

Chapter 4

The Public Sphere

i. Coffee-House Culture

Having explored female inclusion in areas of public life connected to health, courtship and leisure at the eighteenth-century resort in Chapters 1 to 3; this chapter moves on to investigate leisured female involvement in the more widely recognised literary, discursive and associational public sphere. Section one considers the extent of female access to coffee-drinking establishments, section two addresses female patronage of circulating libraries and the third and final section looks at female contribution to a literary public sphere. Bringing together associational and literary components, the chapter illustrates how resorts provided women with access to a form of public life, often argued to have been exclusively male.¹

The mid seventeenth century saw the emergence of the English coffee-house, an institution which would continue to play a key role in the country's social, cultural and political life for the next one hundred and fifty years. The first coffee-house opened at Oxford in 1650, followed two years later by the establishment of London's first coffee house in St Michael's Alley at Cornhill.² It is estimated that by 1675 there were over 3000 of these institutions in the country.³ For the cost of a penny, coffee-house customers were provided with a dish of tea, coffee or chocolate and found access to newspapers, moral weeklies and pamphlets. Here patrons could choose to read, write letters, hold meetings or engage in discussion. Jürgen

¹ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 101.

² Bryan Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 17.

³ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 32.

Habermas has famously argued that the English coffee-house played a central role in the establishment of a bourgeois public sphere. This sphere, he argues, overlapped with the private domain of commodity exchange and social labour, and the realm of public authority, comprised of the state, police and ruling classes. Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere formed in the English coffee-house, the French salon and the German reading room, was a space in which private individuals came together on an equal footing to discuss matters of political import, and in doing so, regulated the powers of the state.⁴ Due to Habermas's influential work, the coffee-house has come to be regarded as one of the most influential institutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Whether or not women were allowed entry to the coffee-house has been a subject of much debate. Far from seeing female inclusion as a necessary part of a 'public sphere', Habermas suggests that the exclusion of women led the coffee-house to be taken more seriously, contributing to its success and longevity.⁵ This has caused concern amongst some historians.⁶ Both Habermas and Edward Bramah argue that women disliked the coffee-house, and 'felt their menfolk were being lured away from them by a new-found freedom'.⁷ As evidence of this animosity, they highlight the publication of the 1673 'Women's Petition' against coffee-houses, which claimed that the drink made men impotent. However, there is no evidence suggesting this pamphlet was actually written by a woman, or that the views expressed in it were common amongst the female sex.⁸

Public sphere theory has evolved considerably since the publication of Habermas's seminal work, and many historians working on women's history have urged others to move away from the strictly defined Habermasian public sphere, towards new areas of investigation. Linda Kerber for instance asks 'why speak of worlds, realms,

⁴ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 27-31.

⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 33.

⁶ E. J. Clery, 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2 (1991), p. 179; Markman Ellis, 'Coffee Women, The Spectator and the Public Sphere in the Early Eighteenth Century' in Elizabeth Egar (ed.), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 27.

⁷ Edward Bramah, *Tea and Coffee: A Modern View of Three Hundred Years of Tradition* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 46.

⁸ Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 139-144.

spheres at all?’, Nancy Cott has suggested that the more historians look at women’s personal documents the ‘more positively they have evaluated woman’s sphere’, and Amanda Vickery argues that ‘new categories and concepts’ must be developed if the field of women’s history is to develop usefully.⁹ Vickery is particularly sceptical of the patterns in women’s historiography: such as the suggestion that the early modern period witnessed ‘the social and economic marginalisation of propertied women and the degradation of working women as a consequence of capitalism’ whilst the nineteenth century saw the ‘separation of the spheres of public power and private domesticity.’¹⁰ Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5 of this thesis respond to this questioning of a strict sphere dichotomy, illustrating the public nature of many areas of women’s lives traditionally viewed as private. However, by exploring female access to the very institution which Habermas positions as one of the most important elements of the public sphere, this chapter engages with the historical basis of his argument and illustrates the more complex and dynamic nature of leisured women’s lives.

The concept of civil society has developed and interwoven with that of the public sphere. James Kelly and Martyn Powell suggest that Harbemerma’s ‘public sphere theory... offers a theory of civil society’, as it identifies the physical manifestation of democracy in the creation of truly public spaces, within which individuals sought to improve society through rational pursuit and discussion.¹¹ Research on eighteenth-century associational life, particularly on clubs and societies, has developed as a consequence of interest in both the public sphere and civil society. However, women are rarely identified as part of associational culture and when they are, it is often as an exception or on the periphery.¹² In contrast, this chapter explores female involvement in the unique associational life of the spas. It argues that be part of ‘the

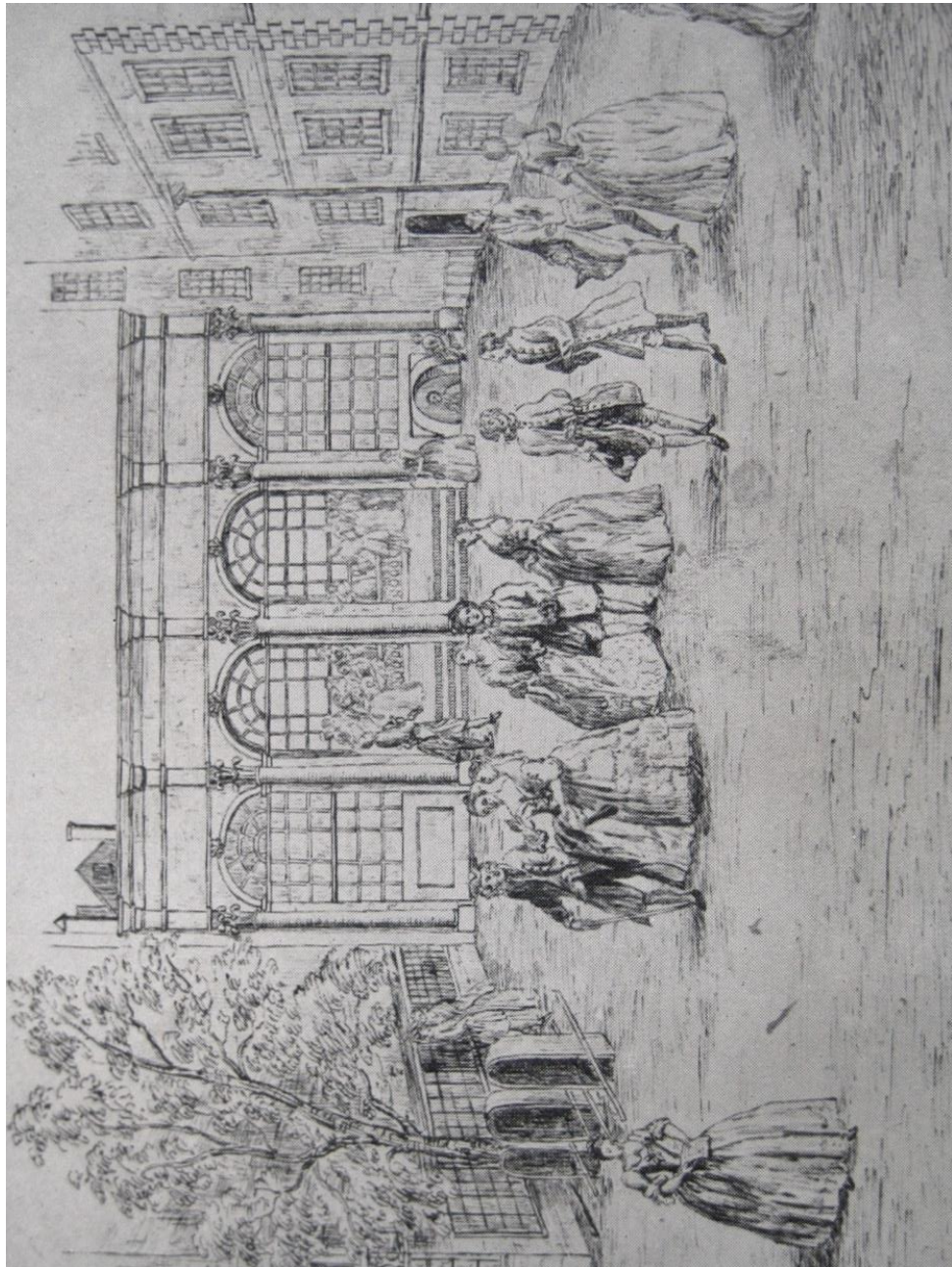
⁹ Linda Kerber ‘Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History’, *Journal of American History*, 75 (1988); Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, p. 197; Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres?’, p. 413.

