HAUTE HAUNTINGS: THE PERSISTENCE OF THE LITERARY PAST IN THE VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS, 1778-1848

by

ANNELISE HALLIDAY NORMAN

(Under the Direction of Roxanne Eberle)

ABSTRACT

Vauxhall made its way into the social plots of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels as a site of leisure and spectacle that attracted fashionable crowds of both the upper and middle classes. As the actions of the literary characters who visited this space suggest, Vauxhall afforded countless opportunities for advancement in terms of conflict or personal agenda, solicited or unsolicited sexual conquest, and the confusion of status in the crowd's mixing of classes. With each new literary representation of Vauxhall comes a remembering of past spectacles, trysts, and maiden terrors. We ought not think of Vauxhall as belonging to the narratives that deploy it as a setting; instead, we should recognize how the casts of these stories occupy and utilize the space. Tracing a broad chronology between fictional visits to Vauxhall made in novels published between 1778 and 1848, this project examines the pleasure gardens as a vessel of both society and history, considering the ways in which the space foregrounds and complicates questions of realism and temporality across these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts.

By conducting case studies of Vauxhall's representation in *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), *Valentine's Eve* (1816), *Vanity Fair* (1848), and *Pendennis* (1848), I approach questions

of realism, setting, and the disorienting blur between fictional containers and the affordances of their real referents. Rather than examining Vauxhall as a constituent element of prose fiction, my project promotes a consideration of the geographical location as it is occupied by the characters of their respective novels. Directing critical attention toward settings with fictional and real provenance, my project introduces the notion of fiction to the historical and archaeological discourses concerning the pleasure gardens and allows Vauxhall to become a way of thinking through ideas about realism and periodization in the history of the English novel. The alignment of Vauxhall's real and literary existences in its function as a site of fiction and fantasy allows this space, a monument of eighteenth-century design, to transcend time, first by maintaining relevance to changing social and cultural tastes, and finally as a cultural and historical icon.

INDEX WORDS: Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, London, pleasure gardens, Frances Burney, Amelia Opie, William Makepeace Thackeray, literary history, eighteenth century, nineteenth century, history of the novel, realism, fiction

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: "MORE NIGHTINGALES AND FEWER STRUMPETS"

The extreme beauty and elegance of this place is well known to almost every one of my readers; and happy is it for me that it is so, since to give an adequate idea of it would exceed my power of description. To delineate the particular beauties of these gardens would, indeed, require as much pains, and as much paper too, as to rehearse all the good actions of their master, whose life proves the truth of an observation which I have read in some ethic writer, that a truly elegant taste is generally accompanied with an excellency of heart; or, in other words, that true virtue is, indeed, nothing else but true taste.[1]

Vauxhall is a composition of baubles, overcharged with paltry ornaments, ill conceived, and poorly executed; without any unity of design, or propriety of disposition. It is an unnatural assembly of objects, fantastically illuminated in broken masses; seemingly contrived to dazzle the eyes and divert the imagination of the vulgar—Here a wooden lion, there a stone statue; in one place, a range of things like coffeehouse boxes, covered a-top; in another, a parcel of ale-house benches; in a third, a puppet-show representation of a tin cascade; in a fourth, a gloomy cave of a circular form, like a sepulchral vault half lighted; in a fifth, a scanty flip of grass-plat, that would not afford pasture sufficient for an ass's colt. The walks, which nature seems to have intended for

[1] Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (Delphi Classics, 2013), vol. 3, bk, 4, chap. 9, Kindle.

solitude, shade, and silence, are filled with crowds of noisy people, sucking up the nocturnal rheums of an aguish climate; and through these gay scenes, a few lamps glimmer like so many farthing candles. When I see a number of well-dressed people, of both sexes, sitting on the covered benches, exposed to the eyes of the mob; and, which is worse, to the cold, raw, night-air, devouring sliced beef, and swilling port, and punch, and cyder, I can't help compassionating their temerity; white I despise their want of taste and decorum; but, when they course along those damp and gloomy walks, or crowd together upon the wet gravel, without any other cover than the cope of Heaven, listening to a song, which one half of them cannot possibly hear, how can I help supposing they are actually possessed by a spirit, more absurd and pernicious than any thing we meet with in the precincts of Bedlam?[2]

