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## ***BAUBLES AND BOOKS: LONDON & THE CONSUMPTION OF GOODS IN CLASSIC MODERNITY***

**Keywords:** *consumerism; leisure; luxury; Classic Modernity; urban sociability; public-private.*

**Abstract:** *Part of the “urban revolution” underlying the long and complex process called modernity, our contemporaneous consumption-of-goods type of society saw the foreshadowing of its success in Classic Modernity, aka the Enlightenment. That was a time when the public sphere emerged as a public of private subjects, pre-eminently in big cities, where sociability became the saving grace of urban and urbane protocols subsumed to the catchy concept of civility. It was the time of definitory spatial (re)negotiations like the public-private one in institutions like the coffee-house, the literary society or the circulating library.*

*Starting from the reading of the 1781 drawing of a Lady coming from a Circulating Library and the 1782 one of Beauty in Search of Knowledge, this paper proposes an analysis of baubles and books, of fashionable and intellectual manoeuvres intertwined in the space of the capital city – London, in this particular case. It assesses the circulating library as a utopia or paradise on earth for the expanding female readership legitimating themselves by books, as well as a eutopia, a microcosm of fashionable items capable of promoting social repute. After interpreting another few illustrations of the time, it focuses on the 1776 *Vis a Vis Bisected*, or the *Ladies Coop*, in which a closed fan and an open billet-doux hold the same symbolic dialogue of baubles and books. The amorous imbroglios implied in these visual representations confirm the early century’s *Rape of the Lock*, in which Pope provides a paradigmatic definition of the prosperous capital as the centre of domestic consumption of colonial goods.*

Credited as the birthplace of consumer society, the London of the Long Eighteenth Century, or else, Classic Modernity, has come down to us as the very hub of modern life, a place which, if one was tired of, one was tired of life, in Dr. Johnson’s celebrated words. The sea change that British society saw between the Restoration and the end of the Regency was a complex set of forms of commercialization, from the economy and politics to society as such. A “consumer boom” occurred which reached astounding proportions in the last third of the century and a genuine “revolution in consumption” (McKendrick 9) eventually crowned the whole process. The population was exposed to waves rippling off from London, from shops and lifestyle to fashions and pastimes, and before long the proudly rising imperial capital “served as the shop window for the whole country” (McKendrick 21). Mimicked all over the place in the kingdom, London settled down as the point zero of modern

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activities to be emulated outside its pale, with the one exception in which it emulated a chic capital of fashion called Paris.

The lower and middling classes made their own contribution to the unprecedented rise in consumption ranging from everyday goods and appliances to varying degrees of affordable leisure and even luxury. The Classic Modernity's consumer revolution entailed cultural and intellectual transformations measurable in terms of "the Veblen effect of emulative spending" (McKendrick 15). In 1899 Thorstein Veblen defended his theory of conspicuous consumption and the irreversible assertion of the leisure class, with consumerism as the result of labour division and social stratification more strongly felt in modern times than ever before. In Veblenian terms, luxury became a lexeme of more or less current use and "the growth of luxury consumption went hand-in-hand with the refinement of taste, the development of the arts and sciences, and the expansion of happiness" (Kwass 89). In the late 1700s the English welcomed "an increased flow of blankets, linens, pillows, rugs, curtains and cloths; along with pewter, glass and china; and brass, copper and ironware into their homes" (McKendrick 26). Most significantly, the consumption of commodities in mass demand increased twice. We would be hard put today to assess the process other than as one of amazing quantities of printed fabrics, worsted stuff, soap, candles, tobacco, beer, spirits, and gradually tea being purchased and enjoyed from one end to the other of the social ladder.