¹⁰ Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres?’ p. 383-414.

¹¹ James Kelly and Martyn Powell (eds.), *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010).

¹² Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp. 198-204.

Fig 31: Detail of the Pump Room Forecourt, Bath. The Ladies' Coffee House was at different periods, situated in the buildings on the right and left hand side of this image (George Speren).



company' at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, was to belong to a hetero-social club; one which met in coffee establishments and circulating libraries to engage in polite discussion. The coffee-house sociability of the resorts does not represent that of London or other provincial towns, yet this does not mean that they should be neglected by historians.¹³ Both spas drew visitors from all over England, and therefore women who were not even residents of the resorts were able to patronise their coffee-houses and coffee-rooms, even if it was only for a few weeks of the year.

Recently, the male-exclusivity of the coffee-house has been called into question. Steve Pincus takes a directly oppositional stance to Habermas and Bramah, stating that 'there is every reason to believe that women frequently attended the newly fashionable coffeehouses'.¹⁴ Emma Clery suggests that coffee consumption and coffee-house talk carried connotations of effeminacy, arguing that coffee-house men regulated their behaviour for women who worked there, drank coffee rather than alcohol as though they were in mixed company and talked freely 'upon any subject as if they were women in the privacy of their homes'.¹⁵ Cowan makes the more subtle argument that no hard and fast rules prohibited women from entering the coffee-house, proposing that the masculine reputation of the institution was effective in preventing female patronage.¹⁶ He highlights the presence of coffee-women working within the establishments and notes that there were exceptional occasions when genteel women entered the coffee-house as patrons, such as in the event of an auction.¹⁷ He also notes the existence of a women's coffee-house which admitted female patrons, but dismisses this as another exception, arguing that the creation of a 'women's coffee-house' proves the general rule that women did not patronise typical

¹³ Brian Cowan, 'What was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England', *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), p. 144.

¹⁴ Steve Pincus, 'Coffee Politicians Does Create: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture', *The Journal of Modern History*, 67: 4 (1995), p. 815.

¹⁵ Clery, 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth', p. 177.

¹⁶ Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 228.

¹⁷ Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, pp. 138, 248-254; Cowan, 'What was Masculine about the Public Sphere?', pp. 143-149.

coffee-houses.¹⁸ Whilst Cowan dismisses the Ladies' Coffee-House at Bath as an exception, the following section explores the existing evidence for this unique institution.

Running from at least 1740 to 1773, Bath's Ladies' Coffee-House provided elite and middling women of the spa with access to coffee-house society. The first known reference to the establishment is made by Elizabeth Montagu, who wrote of visiting the 'Ladies' Coffee House' the morning after her arrival at the spa, in December 1740.¹⁹ Visitors referred to the institution as a coffee-house or coffee-room some time before it officially became known as one. John Wood's *Description of Bath* also notes that 'from the Pump House the Ladies from time to time with-draw to a neighbouring Toy Shop, Amusing themselves there with Reading the News'.²⁰ An advert for the establishment in 1755 avoids categorising it at all, referring to it simply as 'THE LARGE ROOM, adjoining to the Pump-Room.'²¹ Although visitors were calling it a coffee-house from as early as 1740, the first known instance of it appearing as such in print is in 1762 in Oliver Goldsmith's *Life of Nash*, where Goldsmith paraphrases Wood, changing the term 'Toy-shop' to 'female coffee-house'.²² Goldsmith adds that here women have the 'advantage of reading the news, and... enjoying each other's conversations.'²³ The fact that it was patrons rather than proprietors who originally titled the institution a coffee-house, illustrates that customers genuinely believed it provided women with the same facilities and opportunities that the traditional coffee-house offered male customers.

While the coffee-house remained in close proximity to the pump room, its exact location altered over the course of its existence. In 1755 it was located on the east side of the Pump Room forecourt where it was managed by two women, Elizabeth Taylor of the adjoining jewellers and Clementine Foord who had previously worked at the Long-Room at Bristol Hotwells.²⁴ During the 1760s and 1770s it stood next

¹⁸ Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, p. 229.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 72.

²⁰ Wood, *A Description of Bath*, p. 438.

²¹ *TBJ* (6 October 1755).

²² Goldsmith, *The Life of Richard Nash*, p. 44.

²³ Goldsmith, *The Life of Richard Nash*, pp. 41-42.

²⁴ *TBJ* (5 May 1755); *TBJ* (6 Oct 1755).

door but one to the Pump Room on the western side [Fig. 31].²⁵ A milliner named Jane Spurlock was in possession of the establishment during early 1772 and advertised it to be let from Michaelmas of that year.²⁶ In November 1772, Ann and Richard Immins of the Black Bear Inn at Shipton took possession, however their occupancy was of short duration and soon after the room was advertised once again.²⁷ No trace has yet been found of the proprietors of the coffee-house after the Immin's occupancy which ended in 1773.

Despite its name, the Ladies' Coffee-House was not exclusively for women. Taylor and Foorde were open to 'Ladies and Gentlemen, with the News-papers as usual' and were 'pleased to honour their Commands for Breakfasting, and Tea in the Afternoon'.²⁸ Montagu's letters also clearly indicate that men had admittance; she lists a Morgan Vane, Charles Lyttelton and Tom Wyndham as members of 'our coffee-house'.²⁹ As a mixed-gender meeting place, the Ladies' Coffee-House echoed the other hetero-social institutions of the resort such as the baths, pump room, walks, pleasure gardens and assembly rooms. Visitors could choose to pay for individual visits, or to subscribe for the season. Isabella Wrightson's account books 'for London and Bath' detail a visit to the resort in October 1768, in which she records spending five shillings for a 'Subscription to the coffee house'.³⁰ The ability to afford subscription and the leisure time to indulge there excluded women in low wage work. However, it is possible that it was patronised by women with their own businesses, such as widows who took over their husband's trade, perhaps in the same way that merchants and other middling businessmen made use of the traditional coffee-house. The women who we know to have subscribed to the institution: Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Giffard and Isabella Wrightson, were all of a genteel status. The Immins certainly had high expectations of their clientele, informing the public that: 'The Favours of the Nobility, Gentry, &c. will be gratefully acknowledged'.

²⁵ *TBC* (14 March 1765).

²⁶ *TBC* (9 April 1772); *TBJ* (24 August 1772).

²⁷ *TBC* (19 November 1772); *TBC* (7 October 1773); *TBC* (14 October 1773).

²⁸ *TBJ* (6 October 1755).

²⁹ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 92.

³⁰ DA DD/BW/A6-A7 Isabella Wrightson's household account books 'for London and Bath' (1765-1773).

The fact that The Ladies' Coffee-House stocked newspapers strongly suggests that it mirrored the 'male' coffee-house in more than just name. In December 1766 Elizabeth Giffard records visiting the 'ladies' coffee room' where she 'subscribed and sat for about half an hour to read the news & talk to the company.'³¹ She noted two other such visits that year. Just as we should not assume that male coffee-house talk was always on 'masculine subjects', we should not believe that all women's conversations in the Ladies' Coffee-House were limited to domestic concerns, especially as they were provided with current news as a stimulus for conversation.³² The serious turn of discussion in the Ladies' Coffee-House is hinted at in *The Expeditions of Humphry Clinker*, in which Lydia Melford writes: 'Hard by the Pump-room is a coffee-house for the ladies' where female patrons meet to discuss 'politics, scandal and philosophy and other subjects above our capacity'. However, Lydia is forbidden to enter by her aunt who informs her, 'young girls are not admitted'.³³

In September 1772, *The Bath Journal* proudly stated 'That most elegant piece of machinery... call'd the Chronoscope, will be exhibited only two days more' at 'the Ladies Coffee-Room'. The advert claimed that 'Mr. Coxe's museum has been the chief talk amongst the nobility for some time, yet those gentlemen and ladies who have seen this, give it the preference'.³⁴ The exhibition of a new invention illustrates that the proprietors wished it to be regarded as more than a women's gossip-shop and suggests that they attempted to promote discussion on matters such as science and art. In June 1773 a series of lectures on the art of speaking were also held there, further illustrating the attempts made by its proprietors to establish its reputation as a serious institution. The lectures were delivered by John Herries on 'the Formation and Powers of the Human Voice'. Some of the subjects included might be expected from a lecture series delivered to a female-inclusive audience, for example 'The Method of teaching Children to read', while others such as how to achieve 'Energy,

³¹ FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard 'A Bath Journal' (11 December 1766).

