a youthful appearance.²⁷⁴ Although this manipulation may have been nothing more than vanity – she had said of her refusal to look in a mirror “the last reflection I saw there was so disagreeable I resolved to spare myself such mortification in the future”²⁷⁵ – it emphasizes the importance of female beauty in the eighteenth century as well as an upper class woman’s ability to ensure she was seen that way in portraits.

A well-documented case of a female patron of art and protagonist of her self-imagery is Mrs Theresa Parker, wife of John Parker, who played a crucial role in renovating her husband’s new estate, Saltram. She was involved in purchasing and commissioning pictures for the home including paintings by Angelica Kauffman. She desired a pendant portrait for a Van Dyck painting of an

²⁷³ Andrea Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrea Pearson, 1-14 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 1. For an overview on the debate about the validity of concept of female agency for feminist discussions of art history, see Pearson, 12.

²⁷⁴ Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 145.

²⁷⁵ Gamaliel Bradford, Jr., “Portrait of a Lady,” *The North American Review* 196 (Oct. 1912): 532.

ancestor already in the home, eventually commissioning a portrait of herself from Reynolds. As Retford argues, “the fact that she was the moving force behind the portrait commission complicates any potentially simplistic picture of patriarchal discourse.”²⁷⁶

Another example is Sarah Siddons (1755-1833), a famous British actress, who was preoccupied with cultivating her reputation, and did so in part through managing her images. Siddons’ likeness was painted by the most fashionable artists of the day including Reynolds (Figure 22), Lawrence, Gainsborough and Romney. Most of the numerous portraits of her were painted on speculation by the artist rather than commissioned by Siddons herself, although sometimes an admirer would commission a portrait of her. These images were widely distributed through prints and copies, and more than 30 portraits and portrait miniatures of her were exhibited in the Royal Academy and Society of Artists Exhibitions.²⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Siddons retained control of how her portraitists represented her; for example, when sitting for Reynolds she allegedly prevented him from heightening her complexion which would have detracted from her pale melancholy. Siddons, who possessed an artistic talent as well as a performing one, also created sculpted images of herself – as Ariadne for example – that enhanced her cultivated public persona as a tragic muse.²⁷⁸

The examples of Montagu, Parker and Siddons show that women – particularly those of the upper class – were able to control their representations

²⁷⁶ Retford, “Mrs Parker,” 81.

²⁷⁷ Heather McPherson, “Sculpting Her Image: Sarah Siddons and the Art of Self-Fashioning,” in *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrea Pearson, 183-202 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 184.

²⁷⁸ McPherson, 187-9.

in portraiture. These examples also demonstrate women's choice of traditional feminine conventions in portraiture indicating that the gender conventions seen in portraiture of the eighteenth century were both internalized by the women and worked to their advantage in some way. The Amherst full-size portraits can be interpreted along these lines as the Amherst women were by no means empty handed in power relations.

Sarah Hickman Amherst and Elizabeth Carey Amherst brought substantial dowries and important social connections to their marriages. Elizabeth Carey Amherst brought a £10 000 dowry with her as well as family connections to the Viscount of Falkland, and Sarah Hickman Amherst, formerly Countess Dowager of Plymouth, was equally financially stable. The marriages can be seen as a type of investment on the part of the women, wherein they invested their dowry and connections into a rising family in hopes of a greater return on their investment – that is, increased wealth and status. As the women have invested so much into their marriage, it would be in their best interest to support their husbands' reputation through portraits that demonstrated their fulfillment of a socially-sanctioned femininity.

In addition to supporting their husbands, therefore, the traditional feminine conventions in portraiture may also have directly benefited the Amherst women. For example, the choice of fashionable artist in all three cases would have likely highlighted each woman's wealth as much as her husband's. In this light, there is good reason to believe that the Grand Style in Reynolds' portrait – seen in the dignity of the pose and classicism of the drapery – lent as much prestige to

Elizabeth Carey's standing as an individual as it would have reflected favourably on her husband. Indeed, the classicism in this portrait aligns her with the political matrons of the Roman Republic. As Phillip Hicks notes, eighteenth-century aristocratic women exploited the popular legacies of the heroines of republican Rome to defend their political participation. For eighteenth-century writers, Roman women were exemplars of public and private virtue.²⁷⁹

The Amherst women's agency is also visible in the portrait miniatures. The unsophisticated shading and lack of three-dimensionality in Elizabeth Paterson Amherst's miniature suggests an amateur quality which is unsurprising considering the fashion of the day for upper class ladies to paint "little pictures" to demonstrate their gentility.²⁸⁰ Indeed, coupled with proof of Sarah Hickman Amherst's accomplishments in portraiture as recorded in inventories, it is possible that she copied Elizabeth Paterson's image from the Ramsay painting. The painting may have travelled to Montreal House when Paterson's children were orphaned and taken in by Lord Jeffery.²⁸¹ More than engaging in meaningless art projects to pass the time, these upper class women were contributing to the family memories and image for posterity. Considering these amateurish images were often, as with the Amhersts, kept and passed down through the family, the female miniaturists were not just passive sitters but active agents in the representation of their family.

