The Spread of Britishness: Coffee Houses, Circulating Libraries, and the Formation of Gender in
the Atlantic World, 1750-1820

by

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Abstract

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Britain saw a rapid growth of its printing industry and an expansion of both its national and international book trade. One of the most important export markets was the British Atlantic. This large and highly diverse region was home to some of the most culturally and economically valuable colonial holdings, including the Thirteen Colonies in America and Jamaica in the West Indies, who were also some of the largest consumers of Britain's exported print. As the wide variety of newspapers, periodicals, and books left British shores and made their way into the colonies, it took with it British ideals and worldviews, including an understanding of gender roles and identities. Using mainland America and Jamaica as case studies, this thesis will demonstrate that between 1750 and 1820, the consumption of British print promoted British ideals of masculinity and femininity within these colonial societies and gave rise to transnational notions of gender identity. While the roles and responsibilities of men and women differed, as this study will suggest, they also shared several core values, including sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

Tracing the formation of gender identity can prove challenging, but Atlantic-wide literary institutions such as coffee houses and circulating libraries, which contained strong gender connotations, act as useful frameworks to study how gender traits were acquired, promoted, and practiced. Although the scholarship surrounding these establishments has remained largely independent from each other, research findings indicate that these institutions shared many similarities. Together they were important parts of the transnational book trade that acted as social hubs for men and women throughout the Atlantic world, and were destinations where they could foster and display their notions of sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

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Introduction
The British Atlantic World & The Book Trade

The mid-eighteenth century was a time of great imperial expansion for Britain. The Seven Years War (1756-1763) saw them force the French out of their African holdings, take over Quebec, and increase their control within the West Indies.[1] Coinciding with this imperial expansion were many new economic developments and socio-cultural changes on home soil, including the large and rapid development of Britain's domestic book trade, as the number of printers and booksellers in London alone quadrupled over the course of the century.[2] However, the book trade was not limited to these national borders, and during the second half of the century booksellers in the capital actively developed their international markets.[3] From 1750 to 1820, the Atlantic was a particularly rich trading ground, and a wide variety of print, including newspapers, periodicals, plays, poetry, novels, romances, and swathes of non-fiction, such as conduct books, history, geography, travel, grammar, logic, philosophy, and natural philosophy, travelled between the metropole and the colonies.

Several historians of the British Empire have commented that despite regional differences, many colonists self-identified as British.[4] However, the role British print and its

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[1] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 101.

[2] James Raven, *Bookscape: Geographies of Printing and Publishing in London before 1800* (London: The British Library, 2014), 1.

[3] James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 7.

[4] Stephen Foster and Evan Haefeli, "British North America in the Empire: An Overview," in *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Stephen Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44-45, EBSCOhost; Kathleen Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 2011): 1294-1322, Jstor; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 147; Colley, *Britons*, 134.

consumption played in spreading and fostering British identity within the colonies has not received due attention, even though book historians have largely recognized that print was not neutral and contained within it the ideas, understandings, and cultural identities of the society that produced it.[5] This thesis will bring these two fields of study together to begin to remedy this oversight. As British print moved, it carried with it ideas, understandings, and ultimately a sense of Britishness. Among the knowledge transmitted, and the focus of this study were gender ideals and identities. This study will examine print as an imperial tool and will argue that the movement of British print across the ocean helped to create a British, Atlantic-wide notion of masculinity and femininity. To do so, this work will examine two distinct yet related literary institutions, coffee houses and circulating libraries, and will look at the various literary activities within them that helped to spread and foster these gender identities.

The physical enormity and regional differences within the Atlantic world makes it necessary to look at specific locations, and this paper will concentrate on two of Britain's most valuable colonial holdings, the Thirteen Colonies in British North America, and Jamaica in the West Indies. Mainland America was the largest colonial holding in the British Atlantic and was home to rapidly growing urban centers, including Philadelphia, which by the mid-eighteenth century was the second-largest city in the British Empire.[6] These urban centres were culturally

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[5] Those who have made this claim include Leslie Howsam and James Raven, "Introduction," in *Books Between Europe and the Americas: Connections and Communities, 1620-1860*, ed. Leslie Howsam and James Raven (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 1; Raymond Gillespie, *Reading Ireland: Print, reading and social change in early modern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 3, 6; John Hruschka, *How Books Came to America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 1; John Feather, "The Country Trade in Books," in *Spreading the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print 1550-1850*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Detroit: St Paul's Bibliographies, Winchester, 1990), 172.
[6] David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1980), 51.

influential as they were hubs of civil society and embodied the potential for social change.[7]

Beyond being culturally important, the Thirteen Colonies were also economically valuable and

produced a wealth of consumable goods and natural resources. However, their economic

importance was overshadowed by the Caribbean colonies, particularly Jamaica.[8] First taken from

the Spanish in 1655, by the 1750s, Jamaica was the crown jewel of the British West Indies.[9] The

island was highly prosperous due to its role as a large producer of sugar and coffee and was home

to some of the wealthiest colonists in the whole of the Americas.[10]

Beyond their cultural and economic importance, America and Jamaica were also chosen

as case studies because they were two of the largest consumers of British print within the empire.

In 1770, more books were exported to the Americas than to all of Europe and "eastern markets"

combined.[11] Jamaica was particularly important. Despite the prevalent belief among visitors and

British emigrants that the island was a literary wasteland, where literature was, as one

contemporary noted, "little cultivated," and reading was perceived as an unfavourable pastime,

evidence suggests that the population on the island had a significant interest in print, which

equalled if not surpassed that of mainland America.[12] The West Indies as a whole consumed a

quarter of all the books shipped to the Americas and received more print than New England.[13]

Within this, Jamaica alone received forty-three percent of Britain's total exports to the Caribbean

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[7] Vaughn Scribner, *Inn Civility: Urban Taverns and Early American Civil Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 12, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[8] Ibid, 4.
[9] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1296, 1313; Roderick Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade in the West Indies* (London: The Pindar Press, 1987), 105.
[10] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1314.
[11] James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450-1850* (New Haven: London, 2007), 144.
[12] [John Stewart?], *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Ormb, 1808), 171, Google Books.
[13] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 35.

and consumed almost as much print as New York.[14] In addition to the large volume of imports, Jamaica was also the first island in the West Indies to establish a local print trade, when Robert Baldwin set up a printing press in Kingston in 1730, which was followed by print shops in Spanish Town and Montego Bay in 1771, Savanna-la-Mar in 1788, and Falmouth in 1791.[15] Newspapers were a staple of the island's printers, but they also produced a wide selection of books and pamphlets, which catered to local interests, including almanacs, handbills for slave auctions, and works on botany, agriculture, medicine, and slavery.[16] However, the island's printing industry was small, and readers relied on large amounts of British imports to supplement demand and to diversify the types of literature available.

The print imported into this colony had significant and far-reaching effects on shaping the structure and culture of society. The consumption of British print was a means of promoting and fostering a British identity within the colonies. The presence of British publications in Jamaica was particularly important for securing British cultural dominance. Although 125,000 white British and Europeans moved to Jamaica in the first half of the eighteenth century, the number of African slaves on the island far surpassed the white population, and by 1808, there were over 300,000 enslaved, compared to around 20,000 to 25,000 whites, whose profit depended on the control of this population.[17] The minority status of whites produced a highly volatile and extremely violent society. The slave population was the most rebellious of any British West Indian colony, and to maintain dominance, white planters practiced extreme brutality towards

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[14] Ibid, 26.

[15] Ibid, 14.

[16] Ibid, 114- 115. For example, the *Kingston Gazette* ran advertisements for works such as Dr. Moseley's *Treaties on Tropical Diseases* and *Laws of Jamaica, from 1681 to 1792*.

[17] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1313; Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 6.

their slaves.[18] Due to the diverse populations on the island, which included British, European, and African, Jamaican society became what Kathleen Wilson has called a "marshland of Britishness," where national identities were blurred and different cultures clashed and combined to create something new.[19] Jamaicans, more than colonial Americans, were believed to have practiced a debased and lesser form of Britishness. Therefore, for Britain, the exportation of print to the island was a means of control, as it promoted British customs and cultural behaviours, including gender norms. Yet as much as it acted as a means of indoctrination into Britishness, both the white and free coloured populations welcomed British print. The minority status of white Jamaicans drove their desire to retain and strengthen their connections with the mother country and to maintain their British identity.[20] The consumption of imported print allowed many to uphold this association and uphold their British cultural character.[21] This print also let the free black and creole populations to claim Britishness, as the act of consuming British imports and the "performance" of British customs, manners, values, and identities allowed them to separate themselves culturally and socially from the enslaved and claim the title of a British citizen.[22]

Books held similar importance in America. The Thirteen Colonies saw a huge influx of migrants from Britain, Europe, and Africa in the form of slaves, and by 1750 the colonial population of North America was over one million.[23] British print once again helped to promote a sense of Britishness and worked to create a more homogenous identity, and like its Caribbean counterpart, the presence of this print was welcomed by the colonists, who prior to independence,

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[18] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1314.
[19] Ibid, 1313; Wilson, *The Island Race*, 147.
[20] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1313-1314.
[21] Wilson, *The Island Race*, 151.
[22] Ibid, 151.
[23] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 11.

not only saw themselves as British but also as the inheritors of the British Empire.[24] Like

Jamaica, the Thirteen Colonies also had its own print trade, but remained heavily reliant on

British imports, even after independence. The American domestic printing industry was small,

and by 1800 American fiction only made up two percent of all local book production, with the

rest coming from Britain.[25] Additionally, British imports were thought to be higher in quality and

therefore more valuable than American editions.[26] Even after America separated from Britain, the

new nation maintained many similarities with its colonial self, including its desire for British

print.[27] The ongoing importation of print before and after the American Revolution ensured the

continuation and propagation of British culture. It was not until the 1820s, the end date of this

study, that the definition of an American book began to shift from being an American edition of a

British work to being a book originally written and published domestically.[28]

Scholarship

The majority of the scholarship surrounding the British and Atlantic book trade takes a

technical approach and is primarily concerned with the mechanical workings of the trade

networks and the business aspects of the printing industry. This is exemplified in works such as

James Raven's *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450-1850*,

which aims to trace the rise and development of the English printing industry, and in *Spreading

the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print 1550-1850* which focuses on the distribution and

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[24] Foster and Haefeli, "British North America in the Empire: An Overview," 44-45; Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 11.
[25] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 64.
[26] Hruschka, *How Books Came to America*, 52.
[27] Ibid, 11.
[28] Mary Kelly, "Introduction," in *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 2, *An Extensive Republic Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelly (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 55.

trade networks among England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. In terms of colonial book trade history, John Hruschka's *How Books Came to America* and Roderick Cave's, *Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies* trace the history of each locale's printing industry and their trade connections with Britain. Furthermore, databases such as the *English Short Title Catalogue* (*ESTC*) and the *British Book Trade Index* have allowed scholars to reveal business connections between British and colonial booksellers and to untangle the often complex and highly sophisticated trade networks.

Thanks to the work of these scholars, it is now well known that colonists were consuming the same print as those in Britain, but the socio-cultural impact of this Atlantic-wide trade and consumption has received far less scholarly attention. As John Feather has noted, understanding the technical workings of the book trade is a means of getting closer to examining the true influence of print.[29] However, tracing the effects brought on by the transnational book trade can be exceedingly difficult, as changes were often subtle, slow, and continuous. Volumes such as *Books Between Europe and the Americas: Connections and Communities, 1620-1860*, takes a broad approach to this topic. This multi-author work looks at how the movement of print in the British, Dutch, and Spanish book trades affected cultural identity, knowledge, and the political and economic environments of North and South America.[30] Like this book, this thesis is also interested in the social and cultural significance of the book trade and will contribute to the historical understanding of how the movement of print influenced notions of identity. However, it will take a slightly different approach than *Books Between Europe and the Americas*. Where that work tends to focus on how specific genres created transatlantic communities, this study is not

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[29] Feather, "The Country Trade in Books," 172.
[30] Howsam and Raven, "Introduction," 1.

only interested in what genres were consumed, but also in where reading occurred, how it was performed, and what impact spaces of consumption had on gender identity. The history of reading is a challenging field of study with scholars taking different approaches to trace and make sense of this often elusive act.[31] By studying literary spaces, such as coffee houses and circulating libraries, it is possible to trace reading habits and to shed light on the wide-reaching socio-cultural impact of the print trade, and to uncover the important role these institutions played in the spread and creation of an Atlantic-wide British identity. In addition to the act of reading, this project will also examine important literary activities, such as coffee house book auctions and the ability to browse circulating library collections, which both had significant effects on shaping gender identity.

Institutionally, British coffee houses and circulating libraries have both received a large amount of scholarly interest. Markman Ellis and Brian Cowan have both written extensively on coffee houses. Ellis's 2004 book, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History*, provides a sweeping historical narrative, which traces coffee house culture from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century in Britain, America, and Europe. On the other hand, Cowan takes a closer look at British establishments in *The Social Life of Coffee*, where he studies the rise of coffee houses between the early 1600s to the 1720s, arguing that their resounding success and popularity were not inevitable but primarily due to the interest of the "virtuosi," a subculture of England's elite.[32] Together these works touch on a wide range of topics and themes and paint a comprehensive picture of coffee house culture.

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[31] For an overview of the methodologies see Ian Jackson, "Historiographical Review Approaches to the History of Readers and Reading in Eighteenth Century Britain," *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004): 1042, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X04004091.
[32] Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 4, 261.

Academic interest in British library history started in the 1960s with Paul Kauffman's seminal research. While his work remains highly influential to this day, it is also highly biographical, and in regards to circulating libraries, he was primarily interested in documenting where and when they were established, who the proprietors were, what they stocked, and who used them. More interpretive steps were taken in the 1980s and 1990s by social historians such as Paul Langford and John Brewer, who included circulating libraries in their larger discussions on the development of the British middle classes, and named these institutions as pivotal establishments in the development and spread of polite middling identity and culture.[33] More recently, academic interest in circulating libraries has undergone a renaissance with scholars such as Raven, David Allan, and Keith Manley emerging as some of the top scholars in the field. Together they have pushed historical understanding of circulating libraries in many ways. For example, Manley has written on the rise and development of circulating and subscription libraries in England, Scotland, and Ireland, has studied library catalogues, and has most recently questioned the role of sociability in circulating and subscription libraries.[34] Manley's work has greatly expanded our knowledge of these institutions, particularly of those outside England, and has forced a re-evaluation of the purpose and operation of these establishments. Allan's *A Nation of Readers* demonstrated the role circulating libraries, book clubs, and subscription libraries

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[33] See, Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[34] For examples see K.A. Manley, "Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries as Community Libraries," *Library History* 19, no. 3 (November 2003): 185-194; Keith Manley, *Irish Reading Societies and Circulating Libraries Founded Before 1825: Useful Knowledge and Agreeable Entertainment* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2018), ProQuest Ebook Central; K.A. Manley, "London Circulating Library Catalogues of the 1740s," *Library History* 8, no.3 (1989): 74-79; K.A. Manley, "Libraries for Sociability, or Libraries of Reality? The Purpose of British Subscription and Circulating Libraries," *Library and Information History* 36, no. 1 (2020): 2, doi:10.3366/lih.2020.0003.

played in popularizing reading among the middle classes, which in turn had a significant effect on the socio-cultural atmosphere of Britain. However, much of their work follows in the footsteps of Kaufman and has a propensity to be repetitive in its methodology, sources, and overall content.

Outside Britain, scholarship on coffee houses and circulating libraries remains patchy. In America, coffee houses are often discussed in tandem with taverns. Peter Thompson's *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* provides a look at how coffee houses, along with other public houses, helped to forge a notion of American citizenship. Vaughn Scribner has similarly written on how coffee houses and taverns gave rise to an American identity, which was heavily influenced by colonial American's sense of Britishness. In terms of circulating libraries, less work has been performed. David Kaser's, *A Book for A Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* from 1980, might be considered the America equivalent to Kaufman's work, as it was the first to provide an extensive look at these colonial institutions. Since this volume, James Green and Wayne A. Wiegand have both discussed these establishments in tandem with subscription libraries (also known as social libraries in America).[35] Together, these authors have begun to reveal the role circulating libraries played in the literary atmosphere in British America; but an in-depth study of the socio-cultural significance of these institutions to the lives of users and their larger role within the transnational book trade still needs to be completed. Unfortunately, Kaser's work has not sparked the same

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[35] Wayne A. Wiegand, " 'Imporv'd the General Conversation of Americans': Social Libraries before 1854," in *A Part of Our Lives: A Peoples History of the America Public Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central. Both circulating and subscription libraries operated on a subscription basis but were some differences. While the former was privately owned and operated, the latter was owned by the subscribers who purchased a share of the library when they subscribed. As a result, they had more input as to what books the library stocked. Subscription libraries also became seen as more male orientated as they tended to primarily stock non-fiction.

level of interest among scholars, and compared to Britain there is still relatively little academic interest in eighteenth century American circulating libraries.[36]

Of all the locales discussed in this paper, Jamaica has been the most overlooked by academics. Cave's 1987 work remains the most contemporary scholarship on the Jamaican book trade and the island's literary establishments, including coffee houses and circulating libraries. However, there has been no further large-scale interest in either of these institutions on the island. Like other scholarship, Cave's work on Jamaican circulating libraries is largely biographical, as he traces the stories of various establishments, who opened them, where, when, and how long each establishment survived and, where possible, the rules of each library. What influence these institutions and the literature within them had on the lives of Jamaican men and women, what role race played within these establishments, and how they influenced literacy and literary culture on the island all remain largely unanswered. This study will begin to answer these questions, but will only scratch the surface, as writing on Jamaican coffee houses and circulating libraries is extremely challenging due to the scarcity of available sources. This study has remained heavily reliant on surviving newspapers, travel guides, and cultural surveys of the island. Cave's study, along with Frank Cundall's 1935 work on the literary culture of the island, have both supplemented these limited primary sources. The information supplied by these primary and secondary materials raise more questions than they provide answers, but they do offer the ability to form a preliminary understanding of the role reading and literary institutions played in island society. This paper will make a small but vital contribution to the historical knowledge regarding these colonial institutions. It will build on and move beyond the biographical histories that have

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[36] Jeffery Croteau, "Yet More American Circulating Libraries: A Preliminary Checklist of Brooklyn (New York) Circulating Libraries," *Library History* 22 (November 2006): 171-172, doi:10.1179/174581606x158882.

dominated previous scholarship to provide new insights into the island's coffee houses and circulating libraries, the role they played in the transatlantic book trade, and the socio-cultural significance of this participation.

Unlike colonial coffee houses, where a transnational aspect is inherently ingrained in their history, the same cannot be said for circulating libraries. Scholarship on British, American, and Jamaican libraries have remained isolated from each other, and an unfortunate oversight, which has limited scholarship and the discussion surrounding the wider value of these establishments. Just like coffee houses, circulating libraries played a critical and active role within the Atlantic book trade and contributed to the movement of ideas, knowledge, and identity. This study will begin to make transnational connections among circulating libraries across the Atlantic world, and by doing so, will offer a new perspective on the historic understanding of circulating library history.

While typically seen as female spaces, circulating libraries were not entirely female-dominated as their historical reputation suggests. Although their male users have gone largely unexamined, this study will follow traditional paths and will look predominantly at female patrons, as there remains much to be said about the gendered relationship between women and circulating libraries. Historians have not gone beyond simply pointing out that women were present in American establishments, while in Britain, it has been a popular trend in scholarship to try to prove that far from being female-dominated, women were actually in the minority of users.[37] Indeed, when surviving lists of subscribers are studied, men do make up the majority of those listed, but this does not necessarily mean that men were the primary users, as the male

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[37] This includes Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Paul Kaufman, "In Defense of Fair Readers," in *Libraries and Their Users* (London: The Library Association, 1969), 223-228.

names on these lists, more likely than not, hide a large proportion of female readers. Ultimately, it is not possible to know for certain how many women (or men) used these establishments, but in their eagerness to debunk the idea that women were the main customers, academics have failed to recognize the importance of circulating libraries to women's daily lives and their gender identity. In short, while women are a staple within the scholarship, gender is not. However, that is not to say that it has gone completely unexplored. Historians interested in the practice of reading, such as Jacquelyn Pearson and Stephen Colclough, have both examined reading as a gendered practice and have included circulating libraries in their studies. Their work fills in gaps often found in circulating library scholarship, engages with gender as a field of analysis, and employs a greater diversity of sources, such as diaries, conduct books, and periodicals.[38]

One reason for the stunted and repetitive nature of circulating library research is the dependence on a small pool of primary sources. Library catalogues remain the main surviving source, and though they are useful in building an understanding of the basic operation and typical stock of these institutions, they do not disclose how customers actually used these establishments or reveal their cultural significance. In addition to these sources, a vast majority of eighteenth-century commentaries on circulating libraries voice an extremely negative opinion about these establishments and their clientele. This has created a biased version of these institutions that historians must take into account, but not succumb to. Finally, sketches and images of libraries are also common sources historians rely on, but while they provide important clues as to what these libraries looked like, they need to be used with a certain degree of caution. Library historians have remained overly reliant on these sources and although important, they should be

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[38] See Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain* and Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Reading and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

supplemented with other materials, such as diaries, journals, and personal papers, as these sources often provide insight into reading habits, reading tastes, and the experience of individuals and reveal important insights into femininity, reading, and the book trade. This paper will not disregard the traditional debates of library historians, as they provide a vital base to expand upon. Instead, it will combine the methodology and sources used by library scholars with a variety of other sources to shed new light on the role circulating libraries played in informing women's gender identity across the British Atlantic.