Image to yourself . . . a spacious garden, part laid out in delightful walks, bounded with high hedges and trees, and paved with gravel; part exhibiting a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottos, lawns, temples, and cascades; porticos, colonades, and rotundas; adorned with pillars, statues and paintings; the whole illuminated with an infinite number of lamps, disposed in different figures of suns, stars and constellations; the place crowded with the gayest company, ranging through those blissful shades, or supping in different lodges on cold collations, enlivened with mirth, freedom and good humour, and animated by an excellent band of music.[3]

[2] Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89. Letter to Dr. Lewis from Matt Bramble.
[3] Ibid., 93. Letter to Letty Willis from Lydia Melford.

The passages above offer impressions of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens during their eighteenth-century heyday. Each is informed by strong opinions about the space and its trappings. The first, a narration from Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (1751), leans upon cultural memory for its rendition of the pleasure gardens, inviting the reader into the story with their qualifying knowledge of and possible experience in the space. Fielding's narrator breaks the fourth wall, gesturing towards the reader's double occupancy of the real world (with access to and knowledge of Vauxhall) and the fictional one of Fielding's design. The second and third passages derive from Tobias Smollett's epistolary novel *Humphry Clinker* (1771). While Fielding's narrator expounds on the beauty of Vauxhall, Matt Bramble can only take in the space through fatalist eyes. Bramble's negative commentary provides a literal reading of the gardens' geography, perhaps proving Fielding's earlier point that any description would fall short of capturing Vauxhall's splendor. Discomfort replaces splendor for this hypochondriac, but his recognition of the crowd and Vauxhall's threats (specifically to one's health) bring to light the possibility that this place could do harm to a person. On the other hand, the young and lovely Lydia Melford focuses on the enchanting qualities of Vauxhall in her letter to Letty Willis. Though she endures a rainstorm and some unwanted attention from Mr. Barton, Lydia emerges from the gardens unscathed and bright-eyed. The Vauxhall she describes is the "dazzling," shining opposite of Bramble's rheumatic hellscape.

Lydia Melford’s description of Vauxhall is one of the most succinct surveys available of this historical site, and yet it appears in a work of fiction. From its inception as a site of intrigue and debauchery, Vauxhall has had a presence in British literature. In fact, our understanding of its significance in British society between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries has become

so entangled with its literary identity that it is now impossible to conduct research about the historical site without encountering a literary allusion or citation of a British fiction writer. Most descriptions of the gardens' landscape reflect a reciprocal relationship between the reality of the gardens' layout and the fictional plots that help to populate and enliven the communal areas and walks. In his book *Eighteenth-Century Vignettes* (1892), Austin Dobson uses literary characters' experiences to construct his historical vignette of Vauxhall. He explicitly invokes "the Vauxhall of Horace Walpole and the 'Connoisseur,' —of Beau Tibbs and the pawnbroker's widow, — of Fielding's 'Amelia' and Fanny Burney's 'Evelina'," blending his descriptions of the landscape and architecture with novelists' appraisals and imaginings of the aestheticized space.[4] "When, after passing Lambeth Palace on the left," he writes, "you reached Vauxhall Stairs, your experiences were still, in all probability, those of Lydia Melford and her friends."[5] In crafting his glimpse into the eighteenth-century institution of pleasure-seeking at the Vauxhall Gardens, Dobson conflates fiction and reality, using the novels' imagined space of Vauxhall as the necessary historical reference material to convey such an experience.

These records of sociocultural estimations of the space suggest that any attempt to split Vauxhall, as a literary (imagined) and historical (real) place, into separate objects of study—both its literary identity and historical, geographical identity—will fail to produce an accurate reading of the site and its social impact. Further complicating this dichotomy of real/imagined space are Vauxhall's own theatrical and illusory trappings, which unite these identities to form a distinctly imaginative space. The nuances of Vauxhall's doubled historical identity have proven difficult to reconcile in previous surveys of the public assembly space.[6] However, if we look closely at the

