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The Conduct of the Eyes: Feminine Discourses of Vision in Eighteenth-Century England

Though [Mr. B] told Mrs. Jervis he had an eye upon me, in his mother's life-time; and that he intended to let me know as much by-the-by.

—Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740)

Let neither your Eyes nor your Thoughts wander.

—Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1744)

Late-seventeenth-century England was dominated by two seemingly unrelated cultural controversies. The first concerned the antitheatrical debate over the morality of the London stage waged most famously between the English divine, Jeremy Collier, author of the notorious *Short View of the English Stage* (1698), and several well-known Restoration playwrights, including William Congreve, William Wycherly, and John Dryden, among others.¹ The second challenged the materialist implications of John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) in which the philosopher's critics, including most prominently the Bishop of Worcester, John Toland, John Sergeant, Henry Lee, and John Broughton, maintained that if the tenets of Lockean empiricism were accepted then belief in an invisible, sensibly unknowable God would no longer be possible.² Although these controversies would seem at first glance to have little to do with one another, each was deeply implicated in questions about the cultural and epistemological authority of the senses to construct reality and influence human behavior.³ Alone among her contemporaries,

though invisibly to contemporary scholars, English dramatist Catherine Trotter engaged in both controversies—late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century England’s version of the culture wars—by bolstering Collier in support of reforming the stage and by defending Locke against his numerous philosophical detractors.

Beginning in 1698, with the production of *The Fatal Friendship* (performed two months after the appearance of Collier’s *Short View*) and continuing throughout her dramatic career, Trotter responded to the theatrical debate in the lengthy dedications and prefaces to her plays. In these texts she argued in favor of reforming the stage by following the criteria for moral drama laid out by Collier. One need only read the prefaces and dedications to reflect on the insistently moralistic themes of Trotter’s plays and their representation of strong, heroic women antithetical to the female characters of questionable morality that Collier lambasts in the *Short View* and finally to consider that Trotter’s friends, Wycherly and Congreve, were among the most aggrieved figures in Collier’s abundant criticism of the stage, to recognize that her dramatic works are clearly in dialogue—and, somewhat surprisingly given her amicable relationship to Wycherly and Congreve, largely in sympathy—with Collier’s attacks.⁴ Yet Trotter apparently played on both sides of the antitheatrical debate, preserving throughout her career as a dramatist alliances with the leading figures in English theater, in many cases forging friendships with the very men whom Collier excoriates in the *Short View* and elsewhere;⁵ and yet as her dramatic works make clear, Trotter’s tragedies are unmistakably Collieresque in their emphasis on representing public and private virtue for English playgoers.

Trotter even more obviously placed herself in Locke’s camp than Collier’s by publishing *A Defence of Mr. Lock’s Essay of Human Understanding* (1702), one of only two book-length apologies to appear in the philosopher’s lifetime. Trotter’s first biographer, Thomas Birch, called attention to her bravery in the face of potential public censure in his observation that the *Defence* was “perhaps the only piece that had appeared in favour of [the] *Essay*, except one by Mr. *Samuel Bold*, Rector of *Steeple* in *Dorsetshire*, in 1699.”⁶ Unfortunately, Trotter scholars have remained content for three centuries to focus on her dramatic works at the expense of the *Defence*, neglecting to take it up in any serious or systematic way, never drawing a meaningful connection between it and her plays. To their mutual detriment, Trotter’s drama and philosophy have been taken up as separate and discrete features of a long career in letters that began in the 1690s when an unmarried and youthful Trotter was making her living by writing for the London stage and ended with her death in 1749 at a moment when the married and elderly Catherine Cockburn, in anticipation of bringing out an edition of her published and unpublished writings, was putting the finishing touches on a body of late work in which she offers mostly theological views to

an audience of largely women readers. Trotter scholarship has gone so far as to relegate the *Defence*, a work highly regarded by Locke himself, to the status of a footnote.⁷

By contrast to previous Trotter scholars, I consider it crucial to weave the hitherto disconnected strands of her oeuvre—the implicit dramatic alliance with Collier and the explicit apology for Locke—into a single critical tapestry. Doing so allows us not only to construct for the first time a critical narrative of Trotter’s writings in the first decade of her public life, but also to make visible the important cultural nexus that Trotter brought together, namely, between female spectatorship of the stage and Lockean empiricism, both of which made their opponents apoplectic because of the identification with female sexual immodesty and drama on the one hand and the embrace of materialist philosophy on the other. Exploring the intersections among female spectatorship of the stage, empiricism, and morality that Trotter’s work points to is instrumental to the argument of this book because it provides us with a meaningful point of departure for tracing the feminized discourses of visual conduct and domestic surveillance that played such an important function in England throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, especially as those discourses manifested themselves in the novel. We can begin to understand the importance of these discourses if we consider more fully Catherine Trotter’s works and their wider relation to English culture.

*Catherine Trotter, Female Spectatorship, and the
Empirical Virtues of the English Stage*

The antitheatrical culture to which Trotter was responding in the late seventeenth century was dominated both popularly and intellectually by the formidable English divine, Jeremy Collier. Collier regarded female spectators to be especially vulnerable to the immoral spectacle of the contemporary English theatre. He believed that women in particular were likely to identify with their “immodest” counterparts, whom, he contended, then overpopulated the stage:

Obscenity in any Company is a rustick uncreditable Talent; but among Women ’tis particularly rude. Such talk would be very affrontive in Conversation, and not endur’d by any Lady of Reputation. Whence then comes it to Pass that those Liberties which disoblige so much in Conversation, should entertain upon the *Stage*? Do the Women leave all the regards to Decency and Conscience behind them when they come to the *Play-House*? Or does the Place transform their Inclinations, and turn their former Aversions into Pleasure? Or were their pretences to Sobriety elsewhere nothing but Hypocrisy and Grimace? Such Suppositions as these are all Satyr and Invective: They are rude Imputations upon the whole Sex. To

treat the Ladys with such stuff is no better than taking their money to abuse them. It supposes their Imagination vitious, and their Memories ill furnish'd: That they are practised in the Language of the Stews, and pleas'd with the Scenes of Brutishness. When at the same time the Customs of Education, and the Laws of Decency, are so very cautious, and reserv'd in regard to Women: I say so very reserv'd, that 'tis almost a Fault for them to Understand they are ill Used. They can't discover their Disgust without disadvantage, nor Blush without disservice to their Modesty. . . . In a word, He that treats the Ladys with such Discourse, must conclude either that they like it, or they do not. To suppose the first, is a gross Reflection upon their Virtue. And as for the latter case, it entertains them with their own Aversion; which is ill Nature, and ill Manners enough in all Conscience. (14–15)

In this passage and elsewhere Collier reveals himself to be anxious about the weakness of female eyes and character to resist emulating the immodest actions of women on the stage. As Jean Marsden has cannily observed, in this section eight of the nine Restoration characters that Collier invokes to illustrate the gravity of his argument are female.⁸ Throughout the section entitled “The Immodesty of the English Stage,” Collier remains preoccupied with the threat to English womanhood posed by the theater. Once the witnesses of gross speech and debauchery, Collier implies, are not women more likely than men to imitate the censurable behavior that has taken place before their eyes? That Collier’s critique with regard to the stage’s deleterious effect on women resonated with many of his contemporaries is plain, as Josiah Woodward’s *Some Thoughts concerning the Stage in a Letter to a Lady* (1704) reveals.⁹ Woodward captures the sense of injury that antitheatrical enthusiasts claimed were perpetrated against women who attended the theater. He argues, for instance, that “*Ladies* (at least those who make any Pretensions to Virtue and Goodness) should never be seen at the last of these Places [the playhouse],” especially once they have been made aware of Collier’s *Short View*. Exposed to Collier’s argument, Woodward believes women “should never after be Tempted to appear in a Place where *Lewdness* and *Obscenity* (not to mention other Immoralities) are so great a part of the Entertainment; a Place that is now become the *Common Rendezvouz* of the most Lewd and Dissolute Persons” (4). Woodward proceeds by invoking and inverting the feminized language of childrearing to powerful rhetorical effect by showing how the perverted London stage functions as “the Nursery of all manner of *Wickedness*, where the Seeds of *Atheism* and *Irreligion* are sown, which Weak and Tender Minds too readily cultivate, and from thence are easily led into a *Contempt* of all that’s Serious” (4). At the conclusion of his diatribe, Woodward asserts that it is “every one’s Duty to run from a Place of such Infection, lest they contribute to the spreading of a Disease which may, in time, prove Fatal to the whole Nation” (13). Echoing Collier, Woodward contends that eighteenth-century dramatists glamorize sexual

immorality, implicitly encourage highly impressionable female audiences to emulate the vice-ridden actions of actresses, and thereby poison English society by providing illicit training to otherwise virtuous women.¹⁰

Three decades later we see Collier's and Woodward's fears realized to an extreme in Eliza Haywood's novella, *Fantomina* (1725), in which "[a] Young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit and Spirit" (227) opens the work by attending a play and watching the wanton performance of prostitutes in the pit.¹¹ The convergence of the playhouse and prostitution was no mistake, given that Restoration actresses gained so much unfavorable notoriety when they first took the stage. Indeed, by the early eighteenth century the word *actress* had already become synonymous with prostitution.¹² Haywood's protagonist subsequently conflates the professions of actress and prostitute by masquerading in four distinct roles—Fantomina, a woman of pleasure; Celia, a rustic house servant; Mrs. Bloomer, a widow in mourning; and Incognita, a masked seductress—that allow her to deceive and enjoy prolific sexual relations with a single philanderer, Beauplasir, upon whom her wandering eyes fall at the theater. Predictably, Beauplasir grows tired of each role played by the protagonist; unpredictably, his ennui does not deter her from creating a new character every few weeks to perpetuate physical intimacy with him. The novella can easily be taken up as the unbridled expression of female desire on the part of an insatiable woman who cleverly fashions Beauplasir into her sexual plaything, but had Collier lived to read it he would have considered the work his nightmare come true: female spectatorship in the playhouse leading inexorably to a life of sexual vice.

Trotter's dramatic works, even the early *Agnes de Castro* (1696), which took as its source a novel by Aphra Behn, shows Trotter working to place virtue center stage.¹³ For example, in the dedication to *The Fatal Friendship*, addressed to Princess Anne, Trotter echoes Collier's call for a reformation of the stage when she asserts that the play's "[e]nd is the most noble, to discourage Vice, and recommend a firm unshaken Virtue" (i), a theme substantiated by Mrs. Barry in the epilogue when she announced the purpose of the play: "Vice to discourage, Virtue recommend." The anonymously composed complimentary verses to *The Fatal Friendship* assert Trotter's unbesmirched reputation and her unique qualifications to provide especially female spectators with characters well worthy of emulation: "Chaste are your Thoughts, and your Expression clear . . . /Your Virgin Voice offends no Virgin Ear." Trotter's virtuous persona apparently was not manufactured in response to the antitheatrical controversy. Three years earlier, in the epilogue to *Agnes de Castro*, the well-known actress, Mrs. Verbruggen (whose husband played Alvaro in the play), anticipated Trotter's later claims to dramatic and personal virtue and, incidentally, confirmed Collier in his criticism of the debauched Restoration stage: "Our Poetess is Virtuous, Young, and