³² E.J. Clery, 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth', pp. 172, 177; Brian Cowan, 'Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37: 3 (2004), p. 156.

³³ Smollett, *The Expeditions of Humphrey Clinker*, pp. 69-70.

³⁴ *TBJ* (28 September 1772).

and Gracefulness of Public Speaking' are more unusual.³⁵ The provision of newspapers, the exhibition of the chronoscope and the organisation of lectures suggest that the Ladies' Coffee-House did more than offer its patrons a space to sip coffee and gossip; they illustrate an attempt to provide educational subject matter to their female clientele and involve them in a bourgeois public sphere of informed discussion. They also demonstrate the lively sociability of the coffee-house, evidencing that women had access not only to a place where they could publically consume coffee, but where they might partake in the form of rational, educational and improving discussion usually connected with male associational life.

However, Elizabeth Montagu was not impressed at the conversation which abounded there in the 1740s. In addition to complaining that the institution reminded her of a 'hospital or the infirmary', she also described the members of the Coffee-House as 'woeful'.³⁶ In 1748 she made another attack on its patrons, declaring 'Mrs. Trvanion, Lord Berkeley Stratton's sister... goes away from us to-morrow, which I am sorry for; she seems very agreeable and well-bred, and has a thousand other good qualities that do not abound at our morning coffee-house, where I meet her.'³⁷ Although Montagu paints a dismal picture of the establishment, her letter of December 1740 illustrates that the institution played an important role. In highlighting the health-related discussion of its clientele, Montagu alerts us to the fact that the coffee-house provided women with a space in which they could publicly discuss personal issues. If the 'male' coffee-house provided a space in which men could regulate the powers of the state through public discussion, it is plausible that discussion of personal matters in the Ladies' Coffee-House gave women some way of regulating the powers which governed their lives. Through conversing on domestic issues such as health, household management and child care in a public space, visitors could perhaps find comfort, reassurance and advice by drawing from the experiences and opinions of other women. The degree to which women shared

³⁵ *TBC* (3 June 1773).

³⁶ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs Montagu*, i, p. 72; (January 1740) Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland in *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 92.

³⁷ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (1748) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, .iii, p. 80.

personal matters is not known to us, but Montagu's letter hints that invalids found comfort in sharing their health concerns with other patrons.

A journal of a tour of Bath, undertaken by three students in 1725, suggests that Bath's more typical coffee-houses also admitted women when they doubled as gambling houses.³⁸ The author cites Harrison's Assembly Rooms as an example of a gaming coffee establishment, yet whilst they comprised a coffee-room, they could not be termed a coffee-house in the usual sense. However, the fact that women were admitted into the coffee-room at Harrisons is interesting in itself, as it suggests that the coffee-rooms housed within assembly-rooms were not exclusively male. Just how far coffee-rooms paralleled coffee-houses is unknown, yet the minute book of the 'committee for managing the New Assembly Rooms in Bath June 3rd 1771-December 16 1775' and the 'Minute Book of the Furnishing Committee' suggests that there was considerable overlap between the two types of institution. The minute book makes no distinction between the two terms: in 1771 the committee ruled that 'a Coffee House be built in the chair court', then switched without apparent reason between the terms 'room' and 'house'.³⁹ Most significantly, it was ruled that a number of newspapers should be ordered 'for the use of the Coffee Room'. The committee ordered nine different publications for the pleasure of patrons: *The Public Advertiser*, *The Gazette*, *The London Evening Post*, *The London Chronicle*, *Lloyds Evening*, *The Pacquet* and 'also when they come out the Gazette ordinary and the extraordinary the kings Speeches the Voter and the Lottery Papers'.⁴⁰ The provision of newspapers indicates that the coffee-room had much in common with the coffee-house and it is likely that patrons engaged in discussion and even perhaps debate on current affairs as they perused the papers in the coffee-room of the Upper Assembly Rooms.

Elite and middling women also had some access to coffee-drinking establishments at Tunbridge Wells. The first buildings erected at the resort were two stone cottages,

³⁸ BCL 914.238b 'Journal of a Tour'. p. 118; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, p. 248.

³⁹ BCL B914.238 'Bath Assembly Rooms' (14 May 1772), p. 30.

⁴⁰ BCLB914.238 'Proceedings of the Committee for Managing the New Assembly Rooms in Bath' (20 September 1771), p. 26.

which Philip Witbourn argues functioned as a men's and a woman's coffee-house.⁴¹ The evidence for this conclusion has been drawn from Burr who wrote that 'in the present age [the men's cottage] might perhaps be called a coffee-house... because there the gentlemen usually met to converse over a pipe, and a dish of coffee.'⁴² However, the women's cottage cannot be argued to have functioned in the same way and Burr makes no suggestion that it did. Narcissus Luterell's observations in 1680 make it quite clear that the establishment was in fact a public toilet for women: 'The Ladies have a conveniency or passing house when their waters work, in a house at ye end of ye walk by ye well.'⁴³ Perhaps the establishment also served coffee and offered space to sit, but there is no evidence for this. Burr implies that the original women's cottage had gone by the time that he was writing and that 'Mrs Jenner's passing houses' then stood on the original site.⁴⁴ However, there is no evidence that a women's coffee-house stood in this location, instead it seems that it had always housed some form of public toilet for women. The provision of a 'ladies' passing house' was of some significance. Few public places provided such facilities for women, meaning that a call of nature could result in returning home, putting an end to a day's or an evening's entertainment. By providing a public toilet, the resort enabled women to spend as long as they wanted enjoying public entertainments without being forced to return home to their chamber pot.

In the event of a public breakfast it appears that women could enter the coffee-houses of Tunbridge Wells. In August 1738 *The London Daily Post and General Advertiser* described a breakfast organised by John Stanhope Esq at Smiths' Coffee House: 'there were present her Grace the Duchess of Norfolk, the Countess of Pembroke, and several other Persons of the first Distinction'.⁴⁵ The attendance of at least two aristocratic women suggests that it was socially acceptable for polite women to visit coffee-houses on such occasions. As further evidence of this, Jasper Sprange's guide stated that it was customary 'for the company in general to breakfast together in the public rooms, or at the coffee-rooms; and sometimes in fine weather,

⁴¹ Philip Witbourn, 'The Queen's Wells' in John Cunningham (ed.), *400 Years of the Wells*, pp. 18, 21.

⁴² Burr, *The History of Tunbridge Wells*, p. 31.

⁴³ TWRL 942.231 'Luttrell's Journey to Tunbridge Wells', p. 5.

⁴⁴ Burr, *A History of Tunbridge Wells*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* (15 August 1738).

under the trees and upon the open Walk, attended with music the whole time.’⁴⁶ The phrase ‘the company in general’ suggests Sprange refers to men and women. The description illustrates how such public breakfasting was organised; it paints a picture of sociability and of breakfasting customers spilling out of the coffee-rooms and on to the walks, helping to explain how 300 guests could be present at the breakfast at Smiths’ in August 1738.

Listed amongst the institutions which required a subscription, Sprange’s 1780 and subsequent guides included ‘the Ladies Coffee Room’ and ‘the Gentleman’s Coffee Room’.⁴⁷ It is possible that the Ladies’ Coffee-Room was established in imitation of the Ladies’ Coffee-House at Bath and that the term ‘coffee-room’ was opted for as it was more in vogue during the last decades of the eighteenth century. The existence of a separate ‘men’s coffee room’ is curious. Usually coffee establishments did not need to explicitly state that they catered for men, it was only necessary for them to indicate that women were welcome. The separation and clearly defined gender divide between these two coffee-rooms, hints that they were in fact coffee-houses by another name. If conversation within the ‘rooms’ was more genteel and less political than that of the coffee-house, there would have been no need to separate men and women. However the establishment of a Ladies’ Coffee-Room suggests that there was a need for separation, mirroring the creation of the Ladies’ Coffee-House at Bath. By providing women with a separate coffee establishment, the resort gave them a space in which they could ‘play’ at coffee-house visiting without impinging on the male-dominated coffee establishments of the resort.

ii. Circulating Libraries

The coffee-house was not the only public institution which facilitated the development of a bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century England. Habermas argues that the salon enabled its development in France, while reading rooms assisted its progress in Germany, but he pays little attention to the role of the English