[4] Dobson, *Vignettes*, 231.
[5] Ibid., 233.
[6] See James Granville Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens: A Chapter in the Social History of England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), Walter Sidney Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859*

literature constructing and re-constructing Vauxhall in the public imagination, the gardens' resonances with fiction become more pronounced. The Royal Gardens, Vauxhall so often recalled in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels and today's period drama vary in depiction and design, but they ultimately share a resemblance in their historical setting during the late Georgian and Regency-eras. Thus, I have conducted case studies of Vauxhall's presence in five novels between 1778 and 1848. *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), *Valentine's Eve* (1816), *Vanity Fair* (1848), and *Pendennis* (1848-50) account for a significant portion of British cultural memory about the space. Beyond providing insight into the social and physical landscape of Vauxhall, the novels of Frances Burney, Amelia Opie, and William Thackeray, respectively, capture the gardens' immersive qualities to both inspire and reflect interactions with Vauxhall that can only be likened to the experience of reading a novel. These immersive qualities are hallmarks of narrative realism. As the gardens' affordances evolve over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so too does the English novel.[7] Thus, this project traces a realism under formation. The project's evolving definition of realism requires a reader to identify with protagonists and their experiences, which are to be plausibly staged and executed in settings present, currently or historically, in reality. Therefore, narratives depend upon the existence of a physical space with material affordances that can be engaged and investigated. To investigate the social and literary functions of such a vessel for drama and illusion as Vauxhall, I begin this project by establishing the landscape of the pleasure gardens to uncover the geographical and material affordances responsible for its immersive narrative potential.

(London: Odhams, 1955), T.J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), and Jonathan Conlin, *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[7] For the duration of this project, the term "affordances" refers to James J. Gibson's theory of affordances. Gibson's concept of affordances describes the relationships that exist between organisms and their environments, with affordances of an environment being what it offers, provides, furnishes, either for good or ill. See James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

The Gardens

The Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens began in the seventeenth century as the New Spring Garden, situated in Lambeth, south of the Thames. Following the Restoration, the New Spring Garden opened to the public during the summer months, promising enchanting nightingales, winding walks, hedges, and orchards.[8] At its 1661 debut, no admission fee was required, and the only edifice disrupting the idyllic rural landscape was the proprietor's house, in which refreshments were offered. In the late seventeenth century, the paths and avenues that would become Vauxhall's famous walks were laid out as groves of trees were planted.

The Spring Garden rose in popularity during the eighteenth century, attracting "fine people" with its musical diversions and charming orchards. These visitors, in turn, attracted the "rude behavior of the gallants of the town" by the end of Vauxhall's first decade in operation. Over the next sixty years, the Spring Garden acquired a reputation of serving as a rendezvous for fashionable gallantry and intrigue. Joseph Addison enacts this cultural perception of Vauxhall when describing Sir Roger de Coverley's fictional visit to "Fox-hall" in 1712. At the conclusion of his visit, Sir Roger expresses a desire for "more nightingales and fewer strumpets" populating the gardens.[9]

[8] Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 287.
[9] Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 5, no. 383, 1712, pp. 244-247.