Fair;/But that first Epithet I must leave out,/’twill please but very few of you, I doubt.”¹⁴ Half a decade later, Trotter dedicated her third play, *The Unhappy Penitent* (1701), to Lord Halifax, calling attention to her vulnerable status as a woman who has “ventur’d into the World to stand the Test of Publick Censure” (i). Yet even under the threat of such censure she did not shrink from criticizing the state of dramatic art in early eighteenth-century England in terms sympathetic to Collier’s argument, terms that might very well have alienated Trotter from her fellow playwrights who had endured the full force of Collier’s invective: “If the Drammatick rules were justly observ’d, the Stage would soon retrieve that Credit which the abuses of it has I fear with too great reason lost, and be again a Useful Entertainment” (ii). Trotter’s explicit desire in the dedication of *The Unhappy Penitent* is to rehabilitate the English stage to the status of a “Useful Entertainment” (ii). Like Collier, she plainly aimed to reform the stage and return dramatic representation to the high heroic themes of the classical period.¹⁵

Aside from her one comedy, *Love at a Loss, or Most Votes Carry It* (1701), Trotter’s dramatic works after *Agnes de Castro* feature none of the explicit sexuality or coarseness that Collier identified under the rubric of “immodesty”; for example, *The Fatal Friendship* sympathizes with two wronged women, Felicia and Lamira, and concerns itself with love, honor, and the dilemma of reconciling competing and incompatible loyalties, and *The Revolution of Sweden* (1706) represents the heroic and noble actions of Christina and Constantia, women loyal to Gustavus’s revolution against the Danish viceroy of Sweden. In these and other plays Trotter consistently placed on the English stage women in roles that she considered well worthy of emulation by female spectators. In this respect, she actively resisted the dominant poetics of an era in the history of English drama that played fast and loose with the idea of public and private virtue for women, preferring a good laugh or a good scandal (or both) instead.

For her part, Trotter seems to have understood the cultural association between the stage and sexual vice as early as 1693 when, as a fourteen year old, she composed *Olinda’s Adventures*, a loosely autobiographical novel that parallels much of its author’s early life.¹⁶ On two occasions Olinda attends the theater, and on both occasions she becomes unwillingly enmeshed in a romantic intrigue, the second of which nearly leads to her rape. The (often dangerous) sexual entanglements experienced by women who attend the theater became a common feature of eighteenth-century fiction, and although attending the theater does not appear to endanger Olinda’s own moral principles, it plainly places her at great risk in two related ways: (1) by identifying her as a spectator of plays it suggests that Olinda condones what opponents of the stage would have regarded as the immodest dramatic behavior enacted for audiences, and (2) by sitting

in the audience Olinda willingly makes herself the desired object of several male spectators who focus on her, not the play. As for the plays themselves, Olinda is silent, offering us no details as to their subject matter or moral effects. Elsewhere in the work, however, Olinda proves herself to be an acute observer of what she calls, knowingly, “the Language of the Eyes” (17).

Olinda’s unspoken but articulate Language of the Eyes takes the form of two dichotomous, feminized discourses of vision, one identified with sexual desire and the other with domestic surveillance. Reflecting on her newly discovered love for Cloridon, a love that she had hitherto repressed under the guise of friendship, Olinda writes,

In fine, I discovered, that what I had called Esteem and Gratitude was Love; and I was as much ashamed of the Discovery, as if it had been known to all the World. I fancied every one that saw me, read it in my Eyes; And I hated my self, when Jealousie would give me leave to Reason, for my extravagant thoughts and wishes. (164)

Throughout *Olinda’s Adventures*, we are constantly made aware of the narrator and title character’s eyes and their status not as the windows to the soul but as the windows to desire. Although Olinda never falls into bed with a man, her various misadventures occur in large part as a consequence of eyes that all too frequently compromise her status as a lady; the expressive quality of her eyes, their “immodest” appearance before the English stage, and the young woman’s inability to regulate their sexual eloquence cumulatively jeopardize her virtue. Quite differently, we are also confronted by a pair of watchful eyes in the person of Olinda’s mother, who places her daughter under close surveillance. Olinda remarks that her mother “had observ’d, that [her confidante] Licydon often gave me, and I him, Letters in private” (139); suspicious that her daughter may be involved in an illicit relationship with Licydon, Olinda’s mother obtains access to the gentleman’s correspondence and mistakenly interprets a letter in Olinda’s hand for an avowal of love and a surrender of sexual virtue. Far from themselves expressing sexual desire, these intruding, spying eyes attempt to discipline and regulate the sexual behavior of Olinda.

Olinda and her mother’s eyes represent two extremes of feminine visual expression that form a striking dialectic in eighteenth-century English literature, particularly in the novel genre: one side of the dialectic, prevalent in the first half of the long eighteenth century, represented women as desiring subjects with sexually active eyes; the other side of the dialectic, dominant in the second half of the century, encodes ladylike vision as nonsexual and safely contained within the domestic sphere. Women who are represented in the latter half of the eighteenth century as

wielding sexually charged eyes jeopardize their respectable standing within society while women who employ sexually deferential, ladylike eyes increase the likelihood that they will become wives and mothers who, like Olinda's mother, subsequently regulate the scoposexual activities of their own daughters.

Although Trotter apparently felt compelled to navigate delicately the war of words between Collier and her playwright friends, when she turned her sights on Locke's opponents she acquired a polemical voice, as illustrated in the following lines from the preface to *A Defence of Mr. Lock's Essay of Human Understanding*:

[*The Essay*] came too late into the World to be receiv'd without Opposition, as it might have been in the first Ages of Philosophy, before Men's Heads were preposset with Imaginary Science; at least, no doubt, if so Perfect a Work cou'd have been produc'd so Early, it wou'd have prevented a great deal of that unintelligible Jargon, and vain Pretence to Knowledge of things out of the reach of Human Understanding, which make a great part of the School-Learning, and disuse the Mind to Plain and solid Truth. (ii)

The particular object of Trotter's scorn in the *Defence* was Thomas Burnet—an English divine, master of the charterhouse and briefly clerk of the closet to King William—with whom she corresponded about Locke's philosophy.¹⁷ A controversial figure in his own right, Burnet was no more charitable toward Locke than Collier was toward contemporary English dramatists. Burnet's criticisms of Locke, criticism characteristic of Locke's antagonists, motivated Trotter to compose in response a philosophical and theological treatise against the man whom she identifies throughout the volume only as "the Remarker." As Trotter observes, the scope of Burnet's critique is ambitious indeed, for he desires to ascertain how the "Principles of that ingenious Essay, taken together, will give us a sure Foundation for Morality, Reveal'd Religion, and a future Life, which he does not find that they do" (2–3). From Trotter's point of view, Burnet intends to undercut systematically Locke's philosophy, which he regards as a direct threat to the fundamental precepts of Christianity. For Burnet and Collier alike, the very survival of a virtuous and Christian England was at stake in the controversies whose flames they stoked. Reforming the stage and eradicating Lockean empiricism therefore emerged as moral and theological imperatives of the highest order.