A similar approach will be taken with coffee houses. The works of Ellis and Cowan have provided invaluable examinations of coffee house culture, and compared to circulating libraries, there is a wider number of source materials, particularly in Britain, such as anecdotal evidence, satires, newspapers and periodicals, guidebooks, images, and plays, which provide a more well-rounded and thorough understanding of how customers used these establishments and how they behaved within them. But, there are still aspects that need to be further explored, including gender. The role and influence of women within these establishments has been a long-standing theme in academia. This debate will be examined in detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note now that although most commonly associated with men, coffee houses, like circulating libraries, were not entirely gender exclusive. However, this study will primarily focus on men, as it was men who tended to use these establishments as literary destinations and whose identity was most influenced by the reading materials and literary activities found in coffee houses. Despite the large amount of research on coffee houses, there is little scholarship explicitly about them as literary centres and the role they played in shaping masculinity, particularly on a transatlantic level. It is well known that these were establishments where customers could find newspapers, but they also stocked pamphlets and other forms of ephemera.

In Britain, several coffee houses operated what historians refer to as coffee house libraries. In addition to these literary offerings the practice of holding book auctions in these institutions was a common occurrence throughout the Atlantic world. The importance of these libraries and these book sales have remained undervalued, as there is little scholarship about coffee house auctions, although Ellis and Cowan did include some information about them in their monographs, and Ellis is one of the few scholars to write exclusively on coffee house libraries and has tried to reconstruct London coffee house libraries in the mid-eighteenth century.[39] Building on Ellis's work, this study will provide a more in-depth analysis of the social, cultural, and gendered implications of these institutions on a transatlantic level.

The Institutional Foundations of this Study

The decision to use coffee houses and circulating libraries as case studies may seem untraditional, primarily because the histories surrounding these two establishments associate them with different centuries. Coffee houses have become synonymous with the seventeenth century, while circulating libraries are a hallmark of the eighteenth. Traditional narratives have suggested that after 1720 coffee house culture stagnated in Britain, while the eighteenth century saw a general decline in their popularity.[40] However, this idea is now being re-evaluated. Cowan has argued that the deeply ingrained decline narrative is not an effective means of providing a sophisticated understanding of coffee houses on a national or a transnational level. Instead, he has suggested that we view coffee house culture from a perspective of adaptation and evolution.[41]

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[39] Markman Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London," *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 10, no.1 (March 2009): 5-6, Project Muse.

[40] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 4; Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 211, 212.

[41] Brian Cowan, "*Café* or Coffeehouse? Transnational Histories or Coffee and Sociability," in *Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London: Routledge, 2014), 37, EBSCOhost.

Indeed, as this author has found, evidence suggests that far from stagnating, British coffee houses adapted to social and cultural changes and remained relevant urban spaces even into the early nineteenth century, and therefore operated alongside circulating libraries. This ongoing popularity is demonstrated in the 1815 edition of the *Epicure's Almanack*, which listed the various taverns, inns, eating houses, and coffee houses in London, and reveals just how plentiful and relevant coffee houses were in the capital.[42]

The first coffee house in Britain opened in Oxford in 1650 and was closely followed by Pasqua Rosée's London establishment in 1652.[43] Although commonly associated with London and university towns such as Oxford, over the course of the seventeenth century, coffee houses also appeared in places like York, Bristol, Exeter, Edinburgh, and Glasgow.[44] After taking root in Britain, coffee houses quickly spread throughout the Atlantic world. They were in Dublin by the 1660s and were first established in America in 1668 when bookseller Benjamin Harris opened the London Coffee House in Boston.[45] Following this, they appeared in New York in 1696, Philadelphia in 1703, and Charles Town, South Carolina in 1724.[46] In the West Indies, evidence suggests that coffee houses began operating in the region in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In 1781, Christian Dykeman advertised in the *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* for his new "Tavern and Coffee House" in Spanish-Town.[47] Later, in 1792, Robert Firth advertised in the *Royal Gazette* "that on the First of January ensuing, he intends… [to open] that large and

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[42] *Epicure's Almanack; Or, Calendar of Good Living* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815).
[43] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 90, 94.
[44] Steve Pincus, " 'Coffee Politicians Does Create': Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture", *Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 4 (December 1995): 813-814, Historical Abstracts.
[45] Cowan, "*Café* or Coffeehouse?," 45.
[46] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 78, 79.
[47] "King's Arms Tavern," *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega*, advertisement, September 6, 1781, Caribbean Newspapers, 1718-1876.

commodious House, the corner of Little Port-Royal Street, below the building late Edie's coffee-house as, *A Tavern and Coffee-House*."[48]

Seventy-five years after coffee houses first appeared in Oxford, Allan Ramsay established Britain's first circulating library in Edinburgh, but it was not until the 1740s that these institutions gained a cultural foothold and appeared in great numbers across Britain.[49] Kaufman has estimated that by 1800 there were 380 circulating libraries just in England, while Raven has suggested there were only 200.[50] Either way, these establishments were plentiful, and like coffee houses, libraries opened their doors in smaller cities and towns. Outside of London, it has been estimated that during the eighteenth century a total of eighty-eight circulating libraries operated at some point in Liverpool, while there were forty-one in Manchester and Norwich, forty-six in Birmingham, twenty-four in Leeds, twenty-two in York, and several in Bath and Brighton.[51] In Scotland, prior to 1800, there were an estimated twenty-five circulating libraries in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow, and Leith.[52] In Ireland, Richard C. Cole estimates that there were 21 circulating libraries in operation in the eighteenth century, with James Hoey opening the first in Dublin in 1735.[53]

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[48] "ROBERT FIRTH," *Royal Gazette*, public notice, December 12, 1792, December 29, 1792 to January 5, 1793, Vol. XV no. 1, MFM.MC384, Microfilm, British Library.

[49] Manley, "Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries," 86; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), 125.

[50] James Raven, "From Promotion to Proscription: arrangements for Reading and eighteenth-century Libraries," in *The Practice and Representations of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175.

[51] Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, 124.

[52] Paul Kaufman, "Scotland as the Home of Community Libraries," *Libraries and their Users: Collected Papers in Library History*, 135; Manley, "Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries," 187.

[53] Richard C. Cole, "Community Lending Libraries in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 44, no. 2 (April 1974): 112, Jstor; Hyder Abbas, " 'A Fund of entertaining and useful Information': Coffee Houses, Early Public Libraries, and the

Across the Atlantic, William Rind opened the first American circulating library in

Annapolis in 1762, closely followed by George Wood in Charleston the same year and Garret

Noel in New York in 1763.[54] Samuel Loudon opened the second library in the city in 1774, while

two decades later, John Fellows founded another in New York, which was taken over by Hocquet

Caritat, who turned it into one of the largest circulating libraries in America.[55] Several of these

institutions also appeared in Brooklyn in the early 1800s, including Joseph P. Pirsson's operation,

which was established in 1809 and the Brooklyn Circulating Library eleven years later.[56] In

Boston, John Mein opened a library in 1765, while Lewis Nicola, Thomas Bradford, and Robert

Bell opened libraries in Philadelphia in 1767, 1769, and 1774 respectively.[57] Meanwhile, in

Jamaica, circulating libraries struggled to take root. William Aikman opened the first on the

island in 1779 but abandoned the venture two years later.[58] In Montego Bay, James Fannin began

operating his St. James Circulating Library in 1784.[59] However, it too failed, and in 1785 a

notification appeared in the *Cornwall Chronicle* that declared that the library had "not met with

encouragement proportionate to the very great expense of importation."[60] Although many

libraries opened and closed relatively quickly, by the 1790s, Kingston had several circulating

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Print Trade in Eighteenth-Century Dublin," *Library and Information History* 30, no. 1 (2014): 48, 49, https://doi.org/10.1179/1758348913Z.00000000051

[54] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 19, 23, 26; James Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries In the United States*, ed. Thomas August, and Kenneth E. Carpenter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 60.

[55] Ibid, 60, 70.

[56] Croteau, "Yet More American Circulating Libraries," 175.

[57] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 40.

[58] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 229-230.

[59] Ibid, 230.

[60] James Fannin, "St. James's Circulating Library", *The Cornwall Chronicle, and Jamaica General Advertiser* (Montego-Bay), notification, June 18, 1785, Caribbean Newspapers, 1718-1876.

libraries, including David Bower's establishment and the joint operation of Thomas Stevenson and John Aikman.[61] Outside of Kingston, Asa W. Wilder's library opened in 1816 in Montego Bay, while D. Wilson's established his library in Morant Bay in the southeast corner of the island in 1819.[62]

Coffee houses and circulating libraries were plentiful throughout Britain and its colonies and rather than being isolated from each other, these establishments operated simultaneously throughout the British Atlantic world. When considered together, these institutions are particularly useful for examining gender. The gender connotations of each establishment act as useful frameworks for studying gender identity, which can sometimes be abstract, elusive, and difficult to identify, in more concrete and physical ways. This is particularly true regarding masculinity. While scholars have not neglected the history of masculinity, it has not received the same level of attention as the history of femininity.[63] As Michael S. Kimmel has argued, while men are often inherently discussed in works of history, they are not examined as gendered beings and have become historically genderless.[64] Examining institutions such as coffee houses can begin to remedy this issue. The various activities that occurred within coffee houses and the overall culture of these establishments provide the opportunity to discuss men as gendered beings, shed light on masculinity, what it was, and how it was created.

[61] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 233.
[62] Ibid, 231, 237.
[63] For an overview on the historiography of masculinity see Karen Harvey, "The History of Masculinity, circa 1650–1800," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 296-311, doi:10.1086/427126
[64] Michael S. Kimmel, "Introduction: Invisible Masculinity," in *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 3, EBSCOhost.

Coffee houses and circulating libraries are also particularly useful for examining gender on a transnational scale. Just as the literature these establishments housed can be seen as a tool of Britain's imperial project, so too can the institutions themselves. American and Jamaican coffee houses were consciously modelled on their British predecessors and shared many of the same functions and characteristics.[65] Elite Americans, such as Benjamin Franklin and the "Virginian Gentleman" William Byrd II, used coffee houses while they lived in London in the early part of the eighteenth century and took British coffee house culture back to America.[66] Circulating libraries followed the same pattern of emulation. Throughout the Atlantic, circulating libraries mirrored their British counterparts in their basic operation, as they were privately owned and operated on a subscription basis. As a result of this emulation, when coffee houses and circulating libraries appeared across the Atlantic world, they remained largely recognizable in their form and function to those in Britain. These parallels allowed comparable cultures to form in British and colonial establishments, which in turn led to the creation and promotion of similar gender traits among their users. Therefore, these establishments are an excellent means of examining masculinity and femininity across a large and diverse geographical region.

Structure of Atlantic Society and the Development of the Literate Middle Classes

One notable similarity between coffee houses and circulating libraries was their association with the bourgeoning middle classes. In Britain, this large and diverse group encompassed anyone between the landed gentry and the working poor, who had an annual income between £50 and £2,000.[67] This included lower level gentry, gentlemen farmers, and

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[65] Cowan, "*Café* or Coffeehouse?," 46.
[66] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 26.
[67] Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England 1680-1780* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996), 15.

professionals such as doctors, lawyers, merchants, traders, shopkeepers, husbandmen, artisans,

and craftsmen. Overseas, American and Jamaican colonial societies, although not exact replicas

of British society, were somewhat similarly structured in social strata.[68] Like Britain, the middle

portions of American society included small landholders, skilled artisans, and various

professionals.[69] However, while the landed gentry topped British social hierarchy, no such group

existed in the colonies, and the upper echelons of American society, made up of property-owning

merchants and planters, were more on par with the British middle classes than the landed

gentry.[70] In Jamaica, society was dominated by wealthy white and creole planters who were some

of the wealthiest colonists in the entire British Atlantic.[71] Below this group were the middle

classes, which encompassed rich merchants, colonial and military officers, and professionals,

such as farmers, overseers, bookkeepers, retailers, small landowners, traders, doctors, lawyers,

and merchants, while servants, sailors, and soldiers resided at the bottom of white society.[72]

Beneath whites were free black and people of colour. Although the vast majority of blacks living

in Jamaica were enslaved Africans, there was a small but substantial free black population.[73] By

1738, there were an estimated 3,408 free blacks and mulattos who worked as craftsmen, artisans,

and domestic servants, while some even owned property, including slaves. [74]

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[68] Vaughn Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists: Gentlemen's Pursuit of Cosmopolitanism and Hierarchy in British American Taverns," *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 2013): 472, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2013.832473.
[69] Ibid, 473.
[70] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 6; Christina J. Hodge, *Consumerism and the Emergence of the Middle Class in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 22, Cambridge Core; Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, 73.
[71] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1314; Wilson, *The Island Race*, 148
[72] Ibid, 148.
[73] Ibid, 149.
[74] Ibid, 150.

Despite regional variations, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of what can be seen as the Atlantic middle classes, who became increasingly literate over the course of the century. The high import rates of books and print in Jamaica suggest that there was a significant literate population, while in America the literacy rates of the middle classes were as high as ninety percent by the 1750s.[75] The growing popularity of reading and the growth of the transnational book trade was in part due to the growing demands of the increasingly literate middle classes, who used books and reading establishments like coffee houses and circulating libraries to cultivate and announce their social status and taste.[76]

The idea of the coffee house conjures up images of communal tables surrounded by white, well-dressed, wealthy, highly educated men, as best depicted in the seventeenth century image, *Interior of a London Coffee-House* (figure 1). But coffee house customers could be much more economically, professionally, and racially diverse than this image depicts. When a customer arrived at a British coffee house they were seated at the first available spot, which created a mixture of professionals and social classes, and promoted an impression of equality among the clientele.[77] Although British coffee houses were open to all in the seventeenth century, some were predominantly populated by the "virtuosi," whom Cowan defined as a group of relatively wealthy, well educated, intellectual, and elite men who had their own culture that valued civility, curiosity, and cosmopolitanism.[78] Among the ranks of this elite group were members of the Royal Society, such as astronomer Edmund Halley, Hans Sloane the physician and founder of the

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[75] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 5.

[76] Raven, "The Book as a Commodity," in *The Cambridge History of the Book In Britain 1695-1830*, vol. 5, ed. Suarez, Michael F. and Michael L Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 89, http://10.1017/CHOL9780521810173.040.

[77] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 59.

[78] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 89, 115.

British Museum, and Isaac Newton, all of whom were all known to haunt Tom's Coffee House in Deveraux Court, while Samuel Pepys, another virtuoso, frequented the Turk's Head Coffee House.[79]

Figure 1. *Interior of a London Coffee-House*, ca. 1690-1700, drawing, British Museum, London 1931,0613.2, © Trustees of the British Museum, Creative Commons.

After the Restoration, coffee houses started to see a shift in clientele as they began to be frequented by larger segments of society, including many members of the middle classes.[80] This diversity was recognized in the 1763 satire, *Memoirs of the Bedford Coffee-House*, which declared that the Bedford "may be looked upon as the centre of gravitation between the court and the city; the noxious effluvia of St. Bride's is here corrected by the genuine Eau du Luce from Pall Mall, and the predominance of ambergris at St. James's is qualified by the wholesome tar of Thames-street."[81] While some establishments attracted a mixture of people, others became

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[79] Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London," 15; Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 57.

[80] Ibid, 89.

[81] Genius [pseud], *Memoirs of the Bedford Coffee-House* (London: Printed for J. Single, 1763), 3, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

closely associated with specific circles of middle class society, a trend that continued into the latter part of the century.[82] Nando's Coffee House and the Grecian Coffee House, both located in the Inns of Court, the legal centre of London, attracted large numbers of lawyers and law students.[83] Jonathan's and Garraway's in Exchange Alley attracted merchants and businessmen, while in Covent Garden, Will's and Button's attracted writers and poets, including Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Alexander Pope.[84] Others still attracted military men, such as the King's Head Coffee House by Tower Hill, which was inhabited by "naval and military gentleman, and Tower officers."[85] One of the most prominent coffee houses in London, the Chapter Coffee House, had a long history of appealing to a literary crowd. In 1761, a contemporary noted that it was "frequented by those encouragers of literature and… booksellers. The conversation here naturally turns upon the newest publications."[86] The Chapter was also the meeting place for literary clubs, and proprietors of newspapers.[87] It retained its literary reputation into the nineteenth century as the *Epicure's Almanack* noted, "in this house the magnificent and munificent booksellers of London hold their conclave… Of authors, lawyers, and diviners, there are plenty; of doctors of physics, several and of doctors of state… there is daily a whole host."[88] The popularity of this establishment with literary men was due to its location at the crossroads of

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[82] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 150.

[83] Ibid, 150.

[84] Ibid, 150-151; Mr. Town, *The Connoisseur*, 4th ed. vol. 1 (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1761), 7, Google Books.

[85] *The Picture of London for 1807*, 8th ed. (London: Printed by Lewis and Hamblin, 1807)*,* 355, 356, Google Books.

[86] Town, *The Connoisseur*, 4.

[87] Raven, *The Business of Books*, 172.

[88] *Epicure's Almanack*, 7.

Paternoster Row, St. Paul's Alley, and Ivy lane, one of the main centres of the London book trade where booksellers and printers sat on every other corner.[89]

British coffee houses were not only professionally diverse but could also be racially varied. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the black population of Britain was around 20,000.[90] While many remained in the service of wealthy families, some were independent.[91] For example, Ignatius Sancho, an Afro-British grocer and a man of letters who was born into slavery in the West Indies and arrived in London as a young child, regularly used London coffee houses as a free man, including for literary purposes.[92] In 1768 he wrote to a friend, "I went to the coffee-house to examine the file, and was greatly pleased upon the second reading of your work, in which is blended the Gentleman and the scholar."[93] In the colonies, Jamaican coffee houses would have also been economically and racially diverse places. Although the laws of Jamaica were based on racial and national biases that attempted to separate Jamaican society into hierarchical and racial structures, the harsh laws of the island were an attempt to make up for distinctions and differences that were often disregarded in practice.[94] While slaves and indentured servants would not have been allowed to use these establishments, Jamaican coffee houses were no doubt extremely diverse places, used by white, free black, creole, and mulatto peoples from the wealthiest and middling portions of society. In addition to locals, the island's public houses also would have played host to a variety of travellers, as well as many sailors of the Royal British

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[89] Raven, *The Business of Books*, 172.

[90] Tim Lockley, "David Margrett: A Black Missionary in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 730, Jstor.

[91] Ibid, 730.

[92] Vincent Caretta, "Sancho (Charles) Ignatius," accessed April 23, 2020, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

[93] Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the late Ignatius Sancho, an African,* vol. 1 (London: Printed by J. Nicholas, 1782), 11, Slavery and Anti-Slavery A Transnational Archive.

[94] Wilson, *The Island Race*, 148.

Navy, who had a strong presence in Jamaica.[95] Among these men were many free Africans and Afro-Britons, who made up one-quarter of the British navy by 1790.[96] White and black sailors alike would have rubbed shoulders with locals in public taverns and coffee houses.[97] Although people of colour used coffee houses throughout the Atlantic world, they were not free from racial tensions. Coffee houses on both sides of the Atlantic played key roles in the slave trade. British and colonial coffee houses, including Garraway's in London, hosted slave auctions.[98] Overseas, there is evidence that the London Coffee House in Philadelphia, a popular haunt for merchants, regularly held slave auctions, while in Jamaica similar sales took place, exemplified by 1782 the sale of "FORTY-SEVEN NEGROES" at Robert's Coffee House.[99]

American coffee houses were known to have been more racially, socially, and economically restrictive than those in Britain. Slaves, indigenous peoples, apprentices, and unfree whites were all barred from taverns and other public houses.[100] In addition to these populations, others were also excluded from American coffee houses. The first coffee house in Philadelphia, built by Samuel Carpenter in the late seventeenth century, tried to keep out the lower portions of society, which was met with much public outcry.[101] Other Philadelphia coffee houses, such as the London Coffee House, which opened in 1773, were built on the private subscriptions of wealthy

[95] Siân Williams, "The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society during the Eighteenth Century," in *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820*, ed. John McAleer and Christer Petley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 32, Springer Link.
[96] Wilson, *The Island Race*, 44.
[97] Williams, "The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society," 32.
[98] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 170, 285.
[99] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 36; "This IS TO GIVE NOTICE," *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega*, advertisement, July 18, 1782, Caribbean Newspapers, 1718-1876.
[100] Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 75, ProQuest Ebook Central; Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 3.
[101] Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution*, 92.

merchants.[102] Whereas British coffee houses became more egalitarian as time went on, American establishments continued to strive for exclusivity. Thompson has claimed that prior to the revolution, individuals tended to drink and socialize with those similar to their own social and economic standing.[103] Scribner has also argued that coffee houses in the eighteenth century were gathering places for American elites who used these establishments to promote themselves as cosmopolitan and polite, and therefore distinct from the uncivil lower orders, who they saw as lacking the same social and behavioural standards.[104] These elite users included founding fathers such as Franklin, wealthy professionals like Dr. Alexander Hamilton (not to be confused with the founding father of the same name), and affluent landowners. Despite the attempt to ensure exclusivity, there is evidence that there was some mixing of classes, nationalities, and professions. Echoing the Bedford in London, one contemporary noted that Philadelphia's coffee houses were often centres where "men of *straw* with men of fortune meet, and men of neither both familiar greet" and "That daily here for news [they] together troop… the English, Irish here With French and Dutch familiarity appear; The Spaniards, Portuguese and sober Swede, Meet India merchants in the course of trade, The Russian, Prussian, Turk and Scot & Jew, With homebred Yankees here mixing view."[105] Others, such as the Tontine Coffee House in New York also had diverse patronage. While in the city, English traveller John Lambert commented that the Tontine "was filled with underwriters, brokers, merchants, traders, and politicians; selling, purchasing, trafficking, or insuring; some reading, other eagerly inquiring the news."[106] Although

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[102] Ibid, 106, 110.
[103] Ibid, 110.
[104] Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists"; Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 6-8.
[105] *The Philadelphiad; or New Pictures of the City: Interspersed with a candid review and display of some first-rate modern characters of both sexes*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Printed for the Editor by Kline and Reynolds, 1784), 61, America's Historical Imprints.
[106] John Lambert, *Travels through Canada and the United States of North America*,

these establishments may have been more restrictive than British coffee houses, they still attracted a variety of visitors from different nationalities and professions.