In 1786 William Wright published *The Complete Tradesman, or a Guide in the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade..., To Which is added An Account of the British Manufactures, Products, Exports, Imports, &c.* It came out in London and served as a set of instructions for all the sectors of life, as well as a kind of encyclopaedia of the natural world. Significantly all that featured as *trade*, while its "Several Parts and Progressions" were the pride and obligation of the "Complete Tradesman". The *Introduction* made it quite explicit:

In England, and especially in London, all sorts of warehouse-keepers, shop-keepers, whether wholesale-dealers, or retailers of goods, are called tradesmen; such are, our grocers, mercers, linen and woollen-drapers, Blackwell-hall factors, tobacconists, haberdashers, glovers, hosiers, milliners, booksellers, stationers, and all other shop-keepers, who do not actually manufacture the goods they sell. Others, who keep shops, and manufacture the goods they sell, are distinguished by the name of *handicrafts*; such as smiths, shoe-makers, founders, joiners, carpenters, carvers, turners, and the like. Those, who only make goods for others to sell, are called manufacturers, artists, &c. (ix-x)

Eighteenth-century London was "a highly commodified society" (Appadurai 14), in which possessions of enviable worth were a distinct mark of respectability. Ownership and display of luxurious possessions played a paramount role in status-enhancement, especially among ladies of quality. Not only were fashionable clothing, footwear and jewelry commercialized in the proper sense of the word. They were also symbolically consumed in elitist circles, their wearers acting as symbolic objects of admiration. Symmetrically, objects of conspicuous value, especially specie, but also canes, fashionable hats or coats were subjects of literature, as in the *it-narratives* which inundated the book market. In most of these cases, the said objects were set to

act as metonyms of their masters or of their masters' profession. A black coat, for instance, stood for the legal or theological profession and its relation of events and situations in which it happened to find itself could be disquieting at times. A pincushion could be used as a metaphor for persons of minuscule public importance such as young ladies, while it could serve as a moral urge to rectitude and hard work. The best known of these it-narratives, Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal; Or, the Adventures of a Guinea*, boasted "views of several striking scenes" accompanied by "curious and interesting anecdotes of the most noted persons in every rank of life", as we read in its subtitle. It promised loads of impressions, given the "hands it passed through in America, England, Holland, Germany and Portugal", the copious subtitle went on. Chrysal embodied *gold* not just onomastically, but rather through its/his capacity to exceed all kinds of borders, from national and continental ones to strictly identity limits in his relation to human characters. One "Mr Truelove" featured as the author of the 1780 text entitled *The Adventures of a Silver Penny including Many Secret Anecdotes of Little Misses and Masters Both Good and Naughty*. It proved unassuming and neutral enough in telling stories about little masters and misses, but it was quite clear about the worth of "the information and instruction, as well as entertainment and amusement it contain[ed]", for which, "perhaps [it could] be considered as worth its weight in gold" (2).

Customers held a special relationship with the objects of their necessity or/and desire owing to the rapid multiplication of attractive public signs, as well as of printed advertisements. The latter were originally called *corantos*, a term sending the buyer to the sense of *current* need and therefore satisfaction. Their *newness* was an indication of how pressing the fashions had become. There were print-shops in the big city putting at the passers-by's disposal real galleries of characters, situations and happenings and stirring their curiosity to spy on the latest events and get to the breaking news of the day. Print-shop windows were impressive displays of images which those interested could purchase to keep themselves updated or to pry into secrets of the public sphere, which Habermas defines as "a public of private subjects" (Cowan 345). The spectators to this free window display included all walks of life down to the commercial and working-classes, the ad hoc audience of "a subset of Georgian street theatre and part of the material culture of urban politics" (Nicholson, "Consumers and Spectators" 17). In *Spectators at a Print-Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard* (Fig. 1) we see a lady using her fan as a pointer to make a fashionable gentleman aware of a print showing a couple. He, as well as another gentleman of quality, are equipped with a cane each, their own mark of distinction. A pet dog by the lady confirms her own chic status. And there were *thing-poems* deploying a rhetoric very much "indebted to eighteenth-century advertisements, because such ads present things as the justification for writing" (Benedict 199). These and similar "socialized things" placed occasional verse in a new light, "the durability of objects throw[ing] human vulnerability into relief", and offering instead a "parade of commodities capturing the center of culture" (Benedict 205).



Fig. 1 *Spectators* from her pensive brow that she has called out a romance or novel, and that she is looking forward to enjoying it in solitude at home, far from the madding crowd, indeed.