A far more influential work than *Olinda's Adventures* where a feminized discourse of vision plainly emerges and with which the Trotter of the late 1690s would have been intimately familiar is Locke's *Essay*. As William Walker has shown, Locke's theory of the tabula rasa has for three centuries mistakenly been emphasized as his dominant metaphor of human understanding. In fact, Locke's controlling metaphor is *not* a two-dimensional

“blank slate” but actually a three-dimensional spatial metaphor of a room (mind) and its furnishings (knowledge).¹⁸ In a characteristic passage early in the *Essay* Locke writes, “First, I shall enquire into the Original of those Ideas, Notions, or whatever you please to call them, which a Man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his Mind; and the ways whereby the Understanding comes to be furnished with them.”¹⁹ Walker argues that Locke’s prevailing metaphor of understanding represents “the mind [as] some kind of space within which an idea may be had and observed, as a piece of furniture may be owned and observed in a room” (32). One important way of considering how Locke understands the negotiation of the respective “rooms” and their “furnishings” in the consciousness is by employing a kind of feminized *domestic* vision mediated through the mind’s eye. With respect to the pervasiveness of Locke’s domestic metaphor, we see that his epistemology—arguably the most influential that an English philosopher has ever produced—was profoundly shaped by his visualization of the kind of “furnished room” that would in his lifetime have been dominantly overseen by a woman. The tropes of space and furnishing that appear throughout so much of the *Essay* suggest that Locke’s philosophy of empirical knowledge found its most resonant articulation in the profoundly feminized space of the domestic sphere which, as Peter Earle and Lawrence Stone have shown, had already become an intrinsic part of late seventeenth-century bourgeois England.²⁰

Within the terms of my argument, the point of intersection between Trotter and Locke occurs in Locke’s insistence that knowledge, even moral knowledge, is at its base made possible by Experience, a combination of Sensation and Reflection. As Locke distinguishes between these concepts in the *Essay*, he poses a question of central importance at the beginning of book II with respect to Knowledge or what we might call, extending Locke’s metaphor, the “furnishings of the mind”:

Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From *Experience*: In that, all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives it self. Our Observation employ’d either about *external, sensible Objects*; or about the *internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves, is that which supplies our Understanding with all the materials of thinking.* (104)

Although Locke introduces the concepts of Sensation and Reflection as equal in terms of their importance for establishing Knowledge, he also privileges Sensation over Reflection because he regards Reflection as a metaphorical extension of the operations of Sensation within the human mind:

The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds* within us, as it is employ'd about the *Ideas* it has got; which Operations, when the Soul comes to reflect on, and consider, do furnish the Understanding with another set of *Ideas*, which could not be had from things without: and such are *Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*, and all the different actings of our own Minds. . . . This Source of *Ideas*, every Man has wholly in himself: And though it be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly be call'd internal Sense. But I call the other *Sensation*, so I call this *REFLECTION*. (105)

In her *Defence*, Trotter demonstrates an acute understanding of the relationship between Lockean epistemology and morality. Her critique of Locke's theory of Reflection and Perception complements well her own writings, both dramatic and critical, in defense of a virtuous stage poetics. To illustrate this understanding, Trotter quotes at length a passage from Thomas Burnet:

As to Morality, we think the great Foundation of it, is the distinction of Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice. _____ And I do not find that my Eyes, Ears, Nostrils or any other outward Senses, make any distinction of these things, as they do of Colours, Sounds, &c. _____ Nor from any Ideas taken in from them, or from their Reports, am I Conscious that I do, or can conclude that there is such a distinction in the Nature of things. (4)

Burnet, Trotter argues, misapprehends Locke by claiming that knowledge, moral and otherwise, that falls within the ken of Lockean epistemology must be Sensibly determined. Trotter's reply to Burnet shows her mastery of Locke's distinction between Sensation and Reflection:

But this will not satisfie the Remarker, unless Mr. *Lock* tells us *what is to be understood by Perfection in his Way; how it is deriv'd from the Senses, and how it includes Veracity*. The Remarker is very apt to forget, that Mr. *Lock* has another principle of Knowledge, which he calls Reflection, or he thinks it insignificant; perhaps it may be so as to his purpose, but happening to be serviceable in the present Enquiry, I take leave to remind him of it, that we may consider how far it will help us to the Idea of Perfection. (19–20)