⁴⁶ Sprange. *The Tunbridge Wells Guide*, (1780), pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷ Sprange. *The Tunbridge Wells Guide* (1780), p. 100.

circulating library.⁴⁸ The circulating libraries which emerged in England in the first half of the eighteenth century were commercial endeavours run purely for private profit, in contrast to the existing subscription libraries which were more exclusive establishments run ‘by and for’ their members.⁴⁹ In a period when books were expensive luxury items, circulating libraries enabled customers to borrow from large collections of factual works, novels, periodicals and pamphlets at a relatively low cost, providing an impressive variety and quantity of literature. Paul Langford suggests that ‘in some places they plainly provided a social as well as a literary service’, which is certainly true of the libraries, as well as booksellers, at Bath and Tunbridge Wells.⁵⁰ The first known use of the term ‘circulating library’ was in 1742, when Samuel Francourt published his ‘Proposals for erecting a public circulating library’ in London.⁵¹ However, many booksellers were loaning out their stock at least twenty years before this. Between 1740 and 1800, these libraries proliferated and it is believed that by 1800 there were no less than one thousand in England.⁵²

Like the coffee-house, the circulating library provided newspapers and was often used as a public meeting place where news and gossip were exchanged. Yet, the majority of circulating libraries were inclusive of male and female patrons and the presence of some children’s books in most institutions suggests that they were not exclusively for adults.⁵³ The novels of Jane Austen suggest that the circulating library ‘could ideally be ... a means for the intellectual liberation of women of small means’, particularly *Mansfield Park*, in which Fanny Price subscribes to a circulating library on her return to Portsmouth and is ‘amazed at her own doings... to be a renter, a chooser of books!’⁵⁴ Through looking at female patronage of circulating libraries at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, the following investigation further illustrates

⁴⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 31-43.

⁴⁹ David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), p. 15.

⁵⁰ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 94.

⁵¹ Paul Kaufman, ‘The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 57: 7 (1967), p. 10.

⁵² Kaufman, ‘The Community Library’, p. 10.

⁵³ M. O. Grenby, ‘Adults Only? Children and Children’s Books in British Circulating Libraries, 1748-1848’, *Book History*, 5 (2002), p. 34.

⁵⁴ Lee Erikson, ‘The Economy of Novel Reading: Jane Austen and the Circulating Library’ *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 30: 4 (1990), p. 577.

that elite and middling women participated in a literary and discursive public sphere at the two resorts.

Female patronage of the circulating library was a subject of concern and satirical comment. Contemporaries worried about the effect of allowing young women to choose their own reading material, believing that they would opt for racy romances over morally improving literature. Bath had many circulating libraries and therefore it is not surprising that much of the satirical comment on female patronage of such libraries looked specifically to the resort. In Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals*, Lydia Languish's maid scours Bath's libraries to find her mistress a selection of popular novels. As mistress and maid discuss the books, they hear footsteps approaching, forcing Lydia to cry out:

‘my dear Lucy, hide these books. Quick, quick. Fling 'Peregrine Pickle' under the toilet; throw 'Roderick Random' into the closet; put 'The Innocent Adultery' into 'The Whole Duty of Man'; thrust 'Lord Aimworth' under the sofa; cram 'Ovid' behind the bolster. There, put 'The Man of Feeling' into your pocket; so, so, now lay 'Mrs. Chapone' in sight, and leave 'Fordyce's Sermons' open on the table.’⁵⁵

This excerpt illustrates how a close connection was made between the circulating library and the sexualisation of young women. It also shows a young woman borrowing respectable books such as *Fordyce's Sermons* and a work by Hester Chapone in order to conceal the sensational novels she has chosen. Similarly, a poem written from the perspective of the abandoned volumes of the libraries, entitled *The POETICAL PETITION of the BOOKS of a Circulating Library in Bath*, satirises the female preference for titillating novels over more serious literature:

But tho' our romances , ah happy! Get Kisses,
From sitting up servants, or read-a-bed misses,
The papas and mamas all load them with hisses!
Would your ladyship then deign then to bring *us* in fashion,

⁵⁵ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 'The Rivals' in *The School for Scandal and Other Plays* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1998), p.19.

Would you breathe o'er our subjects your own inspiration,⁵⁶

In his memoirs, George Cooke despaired that 'many young people, especially girls often procure, and sometimes in a secret manner, books of so evil a tendency, that not only their time is most shamefully wasted, but their manners and morals tainted and warped.'⁵⁷ Circulating libraries became a 'vigorously contested space', advertised by their proprietors as respectable 'quasi-domestic' institutions, but regarded by conservative critics as 'a public arena transgressively dominated by women'.⁵⁸ At the root of this concern, was the knowledge that women's reading and education could now progress unchecked.

Unlike the satirical commentary on novel-reading women at Bath, Fanny Burney's *Camilla* criticises the ways in which both female and male customers made use of the bookseller's at Tunbridge Wells. Here, Sir Theophilus Jarard falls asleep behind a popular pamphlet, Mr Newford glances at the subscription books and Sir Sedley Clarendal practices foppish conversation and feigns fashionable boredom. The women who appear at the booksellers do so mainly to compete for the attention of the gentlemen, rather than to read or borrow books. For example, Mrs Arlebury vies for male attention with Lady Alitha Selmore, 'who, by a certain toss of the chin, a short and half scornful laugh... gave to every sentence she uttered the air of a bon-mot' although what she says is 'neither good nor bad, wise nor foolish, sprightly nor dull'.⁵⁹ In Burney's work, the bookseller's is not a threatening institution set to turn society upside down by providing women with unlimited access to literature and news, but a public facility misused by both men and women. It illustrates that the libraries could be used, and misused, in a multitude of ways.

Visiting the circulating library or the booksellers was an important part of day to day life for many men and women at the eighteenth-century spa. Bath's high number of circulating libraries signifies that despite wide spread concern about the effects of a

⁵⁶ 'The POETICAL PETITION of the BOOKS of a Circulating Library in Bath' in *London Magazine or Gentlemen's Monthly Intelligence* (1781).

⁵⁷ W. Dunlop, *Memoirs of George Fred Cooke* (2 vols, London, 1813), i, p. 202.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 168.

⁵⁹ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 411.

novel-reading public and in particular, a public of women who could choose their own reading material, reading was regarded as a health-giving activity that could aid spa patients. After all, even the most fragile of spa invalid could read or be read to, and medical treatises emphasised that spa waters were most beneficial when patients were distracted and diverted from their ailments. Therefore, the high number of circulating libraries can be read as evidence that bibliotherapy was encouraged and utilised as a form of treatment at the resort.

Leake's on the Terrace Walk was the first Circulating Library at Bath, opening in the mid 1720s. It quickly developed an impressive clientele, including celebrities of the day such as Leticia Barbauld, Elizabeth Montagu and David Garrick.⁶⁰ In 1740, William Frederick, a former apprentice of Leake, opened his own circulating library, at number 18 the Orange Grove.⁶¹ From this point, libraries proliferated at the resort and the *Bath Directory* of 1792 lists seven, although we know that at least fifteen were active throughout the eighteenth century.⁶² Unsurprisingly, Tunbridge Wells had fewer libraries but they were no less important to the life of the resort. The first belonged to Edmund Baker who originally established himself as a bookseller at Tunbridge Wells in the 1750s. It is unclear when Baker started to loan items from his collection but at some point he joined the increasing number of booksellers who were branching into the library business. Some visitors continued to refer to the establishment as the booksellers, even when it had started to loan items. In 1774 Baker died and was succeeded by his apprentice, Jasper Sprange, who continued to run the business until his death in 1818, when it was taken over by a John Elliott. Just as Baker had developed his bookshop into a library, Sprange further developed the business by acquiring a printing press in 1776/77 and initiating the production of the *Tunbridge Wells Guides*.⁶³ The other circulating libraries at Tunbridge Wells are more difficult to trace, however a John Nash opened a circulating library in 1814 and a William Knight in 1790, continuing to run the business until his death in 1803

⁶⁰ V. J. Kite, 'Libraries in Bath 1618-1964' (High Wycombe, 1966), unpublished thesis, pp. 14-19

⁶¹ Kite, 'Libraries in Bath', p. 307.

⁶² *The New Bath Guide* (1792).