Circulating libraries were also diverse places. The subscription fees users were required to pay to gain access to the collections automatically excluded the poorest members of society, but the relatively low cost of joining these libraries made them affordable for many men and women of the middle ranks across the Atlantic world.[107] A fictitious conversation staged in the Scarborough Circulating Library in Britain, with characters such as the "Merchant," "Post Captain," "Shopman," "Mr. Quid-Nunc," and "Miss Wrinkle" provides a good indication of who used these libraries in Britain.[108] In Jamaica, Cave identified that it was the urban middle classes and their families, as well as the island's planter class who used these establishments.[109] Supporting this claim, a notification in Kingston's *Daily Advertiser* for a young woman's Morocco bound pocketbook with a silver lock, which went missing while she was in the Jamaica Library, further indicates that the island's wealthier citizens used these libraries.[110]

Coffee houses and circulating libraries catered to large and diverse middle class audiences throughout the Atlantic world, and as the following chapters will demonstrate, while there were some differences between their operation and users, these institutions were vital in the spread of British gender norms and the formation of an Atlantic British identity. Chapter One will discuss

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 vol. 2, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1814), 63, HathiTrust Digital Library.

[107] Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," 53.

[108] John Buonarotti Papworth, Francis Wrangham, William Combe, James Green and Thomas Rowlandson, *Poetical Sketches of Scarborough in 1813* (Driffield, 1893), 142-148, Google Books.

[109] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 228.

[110] David Bower, "Eloped", *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston), notice, February 3, 1790, Eighteenth Century Journals.

gender roles in more depth. It will define the specific gender norms, traits, and characteristics this study will address and will begin to examine the relationship between gender, coffee houses, and circulating libraries. The following two chapters will then provide closer inspections of coffee houses and circulating libraries to see how British gender traits were promoted, practiced, and even challenged by the consumption of literature within these spaces, and through the participation in the various literary activities that occurred within these institutions.

Chapter I
Gender Norms, Coffee Houses, & Circulating Libraries

Traditionally, historians have seen the eighteenth century as the watershed moment when

the separate sphere ideology, where men lived in and worked in the public realm, while women

remained in the privacy of the domestic, fully crystallized. The development and dominance of

this model has been closely linked to the emergence of the British and American middle classes

and to the formation of middling virtues.[111] In short, to live and work within these distinguished

gendered spheres was to claim a middling identity. Indeed, the ideal forms of British middle class

masculinity and femininity promoted by eighteenth century contemporaries seems to adhere to

the separate sphere model. The epitome of middle class masculinity took form in the "polite

gentleman," who was well educated, restrained, controlled, refined, self-governed, and

thoughtful.[112] This gentleman aimed to distinguish himself from the more effeminate male

figures such as the vain, selfish, and overly stylized fops and macaroni.[113] On the other hand,

idealized middle class femininity encouraged women to be domestic, demure, modest, chaste,

pious, and passive in the face of men.[114] The difference between the sexes was pointed out in *The*

Ladies Magazine in 1778, when one contemporary declared, men's "fortitude, magnanimity, self-

government, and patience, chiefly command our admiration; while the gentle and amiable virtue

of humanity, benevolence, and kind consideration, fall more immediately under the sphere of

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[111] Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (June 1993): 384, 387, Jstor.

[112] Harvey, "The History of Masculinity," 301; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 62.

[113] Harvey, "The History of Masculinity," 301.

[114] Hunt, *The Middling* Sort, 75; Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, "Introduction," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Longman, 1997), 2.

female action."[115] These idealized female traits were echoed across conduct books from the period. In *A Father's Legacy to his Daughter*, the author declared that "one of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye," and that, "modesty, which I think is so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one."[116] Similarly, another contemporary advised that "modesty is the supplement of beauty," and "docility is a quality very necessary for a young person, who should never have much confidence in herself, but this docility must not be carried too far."[117] Nor was it just British women who were associated with these attributes. In *An Account of Jamaica*, John Stewart declared that white middle class Jamaican women, like their British sisters, were as "as industrious and alert in household concerns as the females of any country in the world" and that they were "in general modest and decorous in their behaviour, sprightly and agreeable when occasion requires it— they are tender, generous, hospitable… and above all, they have the reputation of leading the most correct and virtuous lives. In short, they are formed to become faithful and affectionate wives, and tender and indulgent mothers."[118]

The ideology of the separate spheres has become impossible to dislodge from the historical conversation on gender, but the validity of the theory has recently come under scrutiny from a wide range of scholars. The advice conduct books provided readers and the images of gender roles and responsibilities they promoted were highly idealized and did not always reflect

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[115] Academicus [psud.], "On Sensibility," *Ladies Magazine*, August 1778, 395, Eighteenth Century Journals.

[116] Dr. Gregory, "*A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*," in *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor* (Edinburgh: Printer for J. & J. Fairbairn, and A. Guthrie, 1793), 10. Google Books.

[117] "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters," *The Young Lady's Pocket Library*, 12, 24.

[118] [Stewart?], *An Account of Jamaica*, 156-157.

reality.[119] Although women did have domestic responsibilities, and the home was a site of

women's work, the house was not an entirely private space and domesticity did not always equate

to privacy. British and colonial homes were sociable spaces and must be seen as at least quasi-

public and acted as backdrops to many scenes of leisure, entertainment, and business, as the

practice of afternoon visits from friends, neighbours, and acquaintances became a key part of

daily life for both sexes, but particularly for women.[120] During these visits, guests would partake

in a wide range of activities, including card games, music, sewing, needlework, writing, and

communal reading.[121] Women's work did not just occur within the home. Historians such as

Amanda Vickery, Margaret Hunt, Hannah Barker, Elaine Chalus, and Christine Walker have all

demonstrated the true complexity of femininity and have shed light on the different

responsibilities working and middle class women had in the public sphere. Hunt, for instance, has

shown that many British women worked either with their husbands or in their own trade, while

Barker and Chalus have discussed women's roles in the hospitality industry, as well as their

positions as shopkeepers, pawnbrokers, retailers, domestic servants, and business owners.[122]

Overseas, the separation of gender roles was even less structured than in Britain. Jamaican

men and women were particularly notorious for their apparent disregard of British gender ideals.

Many white Jamaican men had black or mulatto mistresses and often raised the resulting children

as their own.[123] The sexual freedoms and sexual violence practiced by these men and the creation

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[119] Barker and Chalus, "Introduction," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, 1.
[120] Benjamin Heller, "Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (September 2010): 624, 625, Jstor.
[121] Ibid, 625.
[122] Hunt, *The Middling Sort*; Hannah Barker, "Women and Work," in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), 137.
[123] Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1316.

of mixed race families were seen as degradations of British masculine and family values.[124]

Furthermore, despite Stewart's positive description of the island's colonial women, they too were

commonly seen as practicing a debased form of British femininity or blamed for disregarding

gender roles altogether. Indeed, many white and free women of colour on the island held

traditionally masculine roles.[125] Women transacted business in the same way as men, ran shops,

participated in global trade as merchants and traders, owned land and property, and by the mid-

eighteenth century, were commonly slave owners in their own right.[126] Although the ideal for

British, American, and Jamaican women was to be wives and mothers, in reality, they were active

members of civil society, both in Britain and perhaps even more so in the colonies. But, just as

many men and women in Britain and the colonies failed to practice every gender ideal at all

times, they did not necessarily completely abandon or disregard them either. Gender identity was

fluid, and men and women chose which traits to follow, how to foster them, and where and when

to practice them.

Supplementing the efforts of women's historians, coffee house scholars have been

particularly critical of Jürgen Habermas' work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public

Sphere*. Originally written in German in 1962 and translated into English in the 1980s,

Habermas's work has had a profound impact on how scholars view the emergence and formation

of the public sphere and the institutions within it.[127] In his work, Habermas argues that the early

eighteenth century saw the formation of a "bourgeois public sphere," and he specifically

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[124] Ibid, 1316.
[125] Christine Walker, "Pursuing her Profits: Women in Jamaica Atlantic Slavery and a Globalizing Market, 1700-60," *Gender and History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014): 481, doi:10.1111/1468-0424.12085.
[126] Ibid, 481, 491.
[127] Brian Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 51 (2001): 129, Jstor.

identifies coffee houses as one of the primary institutions within it.[128] He qualifies this new

realm, and inherently coffee houses themselves, as middling male-only spaces that "disregarded

status altogether," and fostered social behaviour, intellectual conversation, and debate around art,

literature, economics, and politics.[129] While extremely popular at first, his thesis has since come

under criticism. Cowan has questioned whether or not the idea has been "over-exploited" by

scholars, has suggested that Habermas based his claims on the romanticized ideas of the

Enlightenment, and has even recommended abandoning the phrase "public sphere" for "civil

society," because the provenance of the term dates to the eighteenth century.[130] In addition to

these issues, most coffee house scholars have rejected Habermas' idea that the public sphere was

primarily masculine. As Allan's commented there was a much larger array of individuals,

including women, who participated in many sections of society in more diverse ways than

Habermas' model allows for.[131]

Although traditionally associated with men, coffee houses were not exclusively male

spaces. Many working class women acted as barmaids and servers, while others, such as

London's notorious Moll King, owned and operated their own establishments.[132] At the other end

of the social spectrum, some women acted as customers. Despite Ellis's claim that there is little

evidence that women were ever clientele, several elite women are known to have patronized

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[128] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998), 10-11, 33.

[129] Ibid, 33, 36; Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, 224-225.

[130] Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere?," 150; Brian Cowan, "English Coffeehouses and French Salons: Rethinking Habermas, Gender and Sociability in Early Modern French and British Historiography," in *Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Performance, Geography, Privacy*, ed. Angela Vanhaelen and Joseph P. Ward (New York: Routledge, 2013), 46.

[131] Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, 225.

[132] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 67.

coffee houses, including Mary Somerset, Duchess of Beaufort, who met gathered in these spaces with male and female friends, attended club meetings, and participated in auctions.[133] However, it is still unclear which specific coffee houses these women used, and Helen Berry has suggested the establishments used by high-status female customers may have been more illustrious than the average coffee house.[134] Even though working class and elite women were both found in these establishments there is little evidence that middle class women ever used them.[135] While upper class women had more liberty in their actions and movements, many of the poorer women who entered these establishments tended to earn negative reputations and many coffee house women became associated with criminal activity and prostitution.[136] It is possible that many middle class women faced a similar risk, and those who wished to promote themselves as respectable and polite avoided these establishments. Ultimately, women did not have the same unfettered access to these spaces, but neither were they completely absent.[137]

Similar patterns can be seen in the colonies. In Jamaica, it is exceedingly difficult to know if women were present in coffee houses, but the various public roles women held on the island, suggests that it was possible, that like their British counterparts, some worked in, owned, and operated coffee houses, while the elite women of the island may have used these spaces as customers.[138] In America, there is more evidence that women ran coffee houses. In 1765, Mary

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[133] Helen Berry, " 'Nice and Curious Questions': Coffee-Houses and the Representation of Women in John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*," *The Seventeenth Century* 12, no. 2 (1997): 261, Jstor.
[134] Ibid, 261.
[135] Ibid, 262.
[136] Ibid, 262; Markman Ellis, "Coffee-women, the *Spectator* and the pubic sphere in the early eighteenth century," in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, 1700-1830, eds. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.
[137] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 67; Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere?,"134.
[138] For more on the role of women in Jamaica see Walker, "Pursuing her Profits."

Pinniger opened a coffee house in Newport, Rhode Island, followed a month later by Abigail

Williams, who advertised her new Rural Tea and Coffee House in Providence, Rhode Island.[139]

However, it is once again unclear if women attended these establishments as customers, although

Scribner has claimed that women were only allowed to enter American coffee houses during

special evening events such as balls, dinners, and exhibitions.[140]

Cowan never explicitly states that Habermas should not be used, but by pointing out

serious flaws in the work he implies that historians should move away from depending so heavily

on his thesis. The questioning and rejection of Habermas' theory by historians has pushed

scholarship into what Cowan called a "post-Habermasian" era, which recognizes that there was

no one single public, but multiple publics, which rose and fell, and were not tied to a specific

space, social class, or gender.[141] This concept of multiple publics can be applied to coffee houses

and circulating libraries. Within both of these institutions, mainstream and counter cultures

existed side by side. Each with differing opinions and ideas, this gave rise to two very distinct

versions of the same space. Alongside the polite, rational, and intellectual coffee house promoted

by Habermas and other scholars was the impolite coffee house, which was filled with flirtatious,

sexual, and criminal activity.[142] Many clients and owners, including King, engaged in colloquial

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[139] [Mary Pinniger?], "Mary Pinniger", advertisement *Newport Mercury* Rhode Island, February 4, 1765, America's Historical Newspapers; [Abigail Williams?], "For the convenient Reception, advertisement, *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, March 9, 1765, America's Historical Newspapers.

[140] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 28.

[141] Brian Cowan, "Making Publics and Making Novels: Post-Habermasian Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Eighteenth Century Novel*, ed. by J.A. Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61.

[142] Ellis, "Coffee-women," 31, 37; Helen Berry, "Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King's Coffee House and the Significance of 'Flash Talk," *The Alexander Prize Lecture* 11 (2001): 79, Cambridge Core.

slang called "flash," which was commonly used to discuss illegal activities.[143] The use of flash

talk within coffee houses demonstrates that these establishments were not always genteel or civil

institutions, and reveals a rougher coffee house culture in which both men and women partook.[144]

Nor was physical violence absent from these institutions. In William Hogarth's image of King's

Coffee House, a group of men and women engage in sexual activity just outside the

establishment, while behind them through the open door, a woman Berry identifies as King

herself, can be seen trying to break up a sword fight (figure 2).[145]

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[143] Ibid, 78.
[144] Ibid, 79.
[145] Ibid, 71.

Figure 2. William Hogarth, *Morning: The Four Times of the Day*, 1738, etching and engraving, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 32.35(15), public domain.

Fights also occurred in American coffee houses. In 1769, the *Boston Evening Post* recounted a fight that broke out in the city's British Coffee House between James Otis, Esq. and John Robinson Esq., when "in the Presence of the publick Company in the Coffee-Hoose [Robinson] attempted to pull him [Otis] by the Nose" and demanded "satisfaction for certain Expressions in a publication signed by Mr. Otis in the Boston Gazette."[146] The altercation quickly turned into a brawl as several onlookers joined the fight and violently beat Otis with canes and cutlasses. As these examples show, coffee houses did not always live up to their polite and intellectual reputations. Although this study will work within a post-Habermasian understanding and recognizes that multiple versions of the same space can exist simultaneously, this study will focus only on the polite versions of coffee houses and circulating libraries, as the literary activities which occurred within these establishments were key parts of creating polite coffee house and circulating library culture.

Gender Traits: Sociability, Politeness, Sensibility, and Cosmopolitanism

There is no doubt that the two genders were distinct, but far from living in two separate spheres, the roles of men and women often overlapped. Women lived and worked in the public sphere along with men and took on many of the same responsibilities. Just as the lines dividing gender roles were often blurred, so too were those that dictated gender traits. As Langford has noted, although masculinity and femininity are seen as distinct from one another, they shared many of the same qualities, which each took on unique gendered forms.[147] A set of core values,

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[146] *Boston Evening Post*, September 11, 1769, article, America's Historical Imprints.
[147] Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 317.

which included sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism, ran through genteel masculinity and femininity and became hallmarks of British gender that many men and women across the Atlantic world embraced.[148]

Sociability is perhaps the easiest of these traits to define. Samuel Johnson defined the term "sociable" as being "ready to unite in a general interest" and as being "friendly; familiar" and "inclined to company."[149] Sociability remained important well into the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in Isaac Taylor's 1818 work, *Advice to the Teens, or Practical Help Towards the Formation of One's Own Character*, where he advised readers that, "absolute solitariness is unnatural to man; anything approaching to it is unfavourable to youth. The hermit's life is as hurtful, as it is uncongenial to youth."[150] Closely connected to sociability was politeness, which has become one of the most prominent character traits of the eighteenth century. Politeness was the rules and behaviours that dictated, shaped, and structured sociability, and was, as Karen Harvey referred to it, "a social lubricant" that made interactions in different public spheres easier and more predictable.[151] Essentially, to achieve politeness was to have the rough edges of one's personality smoothed away. A key way to nurture politeness was to engage in sociable activities, because as Taylor noted, by remaining alone "the manners are, to a proverb, deteriorated… He

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[148] Sarah E. Yeh, " 'A Sink of All Filthiness': Gender, Family, and Identity in the British Atlantic, 1688-1763," *The Historian* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 70, 82, Jstor; James Robertson, "Eighteenth-Century Jamaica's Ambivalent Cosmopolitanism," *History* 99, no. 4 (2014): 608, Jstor; Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 6, 13.

[149] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language…* vol. II (London: Printed for J. Johnson, C. Dilly, G.C. and J. Robinson, 1799), Google Books.

[150] Isaac Taylor, *Advice to Teens; or, Practical Helps Towards the Formation of One's Own Character* (London: Printed for Rest Fenner, 1818), 92, Google Books.

[151] Soile Ylivori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England:* Bodies, Identities, and Power, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 20, https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.4324/9780429454431; Harvey, "The History of Masculinity," 302.

who seldom mingles in company does not know how to behave when in it; and the consciousness of this embarrasses him the more."[152] To be polite, one had to socialize.

The importance of politeness and sociability were universal. However, to what ends they were fostered was highly gendered, and each had a different significance for men and women. Although the ideal form of masculinity was the polite gentleman, it was believed that any politeness men had was corrupted by their activities within the public sphere. As a result, women, more than men, were believed to embody politeness, as it was seen to naturally align with women's perceived domestic, demure, and delicate characters.[153] As the primary arbiters of politeness, women became responsible for encouraging this trait in men, lifting them out of degradation, and promoting their respectability, civility, social refinement, and ultimately their own politeness through polite sociability.[154] This uniquely feminine purpose of politeness was so important that Hester Chapone advised women that "politeness of behaviour and the attainment of such branches of knowledge and such arts and accomplishments as are proper to your sex, capacity, and station will prove so valuable to yourself through life, and will make you so desirable a companion, that the neglect of them may reasonably be deemed a neglect of duty."[155] As Chapone's words indicate, not all women could improve men. Only respectable females, who were polite themselves, could promote masculine politeness and help men realize their civility and respectability.[156] Socializing with women was therefore extremely important for men's politeness, but too much time spent with the opposite sex was believed to make men overly

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[152] Taylor, *Advice to Teens*, 92.
[153] Ylivori, *Women and Politeness*, 38- 39.
[154] Ibid, 38, 40.
[155] Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement if the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (London: Printed for J. Walter, 1777), 159-160, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[156] Ylivori, *Women and Politeness*, 39.

effeminate, as embodied in the figures of fops and macaroni.[157] For that reason, spaces like coffee houses where men could socialize together away from large numbers of respectable middle class women can be seen as both corrupting their politeness, but also as necessary, for these spaces allowed men to create a specifically manly form of polite discourse.[158]

Like coffee houses, most scholars agree that circulating libraries acted as sociable spaces.[159] However, not all historians believe that there is substantial enough evidence to prove that these institutions deserve this reputation. Manley has recently declared that historians have taken the idea of the sociable library too far and has commented that, "the academic theory of library and sociability is bogus, unsupported by facts, certainly in a British context."[160] One of the biggest criticisms this author has of Manley's argument is his understanding of sociability, which he defines as having to be a prime "purpose of the library" before the establishment can be considered to be truly sociable.[161] In addition to this, while Manley recognizes that there were many purposefully sociable events held in circulating libraries, such as raffles and balls, he feels that such organized events still did not make libraries sociable spaces. Instead, he suggests that for an interaction to be considered *library* sociability it had to revolve around reading, books, or literature, and although balls and other social events were held in libraries, they were distinct from the physical space of the library.[162] To declare these events as completely separate from the normal daytime operation of the circulating library fails to take the whole purpose of these establishments into consideration. What is of further concern is his understanding that sociability

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[157] Harvey, "The History of Masculinity," 302.
[158] Ibid, 302.
[159] This includes, Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*; Allan, *A Nation of Readers*; Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835*; Colclough, *Consuming Texts*.
[160] Manley, "Libraries for Sociability," 2.
[161] Ibid, 2.
[162] Ibid, 9.

had to be consciously built into the operation of these establishments, as this narrow definition

dismisses the importance of spontaneous social interactions as well as what constitutes

purposeful sociability.

Sociability and politeness were closely entwined, but they also operated alongside many

other traits, including sensibility and cosmopolitanism. These qualities, while not exclusively

confined to men or women, were each commonly associated with one gender more than the other.

Sensibility, usually seen as feminine, can be understood as being in tune with one's physical and

emotional feelings and having increased sensitivity and delicacy.[163] Sensibility first took hold of

British society in the mid-eighteenth century when the "cult of sensibility" swept through genteel

Britain.[164] It eventually made its way overseas where it clashed with local colonial practices, but

was also embraced by many colonists. Over the course of the eighteenth century, sensibility

became a valued characteristic in Jamaica, but while it caused a shift in thought about slavery and

the treatment of slaves in the minds of the British, women in Jamaica had little trouble isolating

the empathy, sympathy, and emotional sensitivity they honed and practiced within their private

lives from the violent treatment faced by slaves.[165]

Next to politeness, sensibility was one of the most important and pervasive traits of the

time and the two were closely connected. Sensibility was displayed through social interactions,

and was believed to improve sociability and make individuals happier as "it is sensibility which

promotes all the tender endearments of social intercourse; without this sweetening quality, the

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[163] Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1993), 1.

[164] John Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21; Mary Kelly, " 'the Need of Their Genius': Women's reading and Writing Practices in Early America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 16, Jstor.