Trotter here issues a stinging rejoinder to Burnet, arguing in favor of what Locke calls the "internal sense" of Reflection. Locke makes clear that Reflection requires the employment of the mind's eye to navigate the rooms of one's mind for experiential models that, in this particular instance, approach if not quite attain perfection. For Trotter, models approaching perfection found in the crowded rooms of our consciousness are the closest things we have to conceiving perfection and along with it

the idea of an omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent deity. According to Lockean epistemology, we are always limited by experience, yet nothing prevents us from conceiving something more perfect than what we have already sensibly experienced in the world. That Trotter relies on Locke's concept of Reflection to respond to a set of theological doubts then becoming increasingly widespread in the eighteenth century should compel us to consider the discursive parallels between Reflection and domestic vision as articulated in England from the late seventeenth century forward. Sensation in the form of seeing with domestically trained eyes and Reflection in the form of visually navigating a mind conceived as a domestic space rely on similar tropes of visual knowledge, each becoming a means for the percipient to validate experience as well as faith. Trotter's plays clearly participate in the logic of Sensation and Reflection, for they offer spectators, particularly the female spectators with whom Collier is so concerned, a powerful sensible experience that subsequently occupies interior space within the mind as a "furnishing" and becomes a subject of potential Reflection. If Trotter's dedications and prefaces can be accepted at face value, she clearly intended for her dramatic works to provide models of virtue, and as a Lockean thinker she could not help but see their continued efficacy beyond a dramatic performance as a consequence of the power of Reflection. If we read Trotter in terms of Locke we can understand how she would have been sympathetic to the antitheatrical arguments put forward by Collier because of what the often bawdy Restoration stage presented to the senses of playgoers, but we can also see how she would have conceived her own moral art as uniquely consonant with Collier's critique and Locke's philosophy.

One of the most intriguing features of Catherine Trotter's biography is that following publication of her *Defence*, she composed and saw performed only one more play in her lifetime, *The Revolution of Sweden*, a work that raises female virtue to a level of heroism that not even Trotter had hitherto achieved. Whether or not Trotter self-consciously composed the play as her last is difficult to ascertain, but *The Revolution of Sweden* does appear to be a fitting final salvo by Trotter to the antitheatrical debate then still raging in London, especially in terms of that debate's anxieties with respect to female spectatorship. Characteristically, Trotter put herself on both sides of the debate, seeking (and obtaining) dramatic advice from Congreve and writing a play populated by women whom Collier could not possibly criticize on moral grounds, thereby implicitly reconciling the two outspoken rivals. But after composing five plays for the London theater over the course of a decade and gaining a considerable reputation along the way, Trotter walked away from the stage for good, presumably because of her marriage to Patrick Cockburn, an Anglican minister who likely would not have approved of his wife's continued vocation as a playwright.²¹ Permanently removed from the London stage and

though an occasional poetry contributor to the periodical press, the now Catharine Cockburn turned her considerable energies to domestic and maternal duties, giving birth to and raising three daughters and a son.

Trotter's two lives—as a well-known dramatist and an ever more obscure wife and mother (and occasional writer on philosophical and theological themes)—represent in miniature the subject matter of this chapter. Trotter moved from theorizing and representing manifestations of female vision in the public arena that are concerned with issues of sexuality, desire, conduct, and epistemology to occupying a private domestic sphere that she inevitably supervised with her own disciplining, overseeing eyes. As the author of a novel, several plays, and an important philosophical defense of Locke, Trotter provides us with one of the earliest, fullest, and most diversified records of a woman deeply engaged in questioning the status of female vision at the discursive, representational, and epistemological levels. For the last four decades of her life, Trotter did not share with us nearly as much as during her first twenty-eight years, when so much of what she thought and reflected upon appeared in print and was performed for the play-going public. Yet although Trotter fell largely silent on the particulars of her domestic life as the eighteenth century proceeded, novelistic representations of domestic Englishwomen proliferated. These representations remind us of the cultural relationships among the empirical, sexual, and domestic discourses of female vision so important to Trotter's early career.

*Domestic Surveillance and Scopic Sexuality in
Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture*

Like Trotter's *Olinda*, the most prominent female protagonists of the eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century novel—including Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Eliza Haywood's *Betsy*, Frances Burney's *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, and Jane Austen's *Elizabeth* and *Emma*—are so closely identified with visually oriented epistemology that empirical knowledge is to a great degree culturally authorized through their closely surveying eyes. In the history of the English novel, Richardson, in particular, has been credited with developing and extending psychological verisimilitude, and particularly the realistic representation of female characters such as *Pamela Andrews* who, according to Nancy Armstrong, came to represent the quintessence of the ideologically and representationally triumphant domestic woman in the eighteenth century. One of the distinctive characteristics that lends *Pamela* such powerful representational force is the detail-oriented quality of her eyes, eyes that are limited exclusively to the domestic sphere. Female characters such as *Pamela* are pervasively figured as the best in-

terpreters of empirical reality because “reality” in the nonpicaresque English novel is overwhelmingly represented within the confines of the home, a cultural space that became subject to feminine (visual) mastery in the eighteenth century. As domestic women proliferated within the novel genre, which developed into the undisputed champion (in popular terms, at least) of literary expression in the eighteenth century, their quite specific form of observation and surveillance—consonant with Locke’s and Trotter’s philosophic tropes of domestic observation—acquired enormous cultural authority.

Beyond the philosophical and literary relationship between empiricism and the eighteenth-century novel that existed in their mutual use of domesticity as both a trope and literal manifestation of epistemological truth, the broader cultural significance of domestic surveillance is explicated by Armstrong’s scholarship on the ideological construction of the modern bourgeois Englishwoman. In her reading of eighteenth-century conduct books and fiction, Armstrong underlines an important aspect of cultural agency that this new kind of woman exercised: “The domestic woman’s capacity to supervise was clearly more important than any other factor in determining the victory of this ardently undazzling creature over all her cultural competitors. For this reason, the peculiar combination of invisibility and vigilance personified in the domestic woman came to represent the principle of domestic economy itself.”²² Like Armstrong’s exploration of domestic subjectivity, my approach to female visibility does not dismiss domesticity as a patriarchal strategy for containing women in the home but rather treats it as a crucial political, economic, and representational force within English culture. As numerous scholars of the eighteenth century have argued, including Lawrence Stone, Peter Earle, Leonard Davidoff, and Catherine Hall, without domesticity’s widespread advent, the transformation of England from an aristocratic, land-based to a bourgeois, capitalist political economy would not have occurred so comprehensively and in such a relatively short period. As we know, the sexual division of labor among the bourgeoisie that feminized the home and masculinized the marketplace occurred with dizzying swiftness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²³ For capitalism to succeed, of course, the human senses—particularly a domesticated version of female vision—had to structure and record reality with Lockean confidence. In the early English novel, female visibility is dominantly articulated as both an ideological and epistemological justification of capitalist materialism.²⁴