²⁷⁹ Phillip Hicks, "The Roman Matron: Female Political Influence and Republican Response, ca. 1750-1800," *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (March 2005): 37-38.

²⁸⁰ Coombs, 104-107.

²⁸¹ Long, 315.

The portrait miniature of an older Elizabeth Carey Amherst (Figure 5) discussed at the beginning of this chapter, furthermore challenges the patriarchal norms of female delicacy and a passive youthful desirability. As she never had children, and her husband's title was secured by his nephew, her affective role and self-image was not that of the young and fertile wife and daughter. Instead this image emphasizes the wisdom and political involvement associated with Roman matrons. Who, therefore, was the intended audience for this portrait? In its role as a token of affection, her husband would have received the miniature to cherish intimately and privately. In the public life of her miniature as displayed in homes and passed among friends the fiction of nubile lover and bride was inappropriate. The depiction of the sitter in portrait miniatures that was ostensibly less vulnerable to manipulation in this case lent the authority of "truth" to other characteristics. The Amherst women consistently perform femininity in their portraits but, under the guise of genuine intimacy, the miniatures allow for different aspects of women's sociality and power to be publicly displayed.

In contrast to the impression given by male-generated prescriptive literature, the Amherst women were not necessarily powerless and relegated to the domestic sphere. Working within a paternalistic model, and internalizing that model themselves, they were able to negotiate – perhaps subconsciously – *gendered roles and work around binaries of subordination and domination*. These negotiations are visible in portraiture and may sometimes have been purposefully employed. When circulated in public, the commonly understood "privacy" of portrait miniatures became feigned and helped to perpetuate an

alternative image of women who's "privacy" legitimized its "truth." The Amherst case studies suggest that women's portraiture was a masquerade or fiction of the woman herself, both a mask of her "true" self and a voluntary disguise by which she was able to negotiate a more active role in the world.

Conclusion and Summary: *Revisiting “Shadow”*

Elizabeth Paterson Amherst’s use of the word “Shadow” in the letter to her husband initiated my investigation into a number of possible functions and understandings of portrait miniatures in the eighteenth century. How were these objects perceived and used: were they mirror-like reflections of the sitter, inferior impressions, or were they understood as being as “real” as the shadows were to the prisoners in Plato’s cave? (While the shadows in Plato’s cave may also have been inferior representations, they were indexical, showing traces of actual presences rather than mere impressions.) Was portraiture understood and accepted – perhaps subconsciously – as the masquerade of a “true” identity?

The full-size and miniature portraits of women from the Amherst family demonstrate that while the portrayed women existed within established gender roles, they were not completely devoid of power. The portrait miniatures participated in the Amherst women’s negotiations of their male-centered socioeconomic contexts by allowing alternative stories of female experience to be circulated without revolutionizing the established social structure. Although portrait miniatures worked in genuinely private ways, the small format and commonly understood intimacy of the objects became a feigned privacy when they were circulated among friends or displayed in the home. The claim to “truth” through the guise of intimacy meant the miniatures were effective participants in the Amherst women’s negotiations of their roles. The Amherst portraits case study is an example of how portraiture participated in and constituted a social

language rather than, like a mirror, just reflected a sitter's visual reality, aspirations or fantasies.

In Chapter One, in comparing full-size and miniature portraits, I explored the viability of relying on categories of public and private to represent the nuances of portraiture. A survey of art historical discourse surrounding these categories indicates that much emphasis is placed on how portraits fit into these terms; some authors such as Robin Jaffee Frank firmly state the portrait miniatures are private and inward-looking and full-size portraits are public and outward-looking. In my research, I found it difficult to categorize the Amherst portrait miniatures as private and full-size portraits as public. The family inventories show portrait miniatures were publicly displayed on the wall of their home and the public role of portrait miniatures is supported by evidence in royal portraiture as well as eighteenth-century fiction. These difficulties led to questions about the boundaries and definitions of each category which I unpacked in a closer look at the existing art historical public/private discourse.