*Beauty in Search of Knowledge* introduces almost the same female figure one year on. This is better delineated, and the lady's slim waist, tightly corseted in her white bodice, contrasts with her black cape and black hat. An elaborate hairdo can be partially glimpsed under the broad brim of her hat, right above her neck. She wears a white skirt coming down in light narrow folds and – relevantly – a light blue umbrella suiting the ornamental line at the end of her skirt, where flounces come down to her ankles. Her delicate feet walk in fine red shoes. From the 1700s umbrellas gradually lost their pragmatic function of keeping the rain out, so preserving their bearers comfortably dry. Instead, they gradually grew into a symbol of cultural identity, a kind of female equivalent of the male cane or/and sword. The lady's skirt is draped at the rear, which is another suggestion of style. She holds a duodecimo in her gloved left hand, a minuscule object, compared to her umbrella, and certainly an indication that she is fond of frivolous readings. "Beauty" walks out of the female *eutopia* which will be revived at home, as she pores over the love affair couched between the covers of the freshly borrowed sentimental novel. *Baubles and books* is what she seems to treasure in her private life and in no way could she conceive of her existence without these sentimental additions.

The "marriage à la mode" of baubles and books had assuredly been declared as the unbreakable rule of fashionable conduct in Paris, the paradigmatic city of Classic Modernity elegance. We have a telling sample of this in an illustration by Gravelot entitled *The Unlucky Glance*. In a grand city gallery a young aristocrat stands in the forefront, facing the long gallery whose end can only be guessed in the far distance. Things are certainly built on a large scale in Paris, whatever the institution. As he leans against a bookseller's booth and points at two stylish young ladies

accompanied by a gentleman and a pet down the aisle, the implied viewer is ignorant of our look, as we ignore his own. But we can presume that he is in genuine admiration of the female scene to which we are direct spectators. The ladies are out to shop at a lace-seller's and have alighted on the shop threshold fully equipped for the fashionable occasion: to their sophisticated sartorial appearance their coiffures stand in perfect correspondence, with catchy curls, expensive hairdresses and costly gems playing their social part each. Fans, parasols and canes add to the aristocratic identity to be ostentatiously exposed. Most importantly, the ladies are accompanied by a *garde de corps*, as it were, in the person of a gentleman responsible for their visit in the big city's maze of commercial wonders. This illustration is the visual counterpart of a scene from Corneille's *La Galerie du Palais* and serves as an exemplification of how the public sphere can host the cultivation of the mind and of the body at ease, despite a little wise look of admiration. The scene is built on the same shop window effect, with the ladies as objects of desire, just as the ladies look for laces as objects of pleasure.

Already in the 1740s, when Henry Fielding wrote his *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, there started emerging circulating libraries in London. Besides the undeniable cultural and intellectual impact they had on their readership and, in broad lines, on the whole of British society, they were devised as businesses making profit from lending books for a certain fee. The Reverend Samuel Fancourt opened the first such library in Fleet Street, in 1743. He set a subscription of a guinea per annum and a scheme for "The Gentlemen and Ladies' Growing Library", by which each proprietor was entitled to borrowing one volume and one pamphlet at a time. The library collection was in proportion of one third to a half of the books, pamphlets, theology, and ecclesiastical history, and about one tenth "light" literature. Most circulating libraries gradually reduced their fees and as these sums went down, there was mutual benefit: libraries saw their readership increasing in real numbers, while their visitors developed a more or less habitual borrowing pattern and expanded the range of reading categories. Towards the late century many lower classes and certainly female readers among them were constant customers and "came to be viewed as a new consumer group" (Sama 392). Their collections grew and expanded according to public demand, which unavoidably resulted in considerable collections of novels. In their own way, circulating libraries did justice to Classic Modernity's popular literature, with a class and gender element playing a crucial role in their assertion as public institutions. The reading woman, "became not only historical reality but also sign, with a bewildering range of significations", the period's definitory debates, namely about "authority, gender and sexuality, the economics and morality of consumption, national identity and stability, class and revolution", using "the sign of the reading woman: and she might function as either positive or negative term" (Pearson 1). Pleasure and peril formed a *sui generis* binomial in the act of reading by, with and for a female audience and their matching was not without long-term cultural and social consequences.