By emphasizing the domestic tradition in the English novel, I am exercising an implicit judgment about the relative obscurity of what we might consider to be an alternative novelistic “tradition,” a tradition constituted by novelists such as Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, Daniel Defoe, and John Cleland, all of whom emphasize the sexuality, visual and otherwise, of their female characters. Richardson’s attempt to negate his

female protagonists' (scopic) sexuality—and, in fact, to have Pamela and Clarissa closely regulate the sexual behavior of others—marks an important departure from seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century novelistic depictions of women, where female sexuality is often openly depicted and even encouraged. By having his female protagonists enact the virtues promulgated in conduct books, Richardson, and those who followed him in the domestic novel or novel of manners traditions, including the later Eliza Haywood, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen, among others, altered the course of the English novel and along with it constructed the discursive and representational possibilities of visual relations between the sexes. Male characters in these novels are overwhelmingly portrayed as sexual spectators, and their female counterparts are depicted either as domestic overseers or sexual spectacles.

In visual terms, conduct book admonishments called for young women to lower their eyes beyond the confines of the home. For instance, in Wetenhall Wilkes' contribution to the genre, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1744), the author admonishes his niece to undertake a painstaking self-surveillance by "set[ting] a double Watch on all [her] Thoughts and Words" (9) and, complementarily, to regulate closely her eyes because of his conviction that "the very name of Virgin [which] imports a critical Niceness with respect to Virtue, Innocence, and decent Behaviour" is endangered by "immodest Glances" that "pollute the Eyes" (84).²⁵ Wilkes' justification for disciplining the conduct of his niece's vision relies on his understanding of men who, like Richardson's Lovelace, are careful observers of women's eyes:

The double Temptation of Vanity and Desire is so prevalent in our Sex, that we are apt to interpret every obliging Look, Gesture, Smile or Sentence of a Female we like to the hopeful Side. Therefore let your Deportment forbid without Rudeness, and oblige without Invitation. We look upon a Woman's Eyes to be the Interpreters of her Heart; and we often gather more Encouragement from a pleasing Glance, than from her softest Words. The Language of the Eyes is very significant.²⁶

In contrast to his warnings about the power of the female eye to elicit sexual impulses in men, Wilkes enjoins his niece to educate herself in watching over and tending the domestic sphere:

It is a great Art in House-keeping, to have the Furniture always clean, and to lay by every thing in its proper Place, when out of Use. This Method will prevent Confusion, preserve the Things, and contribute greatly to your private Ease. A litter'd Room is a sure Sign of Indolence and Supineness in the Mistress, as it is of Sloth and Sluttishness in her Servants. (91)

Written in the Richardsonian 1740s, Wilkes' admonishments—particularly with respect to teaching his niece how to be regarded as the possessor of sexually irreproachable eyes—anticipate Lady Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Daughters* (1790), which appeared half a century later. In that volume the authoress enjoins her daughters to "[r]egard neither the actions nor the dress of others: let not your eyes rove in search of acquaintance."²⁷ Read within the tradition of female domestic vision in the eighteenth-century novel, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady and An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Daughters* suggests, at least from the 1740s forward, a wide-ranging cultural concern over the regulation of female eyes.

Volumes 1 and 2 of *Pamela*,²⁸ among the most popular of eighteenth-century novels, chronicle the interiorization of female vision within the domestic sphere. In these two novels Richardson explores the potential power that feminized "empirical" eyes can effect in the home. Once liberated in volume 1 from the threat of rape by becoming the new Mrs. B, Pamela, the former servant, principally focuses in volume 2 not on the otherwise pleasing figure of Mr. B, but rather on the interior of their home and her duties within it. Pamela's quick and perceptive domestic vision thereby enables her to oversee an efficient and well-regulated household, which was in the ensuing Richardsonian novel tradition widely established as the bourgeois Englishwoman's primary responsibility. The domestication of Pamela's vision in volume 2 is one of the principal discursive constructions of Richardson's sequel. Over the course of her two novels, Pamela moves from occupying a role as the sexualized object of Mr. B's scopic desire, to becoming the visual subject of domestic surveillance. Domestic vision in *Pamela*, with its insistent focus on cataloging the everyday objects, domestic duties, and subtle intrigues of the English home, and its relentless emphasis on ascertaining the truth about the workings of the domestic sphere, is methodologically constituted very much like empiricism, an unsurprising "coincidence" considering that both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empiricism and the novel depend on tropes of domesticity to constitute their similar brands of epistemology.

In volume 2 of *Pamela* (1742), the now gentry-class Pamela B describes well her practice of domestic surveillance in a letter to Miss Darnford, her sexually and domestically inexperienced friend:

[The countess and Lady Davers] told [Mr. B], how much they admired my family management: then they would have it that my genius was universal, for the employments and accomplishments of my sex, whether they considered it as employed in penmanship, in needlework, in paying or receiving visits, in music, and I can't tell how many other qualifications, which they were pleased to attribute to me, over and above the family management: saying, that I had

an understanding which comprehended every thing, and an eye that penetrated into the very bottom of matters in a moment, and never was at a loss for the *should be*, the *why* or *wherefore*, and the *how*—these were their comprehensive words; that I did every thing with celerity, clearing all as I went, and left nothing, they observed, to come over again, that could be dispatched at once.²⁹ [emphasis mine]

Pamela's vision is marked in this and other instances by an extraordinarily particularized attention to physical detail, and her ability to infer an empirical version of reality on the basis of that detail even when it is not immediately present to her eyes. This points to her unequivocal confidence in an epistemology closely akin to Locke's theory of the double existence, what philosophers such as David Hume called a "continu'd" and "distinct" existence, that is, if objects have (1) an existence beyond their perception by our senses and (2) an autonomous existence independent of other objects.³⁰ In ways that are strikingly similar to those employed by empiricism, Pamela gets to the truth of her domestic sphere by employing eyes that penetrate through the rooms, chambers, and mundane mysteries of the household. Pamela uses an ocular language of "penetration" in her correspondence that causally explains everyday phenomena and pierces through the opacity of domestic organization.