[165] Yeh, " 'A Sink of All Filthiness'," 82.

cup of life would be a bitter draught: that man, therefore who is devoid of sensibility, (if there are any such) must be unhappy."[166] This quality quickly became a sign of social distinction and was seen as modern, youthful, virtuous, and feminine, due to women's alleged natural delicacy and fragility.[167] As one contemporary wrote in *The Ladies Magazine*, "the female frame is naturally more susceptible than that of the other sex of the refined feelings of the benevolent and sympathetic affections, of the tender movements of pity and compassion, of the elegant emotions of virtuous love, and these are the principal ingredients which constitute true sensibility of heart."[168] However, for all the benefits associated with sensibility, it was also believed to have the potential to be exceedingly harmful to both men and women. While it was most commonly seen as a female attribute, men could and did practice sensibility. Masculine sentimentality was epitomized in the "man of feeling," a figure created by novelists such as Lawrence Sterne and Henry Mackenzie.[169] Despite this, sensibility was seen as a threat to true masculinity. Sentimental men were depicted as fragile, inactive, silent, irrational, passionate, lacking in self-discipline, and ultimately effeminate.[170] Even for women, sensibility could have detrimental effects.

One of the key methods of fostering sensibility was through reading. By the 1770s, the sentimental style spanned all forms of writing, including magazines, poetry, travel literature, history, and most commonly novels.[171] The sentimental novel was first popularized by Samuel

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[166] Academicus, "On Sensibility,"; Kelly, " 'the Need of Their Genius': Women's reading and Writing Practices in Early America," 16.
[167] Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," 28.
[168] Academicus, "On Sensibility," 395.
[169] Inger Sigrun Brodey, "Masculinity, Sensibility, and the 'Man of Feeling': The Gendered Ethics of Goethe's Werther," *Papers on Language and Literature* 35, no. 2 (spring 1999): 115-116.
[170] Ibid, 115-116.
[171] Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," 22.

Richardson in the 1740s and soon became the pinnacle of sentimental literature.[172] The popularity

of this genre continued throughout the century and reached new heights in the pages of the gothic

novels of the 1790s.[173] Due to its feminine association and close connection to fiction, sensibility

became inherently linked to circulating libraries, but rather than impart the benefits of this trait,

novels and circulating libraries, were seen by many to foster this trait in excess, which could be

extremely detrimental to femininity. A surplus of sensibility could prove dangerous, as it put

women's respectability, civility, and their ability to take part in polite society, at risk. Where true

sensibility was governed by rational discernment and fortified by moral strength and helped make

one ready for action in society, excessive sensibility appeared as artificial, selfish, and

indulgent.[174] Overly sentimental women were prone to fits of tears and fainting and were

perceived to be overly delicate and unwilling to aid in the improvement of society.[175]

While sensibility was seen as highly feminine, cosmopolitanism has traditionally been

associated with men. At its simplest, the eighteenth century cosmopolite was an individual who

had a keen interest in the world around them and believed themselves to be a "citizen of the

world."[176] Cosmopolites fostered this identity through a large and diverse array of activities and

there was no one standard form of this trait.[177] Some fostered their interest in the world through

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[172] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 66.

[173] Ibid, 9.

[174] Ibid, 140; Kelly, " 'the Need of Their Genius', 17-18; Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," 40.

[175] Sarah M. S. Pearsall, "Sensibility in Life and Letters," in *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 84, Oxford Scholarship Online.

[176] Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists," 468; Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

[177] For more on the theory of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism see Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Oxford Scholarship Online.

science and natural philosophy. They read scientific works, attended lectures, conducted experiments, and collected natural and man-made artifacts. For others, such as merchants, cosmopolitanism was practiced through overseas business and trade, while British travellers and migrants who moved throughout the empire were exposed first-hand to local cultures.[178] While the appearance of cosmopolitanism shifted based on how it was fostered, at its core it reflected an interest in the people and cultures of the world.

Scholars have long associated coffee houses with cosmopolitanism, so much so that Cowan defined the social interaction that occurred within them as "cosmopolitan sociability."[179] Scribner and James Robertson have also recognized this same global sociability in American and Jamaican establishments.[180] Cosmopolitan sociability was practiced within coffee houses in several ways and brought cosmopolites from throughout society together. These establishments acted as ports for travellers throughout the Atlantic world and were visited by men from a variety of national and racial backgrounds. These foreigners mixed, mingled, conversed, and debated with a wide assortment of locals. Together locals and visitors consumed coffee, an exotic, foreign commodity, which as a non-alcoholic drink, had a stimulating effect, which in turn, was seen as vital in creating the intellectual atmosphere of these establishments. It was also common, at least in Britain, for coffee houses to act as cabinets of curiosities, reflecting the intellectual cosmopolite's interest in science, natural philosophy, and history. For example, In 1795, the curious could see wonders such as "a tusk of a tiger," "an Indian razor," and "casada bread, from

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[178] Ibid, 9.
[179] Cowan, "*Café* or Coffeehouse?," 38.
[180] Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists,"; Robertson, "Eighteenth-Century Jamaica's Ambivalent Cosmopolitanism."

Jamaica, made of the root of a tree" in Don Saltero's Coffee House in Chelsea.[181] In addition to being centres of academic discussion, they were also hubs of international business. This cosmopolitanism was reflected in the very names of the establishments. In London, the Africa and Senegal Coffee House in Cornhill was "frequented by merchants and captains trading to those parts."[182] Likewise, the Carolina and Honduras coffee houses catered to men with trading interests in America.[183] Finally, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the literary activities, including the consumption of various books, newspapers, and pamphlets, and the participation in the second-hand book auctions commonly held in coffee houses also helped to promote cosmopolitanism.

Although traditionally associated with men, women also fostered cosmopolitanism. Unlike coffee houses, circulating libraries were not seen as cosmopolitan hubs. They were not centred around exotic consumable goods, were not known to act as ports of call for foreign visitors, and did not function as places of business. Furthermore, circulating libraries did not have the same high intellectual, educational, and scientific reputation as coffee houses, but this does not mean that these institutions and their users were not cosmopolitan. As Chapter Three will demonstrate, like coffee houses, circulating libraries also promoted cosmopolitanism through literature, as the wide selection of literary genres and allowed the women who frequented them to foster this trait. Sometimes this literary cosmopolitanism was promoted through genres that were read by both men and women, while other times it was fostered through texts that were traditionally gendered female.

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[181] *A Catalogue Descriptive of the Various Curiosities to be Seen at Don Saltero's Coffee-House and Tavern, in Chelsea*, ([London: 1795?]), 4, 5, 8, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[182] *The Picture of London for 1807*, 356.
[183] Ibid, 356.

In conclusion, although gender traits and the institutions that promoted them appear to exist separately from each other, men and women across the Atlantic world shared many of the same ideas surrounding ideal gender traits, and practiced them in similar ways. Coffee houses and circulating libraries were not the only spaces within society where individuals could foster and display sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism, but these institutions were important centres within society where both genders acquired these characteristics. Furthermore, sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism were all intrinsically connected, and the relationships among them are often difficult to untangle from each other, as these traits overlapped, operated simultaneously, and built on and gave shape to the others, framing critical elements of gendered British identity.

Chapter II
Coffee Houses & the Formation of a Literary Masculinity

As the bell struck "exactly Six O'Clock" in the evening on Monday, March 8, 1762, St. Paul's Coffee House, in central London, began its auction of the private library of the late William Powell. Up for sale was a collection of books, prints, manuscripts, "several curious Roman Missals, on vellum, finely illuminated," and a collection of coins and medals.[184] Just over a decade later, on the other side of St. Paul's Cathedral, Irish clergyman Thomas Campbell arrived in London to see Samuel Johnson and recorded in his diary on March 21, 1775, "a sweet soft & fair day—Strolled into the Chapter Coffeehouse, Ave Mary lane, which I heard was remarkable for a large collection of books, & a reading Society… I subscribed a shilling for the right of a year's reading, & found all the new publications I sought, & I believe what I am told that all the new books are laid in."[185]

Across the Atlantic, colonists engaged in similar literary practices. In Jamaica, Ebenezer Edie placed an advertisement in the paper for his new Kingston coffee house, which included a "room furnished with all Newspapers and Prices Current, for the entertainment and information of the subscribers."[186] One year later, on mainland America, a collection of 169 titles was sold at auction at "Col. Brewster's Coffee-House-Tavern" in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.[187] Although it is necessary to recognize that there was no such thing as a universal Atlantic standard, there were many similarities between British and colonial coffee houses. As these

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[184] *A Catalogue of the Genuine and Entire Collection of Mr. William Powell…* ([London]: 1762), Eighteenth Century Collections Online. A missal is a book of texts used in Catholic Mass.
[185] Dr. Thomas Campbell, *Dr. Campbell's Diary of a Visit to England in 1775*, ed. James L. Clifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), ix, 58.
[186] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 236.
[187] *Catalogue of Books to be Sold by Auction, at Col. Brewster's* ([Portsmith, N.H?]: Printed by George Jerry Osborn, [1791?]), America's Historical Imprints.

examples demonstrate, coffee houses across the Atlantic world were active participants in the transnational book trade and were deeply entrenched in local literary culture. The presence of newspapers and other forms of print, libraries, and book auctions within these establishments unified them on a transnational level and created a relatively homogenous Atlantic coffee house culture. In turn, these literary activities promoted similar patterns of behaviour among clientele and allowed a wide and diverse number of men throughout the Atlantic world to cultivate and practice the notions of cosmopolitanism, politeness, and sociability, all of which were vital eighteenth century masculine characteristics.

Auctions, or vendues as they were more commonly called in America, were known throughout the Atlantic world.[188] The first recorded book auction to occur within a British coffee house took place in 1678 at the Turk's Head in London. Over the 1700s interested buyers could attend auctions at a variety of London institutions, including St. Paul's Coffee House, Tom's Coffee House in St. Martin's Lane, and Hamlin's Coffee House by the Royal Exchange.[189] While auctions continued to be held in coffee houses, by the 1790s, it appears the majority of second-hand book auctions had moved out of these institutions and into specialty auction houses.[190] Nonetheless, their role as eighteenth century literary hubs was significant.

Unlike Britain, where there was a clear distinction between taverns and coffee houses, the two were often synonymous in the colonies.[191] Many public houses in America, including coffee houses, held vendues. British traveller John Lambert painted a vivid picture of the auction

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[188] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 10.
[189] Markman Ellis, *Coffee-House Library Short-title Catalogue*, 35, http://www.bibsoc.org.uk/publications/coffee-house; Cowan, *Social Life of Coffee*, 132-133; Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London," 35.
[190] This observation was made by looking at a selection of book auction catalogue from 1790 to 1820, housed in the British Library.
[191] Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists," 469.

atmosphere of the Tontine Coffee House in New York in the early 1800s, "the steps and balcony of the coffee-house were crowded with people bidding, or listing to the auctioneers, who had elevated themselves upon hogsheads of sugar, a puncheon of rum, or a bale of cotton… or were knocking down the goods, which took up one side on the street, to the best purchaser."[192] Books were among the many items sold at American institutions. In addition to the sale held at Col. Brewster's, Thomas Blyth held a sale of books at his Charleston tavern in South Carolina in 1749.[193] Books were sold along with other imperial goods, as demonstrated by the vendue of Bristol beer, an African slave girl, and "a Large Catalogue of Books, with a Set of Surgeon's Instruments" that occurred at the New York meat market in 1761.[194] Furthermore, like their British counterparts, American coffee houses were deeply entrenched in the literary culture, and it was not uncommon to find bookstores and libraries located in close proximity to coffee houses. Mein's Boston circulating library and bookstore was on the same street as the British Coffee House, while Noel and Ebenezer Hazard's bookstore was next door to Merchant's Coffee House in New York.[195] Some coffee house proprietors, including William Bradford, who owned the London Coffee House in Philadelphia, also ran adjoining bookshops, which sold the latest imported titles from London.[196]

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[192] Lambert, *Travels through Canada*, 63.

[193] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 37.

[194] "To be Sold at Publick Vendue," *New York Gazette*, advertisement, May 4, 1761, America's Historical Newspapers.

[195] "This Day is Published," *Boston Evening-Post*, October 28, 1765, America's Historical Newspapers; "Noel and Hazard," *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, June 15, 1772, America's Historical Newspapers; "Garrat Noel," *New York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy*, July 23, 1770, America's Historical Newspapers.

[196] Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 29; [William Bradford?], *Catalogues of Books* [(Philadelphia?: William Bradford, 1760?]), America's Historical Imprints; [William Bradford and Thomas Bradford?], *Imported in the Last Vessels from London* ([Philadelphia?: William Bradford and Thomas Bradford?, 1769?]), America's Historical Imprints.

Rarer than coffee house auctions were coffee house libraries. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, London had a large number of coffee houses across the city, although the exact number is debated. E.J. Clery has claimed that there were 3,000 coffee houses, whereas Ellis puts the number much lower at around 400 or 500.[197] Despite the puzzlingly large disparity between these two scholars' estimates, it remains clear that coffee houses were plentiful within the capital. However, whereas newspapers were a staple of all coffee houses, not all had libraries. Ellis has identified a total of nineteen coffee houses within London that operated libraries.[198] This included two different Tom's Coffee Houses, located in Cornhill and Devereux Court, two George's Coffee Houses on Chancery Lane and Temple Bar, as well as the Crown Coffee House, Gray's Inn Coffee House, the Grecian Coffee House, Dick's Coffee House, Seagoe's Coffee House, Serle's Coffee House, St. Dunstan's Coffee House, the Temple Exchange Coffee House, Will's Coffee House, Forrest's Coffee House, the Amsterdam Coffee House, Bank Coffee House, Chapter Coffee House, and Robin's Coffee House.[199] Many of these were located in the legal centre of the city, but coffee house libraries were also found around the Royal Exchange, the financial centre, and on the Strand, a street located at the junction of Charing Cross in the City of Westminster.[200]

These non-lending collections first appeared in the 1730s and were only accessible by paying a small subscription fee, such as the one Campbell paid on his visit to London. Coffee house libraries offered subscribers a wider selection of print than the standard newspaper, and

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[197] E. J. Clery, "Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth," *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2 no. 2, (1991): 169, http://doi.org/10.1080/09574049108578077; Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 172.
[198] Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London,"16.
[199] Ibid, 16.
[200] Máire Kennedy, " 'Politicks, Coffee and News': The Dublin Book Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Dublin Historical Record* 58, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 79. Jstor.

collections could include pamphlets, broadsides, political tracts, ephemera, plays, sermons, poetry, and even novels.[201] According to Ellis, these libraries were short-lived and were largely defunct by the 1760s.[202] Yet, there is evidence to suggest that some of these libraries continued to thrive in the 1800s. By 1815 the library in Chapter was still operational. As one contemporary noted, in this establishment "there is a library, consisting chiefly of periodical works and political tracts. Any gentleman desiring to have the use of it is expected to give the waiter a small donation every Christmas— which is money very well bestowed."[203]

Whether coffee house libraries existed outside of Britain is debatable. Hyder Abbas has claimed that there is no evidence to suggest that such collections ever existed in Ireland.[204] However, Máire Kennedy has noted that Dublin's printers and booksellers were closely linked to the city's coffee houses, and as in Britain and America, newspapers and pamphlets were commonly found within their establishments.[205] In Jamaica, Cave categorized Edie's newspaper room as one of these libraries, but this is the only known example from the island.[206] Whether or not Edie offered subscribers any literature other than newspapers is not known, although Cave has speculated that pamphlets and tracts were most likely available. Scribner has like-wise claimed that in addition to newspapers, American coffee houses also stocked a wide variety of ephemera, tracts, periodicals, and pamphlets, which were made available for a fee.[207] This was

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[201] Markman Ellis, "Poetry and Civic Urbanism in the Coffee-House Library in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity In the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, ed. Mark R. M. Towsey, and Kyle B Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 56, EBSCOhost.

[202] Ibid, 56.

[203] *The Epicure's Almanack*, 6-7.

[204] Abbas, " 'A Fund of entertaining and useful Information,' " 42.

[205] Kennedy, " 'Politicks, Coffee and News,' " 79.

[206] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 236.

[207] Ibid, 236; Scribner, *Inn Civility*, 35.

exemplified at Samuel Richardet's Philadelphia coffee house, which included "the Subscription Room" which was "furnished with all the daily papers published in Philadelphia, New-York, Boston, Baltimore, together with those of the principal commercial cities of Europe— They will be regularly filed and none permitted to be taken away on any account."[208] Similarly, in Philadelphia, Edward Moyston, the proprietor of the Merchant's Coffee Houses (not to be confused with the New York establishment of the same name) stocked the city's periodicals as well as those from across America and Europe and held "Bound Books of Public Papers for some years back" at the bar.[209] Whether these colonial examples can be considered coffee house libraries remains undecided, but it is clear that throughout the Atlantic world, these establishments provided customers with a substantial amount of reading materials beyond newspapers, which as will be discussed, all helped to shape gender identity.

Literature, Reading, and the Formation of Polite Coffee House Masculinity

Whether free or accessible only through an additional subscription fee, newspapers were the staple reading material of Atlantic coffee houses. Throughout the eighteenth century, the market for newspapers rapidly increased. By 1811, London alone had fifty-two different papers.[210] Outside the metropolis, newspapers were also printed in provincial English cities, like Newcastle, Leeds, York, and Lincoln in the north, and Nottingham, Bristol, Exeter, Reading, and Canterbury in the centre and south.[211] Scotland, Wales, and Ireland also saw increased newspaper production. Dublin had 160 after 1760, while Scottish cities such as Edinburgh had seven by

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[208] "Samuel Richardet," *Checkerboard*, advertisement, June 7, 1796, Newspaper Archives.
[209] "The Merchant's Coffee-House," *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, January 1, 1794, America's Historical Newspapers.
[210] Raven, *The Business of Books*, 258.
[211] Ibid, 261.

1793.[212] Many of these papers had a wide reading audience. In 1782 alone, 46,000 provincial papers were mailed to London, while in 1796 a surprising 8.6 million London papers were exported from the capital and distributed across the British Isles.[213] Many were also exported overseas and found their way into colonial coffee houses, including Richard Steele and Joseph Addison's *Tattler* and *Spectator*, which were both printed in London coffee houses in the early 1700s and remained highly popular throughout the century.[214]

Periodicals were also growing in numbers overseas, as newspapers were a hallmark of colonial printers. The first paper in Jamaica was started in 1773, and after 1780 there was an increased effort on the island to produce more periodicals with daily, tri-weekly, semi-weekly, and weekly papers being founded in Kingston, Spanish Town, and Montego Bay.[215] Although many were short-lived, by the early 1800s there were some fifteen newspapers printed in Jamaica alone.[216] America also saw increased numbers during the eighteenth century. In the early 1800s, newspapers were the most popular form of literature in America and were avidly consumed.[217] By 1810, 359 periodicals were being printed across thirty different states, including New York, North and South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.[218]

The ever-increasing number and availability of local and imported newspapers and their ubiquity within coffee houses across the British Atlantic reflected the growing desire coffee house clientele had to fashion themselves as cosmopolitans. In addition to international papers,

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[212] Ibid, 258.
[213] Ibid, 259, 261.
[214] Ellis, *The Coffee-House*, 191.
[215] Peter L. Simmonds, "Notes on West Indian Newspapers," in *Working Papers on West Indian Printing* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1975), 3, British Library, 2708.p.3; Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 19.
[216] Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, 40.
[217] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 62-63.
[218] Raven, *The Business of Books*, 261.

foreign news was often reported or reprinted in domestic periodicals. Jamaican and American

newspapers were filled with advertisements for imported goods, reprinted articles and editorials

from foreign papers, and political news from Britain, Europe, and their empires. The strong

interest in international news was lampooned in the satire, *Coffee-House Characters,* when the

author declared, "there are but few persons who frequent Coffee Houses Taverns for the purpose

of perusing the news of the day," as "every person assumed the character of a politician, and

takes more interest in the affairs of Europe than he does in his own immediate domestic

concerns."[219] Indeed, in 1814 lawyer Henry Crabb Robinson noted that he "went early to the

coffee-room" where it was "fully confirmed that [Napoleon] Bonaparte had voluntarily abdicated

the thrones of France and Italy."[220] When he returned the following day he lamented that due to

the previous day's events, "the public papers must of necessity decline in interest."[221] This kind

of desire for international news only heightened the value of the pamphlets and other materials

found in coffee house libraries.

The texts found in coffee house libraries were also highly topical in nature, and they

covered a wide range of socio-cultural and political topics on a deeper level than newspapers. In

the Bamford Coffee House in London, a customer could read works such as *The Present State of

the Nation: Particularly with Respect to its Trade, Finances, &c. &c.*, while in Tom's Coffee

House clientele could pick up *The State of the Corn Trade Considered*, or *A Letter from an Old*

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[219] George Moutard Woodward, *Coffee-House Characters, or Hints to the Readers of Newspapers Exemplified in Eight Characteristic Designs With Letter Press Elucidations to Each Plate* (1808), Yale Centre for British Art, http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3628664.

[220] Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence or Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-At-Law, F.S.A.* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 427, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/diaryreminiscenc01robiiala/page/n6.

[221] Ibid, 427.

Citizen of London, to the Wine-Merchants and Coopers thereof, which discussed a recent

confiscation of illegally imported Spanish wines from London merchants.[222] The printing

industries in America and Jamaica also produced pamphlets. As in Britain, these local

publications dealt with both domestic and international events. Jamaican printers produced

ephemera, such as *A Form of Prayer to be used in the Island of Jamaica* from 1800, and a

pamphlet titled the *Battle of Lake George*, while in colonial America, 231 pamphlets about the

British-American conflict were printed between 1764 and 1776, many of which opposed

Britain.[223]

Newspapers and coffee house library materials such as these allowed male readers to

define themselves as citizens of the world. In the early nineteenth century, Daniel Staniford in

The Art of Reading recognized the cosmopolitan value of newspapers,

> The press is one of the most useful discoveries for the general diffusion of knowledge in
> the world... Periodical publications may be very useful to society, by enlightening the minds of the
> citizens, instructing them in the affair of common life, the state of their country, and the common
> good… well regulated Newspapers, and Magazines, are of inestimable value. In which we may
> find instruction for the artisan, the mechanic, and the husbandman, the divine and the statesman.
> Here the scholar and sentimentalist may find both improvement and entertainment.[224]

Aiding newspapers, the periodicals, pamphlets, and ephemera of coffee house libraries

dismantled personal isolation, broke down barriers across time and space, and created

connections across vast distances. They not only made readers aware of the world, they made

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[222] Ellis, *Coffee-House Library Short-title Catalogue*, 12, 40, 42, 68, 73; Old citizen of London [pseud.], *A letter from an old citizen of London, to the Wine-Merchants and Coopers thereof*. (London: Printed for W. Bickerton, 1744), 4, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[223] Frank Cundall, *A History of Printing In Jamaica from 1717 to 1834* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1935), 47, Internet Archive; Charles E. Clark, "Part One. Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press," in *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 1 *The Colonial Book In the Atlantic World*, ed. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 364, EBSCOhost.