Wright's Library, for instance, was a point of reference in mid-century London. Lofty and outstanding in physical terms, this particular library bore an air of matchless dignity in a symbolic manner, too. Wright's Library could not fail to impress its customers with its Neoclassic style building displaying an amazingly large



indoor space. The whole interior was rhythmically marked by elegant columns. They stood between walls lined up with books shelved in sensible order: the folios on top (as “serious” literature, such as sermons and conduct books), down to less pretentious titles in quarto and octavo size (treatises and books of instruction) and on to the bottom shelf stuck with duodecimo volumes (mostly romances and novels). To the material hierarchy of the library make corresponded a spiritual scale in accord with the moral requirements of the age. Wright’s was a space of intellectual cultivation that the *habitués* were ready to pay for, but it preserved the domestic air of pre-circulating library times. It was a clever public-private space compromise kept smoothly isolated from big city fret and worries. The *sui generis* combination of serious and sentimental (so, presumably, unserious) matters transpires from so many prints of the time. It does in a scene in which a gentlemanly doctor looks steeped in feeling as he feels a delicate young lady’s pulse, in his professional ambience. It does in a library scene in which the male owner is up a ladder to reach for the title meant to please the taste of a female reader. They are as absorbed in their business and seem unaware of us, viewers.



Fig. 2 *Temple of the Muses*, 1880s

It also does in depictions of the sumptuous Temple of the Muses (Fig. 2), a fabulous book shop in the late 1770s into the 1790s, “where above Half a Million volumes are constantly on Sale”, as we read in the caption introducing Lackington, Allen & Co., Finsbury Square, London. In the 1800s it became visibly more opulent and sizable, though at its very opening it was so large

that “a mail-coach and four were driven round the counters” (Vogrinčić 19). Massive and lavishly decorated, yet keeping the balance of rationality untilted, the Temple of the Muses held pride of place in the British capital. Legend had it in the 1790s that when James Lackington, the owner, arrived in London with his wife, he decided to skip dinner that night and instead purchase an edition of Young’s *Night Thoughts* as appropriate food for the mind. Such were his entrepreneurial skills that Lackington gradually made big money out of publishing writers’ manuscripts, buying whole libraries, and selling remaindered books at bargain prices. He added conspicuous glamour to London’s cultural visage. It became a matter of London pride to talk about the celebration of reading by Lackington. In step with the social life of the place and according to sociability and conviviality rules, most of them convened upon as a matter of choice taste, the unprecedented size and quality of the reading public was really spectacular. “All ranks and degrees now read”, maintained Lackington, “the poorer sort of farmers, and even the poor country people in general”, so that “you may see *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, and other entertaining books, stuck up on their bacon-rags” (Altick 39).

But at no time was London more extravagantly artificial and estranged from its pragmatic nature than in its Macaroni years, the 1770s. The term features in the

literature as a badge of cultural identity taking on board the fashionable dress and hair styles advertised by Macaroni aristocrats, both male and female. The common denominator of the overall unnatural appearance in the public sphere was a contented acceptance of outlandishness. The Macaronis were all for affected and effeminate manners beyond any boundary of common sense. They advertised their extravagance in their eating habits, drinking crazes and an irrepressible passion for gambling. Despite this, Macaroni fashion would not admit that it stepped in the track of Parisian *coquetterie*. And yet, it did and was proud of it. *Boarding School Education, or the Frenchified Young Lady* (1771) surprises a must-do step in one's fashionable education. Here is the dancing master topos, as in Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, with two ladies initiated by the hired specialist. The ladies are different ages: the younger one is pleasantly slim and shows a delicate waist put in telling contrast with her side hoop skirt; the older one appears exhausted in her attempt to move as glibly in the same kind of clothing. Both wear huge hair dresses with elaborate locks mounting to the top of those awesome meshes. Here is entertainment with multiple mirror(ing) reflection, a shop window effect in its own right: a crystal mirror in the middle of the back wall, mythical scenes on either side, and a couple of dancing pets aping the main characters.