The language of causality ("the *why*, or *wherefore*, and the *how*") Pamela employs to describe the workings of her eyes within the domestic sphere also corresponds in a number of respects to empiricism. The empirical tradition in English philosophy represented by Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, among others, explains how the human senses, disciplined by induction, may explicate the mysteries of nature. Likewise, Pamela assumes her household to be full of mysteries that must be investigated by feminized eyes; Bacon, who exerted an enormous influence on Locke's epistemology, similarly regards nature as cloaked in secrecy that must be explicated by masculinized science. Seven decades before Locke, Bacon argued in *The Great Instauration* (1620) that nonempirical natural philosophers inevitably "fall to complaints of the subtlety of nature, the hiding-places of truth, the obscurity of things, the entanglements of causes."³¹

Whereas Bacon, who aspires to become a "true priest of the sense" (24), proposes to untangle the knots of cause and effect in nature, Pamela sets out to do just the same in the B household. Yet in comparing Bacon's dominantly masculine-empirical language to Locke's feminine tropes of domesticity, we begin to see how Locke reconfigured late-seventeenth-century empirical philosophy through a language of domesticity, a language that Pamela also invokes in her explanations of the domestic sphere's workings.

Whereas Bacon might hardly recognize the affinities between his masculinization of empirical inquiry and Pamela's feminization of do-

mestic investigation, we retrospectively recognize the close relationship in methodology *and* language between Pamela and Locke's understanding of (domestic) knowledge-formation. As we discover in Pamela's letter to Miss Darnford, cited above, she describes in maddeningly minute detail the work of her domestic eyes as well as the surveillance she is subjected to by her husband's female relatives. This double articulation of the discourse of female vision functions as didactic instruction of Miss Darnford's uneducated eyes. Pamela brings Miss Darnford into being as a "modern" Englishwoman by teaching her how to see with empirically discerning domestic eyes that will—if I may be permitted to paraphrase Bacon's language—raise her to the status of a "true [domestic] priestess" of the senses. For us, Richardson's Pamela calls attention to how knowledge formation was feminized through the language of domesticity in the cultural sites of the novel and Lockean empiricism, respectively.

Writing yet again to Miss Darnford, Pamela describes how she spied through a key-hole to discover Polly and Mr. H's sexual indiscretions. Pamela's peeping-tom-like gaze confirms her earlier hypothesis about the sexual nature of Polly and Mr. H's relationship. By placing this improbable couple under domestic surveillance, Pamela checks her hypothesis against empirically gathered evidence and then double checks her physical evidence against interviews with both Polly and Mr. H to ensure that she witnessed what she believed she witnessed. Pamela's discoveries, and her confirmation of those discoveries, admirably illustrate how she employs a domesticated "empirical" methodology. I should emphasize that in highlighting the methodological similarities between the representation of female vision in the novel and the discourse of empirical vision in Locke, I am not making a case in favor of Pamela's domestic literalization of Lockean empiricism. Rather, what I am underscoring is the extent to which domesticity—and domestic observation—became in the eighteenth century a significant trope of knowledge formation, whether that knowledge formation was constituted in terms of empirical philosophy or in terms of the domestic novel.

Pamela's vision is not circumscribed to strictly household duties, for she also regulates sexual behavior in the household with her domestically discerning eyes. While the peeping-tom sequence detailed above conjures up familiar images of male voyeurism in the eighteenth-century novel, Pamela's vision does not elicit voyeuristic pleasure as accounts of male spectatorship so often do in, for instance, *Clarissa*, or in the work of Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, and John Cleland. Rather, Pamela's eyes, which once more have arrived at the "truth" of a previously inexplicable matter, permit the new mistress of the house to exercise her formidable domestic power. Her subsequent extraction of Polly's sexual history underscores the completeness of Pamela's visual mastery. Just as empirical

observation and reasoning empowered English science over and against nature, Pamela's acute surveillance has granted her access to the power-knowledge apparatus of the domestic sphere. In Pamela's case, ocular observation is not identified (as it is with Bacon) with masculine science's call to dominate feminine nature but rather with feminine surveillance's power to dominate the household.

Miss Darnford's domestic education by Pamela in volume 2 continues a generational passing-on of regulative surveillance from an older to a younger woman, for Richardson suggests that Pamela has learned her own skills of surveillance and investigation from Mr. B's mother. In volume 2, for instance, Mr. B informs Pamela that prior to her death Mrs. B often placed himself and Pamela under her "watchful" eyes, an attitude that too often stymied Mr. B's sexual designs. By watching over Polly and Mr. H—whose social positions as female servant and male landowner relative to Pamela in volume 2 mirror Pamela's and Mr. B's relative to Mrs. B in volume 1—Pamela duplicates Mrs. B's domestic role in the household. In both cases, the watchful lady of the house employs the evidence of her eyes to discover the reality of a socially unequal situation in order to prevent sexual advantage being taken against one of her female servants. This notion of an older woman educating the eyes of a younger woman focuses our attention on the didactic nature of representations of female vision in the English novel. The principal target of this (scopic) didacticism is, of course, not Pamela but the thousands of girls and young women who read Pamela's story.