[224] Daniel Staniford, A.M. *The Art of Reading; Containing A Number of Useful Rules…* (Boston: West & Richardson, 1816), 143, Google Books.

them participants in global news, events, and advancements. They expanded a man's working knowledge of the world and developed his understanding of his place, and that of his country, within in it. This knowledge would have been particularly important for men with international business interests. Merchants, traders, and various other men who had overseas interests relied on newspapers and the other materials found in coffee houses to keep abreast of events that might improve, expand, or disrupt their businesses. These materials ultimately allowed male clientele to interact with the world around them more responsibly and intelligently, and truly distinguish themselves as cosmopolitan.

The Social Practice of Reading Aloud

Reading in the eighteenth century was not just a solitary and singular pastime but was often a convivial and social activity, commonly done out loud in the company of others.[225] As John Rice stated in 1765, "Now the Art of Reading, being in fact the Art of converting *Writing* into *Speech*, the Relation which the *living Voice* bears to the *dead Letter*, becomes a very peculiar Object of the reader's Attention."[226] Coffee houses, as public literary social spaces, were therefore excellent platforms where men could practice reading aloud. Conversations were often sparked by the literature found within these institutions. For example, in the 1775 pamphlet *Coffee-House CHIT CHAT*, after a discussion surrounding political events in Scotland, the author remarked, "being desirous to understand more of this strange matter… purchased the News-paper, and called on a Friend, who I knew would instruct me. Being accordingly set down to a

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[225] Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London," 32.

[226] John Rice, *An Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety* (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson, 1765), 194, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

glass, we convassed the whole paper."[227] The two then discussed what they read. Another, less

flattering description of reading aloud can be found in *The Coffee-House Character* in the figure

of the "Private Declaimer,"

> The Private Declaimer is generally a young would be sprig of consequence— fashionably attired and just escaped from the counting house. — This character comes forward with a friend of a similar description who in all probability cannot read a sentence. They take their seats immediately opposite some regular old steady and silent News Spinners. The Declaimer in order to amuse his illiterate companion and at the same time show his own consequence begins reading aloud with the following introduction —'D—n it Jack here's news!!'[228]

Similar accounts of reading aloud in coffee house libraries are harder to find and are less

plentiful; however, some accounts demonstrate that the same social patterns existed. The texts

found in these libraries tended to be short, averaging around thirty pages. Their brevity made

them excellent communal reading material and they were easy to read in a short amount of time,

while and their topical subjects lent themselves to debate and discussion. This was demonstrated

in a letter from William Shenstone to Richard Jago in 1740 when he wrote, "I was loitering

yesterday in the coffee-room, when two persons came in, well-dressed, and called for my poem."

The pair memorized and recited several lines and then "mentioned them to a *third* person" who

declared, "I'll shew the four best lines in the poem… My critics proceeded to the reading of the

last simile *immediately*, *without* the lines proceeding it."[229] The consumption of this poem was an

interactive activity as the group flipped back and forth through the poem, read passages out of

order, and debated the quality of the lines. Later, musician, composer, and frequent coffee house

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[227] *Coffee-House Chit Chat, or, strictures on a strange paper, dated Mary's Chapel, August 26. 1777. and Signed C------r J--n L-----y Preses*, ([Edinburgh: 1777]), 3-4, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[228] Woodward, *Coffee-House Characters*, plate 3.
[229] William Shenstone, *Letters to Particular Friends, by William Shenstone, Esq; from the year 1739 to 1763* (Dublin: Printed for H. Saunders, W. Sleater, D. Chamberlaine, J. Potts, J. Williams, and W. Colles, Booksellers, 1770), 14-15, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

user John Marsh recalled in his diary that while staying in London's Salopian Coffee House, "my brother Will'm called & drank tea with me during w'ch we read the account of their French Majesties having been insulted at the Tuileries on the 10th. by a great mob…w'ch rather lower'd my brother's ideas of the French patriots."[230] Across the ocean in Jamaica, William Hickey, who travelled to the island in 1775 from England to set up a law practice, recalled that while in Kingston he would regularly visit the coffee houses and public houses in the morning "reading the newspapers and conversing on the general topics. This usually occupied about two hours."[231] Anecdotal evidence for reading aloud in American public houses is difficult to find. Yet, as illustrations in the 1789 edition of *The American Jest Book* indicate, communal reading in public houses was a common sight in eighteenth century America. In each image, groups of men are gathered around tables strewn with cups, jugs, tobacco pipes, newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides. Their attention is on one of their companions who is reading aloud to the group from a book. It is unclear what is being read, but the images indicate that scenes of public reading were not completely unfamiliar to eighteenth century American readers.[232]

Across the empire, newspapers, pamphlets, and other ephemera found in coffee house libraries acted as catalysts for sociability and as a means of engaging with others. However, reading was not just a sociable activity but was also an important way for individuals on both sides of the Atlantic to demonstrate politeness. It was not enough for a man to simply be *able* to read, one also had to execute the task correctly. The true value of reading aloud properly is

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[230] John Marsh, *The John Marsh Journals: The Life and Times of a Gentleman Composer (1752-1828)*, ed. Brian Robins (Stuvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1998), 519.
[231] William Hickey, *Memoirs of William Hickey*, vol. 2, ed. Alfred Spencer, 7th ed. (London: Hursy and Blackett LTD), 45, Google Books.
[232] *The American Jest Book: Containing a Curious Variety of Jests, Anecdotes, Bon Mots, Stories &c.* (Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Taylor, 1789), Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

demonstrated by a plethora of texts published on the topic during this period. In addition to Rice's text, readers could also consume Staniford's *The Art of Reading*, which was in its eleventh American edition in 1816, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*, Samuel Whyte's *An Introductory Essay on the Art of Reading, and Speaking in Public*, or J. Walker's *Hints for Improvement in the Art of Reading*. Together these works provided practical information on how to read aloud with the correct tone, accent, articulation, and pace, all of which were required to read with grace and politeness. As one contemporary stated, "it is easy to expatiate on the charms of a good pronunciation, and to dwell on the wonders it has performed" as "pronunciation, [in reading aloud] is the first and most indispensable requisites of delivery... a delicate pronunciation, is the surest sign of an elaborate education: and least equivocal mark of habitual politeness."[233] These sentiments were echoed by Staniford, who wrote that "pronunciation means the giving to every word that sound which the most polite usage of the language appropriates to it, in opposition to *broad*, *vulgar*, and *affected* pronunciation."[234] The importance of being able to read aloud correctly was also demonstrated in the *Coffee-House Character*, by the "Public Orator," who "is generally selected to read the Evening paper to a company who cannot, or will not, read the news themselves… in some instances this Officious Gentleman volunteers his services and reads aloud to shew his extraordinary and superior abilities — however, in all cases—he is sure to have an impediment in his speech— a nasal twang — or a bad pronunciation."[235] This less than flattering description reveals the importance of being able to read aloud with skill, and how language and speech indicated a man's politeness.

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[233] J. Walker, *Hints for Improvement in the Art of Reading* (London: Printed for the Author, 1783), 4, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[234] Staniford, *The Art of Reading*, 13.
[235] Woodward, *Coffee-House Characters*, plate 4.

Knowing how to read out loud, how to convey the sentiment and meaning of the text, and how to read with the correct pronunciation all demonstrated a man's refinement, civility, social grace, and displayed his lack of rough edges. Furthermore, the high interest in global affairs found within coffee house reading materials allowed men to publically and vocally display and define themselves as cosmopolitan. Finally, as busy networking centres, where men mixed with strangers and colleagues alike, coffee houses offered men eager to advance themselves socially or within their respective professional fields, the opportunity to use the sociable nature of reading as a means to demonstrate important masculine qualities necessary to this advancement.

Book Auctions, Cosmopolitanism, and the Formation of Economic Sociability

It was not just how men read, but what men read that was vital in promoting ideal masculine traits. Reading was an important part of their education, was a means of becoming a gentleman, and was a way to advance their professional careers. John Clarke noted that reading was ideally done in the pursuit and acquisition of information, "for knowledge is Light, and the more a Man has of it, the better he will see his Way through the World, the better and the more successfully will he be able to conduct his Affairs, and avoid those Difficulties, and Inconveniences, which People by their Ignorance are frequently involved in."[236] Echoing Clarke's ideas, another contemporary advised men to "adopt reading… as one staple means of mental improvement," as the acquisition of knowledge was vital if a man wanted to demonstrate his respectability and politeness, and if "persons of good abilities grow up careless of books, giving them little of their time or their affection, they betray themselves on every occasion; their range of knowledge is very confined; their actual acquaintances with science, history, or any

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[236] John Clarke, *An Essay Upon Study Wherein Direction are Given for the Due Conduct Thereof, and the Collection of a Library…* (London, 1731), 219, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

thing which requires thought, is extremely shallow. They cannot but be conscious of their deficiency in these respects…. It is reading, says Lord Bacon, [which] makes a full man."[237] Ultimately, a man who could not or did not read was left behind and was unable to advance himself within society.

Due to the importance of reading, men were often advised to consume highly instructional works that would equip them for public and professional life. Speaking from a British context, Clarke remarked that the landed gentry had the responsibilities to "serve their Country, in the Making or Execution of the Laws," to encourage virtues, "especially Industry and Frugality" and to discourage vice.[238] He suggested, "the Studies of most use to a Gentleman, with respect to his proper business in Life, are… *Logick*, *Eloquence*, *Morality* and *History*, especially of his own Country, with some Knowledge of its Laws and Trade."[239] Clarke's discussion of the upper classes is important because he recommended similar readings for men who belonged to the middle classes. The role of lawyers and businessmen "in the World is so near akin to that of Gentlemen, that in my humble Opinion, the same Studies are most proper for them… Physicians are more at Liberty, and may take their Choice of the liberal Sciences."[240] For merchants and tradesmen he suggested, "if they have brought with them from School, any tolerable Knowledge of the Latin Tongue, I think they may do well to keep it, by looking now and then into the *Classick Authors*, especially the *Historians*."[241] He also advocated for maths such as geometry and algebra and John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in regards to

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[237] Taylor, *Advice to the Teens*, 14, 17.
[238] Clarke, *An Essay Upon Study*, 224.
[239] Ibid, 226.
[240] Ibid, 235.
[241] Ibid, 235.

philosophy.[242] For clergy, he recommended "*Logick*, *Eloquence*, *Morality*, sometimes called *Natural Religion*, or the *Laws of Nature*, with *History* both *Civil* and *Ecclesiastical*" as well as Greek and Latin.[243] Similarly, in *A Method of Study: OR, An Useful Library*, author John Boswell provided clergy and "young gentlemen," "whose small Fortune would by no means permit him to look into such a Number of Volumes" with guidance in starting and expanding personal libraries."[244] Boswell, like Clarke, recommended, "the Study of the Learn'd Languages, and [after] shewing the Use and Design of those initiatory Branches of Knowledge that are first taught in the Universities, viz. Logic, Ethics, Physics and Metaphysics... presum'd to give some Directions for the Study of Geography, Chronology, History, Classical Learning, and Natural Philosophy."[245]

The type of books that men were encouraged to consume by these moralists and what was suggested they purchase for their private libraries did not always reflect reality. Moralists tended to try to dissuade men from reading novels and romances. For Clarke, they were the last genre that should be read.[246] Yet, despite this discouragement, many men consumed a wide range of genres, including novels. Musician John Marsh was an avid reader and read Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, and James Ferguson's *Astronomy Explained on Sir Isaac Newton's Principals*, which was the first book to try to explain astronomy in layman's terms, and Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, which he recommended to his local Book Society.[247] But, in addition to these intellectual works, Marsh also read novels. In the summer of 1795, on a journey from Lyndhurst

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[242] Ibid, 242.
[243] Ibid, 244.
[244] John Boswell, *A Method of Study: Or, An Useful Library. In Two Parts*," (London: Printed for the author, 1738), iii, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[245] Ibid, viii.
[246] Clarke, *An Essay Upon Study*, 6.
[247] Marsh, *The John Marsh Journals*, 492, 500, 567.

to Lymington in Hampshire, he recorded that he and his travelling companions, "brought with us Jackson's *30 Letters* & Moritz's *Travels in England*… but having finish'd the latter (w'ch John was now reading) & Mrs. M. being reading the other, I got Mrs. Radcliffe's novel of the Sicilian Romance from the library there, which I this day began reading & was very much pleased with."[248] Marsh was hardly alone in his enjoyment of novels, and many men consumed a wide selection of fiction. Indeed, plays, poetry, and novels were found in copious quantities in coffee house libraries, and between 1740 and 1744, sixty-seven percent of all titles in these collections belonged to one of these three genres.[249]

Most second-hand book auctions, particularly in Britain, consisted of private libraries of deceased gentlemen, and what titles were for sale depended on the personal interests of the previous owner. Therefore, fiction was not completely absent from these sales, and novels, plays, and poetry can all be found within auction catalogues. For example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* were sold as part of the Powell sale at St. Paul's Coffee House, while *Paradise Lost* and novels such as *Don Quixote* were up for auction in Col. Brewster's New Hampshire establishment.[250] Despite the presence of fiction, in examining book auction catalogues, it is clear novels were in the minority and that most titles belonged to the genres promoted by social commentators. The increased availability of intellectual genres helped many men foster an array of masculine traits, including cosmopolitanism, politeness, and sociability.

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[248] Ibid, 583.
[249] Ellis, "Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London," 30.
[250] *A Catalogue of the Genuine and Entire Collection of Mr. William Powell*, 1, 2; *Catalogue of Books to be Sold by Auction, at Col. Brewster's.*

One way that cosmopolites promoted themselves as citizens of the world was through the consumption of history, travel, and scientific literature. These genres were plentiful in auctions. The 1760 sale of H. Cunningham's library, a member of Parliament, which occurred at Dick's Coffee House in Dublin, included works, such as Robert Green's *Principles of Natural Philosophy*, and John Clarke's *A Demonstration of Newton's Philosophy*. In addition to these titles there was also large amounts of geography, travel, and history, like Griffith Hughes *Natural History of Barbados*, and lots titled "Ogilby's China" and "Nary's History of the World."[251] Two years later in London, the Powell sale included volumes such as "Angola, and Indian History," Cadwallader Colden's *History of Five Indian Nations of Canada*, and "Owen's Dictionary of Arts and Sciences."[252] In America, Col. Brewster's sale included lots titled "Robertson's Navigation," and "History of the World."[253] The wide range of titles at these sales, many of which explored exotic peoples and places marked their buyers as cosmopolitan gentlemen.

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[251] *A Catalogue of Books; Being the Collections of H. Cunningham, Esq; and A Member of Parliament…*([Dublin]: Printed by A. Reilly, [1760?]), 4, 6, 17, 18, Eighteenth Century Collection Online.

[252] *A Catalogue of the Genuine and Entire Collection of Mr. William Powell*, 1, 3, 7.

[253] *Catalogue of Books to be Sold by Auction, at Col. Brewster's.*

Figure 3. Thomas Rowlandson, *A Book Auction*, ca. 1810-1815, watercolour, Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center For British Art, New Haven, B1975.4.913, public domain.

This sense of cosmopolitanism was heightened by the social nature of these auctions. As Thomas Rowlandson depicted in his sketch of a book auction (figure 3), these were highly social events and attracted large crowds of buyers. Second-hand book auctions were scenes of cosmopolitan sociability and acted as platforms of exhibition. The men who gathered at the auctions all belonged to a community of eager cosmopolitan bibliophiles and intellectuals. They honed and exhibited these identities through publically bidding against each other and purchasing intellectual works of history, science, and travel. Furthermore, if we return to Clarke's idea that the more knowledge a man had, the better he will make his way through the world, then the intellectual books bought at these auctions can also be understood as providing men with knowledge, which made politeness easier, as these books smoothed away intellectual roughness and refined men's minds and personalities.

Although the volume of print produced rose dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century, books remained luxury items, and despite an increase in disposable income, new books continued to be relatively expensive for middle class individuals to purchase in large quantities. After 1750, octavos or duodecimos, the common formats for fiction, tended to cost around two or three shillings (£11.67-£17.50 in 2017 currency), but folios and quartos, the preferable format for non-fiction genres could be as high as twelve shillings (£58.33- £70).[254] While new books remained expensive in Britain, they were even more so in the colonies, due to their luxury status and the long, costly importation process.[255] The exact price of books is difficult to know for certain. Each of the Thirteen Colonies had its own monetary system, and the price depended on the format and whether the work was bound.[256] Often, American sellers passed on the high price of importation to consumers.[257] For instance, Joseph Royal raised his prices almost sixty percent higher than the original wholesale price of the London retailer.[258] The high cost of books drove some elite colonists to order privately from Britain. Thomas Jefferson purchased books directly from Ireland, because it was cheaper than buying locally, while Jamaican planter and cosmopolitan Thomas Thistlewood had an annual shipment of seeds, scientific instruments, and books (many about botany) sent from London to his plantation on the southwestern part of the island.[259] For Thistlewood, this supply allowed him to stay informed about scientific

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[254] Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, 45. Folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimos refer to how the sheets that came off the printing press were folded, cut and bound. Folio: two sheets, four pages; quarto: four sheets, eight pages; octavo: eight sheets, sixteen pages; duodecimos: twelve sheets, twenty-four pages.

[255] James Raven, "Part Three. The Importation of Books in the Eighteenth Century," in *A History of the Book in America*: *The Colonial Book In the Atlantic World*, 194, EBSCOhost.

[256] Russell L. Martin, "A Note on Book Prices," in *A History of the Book in America*: *The Colonial Book In the Atlantic World*, 522.

[257] James Raven, "Part Three. The Importation of Books in the Eighteenth Century," 194.

[258] Ibid, 194.

[259] Ibid, 194; Robertson, "Eighteenth-Century Jamaica's Ambivalent Cosmopolitanism," 612.

developments and to take a more active role within the scientific field.[260] The ability to privately order books from Britain allowed wealthy colonists to cater to their own desires and interests. However, even though it was cheaper than purchasing from a local bookseller, many middle class individuals in the colonies still lacked the financial ability to order books from the metropole. Thus, second-hand vendues made a wide range of literature, particularly pricey non-fiction, more accessible and affordable to a larger portion of potential readers across Britain and the Atlantic world.

It is difficult to know the average sale price of books sold at auction, as they were rarely recorded. However, the catalogue of the 1744 auction of the library of the late Lewis Theobald, held at St. Paul's Coffee House, does list some rare examples. This small sampling provides a glimpse into the kind of prices books sold for. The second most expensive lot was listed as "Meursii Opera 22 vols." which went for £2.3s. (£254.17), while the most expensive title "Pope's Shakespeare's plays, in 8vols. with many thousand remarks, some curious, some shrewd, in Manuscript, wrote in every Page, by Mr. Theobald" sold for a surprising £2.13s (£313.28).[261] As these lots indicate, buyers were not always guaranteed a deal and the cost of books could become quite high, driven up by eager bidders.[262] However, it was not impossible to find a bargain. Despite the exorbitant prices of some lots, most of the books at the Theobald sale sold for well below a pound. For example, title 362, simply listed as "A Description of Painting [and] sculpture, &c." sold for £0.1s. (£5.91), while the more intriguing-sounding lot listed as, "Five

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[260] Ibid, 612.

[261] *A Catalogue of the Library of Lewis Theobald, Esq. Deceas'd: Among Which Are Many of the Classicks, Poets and Historians, of the Best Editions. Many Variorums and Delphins…*([London: 1744]), 10, 11, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[262] For more on the high book rates at auctions see Máire Kennedy, "Book Mad: The Sale of Books by Auction in Eighteenth-Century Dublin," *Dublin Historical Record* 54, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 48-71. Jstor.

Volumes in Manuscripts, on various Subjects, filled with many odd Cuts… the like of which never was nor perhaps ever will be seen again" sold for a sizable, but still affordable £0.5s.2d. (£30.54).[263] Equivalent evidence has not been found for American auctions, although while in Boston, founding father, Alexander Hamilton commented that he purchased "a copy of Clark's Homer very cheap" at a public vendue.[264] Consumers tended to purchase second-hand books because they were lower in price than new volumes, and despite some high prices, auctions ultimately remained much cheaper options than purchasing new books from booksellers.[265] Thus, as public, and highly social events, auctions provided what this author defines as an economic form of sociability, as men with a shared interest in books gathered and competed with each other financially for desirable texts and to demonstrate their relative wealth, refinement, and taste.

Conclusion

Despite not being completely homogenous across the Atlantic, British, American, and Jamaican coffee houses shared many similarities and embodied many of the same values. When British travellers like Lambert and Hickey walked through the doors of colonial coffee houses, they would have noticed some differences in the size of the establishments, the clientele, and in the literature and literary activities on offer. However, while colonial coffee houses may not have

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[263] *A Catalogue of the Library of Lewis Theobald*, 9, 10.

[264] Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton's Itinerarium: Being a Narrative of a Journey From Annapolis, Maryland, Through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts And New Hampshire, From May to September, 1744*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart (Saint Louis, Mo.: Printed only for private distribution by W.K. Bixby, 1907), 142, HathiTrust Digital Library.