A number of versions of *The Vis a Vis Bisected, or the Ladies Coop* circulated in London in 1776, the one more exciting than the other. The image showed late eighteenth century *highlife* habits in a longitudinal section of a coach and four. The said vehicle was there on display, as in an "anatomy lesson" identitary disclosure, carrying two *chic* ladies either out of London, to some fashionable spa, or across the city to some public place like the theatre or the opera. Published by Mary Darly and available at her caricature shop in the Strand, it was a typical satirical print of the latest craze in *coiffures* displayed as shop window exhibits. The two ladies are seated face to face visibly burdened by the enormous amounts of natural human and horse hair "improved" with false meshes and flour-based sticking material, with wire baskets underneath, huge buns at the back of their heads and rows of curling locks at the sides, plus, on top, floral and vegetable decorations and multicoloured feathers. The lady to our left holds a closed fan in her right or, possibly, both her hands, the one sitting opposite has a duodecimo book or book leaf in her clasped hands. Both ladies seem

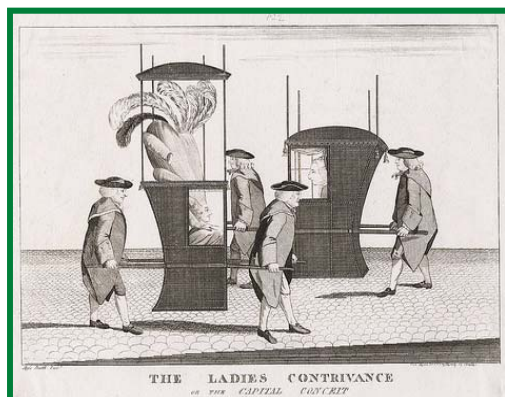


Fig. 3 *The Ladies Contrivance, or the Capital Conceit*, publ. by MDarly, 1777

inseparable from these tokens of fashionable delicacy. They are beauties of the frivolous microspaces making up the public sphere of a thriving Classic Modernity capital city. The, very likely, *billet doux* in the second lady's hands points to the sentimental purpose of this voyage, whose "anatomic di-/bi-section" serves as reading material to the viewer. Here is the *shop window effect* in a display of insane fashion at its apogee, a case asking for a serious cure.

Not that this was an easy disease to treat. *The Ladies Contrivance*,

or the *Capital Conceit* (Fig. 3) speaks to the contrary. Its subtitle puns on *caput, -itis* ‘head’ in order to indicate *The Capital Conceit* as the overall metaphor of public spectacle. It places the male head in a discreet, almost invisible corner of a sedan chair advancing in opposite direction from where the lady is transported. Either of these aristocratic travellers is carried by two servants and their cross encounter is cross in more than the literal sense. The lady’s vehicle has a heightened top to let her huge feathered hairdress jut out and raise the vertical of her seated position to double its expected size. She reigns supreme over the scene.

Male sense serving female sensibility is what we read between the lines of *The Circulating Library* (1801), in which two ladies leave the public area, content with their choice of duodecimo and octavodecimo books, leaving behind a third lady still in the act of choosing her favourite reads. A professional-looking librarian, a quill laid on top his right ear, keeps an inquisitive stare on his visage, seemingly ready to measure the degree of satisfaction on his customers’ faces. The caption may come in handy: she wants Mr. Page the librarian’s opinion as to what she should borrow, from *The Man of Feeling to Frederick or the Libertine*. Her comment on the “unguarded moments” which we all live, when in love, hints at the Werther-effect, while her dislike of moralizing tales speaks for itself.