In order to demonstrate the ideal principles of sexual conduct and ladylike vision that women were encouraged to embrace in the eighteenth century, one need look no farther than *Clarissa* (1747–48).³² Stressing the importance of the language of the eyes to Clarissa's self-conception, the young woman's last will and testament stipulates that her corpse *not* be "unnecessarily exposed to the view of anybody" (1413). Clarissa bequeaths two portraits of herself—the first either to her aunt or mother and the second to her closest friend and confidante, Anna Howe. Clarissa posthumously controls both the viewing of her own body and its pictorial representations, distributing the latter within an exclusively scopic economy for the consumption of female spectators alone. Clarissa's instructions protect both body and image from Lovelace, under whose eyes she suffers almost from the moment of the couple's "elopement."

In the account of the events leading to her rape, Clarissa writes to Anna of Lovelace's "leering" gaze: "He terrified me with his looks and with his violent emotions as he gazed upon me. . . . Never I saw his abominable eyes look, as then they looked!—triumph in them!—fierce and wild" (1013). Lovelace acknowledges the sadistic quality of his eyes, proclaiming, "I love when I dig a pit, to have my prey tumble in with secure feet and open eyes; then a man can look down upon her, with an oh-ho

charmer! how came you there?" (465). In this metaphor of domination, Lovelace makes two important rhetorical shifts: first, he moves from a specific reference to himself in the first person "I" to the general scopic sadist "man" and transitions from the generic "prey" to the gendered pronoun "her." The effect of Lovelace's two shifts not only universalizes the roles of an empowered male spectator looking down on a passive female object but also divests himself of responsibility for his reprehensible behavior. In making Clarissa the visual target of his exploitation, Lovelace simply does what "men" do: he engages in the "masculine" behavior of expressing his scoposexual desire.

According to Lovelace, women must strike an altogether different scoposexual attitude toward men if they are to be regarded as feminine and virtuous, an attitude that Clarissa exemplifies. Just prior to Clarissa's rape, Lovelace instructs two "fallen" women to pose as his aunt and cousin. In these guises he hopes they will appear to Clarissa as appropriate companions. Lovelace understands his plan to be fraught with complications, not least of which is teaching his "actresses" how to see and be seen as ladies, and he therefore instructs them to "be sure not to forget to look down, or aside, when looked at. When eyes meet eyes, be yours the retreating ones" (865), thereby suggesting a connection between deferential eyes and, in these women's case, the appearance of feminine virtue. Lovelace looks with disgust, for example, upon women who violate polite culture's injunction against the female transgression of looking about indiscriminately, and he calls the "staring" Miss Rawlins "a confident slut" (775), basing his judgment on what he considers to be her overly active eyes. Lovelace even more harshly condemns Anna: "Too much fire and spirit in her eye indeed, *for a girl*" [emphasis mine] (864). Further corroborating the active/passive vision-virtue connection, at Mrs. Sinclair's house, Clarissa remains under the constant surveillance of the prostitutes, all of whom wield active, sexualized eyes, and Sinclair and her protégés appear not merely to encourage and assist in Clarissa's rape; they also watch it, becoming, in Lovelace's understanding of scoposexual gender roles, "masculinized" spectators. Sinclair thereby conflates (and perverts) the masculine-sexual and feminine-domestic dichotomy of Richardsonian vision in that she watches over and controls Clarissa's behavior in the brothel (domestic surveillance) as well as views her rape (sexual spectatorship). Richardson's two popular novels thereby provide a culturally powerful discursive production of feminized and masculinized vision, telling in their pages what would become profoundly resonant narratives of proper and improper visual conduct. Clarissa's sexually deferential vision and Pamela's scrutinizing domestic vision capture the complementary characteristics of this newly constituted scopic ideology.

For women like Clarissa in the eighteenth-century novel, knowledge and the social power that accompanies knowledge derive principally

from visually explicating the workings of the domestic sphere. Yet the domesticated knowledge of surveying women depended on how effectively they disciplined their visual behavior prior to marriage. In the novel, unmarried young women were depicted as placing their own and other women's (and men's) eyes under close surveillance in order to regulate their expressive power. Too much visual expressivity—especially of the “wrong,” sexually oriented kind—became regarded as a double threat to feminine sexual and domestic virtue. To see with blatantly desiring eyes marked a woman as wanton and disqualified her from participating in the most desirable marriage markets. Possessing sexually charged eyes threatened young women with social decline and even ostracism; in addition, the articulation of sexually charged vision undermined the epistemological trope of domesticity that the novel and empirical philosophy came to rely upon to justify their cultural authority. In order to protect the sexual integrity of young women—as well as to protect the integrity of domesticity as a powerful epistemological trope—it became incumbent on novelists to emphasize the conduct of “proper” female vision and to produce visually didactic novels that disciplined English girls and young women to focus their eyes on the domestic sphere as well as to supervise the dangerously wandering eyes of other men and women.

The discourse of feminine visual conduct articulated in English conduct books and the Richardsonian novel differs drastically from pre-Richardsonian novelistic depictions of seeing women. One need only consider two of Richardson's popular predecessors, Daniel Defoe, and Aphra Behn, as well as a contemporary, John Cleland, to comprehend the radically different trajectory of the English novel following the publication of *Pamela*, especially with respect to representing female scoposexuality. In the following discussion of this trio of English novelists, what I hope to suggest is how different our understanding of female vision might look today had an alternative, frankly sexualized and feminized tradition in the English novel not been obscured by its domestic competition.

Neither Defoe nor Cleland hesitates to depict his Moll and Fanny as women in possession of scoposexual desires. In *Moll Flanders* (1722) Moll coldly laments the loss of her first husband, coldness that is the result of desire for her first lover, her husband's older brother. The intense sexuality of Moll's gaze becomes clear in the following passage:

I confess I was not suitably affected with the loss of my husband, nor indeed can I say that I ever loved him as I ought to have done, or as was proportionable to the good usage I had from him, for he was a tender, kind, good-humoured man as any woman could desire; but his brother being so always *in my sight*, at least while we were in the country, was a continual snare to me, and I never was in bed with my husband but I