[265] Ian Mitchell, "'Old books— new Bound'? Selling, Second-Hand Books in England c. 1680-1850," in *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade: European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700-1900*, ed. Damme, Ilja van, and Jon Stobart (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 153, EBSCOhost.

been as grand or quite as intellectually rich as some of their London counterparts, they were recognizable to British travellers, who used these spaces to orient and familiarize themselves with their new colonial surroundings. The similarities in form and function of coffee houses allowed many visitors to continue to develop and practice the same behaviours, customs, and habits they enjoyed in British establishments. This made it possible for many British men throughout the Atlantic world to remain connected to their British values, to foster, practice, and display their masculinity, and to retain their British masculine identity as they travelled through the empire and its imperial spaces. Coffee houses also allowed many black and white colonists, who were eager to embrace British middle class values such as cosmopolitanism, politeness, and sociability, the opportunity to define themselves not just as British subjects, or colonists, but also as British citizens. Even after America claimed independence, the desire to retain many British characteristics remained, and British culture continued to heavily influence the young republic.

Coffee houses promoted British masculine social traits in several ways, including through newspapers, coffee house libraries, and book auctions. Together these amenities were important access points for the Atlantic middle classes to enter into the book trade, and they acted as platforms for middling men to cultivate an ideal form of polite masculinity. The wide selection of newspapers and the various types of literature held in coffee house libraries allowed men to engage in literary sociability, as the reading materials found within coffee houses sparked debate and discussion among their clientele, which in turn gave them the opportunity to practice and display politeness. In addition to this, the high level of interest in global affairs, reflected in the large stock of local and domestic newspapers and pamphlets, allowed men across the Atlantic to participate in the world beyond their own city and nation and claim the title of cosmopolite, a trait that was also promoted, through the purchasing of scientific and other intellectual works at

book auctions. Furthermore, by participating in these social events and competing economically for books alongside other bibliophiles, auctions created a form of economic sociability.

As much as coffee houses were contained spaces of male relaxation, reading, conversation, business, and economic exchange, they were also important institutions for developing the skills and qualities a gentleman needed in the larger polite and sociable world of the eighteenth century. Displaying politeness, sociability, and cosmopolitanism acted as keys that opened doors and increased the opportunities available to men and allowed them to move with increased ease through a variety of social circles and public arenas. However, coffee houses were not the only public space that promoted these key traits, nor were men the only ones to practice these qualities. Circulating libraries, to which we now turn our attention, encouraged many women to foster the same important skills of sociability, politeness, cosmopolitanism, and sensibility.

Chapter III

Circulating Libraries & the Negotiation of Ideal Femininity

"There is scarcely a street of the metropolis, or a village in the country, in which a circulating library may not be found; nor is there a corner of the empire, where the English language is understood, that has not suffered from the effects of this institution."[266] By the time Reverend Edward Mangin wrote these words in 1808, circulating libraries had been an established part of British society for almost seventy years, and were at their peak of popularity in America.[267] Much like coffee houses, circulating libraries had an important and far-reaching socio-cultural impact across the Atlantic world. However, as Mangin's words indicate, far from being celebrated, the spread and transnational popularity of these institutions were seen by many as detrimental and threatening.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, circulating libraries gained the reputation across the Atlantic world of being nothing more than destinations where fashionable, flighty, middle class women acquired lowbrow *belles lettres,* or what Mangin referred to as "novels, romances, and poems of a particular class."[268] An American library proprietor recalled that his customers were primarily "lasses, young and old [who]… run over a novel of three, four, or five volumes, faster than bookmen can put them into boards."[269] Similarly, in Jamaica, one local wrote that the circulating libraries on the island were "usually composed of a few good novels, mixed with a much larger proportion of those ephemeral ones which daily spring up, and which

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[266] Rev. Edward Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading, As it May be Supposed to Influence Moral Conduct and Literary Taste* (London: Printed for James Carpenter, 1808), 12-13, Google Books.
[267] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 62.
[268] Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading*, 2.
[269] "Customers of a Circulating Library," *The Emerald or Miscellany of Literature: Containing Sketches of Manners, Principles and Amusements of the Age* (Boston), June 7, 1806, 68, American Historical Periodicals from the American Antiquarian Society.

are a disgrace to literature, and an insult to common sense. The *trash* of novels that are often sent out here, are mere *catch-pennies*."[270] The reputation of these establishments was perhaps best summed up in Isaac Cruikshank's sketch, *The Lending Library* (figure 4), which portrays three young fashionable ladies leaving a circulating library. Each is carrying at least one book, and behind them, the shelves of novels, romances, and tales lie bare, while the sermons, travel literature, and plays remain untouched. While it is important not to dismiss the concerns eighteenth century moralists had over these institutions, the relationship between circulating libraries and their users was far more sophisticated and complex than Cruikshank and other critics suggest, especially when taken in a transnational context. This chapter will examine the relationship between circulating libraries and the women who used them and will argue that these establishments allowed women across the Atlantic to foster, display, and even disrupt gender ideals, including the notions of politeness, sociability, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

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[270] [Stewart?], *An Account of Jamaica*, 171.

Figure 4. Isaac Cruikshank, *The Lending Library*, ca. 1800-1811, watercolour, Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center For British Art, New Haven, B1975.4.867, public domain.

Compared to coffee houses, circulating libraries across the Atlantic world were relatively universal in their operation, customers, and functions. American and Jamaican circulating libraries were modelled after their British predecessors, and like those in the metropole, operated on subscription schemes and offered readers a selection of fiction and non-fiction.[271] However, there were still regional differences, particularly in Britain, between urban, resort, and provincial circulating libraries. The first two tended to have larger collections than the latter. By the early 1800s, James Lackington's London library, known as the Temple of the Muses, supposedly had over a million books on display, while William Lane's Minerva Press and Circulating Library

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[271] Wiegand, " 'Imporv'd the General Conversation of Americans': Social Libraries before 1854," 7, 9.

had 20,722 titles listed in his 1795 catalogue.[272] In addition to large collections, urban and resort libraries were also highly social spaces. This is exemplified in the 1828 illustration of the Temple of the Muses (figure 5), which depicts groups of people examining books and browsing the shelves. An even more sociable scene can be seen in the etching, *Hall's Library at Margate* (figure 6), which shows a large, bright, lively space filled with people visiting and chatting. Even more so than London establishments, libraries in seaside and resort towns, such as Bath, Brighton, and Margate, were highly fashionable spaces used for walking and socializing.[273] This function was so central to these resort libraries, that all forms of reading are pushed to the sides of the image.[274]

[272] Raven, *The Business of Books*, 289; [William Lane?], *Minerva Literary Repository, Library and Printing-Office. A Catalogue of the Minerva General Library* ([London?: 1795?]), Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[273] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, 92.
[274] Ibid, 92.

Figure 5. Trade card of Thomas Lackington's Temple of the Muses, Finsbury Square, ca. 1810-1825, aquatint, British Museum, London, Heal, 17.87, © The Trustees of the British Museum, Creative Commons.

Figure 6. Thomas Malton the Younger, *Hall's Library At Margate*, 1789, aquaint, Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center For British Art, New Haven, B1978.43.922, public domain.

In addition to being social gathering spaces, many resort and urban libraries also had adjacent shops that sold a wide variety of items, many of which catered to women's interests. The pamphlet, *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered*, advised proprietors that in addition to their library services, they could easily sell haberdashery, hosiery, hats, tea, medicine, snuff, and tobacco (which were also commonly available in coffee houses).[275] Many libraries did indeed carry such items. *A Guide to All the Watering and Sea-bathing Places* noted that the libraries in Bath all sold "an extensive assortment of stationery, perfumery, jewellery… and the proprietors let out musical instruments, by the week, month, or year."[276] Even provincial libraries, which were smaller in size and stock, sold other merchandise. For example, the establishment Jane Austen frequented in Basingstoke operated out of a stationery shop.[277]

Compared to those in the metropole, colonial libraries were much smaller. For example, Caritat's New York circulating library, the largest in America, had a stock of only 5,000 volumes by 1797.[278] Although not as large, American and Jamaican libraries often had the same features as those in Britain. Many colonial circulating libraries also sold a selection of goods. Lewis Nicola's library in Philadelphia contained a bonnet shop, while Stevenson and Aikman, who ran a library in Jamaica, advertised themselves as a stationery store and circulating library in 1791, but also carried a selection of other goods, including leather shoes.[279] Despite minor regional

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[275] *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered; With Instruction for Opening and Conducting a Library…* ([London?: 1797), 35, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
[276] John Feltham, *A Guide to All the Watering and Sea-bathing Places, for 1813* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1813), 91, Google Books.
[277] Manley, "Libraries for Sociability," 8.
[278] Wiegand, " 'Imporv'd the General Conversation of Americans'," 15.
[279] Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," 63; "Imported," *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston), advertisement, June 4, 1791, Caribbean Newspapers; "Stevenson & Aikman," *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston), advertisement, December 17, 1791, Caribbean Newspapers.

differences, circulating libraries across the Atlantic demonstrated the same socio-cultural

significance and functions, which led to the promotion of the same behavioural traits throughout

the Atlantic world, including sociability.

Circulating Libraries as Sociable Spaces

As visual depictions of circulating libraries suggest, these institutions were highly

sociable places, and most scholars have accepted surviving images as reliable evidence of that

sociability. However, Manley has rejected these images as credible forms of evidence.[280] He

combines this assessment with the argument that circulating libraries acted more as closed

warehouses, where readers had to come prepared with a list of volumes, or write ahead to put

their desired titles on hold. Beyond this, he has asserted that many subscribers did not even visit

the library to pick up their books in person, but sent servants and errand boys on their behalf.[281]

While Manley's argument forces a revaluation of sociability and libraries, he is overly confident

in his declaration, and his argument is problematic on several levels.

It was common on both sides of the Atlantic for libraries to ask subscribers to put books

on hold. For example, Lane suggested that "subscribers or Readers, to prevent disappointment

and delay, are to send a list of ten or twelve numbers, taken from their Catalogue, of such Books

as they want: — As thus, 24, 82, 976, 13256, 16790."[282] Mein's Circulating Library in Boston

advised subscribers to take similar action "to prevent being disappointed," while in Kingston the

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[280] He has made this claim several times. See: K.A. Manley, "Booksellers, Peruke-makers, and Rabbit-merchants; the Growth of Circulating Libraries in the Eighteenth Century," in *Libraries and the Book Trade: The Formation of Collections from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, edited by Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2000), 42; Manley, "Libraries for Sociability."

[281] Manley, "Booksellers, Peruke-makers, and Rabbit-merchants, 43; Manley, "Libraries for Sociability," 7, 8.

[282] Lane, *Minerva Literary Repository,* iv.

St. James's Library recommended, "as there will be at all times many books in circulation

subscribers to prevent disappointment or delay, are to send a list of ten or twelve numbers of such

books as they want."[283] Despite the apparent universality of this suggestion, it does not

necessarily denote that this was the only means of acquiring books. Nor does it indicate with any

certainty that library shelves were closed and there is evidence that they were open to the public.

For example, in the image of Hall's establishment, a woman dressed in a dark hat and shawl can

be seen taking a book off the shelf on the right side of the etching. Even if, as Manley claims,

these images are wholly unreliable, there is also anecdotal evidence that demonstrates that

subscribers were free to wander and browse the stacks. Charles Knight visited the Temple of the

Muses as a child and recalled,

> In the centre is an enormous circular counter, within which stand the dispensers of knowledge, ready to wait upon the country clergyman… upon the fine ladies…or upon the bookseller's collector with his dirty bag… We ascend a broad staircase, which leads to 'The Lounging Rooms,' and to the first of a series of circular galleries, lighted from the lantern of the dome, which also lights the ground floor. Hundreds, even thousands, of volumes are displayed on the shelves running around their walls. As we mount higher and higher, we find commoner books, in shabbier bindings; but there is still the same order preserved, each book being numbered according to a printed catalogue. This is larger than that of any bookseller's, and it comes out yearly."[284]

Knight's description matches the detailed rendering of this establishment, and although he

does not mention if he was allowed to remove any of the books from the shelves, this passage

shows that visitors, at least in some institutions, were free to wander through the collection.

Manley's failure to take important evidence such as this into consideration is deeply problematic,

but it is not the only issue with his theory. One of the biggest problems is his understanding of

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[283] [John Mein?], *A Catalogue of Mein's Circulating Library* (Boston: 1765), 2, America's Historical Imprints; Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 230.

[284] Charles Knight, *Shadows of the Old Booksellers* (London: Bell and Daldy: 1865), 283, Google Books.

sociability. To reiterate, Manley felt that for a library to be considered as a sociable space, sociability had to be "part of the purpose" of these establishments, and even when purposeful social events, such as the balls and raffles were held at circulating libraries they did not constitute library sociability in his view, as they did not revolve around books or literature.[285] Although these gatherings and parties happened in the same space as the library, they were distinct from one another.[286] Therefore, for Manley, the daily and unstructured interactions that occurred in these establishments failed to qualify circulating libraries as sociable spaces, and as he declares, "bookshops, stationers, and other businesses were not centres for sociability other than the everyday unstructured sociability of any local shop."[287] This definition of sociability is extremely short sighted, and his implication that shops and shopping were not purposely sociable is uninformed and incorrect.

For many middle class women throughout the Atlantic, shopping was a necessary part of their daily routine and was also a highly social activity. It was more often than not performed with friends, relatives, and relations, which as Berry has claimed, "cemented the social pleasures of shopping."[288] In addition to being a necessary chore, it was also a leisurely activity performed purely for pleasure, without the intention of buying any goods.[289] This not only occurred in Britain but also throughout the empire. In Jamaica, one contemporary noted, "the ladies residing in towns (particularly Kingston, where there is generally something or the other offered as an

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[285] Manley, "Libraries for Sociability," 2, 9.
[286] Ibid, 10.
[287] Ibid, 8.
[288] Helen Berry, "Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12, (2002): 380, Jstor.
[289] Claire Walsh, "Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Centre for British Arts, 2006), 167, 170.

amusement)…can occasionally relieve the tedium of existence with a *shopping*; that is, a rummaging over every shop, without any intention, perhaps, of buying anything; an amusement which the females here are as partial to as those of the first fashion in the British metropolis."[290] With shopping as a social activity, shops themselves became sociable destinations for women across the empire. In addition to being sociable spaces shops also acted as platforms where women exhibited their respectability. The act of selecting goods and haggling over prices with store clerks required the shopper to have an understanding of a certain set of unspoken, but extremely important rules of behaviour, which through the correct execution allowed the customer to publicly demonstrate to the store clerks and their fellow shoppers their good taste, civility, manners, and politeness.[291]

It is reasonable to believe that circulating libraries played a similar role in women's lives and offered them the same opportunities to display their qualities. Indeed, the very presence of shops within libraries suggests that circulating libraries actively tried to attract women to partake in the sociable nature of shopping. Furthermore, many circulating libraries operated in the social centres of towns, alongside fashionable shops. Between the 1790s and 1810s, Marshall's Circulating Library, Bally's Circulating Library, and Godwin's Circulating Library were all located on Bath's fashionable Milsom Street, which one contemporary called, "the very magnet of Bath."[292] In addition to their location, many circulating libraries shared similar design features, including bow-front windows, which were used to display goods and entice customers.[293] This is

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[290] [Stewart?], *An Account of Jamaica*, 192-193.
[291] Berry, "Polite Consumption," 377, 384.
[292] *A New and Enlarged Catalogue of Marshall's Circulating Library*, ([Bath?]: Printed by R. Cruttwell, 1794), Google Books; Feltham, *A Guide to All the Watering and Sea-bathing Places*, 51
[293] Berry, "Polite Consumption," 383.

visible in John Raphael's print, *Beauty in Search of Knowledge* (figure 7), which shows a fashionable young lady standing in front of a circulating library. Behind her, the windows are filled with prints and elegantly bound books. However, in America, some circulating libraries were situated outside city centres. For example, William Bradford operated his London Coffee House in the commercial centre of Philadelphia, but his son, Thomas, opened a circulating library from his home in a residential area of the city.[294] This location demonstrates the close connection between American circulating libraries and domesticity.[295] However, this does not mean that these libraries were less social but rather indicates that they created smaller, localized reading communities. Ultimately, a closer examination of a wider selection of available evidence demonstrates that these libraries were not just closed-off warehouses, but clearly had great social significance and cultural cachet and, like shops, were an important tool middling women used on a routine basis to publicly announce their own polite sociability.

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[294] Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," 65.

[295] Ibid, 65.

Figure 7. [Derived from John Raphael], *Beauty In Search On Knowledge*, 1782, British Museum, London, 2001.0930.33, © Trustees Of The British Museum, Creative Commons.

The precise way people behaved in circulating libraries is still uncertain, but evidence indicates that much like the way goods in stores were examined and discussed by shoppers, circulating library clientele talked about books. This is seen in a conversation overheard in Lane's library, which claimed to be printed verbatim in the 1798 edition of *The New Jamaica Magazine* and is worth quoting at length,

 'My dear Laura, have you read the new novel I recommended to you, The Animated skeleton? I assure you it is the production of a very young lady, and is her first appearance in that character'.... 'Heaven grant it may be her last! [replied Laura] What, a young lady in the character of an animated skeleton? I protest I shudder at the very idea!' — 'Pooh! You will know better soon! To be sure they used to frighten me a little at first, but it is nothing when you are used to it; there is nothing else read now, and for my part I would not give a farthing for a novel that had not something about ghosts, and skeletons, and hobgoblins…' —L. 'Well, it is surprising to me what pleasure you can take in such shocking books, that ought to inspire you with horror; for my part I never touch a novel that is not recommended by capt. O'Brien, and he always sends me Disinterested Love,

Excessive Sensibility, Delusions of the Heart, and all those charming books that melt my very soul, and make me weep while sitting under the great oak in our garden.'[296]

This possibly satirical conversation demonstrates that libraries were not just spaces that women visited together but were also backdrops to literary sociability where women recommended or debated the worthiness of genres, specific titles, and shared their reading tastes with others. In addition to being places where women discussed books, it was common to have reading rooms, or at least tables and chairs in circulating libraries, which further suggests that these institutions were not only designed to be sociable spaces but also places of sociable reading.[297] In Dover, the Apollo Circulating Library, "situated in King-Street, at a short distance from the Bathing machines… has a handsome reading-room, where the London and country newspapers are daily to be seen by subscribers. The Albion Circulating Library, in Snaregate-street, possesses similar accommodations."[298] In New York, Caritat's library provided tables, chairs, writing desks, and even coffee for the convenience of his subscribers.[299] While not as extravagant, David Bower in Jamaica advertised that while on a trip to London in 1788, "for the amusement of such Gentlemen as may be inclined to pass an hour in the Library… intends [on] collecting a variety of the most curious and entertaining pamphlets," implying that subscribers read in the library itself.[300] Even libraries that did not have reading spaces, such as Bradford's in America, were still social centres, as many of the same users visited daily and used trips to the library as a sociable outing.[301]

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[296] "The Wanderer," *The New Jamaica Magazine*, August 1798, 7, Google Books.
[297] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, 94.
[298] Feltham, *A Guide to All the Watering and Sea-bathing Places*, 229.
[299] Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, 58.
[300] Cave, *Printing and the Booktrade*, 232.
[301] Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," 67.

Libraries with reading rooms promoted polite sociability as it encouraged male and female patrons to linger and read, which many did. For instance, Charlotte Francis noted that her acquaintances, "Mrs. and Miss Middleton spend their morning there [in the circulating library] reading the newspapers & looking at all the things & yet neither of them subscribe."[302] Another example can be found in governess Ellen Weeton's journal,

> After calling on several friends (who were *not in*), we went to Willan's Library. Two books, on a similar subject, were produced, but not belonging to each other, Miss C. [Catherine Braithwaite] was looking to see which was the right one. I advised her looking at the beginning of the different Vols. That she, might compare them… 'Do *you* look,' said she, throwing them to me with the utmost scorn, and turning to a review which lay near… I spoke not, but turned to look at some other publications. She continued reading some time."[303]

While this example does not demonstrate polite sociability, it does, along with the practice of the Middletons, and the commonality of reading rooms throughout the Atlantic world, indicate that circulating libraries were sociable spaces where women gathered together to spend time with one another to read, browse, and discuss books, if not always politely.

The Gendered Act of Reading

What women's reading looked like in public establishments is difficult to ascertain. Like men, women were encouraged to hone the skill of reading aloud, and the ability to read properly was a sign of a woman's politeness. One contemporary declared that "to read well, is the first and greatest Article, in a young Lady's Education… There is a certain Beauty, and Harmony of Voice, required in Reading, that without a nice Attention and frequent Application, is not to be obtained" and any "jerks, and Starts of the Voice, in reading, destroy the Sense."[304] Similarly, the

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[302] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, 95.

[303] Ethel Weeton, *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, vol.1, (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1969), 135.

[304] Rev. Mr. Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (London: Printed for C. Hitch and L. Hawes, 1760), 140-143. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

Polite Lady; or, a Course of Female Education, published in both Britain and America, advised, "to be able to read with propriety is certainly a very genteel accomplishment," and the ideal reader, "reads with the same easy natural voice as she uses in conversation. She observes the stops and pauses with great exactness. She reads so slowly as to be easily understood by any person… Her voice she carefully adapts to the number and extent of her audience… In a word, she is a complete mistress of the art of reading."[305] Yet, despite this encouragement, other moralists, such as Sarah Green, believed that "women are never intended for public readers," but conceded that reading aloud was still a necessary skill for women as "you know not how large the circle, or how many strangers to you, there may be in it, when, by accident, you may be called upon to read aloud, though it should be only a paragraph in a newspaper, it will very soon be discovered by that small specimen, what sort of reader you are."[306] While the reading Weeton recorded was clearly done in tense silence, and there is not enough information to determine if the Middletons read the newspaper aloud, it remains possible and highly likely that women read aloud to each other within the public realm of the circulating library.