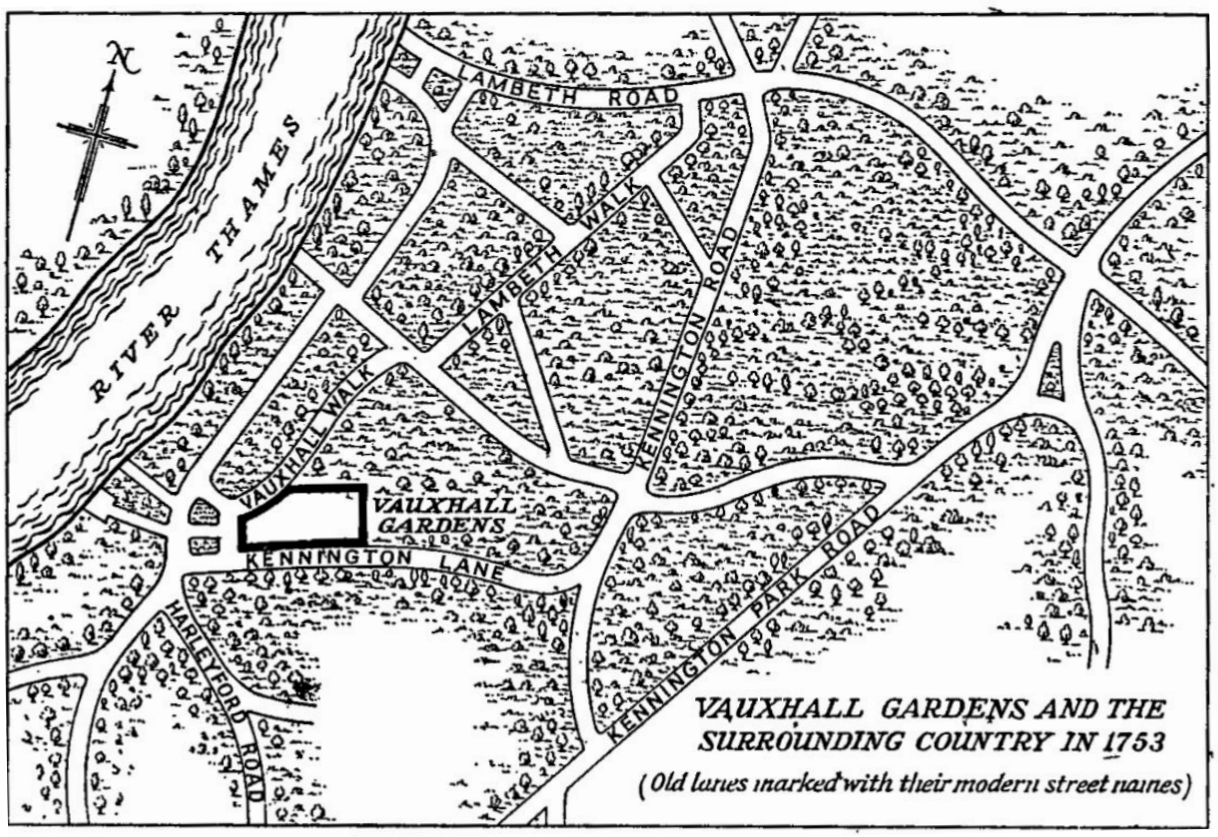

Fig. 1. “Vauxhall Gardens and the Surrounding Country in 1753." Illustration reproduced from *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859*, London, 1955.

Despite its reputation for debauchery, in 1726 the Spring Garden was named as a “London sight” in *A New Guide to London*. When Jonathan Tyers acquired the pleasure gardens’ lease in 1728, he implemented more robust management and began a campaign of reforming the morals that had for too long dictated the amusements of Vauxhall. He reopened Vauxhall to the public on 7 June 1732 with an opulent *Ridotto al fresco*, which was attended by Frederick, Prince of Wales and 400 other guests. Tyers is credited as being “the true founder of Vauxhall Gardens,” for it is his vision that inspires the romanticized Vauxhall of our literature and

fantasy.[10] Thus, the Vauxhall of this project refers to is specifically Tyers's Vauxhall and his legacy.

With improved management and programming, Tyers worked to establish Vauxhall as a genuine social institution. He began charging admission and by 1736 offered season tickets to those esteemed guests who could afford them and were trusted to invite a suitable guest as their plus one.[11] While the cost of admission would have theoretically barred the riff raff from gaining entry to the gardens, Vauxhall under Tyers did not necessarily see the end of promiscuity, debauchery, and generalized tomfoolery; rather, the array of entertainments increased in number and diversity. Vauxhall would never come to be known for its exclusivity, and, as Wroth remarks, "at no other London resort could the humours of every class of the community be watched with greater interest or amusement".[12]

What Tyers's Vauxhall lacked in prestige and exclusivity was made up for in its spectacles and amusements. These entertainments were made possible by the addition of both architectural and agricultural features; the changes made to Vauxhall during the first decade of Tyers's management account for much of the landscaping and architecture that define the cultural and historical memory of the space. At its most expansive point, the gardens boasted nearly 12 acres of land. The famous walks were laid out in either gravel or turf, lined with shrubs, and enclosed by clusters of trees.[13] The landscape was also altered to include lawns, groves, and pavilions in addition to the edifices constructed for the outdoor orchestra, rotunda, and supper boxes. By the 1740s, Vauxhall was noted for having simple open supper boxes,