London’s public sphere did send signs of a symbolic dialogue of sense and sensibility from the late 1770s, by which time the *Weltanschauung* had started moving along what we now call Romantic lines. Lackington’s delight in Young’s nocturnal meditations, the novels of sentiment and sensibility circulating on the book market, and definitely the more appealing fashion, both in ladies and gentlemen, were as many signs of the time. They were the times when *The History of Women, From the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* came out signed by William Alexander. The year was 1779. Alexander made clear his understanding of the categorical divide: “Nature has given to men strength, and to women beauty” (82). He also saw the masculine/Western conception of “necessity” as the root of making clothes vs. the feminine/non-Western notion of “shame”. At the junction of the two he identified the love of “ornament” and “variety” as a human thing throughout the world (81). As he pinpointed the feminine delicacy of “clothing ourselves with elegance . . . [as] perpetually whet[ting] the invention, and distinguish[ing] the man of taste from the mere imitator” (83), he drew the sartorial boundary round nature and culture as “one of those improvements which strongly distinguish us from the brutes” (83). Nature stood to nurture in proportion of genuine vs. counterfeited identity.

He was keen on showing the use and charm of cosmetics, which ladies already in the classic Greek cities used on a daily basis, an indication of how important they too found the protocol of public show as “mak[ing] a face to meet the faces that you meet”. To this end, they used “a paint which they call Sulama, which imparts a beautiful redness to the cheeks, and gives the skin a remarkable gloss” (103). As a point of linguistic interest, the lexeme *suliman* entered into Romanian from the Turkish *sülümen* ‘arsenic’ < Lat. *sublimatum*, cf. Ngr. *σουλιμας* ‘make up.’ Cosmetics and cosmeticized faces were regarded as signs of civility and urbanity in the face of barbarity. The morning toilette ritual in classic Athens, like, indeed, the morning bath in Rome, with female servants attending on their mistresses, was everyday business. Slaves in charge of the ladies’ hair were considered central in the beautification



process. “Coquettes . . . often blamed the slaves who dressed them for their [possible] want of success”, (104) and “[each maid] had her proper task assigned her: one had the combing, curling, and dressing the hair; another managed the perfumes; a third disposed of the jewels, as fancy or fashion directed; a fourth laid on the paint and cosmetics” (104).

The Roman ladies deserve special attention, we discover as we read on about their “comb of box and ivory for the hair, the curls of which they fastened with gold silver pins; besides these, they commonly stuck into their hair, pins set with pearl, and plaited it with chains and rings of gold, or with purple or white ribbons, shining with jewels and precious stones . . .” (105). And, to drive the case home, the late eighteenth-century English author draws an amazing parallel between this ancient Roman and his contemporaneous fashion: “The modern gigantic head-dress of the present time, with all its combs, and curls, is not an invention of this age” (105). Rather, like the former it “consists of so much wool, false hair, pomatum, paste, quilts, combs, pins, curls, ribbons, laces, and other materials, that the head of a modern lady in full dress is, when standing, commonly something more than one-third of the length of her whole figure” (139). And he rightly concludes, with reference to his age, that, “in justice to the sex, . . . such preposterous modes of dressing are not peculiar to them alone; the men have not been less rapid in their changes, nor have these changes been proofs of a more elegant taste, or a more solid judgment” (139). We could hardly think of a more adequate visual correspondent than *The Preposterous Head Dress, or the Featherd Lady*, published in 1776, by Mary Darly, the famous London caricature-shop owner.

Just a few years before this *History of Women* was published in London, something extraordinary occurred. The year was 1774 and it saw big numbers of Americans who, after decades of British-style life, suddenly turned to daring actions that led almost inevitably to independence. They had shared the “language of consumption within the familiar material culture” (Breen 75) of the day and when they embarked upon boycotting British commodities, they dealt a blow at the metropole’s symbolic presence across the Atlantic. Derogatorily known as “baubles of Britain” (88), these items of current use had helped in the overall Anglicization of the American market. There was now the danger of this achievement crumbling, and in a subtle way it did. There occurred a complex symbolic redefinition, during which time consumer goods became less Anglo-oriented. Back in the old country, the capital city increased in prosperity and assimilated colonial identity/ies in more than one way. In 1769 Captain Cook spent a few months on the island of Tahiti, with which he maintained ties for some time. In 1773 a local called Mai, or Omai, by mistaken English pronunciation, embarked on board HMS *Adventure*, which had touched the island as part of Cook’s second voyage of discovery in the Pacific. Omai arrived in London in 1774, the very time American colonies were moving away from British rule. Alexander’s *History of Women* mentions “Otaiteite [where] the people wrap themselves in pieces of cloth of a length almost incredible” (91).