While the possibility of public reading must not be dismissed, instead of reading publicly, most of women's communal reading did occur within the domestic realm, as this was seen as a more gender-appropriate location. Reading aloud was a common social pastime that women performed with their families and in the company of peers and companions.[307] Circulating

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[305] Charles Allen, *The Polite Lady; or, a Course of Female Education. In a series of letters. From a Mother to her Daughter*, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for T. Carnan, and F. Newbery, 1775), 16, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[306] Sarah Green, *Mental Improvement for a Young Lady, on her Entrance into the World; Addressed to A Favourite Niece* (London: Minerva Press, 1793), 109, Eighteenth Century Online.

[307] Heller, " Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London," 624; Merril. D. Smith, *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century America*, Women's Roles Through History (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 89.

libraries made a wide selection of books more readily available to a large portion of middle class women, and the ability to borrow books, and take them into other spaces, including the domestic, promoted and heightened the practice of both solitary private reading and sociable communal reading. This domestic literary sociability can be seen as a by-product and an extension of the sociability found in circulating libraries.

Yet even in the home, women's consumption of print walked a fine line between being seen as necessary for fostering and adhering to gender norms and as threatening to their femininity. It was not uncommon during this period for women to read alone. Women read in a variety of private or semi-private settings, including in bed, during meals, in coaches, or while getting their hair done.[308] However, these moments of silent, solitary, and unsupervised private reading were seen as dangerous, anti-social, and even selfish, as this practice was typically associated with novels and romances, the lowest and most corrupting form of literature.[309] Instead, women were encouraged to read communally, particularly with family. Family reading was seen as the ideal way for women to consume print because, as Pearson has pointed out, reading within a domestic setting kept women close to the family unit.[310] When women read within the familial unit, it was often morally constructive and improving works, such as the Bible. For example, Anna Green Winslow in Boston regularly read to her aunt, "I have read my bible to my aunt this morning (as is the daily custom) & sometimes I read other books to her."[311] Familial reading offered an opportunity to control what print women consumed and ensured that the texts were suitable for the promotion of correct female values. However, reading within the

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[308] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 169.
[309] Ibid, 169-171.
[310] Ibid, 171.
[311] Anna Green Winslow, *Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771*, February 1772, March 9, 1772, North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

family unit was also extremely important for the formation of correct feminine traits as they acted as educational platforms. Reading to one's family created spaces where women could learn how to read aloud properly and practice their skills. In turn, this promoted and fostered their gentility, sociability, and politeness, while remaining connected to the domestic sphere.

Although the family acted as a way to structure and control women's reading, women had more freedom to choose what to read when they were with female friends and acquaintances. Harriet Grove wrote in her diary that, "Charlotte read *The Beggar Girl* to us as She Acted in the Evening to the great Entertainment of the Miss Frasers."[312] The group continued to read the novel over the next few days, but on the third day, were disrupted when "Tom came here, [and] Did not make up for the interruption he made in the *Beggar Girl* as he did nothing but talk about his grievances."[313] Overseas in Philadelphia, Quaker Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker recorded on January 21, 1796, that, "Elizah. Skyrin spent the day— I read a piece of twelve pages, published by Rebecca Griscomb, on the propriety of taking people of colour into society."[314] Women even read communally while travelling across the ocean. While journeying to the West Indies, Janet Schaw's companion read aloud to her during a storm, "I begged her to let me share the amusement by reading aloud. This she instantly complied with. She had however taken up the first book that came to hand, which happened not to be very apropos to the present occasion, as it proved to be Lord Kaims's Elements of Criticism. She read on however and I listened with much

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[312] Harriet Grove, *The Grove Diaries: The Rise and Fall of an English Family*, ed. Desmond Hawkins (Stanbridge, Dorset: The Dovecote Press and University of Delaware Press, 1995), 68.
[313] Ibid, 68.
[314] Elizabeth Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 2, ed. Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), January 21, 1796, North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

seeming attention, tho' neither she nor I knew a word it contained."[315] As Schaw travelled, first

to Antigua and then to North Carolina, she took the practice of communal reading with her.

Together, these examples not only demonstrate that reading with friends and companions was a

common activity across the British Atlantic world but also begins to reveal the diverse array of

genres women consumed in the company of their peers.

Reading was a popular habit among both men and women, but the practice of reading was

highly gendered. For women, it was not just how or where they read that was important to the

formation or deterioration of ideal femininity, but also the kind of literature they consumed. In

*The Lady's Precepto*r, the author, Mr. Cresswick noted that reading was "the highest and most

important branch of solitary amusement... much depends on the choice of books: improper ones

do an irreparable injury to the mind; but in making a judicious choice, we acquire a stock of

knowledge."[316] For groups of young women, like the Groves and the Frasers, the unsupervised

reading of novels had the potential to be highly dangerous and morally corrupting, even reading

non-fiction works that discussed philosophical ideas, and current political, economic, and social

issues could prevent women from fostering the correct gendered qualities. Cresswick suggested

women should "avoid all abstract learning, all difficult researches."[317] These types of works "may

blunt the finer edge of their wit and change the delicacy in which they excel into pedantic

coarseness."[318] Instead, he suggested that women read history, which would provide useful

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[315] Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality; Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the years 1774-1776*, ed. Evangeline Walker Andrews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 43-44, Internet Archives.

[316] Mr. Cresswick, *The Lady's Preceptor; or, a Series of Instructive and Pleasing Exercises in Reading; for the Particular Use of Females…* (London: Printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1792), 12, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[317] Ibid, 20.

[318] Ibid, 20.

"lessons for the conduct of life," as well as natural philosophy, works on religion, and the fine

arts, including poetry.[319] While he does not provide a definition of what genres belonged in the

category of "abstract learning," the pamphlet that discussed the position of people of colour

within society read by Drinker and Skyrin, and philosophical works such as the *Elements Of*

Criticism read by Schaw and her companion most likely belong in this group. The freedom these

women practiced when they chose these works let them dabble in ideas that had the potential to

upset social, cultural, and economic traditions, as they provided women the opportunity to engage

with new ideas, educate themselves on topics that were seen as less proper for women, and form

their own opinions that were uninformed by men or family members. Reading these works can be

seen as a rebellion, albeit a small one, against the control, particularly masculine control that was

often placed on women's reading.

Yet these moments of communal reading with friends were not entirely harmful to ideal

femininity. Reading with friends was a sociable pastime that promoted female friendships,

strengthened social circles, and allowed women to practice their social skills. This is

demonstrated in the frustration expressed by Harriet Grove when a man interrupted *The Beggar*

Girl. She seemed upset not only over the interruption of the story but also about the disruption he

caused to what feels like an exclusively female space and activity. Women also used the social

nature of domestic reading to pass the time while they were performing chores.[320] Although

women were blamed for neglecting domestic duties to read, the two were not incompatible.[321] In

1808, Weeton visited the Braithwaite sisters, where she "read for them while they have sat at

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[319] Ibid, 22, 23, 24.
[320] Heller, " Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London," 625; Pearson*,
Women's Reading in Britain*, 174.
[321] Pearson*, Women's Reading in Britain*, 4.

work, for their indefatigable mother left them so much to do, that they have been obliged not only

to sit closely themselves but procure assistance."[322] The social nature of reading with peers also

developed women's conversational skills and allowed them to define themselves as polite, well-

spoken, refined, educated, and dutiful, all the hallmarks of ideal polite femininity, which in turn

gave them useful skills necessary for improving men's manners in mixed settings.

It is not possible to know for certain where these women acquired books but many,

including the Grove sisters, relied on circulating libraries.[323] These establishments increased

women's opportunity to select works that interested them, an opportunity that was only

heightened by the prevalence and popularity of these institutions. The sense of freedom

circulating libraries gave to women was expressed in *Mansfield Park* when Fanny Price became a

subscriber to a local circulating library and was "amazed at being anything in propria persona,

amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chooser of books! And to be having any

one's improvement in view in her choice! But so it was. Susan had read nothing, and Fanny

longed to give her a share in her own first pleasures, and inspire a taste for the biography and

poetry which she delighted in herself."[324] While women embraced and celebrated the literary

independence circulating libraries gave them, this freedom of choice was seen as problematic for

many eighteenth century moralists for a variety of reasons.

One of the primary issues critics had with the unfettered access circulating libraries

offered, was that it increased the availability of novels. Ideally, novels and romances acted as

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[322] Weeton, *Miss Weeton's Journal*, 65.
[323] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 163.
[324] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814; repr., New York: Open Road Media, 2016), 356, ProQuest Ebook Central.

morally improving texts that taught manners and imparted knowledge in entertaining ways.[325]

The Use of Circulating Libraries claimed that "most of those [novels] produced of late years, convey instruction with delight— have a tendency to improve the morals of the age, and are the most pleasing of our literary works."[326] The effectiveness of the moral lessons of novels was supposedly heightened through the promotion of sensibility. Novels and romances were meant to awaken and connect readers to their own feelings and bring them to the surface. Some novels did have a sentimental effect on their readers. In 1748, Sarah Fielding wrote to Richardson, who was the first to legitimize and popularize the field of sentimental literature, "I have been, suddenly to have found all my thoughts strengthened, and my words flow into an easy and nervous style; never did I so much wish for it as in this daring attempt of mentioning Clarissa; but when I read of her, I am all sensation; my heart glows; I am overwhelmed; my only vent is tears; and unless tears could mark my thoughts as legibly as ink, I cannot speak half I feel."[327] Fielding was not the only reader moved by Richardson's novel. Over thirty years later, the American Quaker Anne Livingston wrote in her diary, "very busy all the Morning, & in the Evening alone reading Clarissa H. I like it very much, her character is fine & her letters are full of sentiment -- I must adopt some of her excellent rules."[328] Although Livingston's reaction was less flamboyant, both women were deeply moved by Richardson's work, and Livingston used the novel as a learning tool. In addition to sensibility, novels also promoted cosmopolitanism. This can be seen

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[325] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43.

[326] *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered*, 15.

[327] Samuel Richardson, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, vol. 2, (London: Printed for Richard Phillips, 1804), 60-61, HathiTrust Digital Library.

[328] Anne Hume Shippen Livingston, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book: The International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and about Her*, ed. Ethel Armes, January 7, 1784 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1935), North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

in *Northanger Abbey* when Catherine Morland, the young, impressionable heroine and avid novel reader, proclaims to Henry Tilney that an English country view reminded her of the South of France, " 'You have been abroad then?' said Henry, a little surprised. 'Oh! No, I only mean what I have read about it. It always puts me in mind of the country Emily and her father travelled through in the "Mysteries of Udolpho." But you never read novels I dare say?' "[329] While Moreland had never been to France, she believed that she had a cosmopolitan knowledge and a connection to the nation simply by reading Radcliffe's novel.

Fiction was intended to be a means for women to foster sensibility, and also offered a uniquely feminine means of promoting cosmopolitanism. However, by the late eighteenth century, moralists believed novels had the adverse effect and thought this genre corrupted and destroyed the ideals of femininity and encouraged women to indulge in excessive sensibility, which destroyed rational thought, cosmopolitanism, and all feminine charms.[330] Many moralists saw novels as harmful and encouraged women to avoid the genre. Chapone warned that novels made women "ridiculous in conversation, and miserably wrong-headed in her pursuit and behaviours."[331] These concerns were echoed across the empire. *The New Jamaican Magazine* claimed that a period of "sentimental delicacy" had become the dominant trend in literature, as "a whole host of swains, with the voluminous Richardson at their head, continued to entangle the town in delicate distress, errors of innocence, and excessive sensibility."[332]

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[329] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, (1818 repr., Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), 121.

[330] J. Paul Hunter, "The Novel and social/cultural history," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21; Pearson*, Women's Reading in Britain*, 165.

[331] Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, 188.

[332] "The Wanderer," *The New Jamaica Magazine*, 69.

Others still, took another position on this genre and saw novels as neither beneficial nor entirely harmful to readers. Like her contemporaries, Mary Wollstonecraft disapproved of novels but tempered her criticism by stating, "when, I exclaim against novels, I mean when contrasted with those works, which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination. For any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must receive a degree of enlargement, and obtain a little strength by a slight exertion of its thinking powers."[333] Although reading novels may not be the ideal form of education, Wollstonecraft conceded that they were better than nothing, and provided readers with some form of increased awareness of the world around them. Others felt that if read with caution novels could be highly beneficial. In an anonymous letter from a lady in Jamaica to a friend in Pennsylvania, published in a 1791 American magazine, the author debates the benefit of reading novels. Although she declared that "our sex is much indebted to the great novelist *Richardson*, for painting virtue in so pleasing a garb, in his various performances," she cautioned that the sentimental benefits could only be learned from novels if those that consumed them "call in the aid of reason and religion to their alliance."[334] Ultimately, for this genre to be successful in its goal of refining morals, readers had to consume them carefully and ground their understanding of what they were reading in rationality and good sense to ensure they gained the proper morals and fostered the correct and beneficial level of sensibility, which was key to ideal femininity.

While the concern moralists had over novels may seem extreme, the fears over the dissolution of proper female manners posed a very real threat to British society and the future of

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[333] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures of Political and Moral Subjects* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 328.

[334] D.S., "EXRTACT *of a* Letter *from a* Lady *in* Jamaica, *to her* Friend *in* PENNSYLVANIA; *On* NOVEL READING," *Universal Asylum, & Colombian Magazine,* March 1791, American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals Collection.

British civilization and empire. For women, an excess of sensibility prevented them from successfully performing traditional duties. As Cresswick wondered, "Can it then reasonably be expected, that young ladies who have imbibed such principles, should make good wives, prudent mothers, or even agreeable companions?"[335] Furthermore, novels not only created an excess of sensibility but also destroyed cosmopolitanism. An overly sentimental woman was believed to live in the fantasy world of her own imagination and had no interest in participating in the advancement of British society, and by association with the British Empire itself. This fear was demonstrated when Mangin declared that a woman who "for two or three years previous to marriage… moved amidst imaginary circles of heroes, nobility, and even of angels" had no real understanding of the world and was bound, along with her husband to "propagate a race of sons and daughters— doomed, like themselves, to suffer future misery, and to inflict it; to encumber, not to serve their native land; and imbuing the parental taste, to become, not the encouragers of useful arts, and elegant studies, but of a tribe of illiterate and rapacious miscreants."[336] This issue was only heightened by the fact that it was believed that women throughout the Atlantic world all shared the same taste for reading novels, meaning that instead of society being corrupted just within the metropole, it was simultaneously being debased at the colonial level.

If novels were dangerous, they were apparently made worse by being procured from a circulating library. As Mangin declared, "the evil [of novels] is greatly magnified indeed, when the circulating library has been the preparatory school."[337] Circulating libraries were not just closely associated with novels and romances, but were also believed to carry the worst, most debased, and corrupting titles of the genre. Due to their close association with this genre,

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[335] Cresswick, *The Lady's Preceptor*, 14.
[336] Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading*, 16, 22.
[337] Ibid, 20.

circulating libraries were seen as promoting the dissolution of female rationality and further

disseminating excessive sensibility. Therefore, due to their potential danger, it is of little wonder

that the increased access women had to novels worried many moralists. The fear was so great that

one contemporary referred to these institutions as "literary brothels," while in 1813 George

Cooke wrote that "a licenser is necessary for a circulating library… especially when it is

considered how many young people, especially girls, often procure… books of so evil a

tendency, that not only their time is most shamefully wasted, but their morals and manners

tainted and warped for the remainder of their lives."[338]

Throughout the Atlantic world, women were aware of the reputation of novels, but

despite concerns, remained avid readers of the genre. Harriet Grove read works such as the

Children in the Abbey and *Edmund of the Forrest*, while Charlotte consumed works such as

Mysteries of Udolpho, *Tom Jones*, and several of Jane Austen's novels.[339] She also lent her friend

Charles Henry the eight volumes of her personal copy of *Clarissa*.[340] In America, Drinker read

Anne Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance,* Matthew Lewis' *Tales of Wonder,* and Mrs. Bennet's *The*

Beggar Girl.[341] What women thought of the novels they read or how they impacted their

femininity is exceedingly difficult to gauge. Women, such as the Grove sisters, often failed to

comment on the novels they read. Others were mindful of the reputation of novels and novel-

reading but continued to read them anyway, such as Austen who famously said, "our family, who

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[338] "On Novel Reading," *The London Chronicle*, May 18, 1765. Newspaper Archive. Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, 119.
[339] Harriet Grove, *The Grove Diaries*, 88, 90; Charlotte Grove, *The Grove Diaries*, 105, 116, 129, 132, 139.
[340] Ibid, 144.
[341] Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 3, January 18, 1803, November 5, 1804, July 25, 1805, North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

are great novel-readers and not ashamed of being so."[342] Drinker was similarly aware of the

reputation of consuming this genre, and these works appear throughout her diary as guilty

pleasures, and she continuously attempted to rationalize her consumption of them by claiming

that she does not read them as often as she used to. In 1795, she revealed that she "read a

romance or novel, which I have not done for a long time before -- it was a business I followed in

my younger days, not so much as many others, 'tho more than some others."[343] This sentiment

was repeated several times through her diary, including in January 1797, when after reading *The*

Victim of Magical Illusions she wrote, "it may appear strange to some that an infirm old woman

should begin the year reading romances -- 'tis a practice I by no means highly approve, yet I trust

I have not sinned -- As I read a little of most things."[344] How women chose the novels they read

is not known, but it is clear that many women who self-identified as respectable, rational, polite,

and conscious of the negative reputation and potential dangers of this genre, still actively chose to

consume it.

Although popular, novels and romances were not the only books circulating libraries

carried. Making up the rest of the stock was a diverse array of genres. *The Use of Circulating*

Libraries Considered stated, "the variety of books to be met with at Libraries, opened an

extensive field for choice of subjects, to inform and instruct" and in addition to novels, it

recommended libraries stock history, divinity, travel, biography, and "arts and sciences."[345] Many

circulating libraries included these genres and more. Lane, in addition to supplying his clientele

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[342] Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, 4th ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 25-28.
[343] Elizabeth Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 1, March 30, 1795, North American Women's Letters and Diaries.
[344] Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 2, Jan 7, 1796.
[345] *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered*, 12, 27.

with a diverse selection of works, advertised that he would send anyone who wished to open their own circulating library a start-up collection of "books suitable for that purpose," including "History, Voyages, Novels, Plays, &c. containing from One Hundred to Five Thousand Volumes, which may be had at a few days' notice, with a catalogue for their subscribers, and instruction and directions [on] how to plan, synthesize and conduct the same."[346] Although this business venture was a way for Lane to move his Minerva Press publications across Britain, the majority of which were novels, the fact that he also included a variety of other genres suggests that they were standard parts of circulating library collections. American and Jamaican circulating libraries also carried more than just fiction. Those who subscribed to Mein's Circulating Library had access to a wide selection of categories, including history, voyages, philosophy, physics, gardening, husbandry, navigation, and mathematics, while in Jamaica, a 1791 advertisement for Stevenson and Aikman's Kingston circulating library promoted newly imported works such as William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine,* François Le Vaillant's *Travels Into The Interior Parts of Africa*, and Alexander Cunningham's *History of Great Britain*.[347]

Much like novels, not all of the non-fiction carried by these libraries was seen as appropriate reading materials for women, and these institutions stocked a selection of non-fiction works that moralists discouraged women from reading. While the sciences were not entirely deemed to be unsuitable for women, their appropriateness remained uncertain. Some moralists considered them to be a key part of women's reading. To reiterate Cresswick's opinion, it was history and natural philosophy alone that was "sufficient to furnish women with an agreeable

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[346] "A Tale of Incident and Adventure," *The Star*, advertisement, February 1, 1791, 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers.
[347] "Imported," *Daily Advertiser*, advertisement, June 4, 1791, Caribbean Newspapers, 1718-1876.

kind of study."[348] Chapone also encouraged women to read natural philosophy, as the "study of nature, as far as may suit your powers and opportunities, you will find sublime entertainment."[349] While it was not uncommon for women to read extensively in this genre, it still had a masculine orientation to it, and some contemporaries were not so convinced of its benefits to female readers.[350] Marchioness De Lambert advised women to "moderate your fondness for extraordinary sciences; they are dangerous, and generally teach one nothing but a vast deal of vanity: they depress the activity of the soul."[351] While the benefits and dangers of natural philosophy were debated, the consumption of other genres were more firmly discouraged. Next to novels, philosophy and metaphysics were deemed entirely inappropriate for women.[352] As Wilkes advised, "the study of Metaphysics (under which Title the Consideration of Spirit generally comes) is too deep and laborious for your sex to engage in."[353] This genre included philosophical texts that challenged traditional gendered and societal roles, such as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Works like these were seen as being both above women's intellectual capacities and as threatening to women's traditional feminine qualities.[354]

No borrowing records for British circulating libraries have survived, and it is impossible to say how many women actually borrowed novels or any other genre, or how often specific titles were checked out, but some have survived in America. In 1769, the Bradford library had 300

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[348] Cresswick, *The Lady's Preceptor*, 21.
[349] Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, 183.
[350] Ibid, 64-65.
[351] Marchioness De Lambert "Advice of a Mother to her Daughter," *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*, 23.
[352] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 77.
[353] Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, 28.
[354] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 78-81.

titles and loaned out 7,000 volumes over the course of the year, eighty-six percent of which were novels.[355] There is no doubt that novels were popular, and it is possible that similar borrowing patterns existed in Britain. However, there was no such thing as a universal female reader and although many read novels, they also consumed a wide selection of other works, some of which belonged to the categories moralists warned women against. For instance, Pricilla Wakefield had a keen interest in botany and natural sciences as well as travel, and read works such as Wild's *Travels in America*, Michaud's *Travels in the United States*, and Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*.[356] Wakefield not only had a personal interest in these works but also used them as research for her own books, most of which were written for children.[357] Drinker, although an avid novel reader also consumed a variety of other works, such as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, her *Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, works of history, poetry, and a variety of pamphlets.[358]

The diversity in circulating library stock provided women with the opportunity to take control not just of their entertainment but also of their education. Women's freedom to read widely in philosophy, metaphysics, and natural science, posed a direct challenge to traditional female notions of passivity and limited intellectual capability. Women like Wakefield, who read scientific works, or Drinker, who picked up Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, pushed their intellectualism into fields of literature and thought usually seen as the purview of men. Women's conscious decision to read these works was an active rejection of the traditional female values of

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[355] Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," 65.
[356] Bridget Hill, "Priscilla Wakefield as a Writer of Children's Educational Books," W*omen's Writing* 4, no. 1 (1997): 10. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09699089700200002
[357] Ibid, 3.
[358] Elizabeth Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 1&2, December 4, 1759, September 11, 1794, April 22, 1796, May 27, 1797, November 25, 1798.

docility, passivity, obedience, and intellectual delicacy, and in turn, feminine traits such

politeness and appropriate sensibility. Furthermore, using these establishments allowed women to

expand their understanding of and participation in the world around them. Like men, they could

promote their cosmopolitanism through the consumption of history, natural philosophy, and

science. For moralists, this threatened men's intellectual dominance, proper social order, and

traditional gender roles.