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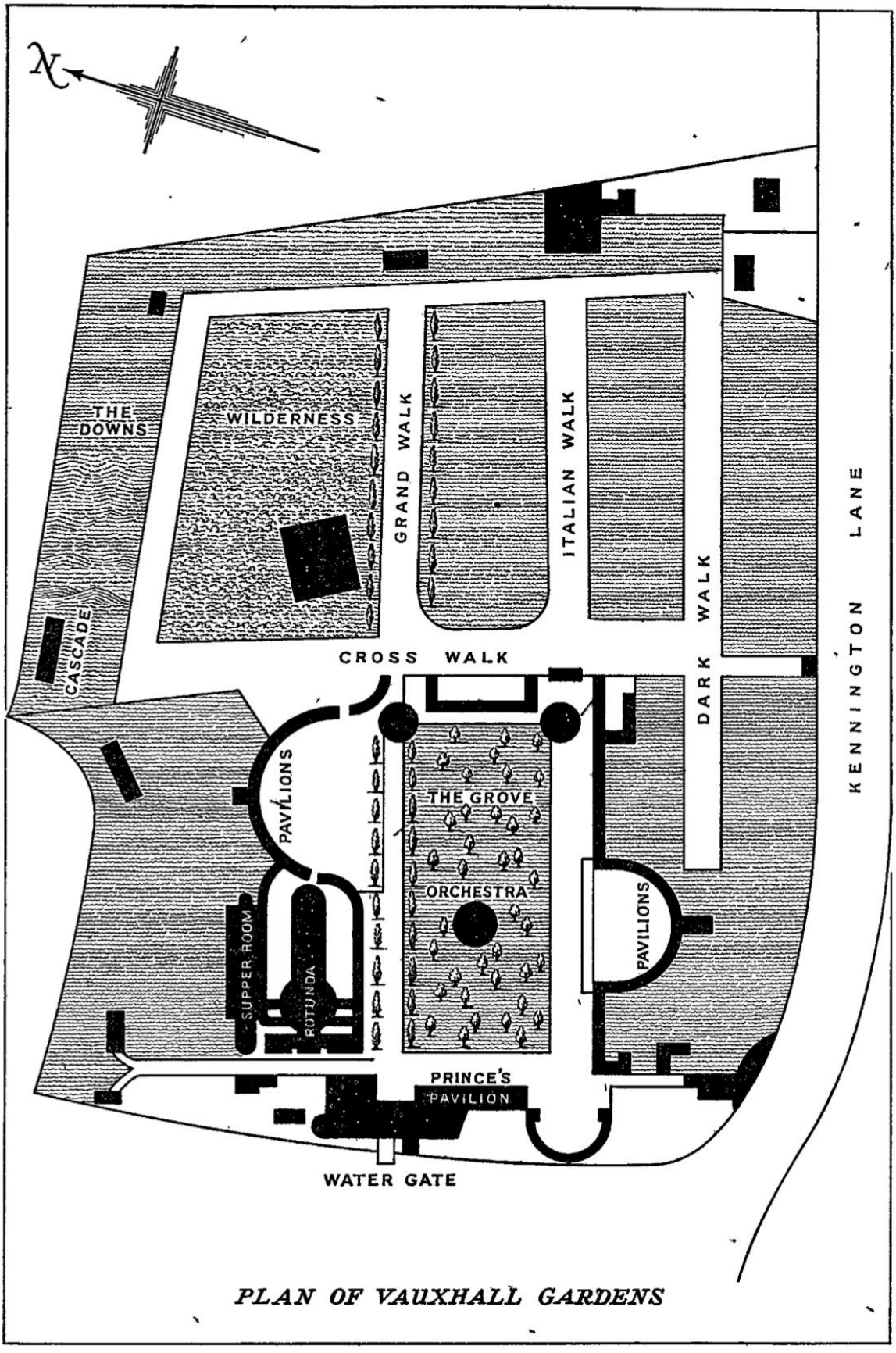
[10] Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens*, 290.
[11] Ibid. These tickets were usually made of silver and featured an exclusive design by William Hogarth. A season ticket admitted two people per visit.
[12] Ibid., 292.
[13] Ibid., 300; See also Walter Sidney Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859* (London: Odhams, 1955), 41.