⁶³ R. J. Goulden, 'Edmund Baker and Jasper Sprange', *Factotum: Newsletter of the Eighteenth Century STC*, 39 (February 1995), p. 19.

when he was succeeded by William Baldock. In the 1830s another establishment, named Fry's Circulating Library, also opened at the resort.⁶⁴

Despite negative satirical representations, the circulating libraries of Bath and Tunbridge Wells were regarded as reputable institutions which women of the highest social status could patronise without comprising their reputations. Proprietors of circulating libraries were keen to encourage female patronage. William Meyler, for example, emphasised that he welcomed male and female customers; the introduction to his catalogue states that 'It is Customary for *Ladies* as well as *Gentlemen* to resort to this Library to peruse the public Prints.'⁶⁵ One of the most valuable sources informing us of circulating library borrowing patterns is the subscription book of Marshall's Library in Milsom Street, Bath. The book lists the names of borrowers, their town addresses and their subscription fees between 1793 and 1799. Work carried out on the book by Kaufman reveals that although they were in a minority, women formed a substantial and constant proportion of Marshall's customers. His research illustrates that in 1793, 35% of Marshall's customers were female, dipping slightly to 28% in 1795 and rising again to 32% in 1797.⁶⁶

Amongst the names of Marshall's subscribers are several titled women, including the Duchesses of Cumberland and Devonshire and the Countess of Hadinton. The name of Dr Fordyce can also be found amongst the subscribers, further proving the reputable nature of the establishment. It is possible that there were more female customers, women borrowing from the library under the name of their male relatives. Jan Fergus's work on the records of Samuel Clay's Circulating Library in Warwick, illustrates that at least one quarter of his female customers concealed their magazine subscriptions under the name of their husband, and sometimes father or brother, suggesting that this may also have also been common at other provincial circulating

⁶⁴ Robin Alston's Library History Database, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/63097781/Robin-Alston-Library-History-England> [accessed on line 16/09/2014], p. 82 ; Kaufman, 'The Community Library', p. 51.

⁶⁵ William Meyler, *A Catalogue of Meyler's Circulating Library, in Orange-Grove, Bath; Consisting of Many Thousand Volumes in Every Branch of Polite Literature, Including Modern Publications; And to Which Every New Book of Estimation is Added Immediately on its Being Issued from the Press* (Bath, 1790), p. 2

⁶⁶ Kaufman, 'The Community Library', p. 62.

libraries.⁶⁷ In addition to this, men might have taken out books for themselves which were also read by their wives and daughters. During her visit to Bath in 1774 Eliza Noel read her father's newspaper and hoped that he would find a book that she could read aloud to him.⁶⁸ It is likely that women in family situations such as this benefitted from the library subscriptions of their male relations. However, one of the most significant characteristics of the circulating library was the fact that women were not required to hide their subscriptions for public appearance.

Guide books illustrate the female-inclusivity in the sociability of the spa circulating libraries. Burr and Sprange argued the admittance of women was one of the benefits of the books-sellers at Tunbridge Wells, stating that: 'The bookseller's shop has indeed an advantage over the coffee-house, because there the ladies are admitted'. They make the further claim that in the booksellers, female customers proved 'that British beauties are no less superior to their sex throughout the world, in the ornaments of the understanding, than they are universally allowed to be in the external graces of the body'; representing female patrons as intelligent participants in the public life of the booksellers.⁶⁹

On hearing that his daughter needed to stay longer at Bath for her health, Adam Ottley wrote to advise her 'the sooner you subscribe to Leek the better that you may improve your vacant hours with a Book'.⁷⁰ The fact that a clergyman would encourage his daughter to subscribe to one of Bath's circulating libraries offers further proof that the satirical representation of the female library customer did not represent the dominant view of respectable society. Adam Ottley's letter also illustrates the usefulness of circulating libraries for spa invalids. For women such as Ottley, who were at the resort for their fragile health, a subscription to a circulating library was almost a necessity as it provided a constant supply of entertainment which could be enjoyed at home. Mary Isham was another of the patients at Bath

⁶⁷ Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 240.

⁶⁸ Eliza Noel, Milsom Street, Bath, to Judith (27 January 1774) in Elwin (ed), *The Noels and the Milbanks*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ Burr, *The History of Tunbridge Wells*, pp. 127-128; Sprange, *The Tunbridge Wells Guide* (1780), pp. 103-104.

⁷⁰ NLW Ottley Pichford Hall Correspondence (3) 3650 Adam Ottley, Pichford Hall, to Bridget Ottley, Mr Bevan's, the Grand Parade, Bath (9 February 1741/2) [1742].

who subscribed to the library; she wrote to her husband informing him that her time was taken up by bathing and reading, adding that she had ‘some agreeable companions from Mr. Leakes.’ Unlike the female characters of popular satires, Isham did not conceal the fact she was reading volumes in quarto (the most common format of romances and adventures), instead she boasted that she had read ‘4 books in quarto since you went, wch I hope you’ll think pretty sufficient for ye time’, suggesting that she viewed her reading as proof of productivity.⁷¹

Female subscribers had access to a wide range of printed publications at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, both spas having multiple circulating libraries, and each establishment offering its own array of reading material. Few subscription lists have survived from the eighteenth century, and even where they have such as in the case of Marshall’s, they do not detail the items which were borrowed, making it hard to draw any conclusions about women’s interests. For a long time it was assumed that circulating libraries consisted mainly of fiction and that women were the main consumers. For example, Peter Earle rhetorically asks: ‘Who had the time to read the translations of French romances, the play-books, the periodicals and later the novels which were poured out by English publishers for a predominantly female reading public?’ making the assumption it was predominantly women.⁷² Christopher Skeleton Foord argues that the majority of small circulating libraries were made up largely of fiction, whilst Lee Erikson and Edward Jacobs emphasise that women were the main consumers of circulating library novels.⁷³ However, Jan Fergus argues that these studies lack proof about actual borrowers while her own research on Clay’s Circulating Library shows no evidence that there was a predominantly female audience for fiction.⁷⁴ Kaufman suggests that collections varied from library to library as is illustrated by the catalogues of four libraries at Bath.⁷⁵ Hazard’s 1796 catalogue reveals that his collection was less than 10% fiction, while Marshall’s in 1808 was as small as 8%. In contrast, T. Gibbon’s catalogue for 1799-1800, was

⁷¹ NRO IC2019 Mary Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian, London (29 January 1733).

⁷² Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 165.

⁷³ Erikson, ‘The Economy of Novel Reading’, p. 578; Edward Jacobs, ‘Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 33 (1999), p. 578.

⁷⁴ Fergus, *Provincial Readers*, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Kaufman, ‘The Community Library’, p. 14.

comprised of at least 45% fiction. Gibbon's appears to have been the odd one out in having such a large proportion of fiction as the next largest collection, for which we have evidence, is Meyler's Circulating Library, which was approximately 12.5 % fiction in 1790.⁷⁶ These statistics suggest that some libraries specialised in fiction, but that the image of the library providing little else but novels was a caricature.

The personal correspondence of female residents and visitors hints that women borrowed volumes from a variety of categories. Of course, many did enjoy novels, mysteries and romances as popular caricatures suggested. During a visit to Bath in 1792 Elizabeth Collett subscribed to a circulating library from which she borrowed five works, all of which were fictional.⁷⁷ However, novels were not the only literature read by women. Katherine Plymley subscribed to Barratt's in Bond Street, where she took out two biographical works, 'the Supplement to Hayley's life of Cowper & the 1st vol. of Lord Teignmouth's Life of Sr. William Jones.'⁷⁸ Biographies were often listed along with novels in library catalogues so their popularity amongst women may have been regarded as further proof that female customers only read 'light' literature. At Tunbridge Wells, Elizabeth Montagu borrowed 'a volume of the new translation of sophocles' from the bookseller's, which she informed Lord Lyttleton 'I read with great pleasure, or... I may almost as properly say with great pain; and indeed with an interest and eagerness that is not to be described'.⁷⁹ Hester Thrale Piozzi also enjoyed reading demanding literature; she commented that her slow and careful selection of volumes at Bull's library in Bath had made her unpopular with its proprietor: 'I make him clamber for me & reach Books which do n`ot answer, & then he has to mount the Steps again, & so we go on...' ⁸⁰

Margaret Graves was an avid reader and her letters to her niece Eliza Simcoe often discussed the merits and pitfalls of the literature she consumed. She had a dislike of

⁷⁶ Kaufman, 'The Community Library', p. 13; *A Catalogue of Meyler's Circulating Library, in Orange-Grove, Bath* (1790), p. 2.