I conclude that the art historical discourse surrounding public and private aspects of portraiture is essentially focused on its functions, audiences and the identities constructed by it. This chapter, rather than focusing on categories, utilized the notion that visual media can be a cultural representation of subjectivity. I specifically draw on postmodern theories of identity that claim it is developed exogenously, such as Habermas' notion of audience-oriented subjectivity which also allows for the permeability between public and private that is present in the Amherst cases.

Eighteenth-century examples of portrait use and theories of exogenous subjectivity, supported by Amherst letters and inventories, suggest that the “privacy” of portrait miniatures could be staged and thus actually meant for public consumption, essential in the construction of upper class women’s identity. However, as they simultaneously continued to function in the genuinely intimate relations between the women and their husbands, the miniatures can be seen to have overlapping and variable meanings.

The second chapter extends the first chapter’s premise that identities conveyed in portraiture were oriented to an audience by examining how the Amherst women’s economic context affected the portraits, taking into account the struggle for and subsequent instability of the Amherst title. I evoke Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption to emphasize the connection between the Amhersts’ purchase of expensive portraits by top artists, and social ambition. Bourdieu’s notion that social distinction is influenced by cultural taste – seen in the Amhersts’ adherence to contemporary art theory – is employed in my examination of the full-size portraits as reflections of a desire to convey membership in the elite class.

I then explored how the Amherst portrait miniatures could publicly convey class and wealth. The elite status of the Amherst women suggests that their privacy is not necessarily truly private. The public display of miniatures makes them conspicuous indicators of taste functioning within the context of the British upper class; in this role their privacy is feigned and works to support the “truth” of

the representations in the portrait miniatures, a strategy of outward projection of the self.

In Chapter Three I discussed how both formats of portraiture raise questions concerning contemporary views of women, their expected and actual roles in society, portrait conventions and how much agency they had in the creation of their portraits – and by extension, in their own lives. Laqueur's theory of a change in social thought about biologic sex from a one-sex model to a two-sex model in the eighteenth century suggests a shift in attitudes that necessitated women's negotiation of new power dynamics.

The Amherst portraits suggest that while the women internalized and performed established gender roles, portraiture participated in their negotiations of power structures. The Amherst women strategically – consciously or subconsciously – adopted masks of privacy through their miniatures which, in fact, had a public consumption role. The portrait miniatures were used to mask and protect the unsanctioned mobility of women demonstrating the acceptance of patriarchal structures in upper class society. In other words, the portrait miniatures allow us to rethink how privacy worked for women of the British nobility and how the fictitious nature of privacy that was upheld in the portrait miniatures protected women's power.

Hannah More's letters to Elizabeth Carey Amherst support Nancy Fraser's assertion that women could participate in the public sphere through "counter-publics." Portrait conventions such as the Grand Style would have worked to the women's advantage as they conveyed social prestige, taste and the idealization

of historicism that conveyed patriarchal and class values, not to mention echoing the politically influential Roman matrons from the Ancient Republic. These conventions allowed women dignity and power in addition to the prestige the paintings lent their families.

Challenges and Possibilities for Further Research

The comparison of full-size and portrait miniatures in my research presented a number of challenges throughout the project. My position as a researcher from the twenty-first century meant I had to be vigilant about contemporary assumptions I projected onto these objects. For instance, due to their size, the portrait miniatures immediately brought to mind present-day use of wallet photos (or even more cutting-edge: cell phone photos). As we have seen, however, it is dangerous to assume such a simplistic parallel: for example, the public display of miniatures on the wall does not occur with wallet photos and therefore signals different usage.

Another area that presented challenges was how public and private worked as categories of description; as I discussed throughout the thesis, it is impossible to situate either format of portraiture exclusively in one category or the other. This does not totally dispute, however, the efficiency of these terms; for example, miniatures can undoubtedly be described as “private” when kissed by a spouse, and a portrait conveying status displayed in an area open to the public would likewise be accurately described as “public.” I outline how – although effective as a *component* of description – portraiture is never monolithically public or private.

Rather than finding acceptable terms of categorization to replace “public” and “private” I have tried to carefully use the terms to describe specific aspects within the multiple roles the portraits played.

The possibilities for further exploration and the interesting questions generated by this research was simultaneously very rewarding and frustrating. There are areas that merit research but are beyond the scope of this thesis. First, the methodology of comparing full-size and portrait miniatures of the same sitter (or class or family) proved to be illuminating and could be applied to different types of sitters: men, members of the middle class, and royalty. The evidence of Sarah Hickman Amherst’s artistic talents also presents a research opportunity to further understand how amateur art participated in the construction of *her* identity, and may also provide answers about the “amateurish” portrait miniatures found in the Amherst collection.