A number of things combined in sending the message of a proud colonial capital called London from its Augustan through to its Georgian times. These could be event-gearred changes in its political scaffolding, the deep-going shifts in daily lifestyle and, in a less apparent but doubtless definitory way, the taste cultivated at individual or/and collective level. Reloaded in late-century illustrations, Alexander

Pope's *Rape of the Lock* held a telling relation to Thomas Gainsborough's *Duchess of Beaufort* and both to *The Preposterous Head Dress*. By sheer coincidence, at least onomastically, Gainsborough's aristocratic lady partakes of *beauty* in a way in which Pope's *belle* does, and this is by public display of charm – the shop window effect. Their common denominator is assuredly their sophisticated hairdo each. A glimpse back at Alexander's *History of Women* calls our attention to the fact that no men were admitted to the female toilette ritual in ancient Rome, and initially in his contemporaneous London, but Paris did make a show of this and gradually London took after the French capital. We see this in Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*, IV: *The Countess's Levee*. All these instances betray the French influence on the mores and manners of London highlife.

In *The Rape* we read that “Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,/ Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billets-doux” (I, 137-138). The versatility of the metre and its phonetic make have incessantly been praised, and yet it is never too much to ponder over them. Let us, in our turn, insist on the [p]-[b] interplay of plosives that single out word and thing thus exemplified. We are faced with *samples* taken out of a set for consumption (Old Fr. *essemble* < L. *exemplum* < *exi* – *emere* ‘to take out, to buy’). What would have sat on a *belle*'s toilette table would most likely have been cosmetic and hairdo trinkets or ornaments generically called *baubles* < Old Fr. *baubel* child's toy, trinket,’ probably a reduplication of *bel* < Lat. *bellus* ‘pretty.’ Associated with *bibelots*, *baubels* pointed to frivolity and the reduplicative *beubelet*, very likely from *beau*, indicates the other possible etymology, namely a variation of *bimbelot*. Pope's versatility could not stop at the phonetic level, which he nonetheless exploited at the maximum. By placing *Bibles* between cosmetic items (*Puffs, Powders, Patches*) and love missives (*Billets-doux*) he meant to at once soften the religious register and to give it a secular tinge: *Bibles*, like *Billets-doux*, are *baubles* for the embellishment of the *belle*, in no way different from *Beauty in Search of Knowledge*. There is also the entertaining interpretation of duodecimo *Bibles* and *Billets-doux* serving as hairdo items, their tiny leaves (like the tiny books, τὰ βιβλία making up *The Bible*) being used as paper curls.

On the tercentenary of Pope's birth, Geoffrey Carnall put it in exciting terms in a study entitled “Belinda's Bibles”. He saw in her “a priestess of the religion of vanity”, so he found it appropriate that she should “have the scripture of the true religion as some mere miscellaneous adjunct among the puffs and powders, patches and billets-doux” (Nicholson, *Alexander Pope* 131). And he went on to suggest that “[w]hether Pope was thinking of Belinda with bijou Bibles, or using Bibles as waste paper, he engaged in a satire peculiarly appropriate to the early years of the eighteenth century” (Nicholson, *Alexander Pope* 135), and that “an active Rural Dean in any period might be expected to feel a pang at the sight of the Bibles on Belinda's dressing-table” (Nicholson, *Alexander Pope* 136). To which we will add that *bijou Bibles*, or else tiny formats (sextodecimo size) had been in circulation since the mid-1500s. In the 1700s they were much preferred by ladies of quality and libertines such as Bluestockings, for sliding easily into silk bags, ruffled cuffs of deep dress cuts, nicely concealed under scented nosegays. The name speaks for itself: a *bijou Bible* is jewel and scripture, cosmetic and cosmic, bauble and book.

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