⁷⁷ BCL Elizabeth Collett, 'A Visit to Bath in 1792'.

⁷⁸ SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1807 (22 January 1807).

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Lyttleton (7 August 1760) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, ix, p. 275.

⁸⁰ James. L. Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941), p. 398.

history which was full of the ‘vices, follies, & miseries of mankind’, but enjoyed reading novels, had a particular keenness for Shakespeare, and avidly read morally improving literature such as ‘Hannah Moores strictures on Female Education’ which she had found ‘instructive; full of good sense, & breathing pure religion in every page.’⁸¹ Graves had the wealth to be able to purchase books as well as just borrow them, and was proud of her personal library to which she added by purchasing volumes at the spa, sometimes from Barratt’s. In January 1795 she noted that she had recently purchased ‘a little Book, most elegantly bound... entitled Lectures on Astronomy & natural Philosophy for the use of children’ which she had given to the daughter of Lady Morice Gore; the gift which was highly approved of by Lady Gore and the child’s governess.⁸²

These examples illustrate that in addition to novels, women enjoyed reading a range of literary genres during their spa visits and residences, including biography, philosophy, plays and conduct literature. Some readers were more interested in the newness of a book than whether it was fiction or non-fiction. For example, Lady Luxborough praised the ‘friendly booksellers’ of Bath ‘who for five shillings for the season will furnish you with all the new books’.⁸³ Similarly, Mrs Ogle, a widow of at least eighty, who resided at Bath had ‘all the new books read to her’ and responded by giving ‘her opinion with admirable judgement.’⁸⁴ Although we do not know if Ogle subscribed to a circulating library, it seems highly probable that she did, if she was able to afford all the most recent books. It is possible that she took books out on her own subscription and had them read aloud by friends and family. The popularity of new volumes could result in long waiting lists and frustrated borrowers.

One of the ways in which circulating libraries most resembled coffee-houses was in their provision of newspapers. Spa circulating libraries provided a variety of newspapers, offering London, local and a range of provincial papers so that visitors

⁸¹ DRO 1038M/F1/151 Margaret Graves, Bath, to Eliza Simcoe (31 March 1799).

⁸² DRO 1038M/F1/139 Margaret Graves, Bath, to Eliza Simcoe, Wolford Lodge (15 January 1795).

⁸³ Lady Luxborough, Orange Grove, Bath, to William Shenstone (29 February 1752) in *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Lady Luxborough, to William Shenstone, Esq* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 296.

⁸⁴ Fanny Burney, 23 Great Stanhope Street, Bath, to Princess Elizabeth (June 1816) in Peter Hughes (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney* (12 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972-1984), ix, p. 152.

could read news from home. As in the coffee-house, visitors could meet at the library to read and discuss the news, however, unlike the coffee-house, female patrons were welcomed just as much by the proprietors of circulating libraries as male patrons were and could also partake in news-reading and discussions. While Smollett's Lydia Melford is too young to enter the Ladies' Coffee-House at Bath she is able to visit the booksellers. Lydia calls the booksellers shops 'offices of intelligence' where 'all the reports of the day, and all the private transactions of Bath, are first entered and discussed.'⁸⁵

The Little Fan-Makers in the Church-Yard at Bath provided newspapers specifically for female clientele. In January 1754, Thomas Loggon the self-styled 'Dwarf-fan-painter' advertised that he had taken two parlours in the church yard, one for use as a shop and the other to provide 'News-Papers, particularly for the Ladies to read, and by their Leave, the Gentlemen'.⁸⁶ In February of the same year Loggon advertised that he held 'The Whitehall & general evening posts, The Daily and public advertiser, The Dublin Journal & Courant The World and the Bath Journal For the Ladies to Read at HALF A – CROWN the SEASON'.⁸⁷ Gradually, he also developed a book collection and in February 1755 proudly boasted 'a well-chosen circulating Library, daily increasing, and all the entertaining new Books ... as they come out'.⁸⁸ It is significant that its proprietor wished to cater specifically for female patrons. Not only does he explicitly state he wished to serve women, but his description of the establishment also reinforces its feminine character. It is described as being situated in 'two parlours'; parlours were regarded as particularly feminine spaces, indicating that it was an establishment especially for women.

Loggon also advertised that he sold 'Flowers neatly rais'd and painted on cards' and informed readers that ladies could be 'taught to Cut and Raise them', once again appealing to female clientele.⁸⁹ The fact that he advertised hot chocolate rather than coffee can perhaps be seen as an indicator that he wished to attract female

⁸⁵ Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*.

⁸⁶ *TBJ* (7 January 1754).

⁸⁷ *TBJ* (4 February 1754).

⁸⁸ *TBJ* (17 February 1755).

⁸⁹ *TBJ* (4 February 1754).

customers.⁹⁰ Chocolate was drunk by both sexes but sweet delicacies were often particularly equated with femininity. Loggon's fame as a 'dwarf-fan-painter' may have helped him to establish an effeminate reputation; his physical stature meaning that he was unlikely to be intimidating to a female clientele, and his delicacy with a paintbrush and fan canvas, contributing to this image. The establishment, a hybrid of the circulating library and coffee-house provided female visitors with another space in which they could participate in a bourgeois public sphere; by reading current news, taking out a subscription to borrow books and pamphlets and engaging in conversation over refreshments.

The letters and diaries of female spa residents demonstrate a varied interest in the type of political current affairs traditionally associated with coffee-house discussion. Bridget Ottley, for instance, had a keen interest in the news, and wrote to her father in 1742 informing him that 'we talk of nothing here but of ye Great man's Resigning & who is like to succeed him in all his honours ... such as L.D Willminton Ld. Carteret Earl of Chesterfield Mr Pellham Duke of Argyle Duke of Newcastle &c.' Her knowledge of possible candidates to replace the first lord of the treasury and her declaration that 'we are all turned politicians', illustrate that she was able to participate in a public sphere of information and discussion.⁹¹ Ottley was not alone in expressing an awareness of political affairs; during moments of great change or crisis, political news was widely discussed at the resorts with no gender divide. For example, in 1797, Melesina Trench informed her friend Sarah Tuite, in Ireland: 'We can here think, and talk of nothing but Irish affairs, which seem indeed to wear a glooming aspect.' She wrote again, in anxious concern for the pregnant Tuite, to encourage her to leave her home and go to Dublin until she had given birth.⁹² Elizabeth Foster residing at Bath in 1793 was also attentive to current news, like Trench following political events in order to discover how her friends would be affected. She wrote to Lord Sheffield, informing him of her devastation at the death

⁹⁰ *TBJ* (17 February 1755).

⁹¹ NLW Ottley Pichford Hall Correspondence (3) 3649b: Bridget Ottley, Bath, to Adam Ottley (7 February 1741 ½) [1742].

⁹² HRO 23M93/42/33/9 Melesina Trench, Bath, to Sarah Tuite, Ireland (1797); HRO 23M93/42/33/10 Melesina Trench, Bath, to Sarah Tuite, Ireland (1797).

of the Duchess de Polignac, adding ‘I have no ambition or knowledge beyond a newspaper’.⁹³

The coffee-drinking establishments and circulating libraries provided women with access to newspapers on a daily basis, and women such as Elizabeth Giffard visited specifically to read the papers.⁹⁴ Most circulating libraries also offered visual prints which conveyed political and social news and opinion through satirical illustration. These images could be borrowed by male and female customers and shown at private evening assemblies. For example, Gibbon’s at Bath offered ‘FOLIOS containing upwards of 200 New, Humorous, and Political CARICATURES, Lent at ONE SHILLING and SIXPENCE the Evening.’⁹⁵ Visual caricatures were a form of print produced to be consumed by a wide audience; they were accessible to all classes, even those who could not read, and the subjects satirised were so varied, that everyone could find prints they found humorous. In June 1786 Betsy Sheridan wrote to her sister that: ‘This day after dinner the Dr and Bogle contrive to pay me visits one with a bouquet and the other to shew me some very good prints and to lend me a periodical paper printed at Edinburgh call’d the Lounger.’⁹⁶ Though the term ‘prints’ might refer to written texts, the fact Sheridan distinguishes them from the ‘periodical paper’ hints she was offered visual prints by her male visitors. Throughout this thesis several satirical prints of spa visiting women are considered, and it is likely that the circulating libraries of the resorts featured locally inspired satirical cartoons.