Although some library stock was seen as harmful, women were encouraged to read a wide

variety of genres, many of which overlapped with the titles found on library shelves. Like men,

women were avid newspaper readers, and the consumption of the news had a similar impact on

women as it had on men. The presence of reading rooms and the stock of newspapers within

circulating libraries was extremely important, as it gave women the opportunity to engage with

current events and to participate in global affairs and empire. For some, newspapers would have

been an invaluable part of their livelihoods, especially for those with overseas interests. Indeed,

in Jamaica, in addition to running households independently, many women on the island ran local

businesses and acted as merchants, while others owned slaves and depended on their labour for

commercial success.[359] Therefore, the news of new imported goods, departure notifications for

ships, advertisements for slave auctions, notices regarding runaway slaves, and international

news and politics, which were all found in Jamaican newspapers were vital for the success of the

island's cosmopolitan businesswomen.

Women were also encouraged to read histories and travel. History was often suggested as

a replacement for novels, as it was believed that this genre achieved what novels failed to do.

History contained a story but lacked the flamboyancy and the improbability often found in novels

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[359] Walker, "Pursuing her Profits," 491, 438.

and romances.[360] History provided "lessons for the conduct of life" without invoking a dangerous excess of sensibility.[361] Critics suggested that by reading about the past, the mind "receives improvement with rapture and delight" and that to study history was "to enquire into the characters of these we meet with, and to judge of them wisely and cautiously: to study history is to study the designs, the prejudices, and the passions of mankind; to discover all the secret springs of their actions, their arts and fallacies."[362] Chapone promoted the consumption of history as "likely to form and strengthen… judgment," while Wilkes commented that, "history informs you without Disguise" and that, "history is very well adapted; and so copiously, as to be able to furnish us with Precedents, upon almost every Occasion."[363] The women who read extensively in this genre were believed to be rational and moral, where the novel reader was irrational and immoral.

Travel, and the related study of geography were other fields moralists encouraged women to read. Green advised women to "divide one morning in the week between the study of geography, and the reading of voyages and travels."[364] These genres, like history, were believed to have promoted morals and virtues, and they were, for the most part, deemed by commentators to be safely devoid of passion, and instead excited only wonder.[365] Travel and geography were also important to fostering cosmopolitanism. Chapone encouraged women to learn how to read a map, to understand the geography of Europe, and to have a working knowledge of European

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[360] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 51.
[361] Cresswick, *The Lady's Preceptor*, 23.
[362] *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered*, 14; [George Wright?], *Pleasing Reflections on Life and Manners with Essays, Characters, and Poems, Moral and Entertaining…* (London, 1788), 192.
[363] Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, 177; Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, 152.
[364] Green, *Mental Improvement for a Young Lady*, 91.
[365] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 55.

settlements and colonies. Without this knowledge, women would not be able to navigate or

participate in the rapidly expanding and interconnected world. As Chapone noted, without an

understanding of geography, "even a news-paper would be unintelligible."[366] Thus, women's

consumption of travel and geography, in addition to newspapers, promoted their

cosmopolitanism by improving their understanding of the world, their role within Britain and its

empire. Travel also promoted the idea that Britain was the most civilized nation in the world.[367]

This idea was supposed to inspire gratitude among both male and female readers. This gratitude,

in turn, may have encouraged women to adhere to traditional gender roles and uphold the strong

moral, religious, and gender values that many thought allowed Britain to hold the title of being

the most advanced and civilized nation on Earth.

Conclusion

Often defined as nothing more than repositories of fictional trash, circulating libraries

across the Atlantic world received much of the same disapproval, anger, and hatred from

eighteenth century critics. However, while much about circulating libraries remains unknown,

unclear, and debated, the actual function of these libraries and the impact they made on the lives

of their female subscribers was much more complicated than the criticisms moralists levelled at

them. Like femininity itself, circulating libraries embodied dichotomies and contradictions. They

were important institutions that offered female readers across the Atlantic world the opportunity

to participate in the social and cultural ideals of British society. They were spaces that allowed

women to foster, practice, and display ideal feminine qualities, including sociability, politeness,

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[366] Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, 191.
[367] Pearson*, Women's Reading in Britain*, 55.

sensibility, and cosmopolitanism, while also providing them the opportunity to consciously reject and subvert these very same qualities.

Circulating libraries were social destinations for many women. They visited them with friends, used these spaces to see and be seen, to peruse the shelves, or to browse the goods sold within these establishments. Much like men, women were also encouraged to read aloud, and the tables, chairs, and reading rooms within these establishments offered spaces to gather and participate in the social pastime of communal reading. In turn, this social activity helped women to foster and display their politeness. As much as they were public spaces, circulating libraries were also intrinsically connected to the domestic realm. The books borrowed from libraries made their way into a variety of other spaces, including the home, where they were consumed alone or read aloud in the company of family and friends. This created a form of polite sociability that differed but was still connected to the polite sociability that occurred within the libraries themselves. Yet, while domestic social reading was seen as more appropriate for women than reading aloud in public, it was not free from potential issues. While familial reading offered families an opportunity to monitor or control women's reading and influence their interpretation, understanding, and opinion of the texts, women also commonly read aloud with their peers and friends during social visits. In these scenes of unsupervised reading, women enjoyed more freedom in what they read. Some, such as the Grove sisters, consumed potentially dangerous novels, while others, such as Schaw and Drinker selected more intellectual works that discussed philosophical concepts, and socio-cultural issues and debates.

Reading was a vital activity in a woman's formation of politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism, but depending on what women read, it was also seen as a threat to these values. Circulating libraries carried a wide range of stock. Newspapers, novels, romances, poetry,

history, travel, geography, biography, natural philosophy, science, philosophy, metaphysics, husbandry, gardening, navigation, and mathematics, among other topics all lined the shelves of these establishments and were easily and readily accessible to women on both sides of the Atlantic. The freedom of choice women had to select from the diverse collections posed several issues for moralists. Some works carried in libraries, such as newspapers, travel, and history were genres women were encouraged to read. These works allowed women a means to participate in and protect the future of British society, to enhance their cosmopolitanism by learning about Britain's relations with the wider world and the role its empire played within it. However, libraries and some of the materials they carried were believed to have an adverse effect and act as a corrupting influence on female readers. Novels, the genre most associated with circulating libraries, were perceived by some to debase the very female characteristics that reading was supposed to foster, and made women overly emotional, flighty, and lazy, and became a serious threat to the very future prosperity of Britain and its empire. Besides novels, women were also discouraged from reading philosophy and metaphysics and were cautioned against natural philosophy and science, as these subjects were deemed overly intellectual and had the potential to corrupt and corrode women's ideas about proper feminine behaviours. The relatively unfettered access to large amounts of novels heightened the fears over their potentially corrupting influences. Furthermore, some saw women's increased access to a large range of intellectually challenging works, including genres that were seen as inappropriate for their gender, allowed women to encroached on what was seen as traditionally male areas of knowledge, which challenged traditional feminine ideals and disrupted socio-cultural structures. Despite the warnings and fears of moralists such as Mangin, the popularity of circulating libraries persisted throughout the Atlantic world, and they continued to be used by British, American, and Jamaican

women alike to simultaneously achieve, disrupt, and debate ideal feminine traits, such as

sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion
The Book Trade, Coffee Houses, Circulating Libraries, & the Formation of Atlantic Gender

In the second half of the eighteenth century, British print dominated the Atlantic world. Many colonies such as America and Jamaica depended on British exports to supplement the smaller domestic print industries and to meet the growing desire the emerging middle classes had for literature. However, beyond answering consumer needs, the movement and consumption of British print throughout the Atlantic world also had widespread social and cultural implications. The British Atlantic was a large and highly diverse place, filled with peoples from unique backgrounds, traditions, and cultures. Yet despite the differences, there can be found a relatively cohesive understanding of the ideal forms of masculinity and femininity. This unanimity was achieved in part by the Atlantic-wide consumption of British print. As it travelled across the ocean and into the colonies, this print brought with it British cultural understanding, including notions of gender. Although local gender roles and identities were sometimes at odds with those of the mother country, British, American, and Jamaican men and women still shared several core gender values, including sociability, politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

The diverse and sometimes rebellious nature of the Atlantic world often meant that British authority was threatened. In many ways, the dominance of British print within the colonies was a means of maintaining influence and control. However, as much as this imported print was a tool of indoctrination, many colonists welcomed the cultural knowledge they found within imported British literature, as it allowed those who originated from Britain to maintain a connection to their mother country, while for many non-British born colonists, including Africans, mulattos, and creoles, it let them claim a British identity and the rights associated with that title.

To declare that the movement and consumption of British print created a perfect replica of British gender norms within the colonies would be incorrect. Although many colonists saw themselves as British and actively cultivated that identity, British-American and British-Jamaican masculinity and femininity were never exactly the same as those of the metropole. This idea was reflected upon by the twentieth century Trinidadian writer C.L.R. James, who saw himself as British, "not merely in historical facts, but in the instinctive responses," but declared to have felt "transplanted" like "a hot-house flower" when in London.[368] This statement was as true in the eighteenth century as it was in the twentieth. America and Jamaica both had unique societies, highly influenced by the different cultures of the peoples who lived within them. As British ideals entered the colonies, they collided head on with local customs and mixed with native practices and traditions to create something new and unique. As a result, some colonists, particularly Jamaicans were often looked down upon by the British and were seen as failing to meet the standards of proper Britishness. For example, while the introduction of sensibility altered the British understanding of the treatment of slaves, it clashed with the Jamaican understanding of slavery.

Despite local differences, middle class colonists shared many core character values with those in the British metropole. These were sometimes practiced differently and took altered forms, but when fostered through literary practices, they shared many similarities. Politeness has come to dominate the discussion about eighteenth century society. Believed to be a set of social rules, politeness set the standards of sociability and made social gatherings more predictable. Other traits, such as sensibility and cosmopolitanism, were closely associated with sociability.

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[368] Antoinette Burton, "Rules of Thumb: British history and 'imperial culture' in nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 4 (1994): 490, http://doi.org/10.1080.096120294002000064.

Next to politeness, sensibility was one of the most universal and important traits in the eighteenth century. Most commonly associated with women, to claim sensibility was to claim a deeper connection to your emotions and a heightened level of sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy. This quality was believed to improve polite sociable interactions and make them more genuine. However, like most things associated with suitable female behaviour, sensibility was a double-edged sword. As much as it was encouraged and even coveted, in excess, had the potential to prove dangerous and harmful to a person's respectability, civility, and ability to take part in polite society. Due to their perceived gentleness, delicacy, and fragility, women were believed to naturally embody sensibility, and they had the responsibility to improve men's manners and politeness, which were corrupted by their life and duties within the public sphere. For men, the acquisition of sociability and politeness was believed to help them succeed in their professional lives and career. However, too much interaction with women was believed to make men effeminate. Therefore sociability between men in spaces like the male-oriented coffee house was particularly important.

Finally, cosmopolitans were individuals who had a keen interest in the world around them and believed themselves to be citizens of a global humanity. Traditionally, cosmopolitanism has been associated with men, yet women were not entirely parochial or ignorant of the world around them. Like men, many had business interests overseas and participated in the public sphere as traders, merchants, shop owners, and slave owners. Men and women's cosmopolitanism took many forms and was fostered and displayed in a variety of ways. Some travelled the empire, while others nurtured their cosmopolitanism through the consumption of foreign goods such as coffee. Cosmopolites also developed and displayed their identity by collecting and exhibiting natural and man-made objects, or through participating in overseas trade and business. Reading

was another key means of developing cosmopolitanism and was a way for both genders to develop this characteristic.

Coffee houses and circulating libraries are a non-traditional comparison and have generally been seen as the products of different centuries and different genders. While they may seem incomparable, this study has shown that they not only operated simultaneously but also shared similarities. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, both were literary footholds within the colonies that aided in meeting the demand middle class colonists had for British text. As spaces and centres where gender identities were formed and expressed through literary practices, they are useful frameworks for studying the formation of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, much like the print they housed, coffee houses and circulating libraries themselves helped to transmit a sense of Britishness across the Atlantic and throughout the colonies. Having originated in Britain, these establishments then travelled to the Americas. This pattern of movement significantly helped to define the operation and purpose of colonial coffee houses and circulating libraries, as they were styled after the original British institutions, and were recognizable across the Atlantic world in form and function, and British men and women who travelled the empire used them as familiar cultural touchstones, which let them maintain their British gender identities.

The sociable status of coffee houses has remained undisputed, yet the sociability of circulating libraries remains highly debated. One reason for this is the limited surviving evidence. A wide range of anecdotes, satires, plays, journal entries, letters, travel books, and social commentaries reveal that coffee houses were social destinations where men went to mingle, discuss, read, and display manly traits. Coffee houses also had a unique form of masculine sociability that evolved through the practice of second-hand book auctions. These sales promoted

what can be referred to as economic sociability as they allowed men to compete and bid against each other in the purchasing of books, and in the process, display their financial status, taste, learning, intellect, and ultimately their cosmopolitan identity. However, the surviving primary source material for circulating libraries is less revealing. Catalogues, sketches, diary entries, and newspaper advertisements begin to provide some indication of how these institutions worked, and how subscribers used them, but in the end, these materials often raise more questions than they answer.

The uncertainty surrounding the operation of these institutions has allowed historians to question their socio-cultural significance. Although most historians believe that these establishments were sociable, Keith Manley has recently questioned this and has declared them to be non-sociable spaces, which operated more like warehouses than open public spaces. Despite the shortfalls of surviving records, and in opposition to Manley's claims, this author believes that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that like coffee houses, circulating libraries were sociable destinations. There is little reason to doubt that these establishments operated the same ways as other fashionable shops. Indeed, the presence of consumable goods such as stationery and haberdashery served as an added incentive to enter the establishment and indicates that circulating libraries promoted the same polite sociable forms of behaviour as shops and shopping. Just as shopping was a daily task and a social activity that many women performed with friends and family, so too was visiting and browsing circulating libraries. Women perused the stacks together, discussed their tastes in reading, and debated the value of certain titles and genres. By doing so, women displayed to their companions their taste in reading, and in turn, their politeness, sensibility, and cosmopolitanism.

Reading aloud was a common social activity for both genders, and the ability to perform it correctly was vital, as it was a powerful indicator of both male and female politeness. In coffee houses, men read newspapers, pamphlets, plays, and a wide selection of other printed material aloud to each other. Similar behaviours can be seen within the circulating library, as reading rooms stocked with newspapers indicate that these establishments were sociable reading spaces for many women, such as the Middletons and Anne Weeton. Although scenes of sociable male reading were confined to coffee houses, the ability to borrow books from circulating libraries and take them back into the home promoted the important and widespread practice of sociable female reading within the domestic realm.

Cosmopolitanism, another important social trait, was deeply entrenched in coffee house culture and masculinity, but although commonly overlooked, it also held a key position in circulating libraries and femininity. The presence of local and international newspapers within both of these institutions allowed men and women to engage with the world around them in the same way, as these periodicals connected people and built awareness of global events and one's position within society and the British Empire. Although women's roles with the public sphere were once overlooked and under-researched, it is now widely recognized that women held various roles within the public realm that often overlapped with men's. Thus, for both men and women with global business interests, newspapers armed them with vital knowledge, which had the potential to protect or advance their businesses. In addition to newspapers, travel, history, natural philosophy, and scientific literature were all consumed by men and women who wished to be cosmopolitan. Jamaican planter Thomas Thistlewood and British author Priscilla Wakefield both read a wide variety of British travel and science, which gave them a similar cosmopolitan outlook. Newspapers and non-fiction were not the only way cosmopolitanism was fostered.

Novels were a more female oriented way of creating this trait. For many middle class women who had limited access to formal education and international travel, novels were a way to build awareness and connections to the world beyond the shores of Britain.

Sensibility was an essential quality, if troublesome in excess. The consumption of novels and romances was one of the key ways to foster sensibility, but the low-brow and vulgar literature that became associated with circulating libraries led critics to fear that these institutions promoted an excess of sensibility, which led women to stray from ideal gender norms. Overly sentimental women failed to make prudent and appropriate marriages or succeed as wives and mothers. Excessive sensibility not only posed a threat to the future of British society but also undermined female cosmopolitanism as women became more interested in the fantasy world of the novel and their own imagination than in the real world around them. As a result, this failure, believed to be ubiquitous across Britain and its Atlantic holdings, threatened the future stability and success of the British Empire. Despite the fear over *belle lettres*, they only made up a part of circulating library stock. History, biography, travel, and natural philosophy were also available and were key genres that contemporaries believed fostered appropriate levels of sensibility. History depicted stories from the past and detailed the successes, failures, and woes of historic peoples and nations, which imparted positive lessons and taught morals and virtues. Travel and biography acted in similar ways, and along with history, offered knowledge of both the wider world and Britain's place within it, and did what novels failed to do.

The prevalence of these genres within circulating libraries meant that although these institutions were believed to be centres of excessive sensibility, in reality, they were also educational centres, which offered many women the opportunity to foster the appropriate levels of sensibility and cosmopolitanism. The consumption of the news had a similar impact on women

as it had on men. The presence of reading rooms and the stock of newspapers within circulating libraries was extremely important and gave women the opportunity to engage with the world around them and to participate in global affairs. For some, newspapers would have been an important part of their livelihoods, especially for those with overseas interests. Therefore, the news of new imported goods, departure notifications for ships, advertisements for slave auctions, notices regarding runaway slaves, and international news and politics all found in Jamaican newspapers were vital for cosmopolitan businesswomen.

Circulating libraries carried a wide selection of intellectual genres that allowed women to foster proper female qualities, but just as novels posed a threat, so too did some of the non-fiction in these establishments. While moralists did not discourage women from consuming works of science and natural philosophy, the intellectual nature of the genre still meant that it had some masculine connotations, and women were advised to consume it carefully. Other genres, like metaphysics and philosophy, were seen as far more threatening. Women were warned to stay away from these works, as they were believed to be too sophisticated for women's mental capacity, and also contained ideas that directly threatened traditional gender roles and societal norms. The diversity of circulating library stock provided women with the opportunity to take control not just of their entertainment but also of their education, freedom that moralists saw as threatening. The ability to select from a large selection of novels heightened moralists' concerns over this genre and the libraries that carried them, while the increased availability and opportunity for women to read non-fiction genres, traditionally seen as the purview of men, was seen as a direct challenge to traditional female traits.

The breadth of this paper has been exceedingly large, and some subjects could only be briefly addressed. However, the extensiveness of this study has opened up many avenues for

future inquiry, and has made important new connections, and has highlighted themes, ideas, and concepts that have previously been overlooked by scholars. For example, the mechanical and technical aspects of the book trade have been well examined. The fact that the same volumes were consumed throughout Britain, America, and Jamaica is well known. The specific business connections between colonial booksellers and those in the metropole, although often elusive and highly complex, have also started to reveal themselves. However, the cultural significance of the movement of books and print has remained relatively unexplored. This study has furthered this limited field and has advanced the historical understanding of the importance and impact of the circulation of print in the British Atlantic.

On an institutional level, the scholarship on British circulating libraries has been stuck in a rut, while in America, and even more so in Jamaica, much more work on these institutions needs to be performed. This is truly an oversight because, as this paper has demonstrated, circulating libraries were active participants in the book trade and made important contributions not just to the movement of books themselves, but the transfer of ideas, knowledge, and cultural understandings, including gender norms. The role race played within coffee houses and circulating libraries also needs to be further examined. Along with slave auctions, the ability to locate Afro-Britons such as Ignatius Sancho in London coffee houses is extremely important, as it begins to reveal a more sophisticated picture of these establishments. The significance of coffee houses as racialized spaces has not been widely recognized by historians and needs to be examined in more depth. This project started the process of demonstrating the importance coffee houses had for many people of colour across the empire, as these spaces allowed them to participate in British culture and cultivate a British identity. In terms of circulating libraries, there is a lack of evidence in regards to Britain, America, and Jamaica about the role race played within

them. Yet, far from being racially exclusive, these libraries would have attracted both white women and many free women of colour, particularly in Jamaica.

This work has also extended the story of the coffee house beyond the early eighteenth century and has offered a useful comparison with circulating libraries; particularly in the ways gender was articulated within the venues. While it has not been able to entirely break away from the traditional narrative that surrounds the circulating library, this work has started to take some new interpretive steps and has begun to shift the angle from which circulating libraries are approached. Some of the most important facets of this research have been the steps taken in building a transnational history of these establishments, reframing them in a new and refreshing way. It has situated both coffee houses and circulating libraries within the context of the book trade and has demonstrated that they were both active in shaping Atlantic culture. Finally, it has started to take some much-needed steps toward providing a more interpretive look at the book trade from a social and cultural perspective, moving beyond the mechanical and technical aspects of the movement of print to start examining the gendered impact print had on male and female readers. The Atlantic was a large and diverse space filled with contradictions, differences, and oppositions. However, as books and print were shipped from the shores of Britain and made their way across the Atlantic Ocean, they helped to build cultural networks, connect people of different nationalities, races, and genders across time and space, and helped to unify their identities.

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