This thesis has contributed to the study of portraiture in the eighteenth century through its in-depth investigation into how full-size and miniature portrait formats worked in public and private roles. It suggests that the small-scale format of portrait miniatures – which alludes to genuine intimacy – gave them a claim to “true” representation of the sitter’s identity through a feigned privacy which allowed additional views of femininity to circulate outside of gender norms.

Figures

Figure 1. Joshua Reynolds. *Elizabeth Carey Amherst*. c. 1767. Oil on canvas.
Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, Massachusetts.

Figure 2. Allan Ramsay. *Elizabeth Paterson Amherst*. c.1766. Oil on canvas.
Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, Massachusetts.

Figure 3. Thomas Lawrence. *Sarah Hickman Amherst*. 1802. Oil on canvas.
Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, Massachusetts.

Figure 4. Amherst Family Tree.

Figure 5. Unknown Artist, *Elizabeth Carey Amherst (?)*. Late 18th century (?)
Negative number C-112026. Watercolour on ivory. Library and Archives Canada
(Portrait Gallery of Canada). Ottawa.

Figure 6. Unknown artist. *Possibly Elizabeth Carey Amherst. c.1767(?)*. Negative number C-112025. Watercolour on ivory. Library and Archives Canada (Portrait Gallery of Canada). Ottawa.

Figure 7. Unknown Artist. *Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (?)*. N.d. Watercolour on ivory. Negative number C-112029. Library and Archives Canada (Portrait Gallery of Canada). Ottawa.

Figure 7.1. Unknown Artist. *Verso, Elizabeth Paterson Amherst (?)*. N.d. White beading on portrait miniature case. Library and Archives Canada (Portrait Gallery of Canada). Ottawa.

Figure 8. Unknown artist. *Sarah Hickman Amherst* (?). 1740-1750 (?). Watercolour on ivory. Negative number C-112064. Library and Archives Canada (Portrait Gallery of Canada). Ottawa.

Figure 9. Johann Zoffany. *Queen Charlotte* 1771. Oil on canvas. The Royal Collection, London.²⁸²

²⁸² The Royal Collection, "Queen Charlotte," <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/eGallery/object.asp?maker=12720&object=405071&row=9>, (Accessed September 8, 2009).

Figure 10. Charles Spooner, after Mary Benwell. *The Studious Fair* (possibly Queen Charlotte). 18th Century. Mezzotint. National Portrait Gallery, London.²⁸³

²⁸³ National Portrait Gallery, "The Studious Fair," <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?linkID=mp00845&page=1&rNo=4&role=sit>, (Accessed September 21, 2009).

Figure 11. *Graphic Representation of Habermas's Public and Private Spheres.*

Figure 12. Allan Ramsay. *Anne Howard*. c. 1768-69. Oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.²⁸⁴

Figure 13. Allan Ramsay. *Maria Walpole, Countess Waldegrave*. c. 1765-66. Oil on canvas. Private collection.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Smart, *Allan Ramsay: A Complete Catalogue*, 372, fig. 587.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 369, fig. 577.

Figure 14. Unknown artist. *Montreal House, Kent*. n.d. Kent County Archives. Maidstone, U.K.

Figure 15. Joshua Reynolds. *Jeffery Amherst*. c. 1768. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa.

Figure 16. Unknown artist. *Unnamed Room in Montreal House*. 1830(?).
Ink on paper. Kent County Archives. Maidstone, U.K.

Figure 17. After Van Dyck. *Frances Brydges, Wife of the second Earl of Exeter*.
Oil on canvas. Burghley House Collection, U.K.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Gibson-Wood, 189.

Figure 18. Attributed to Annibale Carracci. *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*. 1610. Engraving. Bologna Repository.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ ARTstor online database, Image Id. 7 (203).

<http://library.artstor.org/library/welcome.html#3|search|1|carracci20samaritan|Multiple20Collection20Search|||type3D3126kw3Dcarracci20samaritan26id3Dall26name3D>

Figures 19 and 20. John Russell. *Dr Henry Peckwell and Mrs Peckwell*.
c.1774. Oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 23, Figs 9 and 10.

Figure 21. Joshua Reynolds. *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll*. 1760. Oil on canvas. Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, U.K.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Nicholas Penny, *Reynolds*, 101, Fig.36.

Figure 22. Joshua Reynolds. *The Honourable Theresa Parker née Robinson*. 1770-2. Oil on canvas. Saltram, The Morley Collection. U.K.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 157, Fig.117.

Figure 23. Joshua Reynolds. *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse*. 1789. Oil on canvas. Governors of Dulwich Picture Gallery, U.K.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Nicholas Penny, ed. *Reynolds*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 160, fig. 151.

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