Some women found they could not access the newspapers they wanted, or in the way they wanted. Mary Isham wrote home to Lamport Hall asking to be sent ‘a weekly news paper I having sent to ye Coffee House here, & they don’t care to lend ‘em out.’⁹⁷ As there is no evidence suggesting the Ladies’ Coffee House existed at this time, it is likely she requested the paper from a more male-dominated institution yet it was not on gender grounds but on custom that she was denied her request. Isham could still have read the paper at a circulating library, perhaps at Leake’s, where she already had a subscription, however she preferred to read the news in private and so found alternative means. Similarly, instead of visiting the circulating library, Fanny

⁹³ ESRO ADD.AMS 5440/224 Lady Elizabeth Foster, Bath, to Lord Sheffield.

⁹⁴ FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (11 December 1766).

⁹⁵ BCL Catalogue of Gibbon’s Public Library No.7, Bridge Street.

⁹⁶ Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells in LeFanu (ed.), *Betsy Sheridan’s Journal*, p. 88.

⁹⁷ NRO IC2020 Mary Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian Isham (10 February 1733).

Burney contented herself with ‘old news papers, which, till I have read them, are, to me, new’ and learned news second hand from her husband who went ‘daily to Barrett’s and brought her ‘accounts of all that passes at the moment’.⁹⁸ Isham and Burney’s examples illustrate that some women preferred to consume political news privately, rather than showing an overt interest in current events. They could both have accessed papers in public institutions and have participated in public discourse if they wished, but both women preferred to have the news brought to them at home.

Many contemporaries commented on the difference between London talk and ‘Bath chat’, the former being composed of recent, political and social news, the second, being seen as idle gossip about the fashionable company resorting to Bath. Those that complained of lack of recent news at the spa often wrote to their friends for more information, such as Elizabeth Foster who asked Lord Sheffield ‘if you have any news foreign or domestick, prey send it, there is something in the atmosphere of Bath that inspires an avidity for it.’⁹⁹ Yet ‘Bath chat’ carried currency in itself, social news such as the current fashions to be seen at the resort, what had happened at the most recent ball, and which members of the royal family were taking the waters, were all eagerly told and consumed in letters written from the spa. From London, Anne Sturges requested that her friend Marianne Dyson, residing at Bath, would write to her ‘a long account of all you did and said & all your parties, & all your talkings... But tell me more of your readings & walks.’¹⁰⁰ Dyson responded in frustration ‘what is there to tell? Would you have me repeat the interesting conversations on weather, Rooms, plays, walks, pleasantness of Bath, advantages of chairs, sales, meetings, & all those profitable things that would so well fill up a letter.’¹⁰¹ Though written with satirical bite, Dyson’s letter neatly summarises the typical local news which those absent from the resort wished to know. The fact that ‘Bath chat’ was often spoken of dismissively during the eighteenth-century, does not mean that historians should see it as superficial or unimportant; women’s spa

⁹⁸ Fanny Burney, 23 Great Stanhope Street, Bath, to Alexander D’arblay (20 April 1816) in Hughes (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, ix, p. 99.

⁹⁹ ESRO 5440/224 Lady Elizabeth Foster, Bath, to Lord Sheffield.

¹⁰⁰ HRO 9M55/F5/6 Anne Sturges Bourne, South Audley Street, London, to Marianne Dyson, St James Square, Bath (13 March 1827).

¹⁰¹ HRO 9M55/F35/1 Marianne Dyson, St James Square, Bath, to Anne Sturges Bourne, South Audley Street, London (16 March 1827).

correspondence often communicated local social information, which was keenly awaited by those with a taste for social news, such as Anne Sturges.

iii. Contribution to the Literary Public Sphere

Coffee-drinking establishments and circulating libraries offered elite and middling women access to a literary public sphere where they could familiarise themselves with current news, political opinions and popular literature, and contribute to the formation of public opinion and taste through discussion and perhaps even debate. Within these spaces they could also partake in a form of sociability mirroring that of the male club or society. However, these were not the only ways in which women participated in the literary public sphere of the resort. In writing letters and journals, women were also active in producing a manuscript culture which formed part of this sphere. Personal letters transferred information and opinions and letters written from fashionable resorts were often read aloud to family and friends at home, as travel journals sometimes were when their authors returned from their expeditions. Chapter 5 looks more closely at female participation in a literary public sphere through the writing of letters and journals, whilst the remainder of this chapter forms a case study of the resident professional female authors of Bath. In contrast to Bath, Tunbridge Wells does not appear to have had many resident published authors. This is probably because Bath was a more comfortable, convenient and relatively inexpensive place for retired and single women to live. The vast majority of the professional female authors considered were single. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, Bath was home to many female literary figures including poets Mary Chandler and Jane Bowdler; novelists Jane Austen, Fanny Burney and Sarah Scott, religious tract author Hannah Moore, editor Henrietta Bowdler and literary hostess Anna Miller. It was also visited by many more, such as the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu and poet Anna Seward.

Several of the authors in consideration wrote and published whilst living at Bath, producing literature which extended beyond the resort. Mary Chandler, a milliner who opened a shop at Bath in 1705, had considerable success when she published

The Description of Bath in 1733.¹⁰² Her verses went through five editions during her life time, making famous both her name and her Bath-based water-poetry. The spa was important to Chandler's success as it was the ideal place for a single woman to set up business on her own, being home to many single women and to many female business owners. These circumstances put her in a comfortable state of independence, while her familiarity with the resort provided an inspiration for her writing. Chandler originally believed that she would never attract a husband as she suffered from a spinal deformity and chose to establish an independent business in order to be self-sufficient.¹⁰³ However, in addition to success as a milliner and poet, she received an offer of marriage, at the age of 54, from an admirer of her poetry, whom she refused on the grounds that she was too old.¹⁰⁴ It is possible that Chandler declined the offer because she did not believe she needed marriage to improve her status, having already achieved respect and admiration through her published works. Chandler's verses became part of the rich literary culture of the resort, well-known to visitors and residents, and joined the more respected of the 'water poets' such as Christopher Anstey.

While Chandler's flowing verses on the beauties of Bath are typical of eighteenth-century 'feminine' subject matter, the works produced by Sarah Scott and Catherine Macaulay during their Bath residences, made advancements into 'masculine' territory. After the breakdown of her marriage, Sarah Scott (sister of Elizabeth Montagu) pooled finances with her friend Lady Barbara Montagu and took up a house in Bath. Though of aristocratic birth, she was cut off from the financial support of her family after leaving her husband, and started to write to create an income for herself, producing five published works during her Bath residence. In 1754 she wrote *An Agreeable Ugliness*, based on a moralistic French text, and a series of tales entitled *A Journey through every Stage of Life*. In 1760 she wrote *The History of Gustavus Ericson, King of Sweden*, to generate support for George III who had come to the throne that year and in 1761 she attempted to engender support for his wife Charlotte in writing *The History of Mecklenburg, from the First Settlement*

¹⁰² Oswald Doughty, 'A Bath Poetess of the Eighteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies*, 1: 4 (October 1925), p. 405.

¹⁰³ Doughty, 'A Bath Poetess of the Eighteenth Century', p. 408.

¹⁰⁴ Doughty, 'A Bath Poetess of the Eighteenth Century', pp. 416-417.

of the Vandals in that Country to the Present Time. While women might be expected to take an interest in reading history, it was highly unusual for them to write and publish histories as Scott did. Scott's most unusual work *A Description of Millennium Hall* (1762) is a fictional work narrated as series of tales, each one describing how a different woman become a resident of the female Utopia, Millennium Hall. At the Hall residents better themselves with crafts and spend the majority of their day in educational pursuit. Scott attempted to set up a real life Millennium Hall in Buckinghamshire in 1766, illustrating that she believed her female utopia could become a reality.¹⁰⁵

Although Scott wrote two histories, she did not see herself primarily as a historian, unlike Catherine Macaulay; often termed the first female historian, Macaulay wrote and published during her Bath residence of 1774 and 1778. Moving to the spa as an impoverished widow, Macaulay was offered shelter for herself and her daughter in the home of her elderly friend, Dr Wilson, in Alfred Street. Macaulay had completed five volumes of her *History of England* before she moved to Bath, finishing the fifth volume in London in 1771. However, despite having started work on the sixth volume before her move to the spa, she did not publish it until 1781 well after her removal.¹⁰⁶ Macaulay still studied and wrote whilst living at Alfred House, working with the benefit of access to Wilson's personal library. It was during this period that she wrote *A History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time in a Series of Letters to a Friend*, which she published in 1778. Although this was a separate work which stood apart from her eight volume history, it was remarkable in the same way, for being a thoroughly researched history written by a woman and published under her own name. In addition, her own strong republican ideals were becoming more evident in her writings. Not only was Macaulay contributing to the literary public sphere, she was actively engaged in trying to shape the political ideas of her readers, and their perception of England's history.

After falling out on the occasion of Macaulay's second marriage in 1778, Dr Wilson tried to charge Macaulay for the expenses she had incurred whilst living with him,

¹⁰⁵ Holger Th. Graf, 'Sarah Scott: Female Historian in Mid Eighteenth-Century Bath', *Bath History*, 5 (2005).

¹⁰⁶ Hill, *The Republican Virago*, p. 85.

including money for parchment, further suggesting that she had been working during her residence at Alfred House. It is likely Macaulay missed the benefits of working in London, as she no longer had access to the British Library which she had previously used extensively for her research. However, Bath provided her with a safe and comfortable home in which she could work, a patron in the form of Dr Wilson and a constant stream of visitors to offer praise and literary discussion.

As with Macaulay, biographers of Jane Austen highlight her Bath years, 1801 to 1806, as ones of little creative output, often attributed to the writer's supposed dislike of the resort.¹⁰⁷ Austen had written her first three novels by 1799, and in 1800 finished writing a dramatic version of *Charles Grandison* for her family's entertainment. John Halperin argues that between 1799 and 1804 Austen attempted no sustained piece of writing, pointing out that it was not until she left Bath that she seriously returned to her work, and that she wrote her last three novels.¹⁰⁸ However, Austen was still working during her Bath years. There is some evidence suggesting that she reworked *Susan (Northanger Abbey)* during the early stages of her residence.¹⁰⁹ In 1803 she was clearly still thinking of her literary career as she was successful in selling *Susan* to the London publisher Crosby and Sons for £10.¹¹⁰ Although Austen later bought the novel back from Crosby, due to his reluctance to publish it, her work on it and its sale during her Bath years suggests that she was still interested writing and publishing. The fact that it was a Bath-located novel that she chose to sell in 1803, rather than *First Impressions* or *Sense and Sensibility*, may also indicate that the resort sparked rather than withered her literary interests. Between 1804 and 1805 Austen started work on a new novel, *The Watsons*, which she put aside after the death of her father.¹¹¹ Like all of Austen's novels, the work follows the lives of single women searching for husbands, in this case, those of the four Watson sisters. It is possible to see the author's concerns about her own spinsterhood reflected in her depictions of the elder Watson sisters, but her lively

¹⁰⁷ John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), p. 124

¹⁰⁸ Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen*, pp. 135-136.

¹¹¹ J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen: And Other Family Recollections* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 59.

description of provincial assemblies are similar to those of Bath balls in *Northanger Abbey*.

Several of Bath's female authors engaged in a salon-like culture, holding literary assemblies at their homes. Macaulay established an unofficial salon at Alfred House where 'she made herself the centre of a little circle of politicians to whom she was accustomed to give lessons on general politics and English Constitutional history'.¹¹² In addition to playing the traditionally feminine role of hostess, she also stepped into masculine territory, speaking about politics and acting as educator and informer for her guests. Henrietta Bowdler, editor of the first *The Family Shakespeare* and author of *Sermons on the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity* (1801) and the novel *History of an Old Maid* (1813) was another of Bath's resident female literary figures and salonières. Noel Perrin suggests that Bowdler was in correspondence with 'half the leaders of high-minded thought in England', who visited her at the resort where they attended the 'salon' she kept there.¹¹³ Unfortunately we do not know what topics were discussed at her assemblies. It seems unlikely that her salon discussions would have taken a political or radical turn like Macaulay's, however this does not lessen the importance of Bowdler's gatherings. The fact that she was able to establish her own salon at the resort and to attract visitors illustrates that she was active in promoting her reputation as an important literary figure.

The poetical assemblies held at Batheaston between 1774 and 1781, presided over by Anna Miller (nee Rigg), were very unlike the French salons of the eighteenth century; they were not held to discuss philosophical matters, but instead were more in the style of French salons of the late sixteenth century, designed with an emphasis on leisure, amusement and entertainment. These once weekly meetings were originally held on Fridays but moved to Thursday's so they did not clash with ball night. Guests were encouraged to write rhyming verses which they brought to the assemblies and placed in an ancient Roman vase, which Miller had brought back from Italy. The verses were then read aloud and a first, second and third prize winner

¹¹² Reverend Joseph Hunter, *The Connection of Bath with the Literature and Science of England* (Bath, London, 1853), pp. 56-7.

¹¹³ Noel Perrin, *Dr. Bowdler's Legacy: A History of Expurgated Books in England and America* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1994), p. 69.

selected; each winner being awarded a crown which was worn to the assembly rooms the following evening.¹¹⁴ Miller prohibited discussion of any controversial subjects and decided the poetic theme; usually a seasonal or local topic.¹¹⁵ The poetical assemblies at Batheaston were scorned by many more serious authors of the eighteenth century, but remained a fashionable and popular part of the Bath season during the 1770s and early 1780s. While women were excluded from some aspects of the actual assembly, for example, they could not judge and select a winner, they could compete for the crown of laurel on grounds of literary capability.¹¹⁶

Some of the verses written for the Batheaston assemblies were compiled for publication by Miller.¹¹⁷ Miller was successful in enabling herself and her literary guests to launch their verses into the wider literary public sphere. For poet Anna Seward, Miller's poetical assemblies provided a crucial turning point in her career. Walter Scott argues that before attending the Batheaston assemblies Seward's 'poetical powers appear to have lain dormant, or to have been only sparingly exercised', but that the 'applause' she found in the Batheaston circle gave her the 'courage to communicate some of the essays to the press' and therefore he holds them responsible for the start of her career as a published poet.¹¹⁸ Salon-like gatherings such as Macaulay's Boulder's and Miller's are significant because they illustrate how women could establish themselves as local celebrities at the resort and make themselves the centre of a semi-public entertainment.

This chapter illustrates that elite and middling women were able to participate in a public sphere which was literary, discursive and associational at eighteenth-century Bath and Tunbridge Wells. While there is little evidence suggesting they found a ready welcome in the majority of coffee establishments at the resorts, through admittance to the Ladies' Coffee-House at Bath and to the coffee-rooms of both resorts, women had direct access to one of the central institutions of the Habermasian

¹¹⁴ Ruth Hesslegrave, *Lady Miller and The Batheaston Literary Circle* (Yale University Press, 1927), pp.17-22.

¹¹⁵ Hesslegrave, *Lady Miller*, pp. 30.

¹¹⁶ Hesslegrave, *Lady Miller*, pp. 72-73.

¹¹⁷ Hesslegrave, *Lady Miller*, pp. 13, 77.

¹¹⁸ Walter Scott (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward: with Extracts From Her Literary Correspondence* (3 vols, Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co, 1810), i, p. xi.

public sphere, where they could learn of current affairs either through newspapers or discussion with other patrons. The spa circulating library has been investigated as another institution which gave women access to the bourgeois public sphere. Despite the negative representation of female circulating library borrowers in eighteenth-century print culture, elite and middling women were happy to frequent the libraries of the resorts, encouraged by their proprietors and by the authors of spa guide-books. Within these libraries women found access to a wide variety of printed material which they could take away and consume at home (a benefit which was especially felt by invalids) as well as another public space which could be used to read newspapers, learn local gossip and essentially participate in the formation of public opinion, whether it was on literary, social or political news.

The chapter has also explored the complicated relationship between Bath and its literary female figures, suggesting that the high number of resident and visiting female authors is more indicative of the spa's suitability as a home for single women (as many of the authors were), rather than its literary reputation. However, this does not undermine the fact that a high number of female authors were present at the spa, publishing works which entered a literary public sphere extending beyond the resort. Some women, such as Macaulay, Bowdler and Miller also held literary salons, for entertaining and improving the minds of their guests, turning their homes into semi-public spaces which mirrored the types of sociability prevalent in the coffee-house and circulating library. In the following chapter it is argued that the letters and journals of elite and middling women, of both resorts, also contributed to the literary public sphere of the spas and that their manuscript, rather than print format, only restricted the audience to whom such writings were available; the public status of the texts was not altered.