elegant groves and avenues of trees, a rusticated orchestra building, and, of course, its varied walks and lanes. The edifices constructed in the gardens—the obelisks, triumphal arches, temples, and grotto rooms—were designed in the fashionable style of the day until 1740, when the Prince of Wales, Vauxhall's patron, imposed his own taste upon the gardens. And thus, we have Frederick, Prince of Wales to thank for the "exotic" features that appeared at Vauxhall, such as the Eastern palace and Roman temple.[14] This unlikely blending of designs would transform into the rococo style that came to define Vauxhall's permanent aesthetic, a style that embodied its playfulness and informality. After these renovations and redecorating measures, the Vauxhall Gardens of the 1760s remained relatively the same for the next century. The pleasure gardens at this time encompass the walks, supper-boxes, and other stages that would host and generate the plots that unfold in the literature that will be discussed at length in this project.

[14] David Coke, *The Muse's Bower: Vauxhall Gardens 1728-1786*, exh. cat. (Sudbury, Suffolk: Gainsborough's House, 1978), 4.



PLAN OF VAUXHALL GARDENS

Fig. 2. "Plan of Vauxhall Gardens." Illustration reproduced from *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859*, London, 1955.

Visitors like Frances Burney's Evelina Anville and Cecilia Beverley would have entered Vauxhall by the water gate, having hired a boat for the journey down the Thames to Vauxhall Stairs. After paying the admission fee or showing a season ticket, guests would find themselves on the Grand Walk, a long, straight gravel lane that was lined with tall, mature elms. For this immediate entrance to the gardens, Tyers commissioned a full-length marble statue of George Frideric Handel to be displayed in honor of the beloved composer.[15]

Handel himself became quite a legend at Vauxhall for the rehearsal of his *Music for the Royal Fireworks* in 1749. On April 21, 1749, thousands of people thronged the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens to attend a public rehearsal of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Handel was contracted by King George II to compose a soundtrack for the celebration to mark the end of the War of Austrian Succession and the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that had occurred the previous year. This display would be one of several events held across two weeks for the elites to enjoy large-scale amusements in the name of patriotism.[16] The public rehearsal of music for the fireworks show was scheduled for 11:00 on a Friday morning. Tyers raised the price of admission by 150 percent for this event, despite the absence of Vauxhall's usual attractions like fireworks, illuminations, or one of the usual vocalists.[17] Nevertheless, the

[15] David Kerr Cameron, *London's Pleasures: From Restoration to Regency* (Sutton, 2001), 49.
[16] David Hunter, "Rode the 12,000? Counting Coaches, People and Errors En Route to the Rehearsal of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* at Spring Gardens, Vauxhall in 1749," *The London Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 2012): 13-26.
[17] Ibid., 23.

rehearsal received a disproportionate review in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that would come to corrupt research for history and musicology even to this day.

> *Friday, 21. Was performed, at Vauxhall Gardens, the rehearsal of the music for the fireworks, by a band of 100 musicians, to an audience of above 12,000 persons (tickets 2s. 6d.). So great a resort occasioned such a stoppage on London Bridge, that no carriage could pass for 3 hours. -- The footmen were so numerous as to obstruct the passage, so that a scuffle happen'd in which some gentlemen were wounded*.[18]

Likewise, the *Penny London Post* called the event "a thing not known before in the Memory of Man."[19] To put things in perspective, this three-hour traffic jam was occasioned by the rehearsal of a 22-minute-long bop. However, records indicate that enough supplies were ordered for two run-throughs of Handel's piece with explosions (18 chambers with two rounds of powder for each cannon), so playtime was likely around 45 minutes to one hour, depending on Handel's mood.[20] While this event has been largely documented for the chaotic traffic jam it caused, it also serves as a testament to Vauxhall's entertainment identity. While this project focuses specifically on visual materiality with the garden's spatial design and traditions of spectacle and voyeurism, one of Vauxhall's trademark amusements was its musical performances.

At the opposite end of the Grand Walk was an obelisk[21] with corners that depicted several enslaved people in chains and bore the inscription

SPECTATOR

FASTIDIOSUS

SIBI MOLESTUS,

[18] *Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX (April 1749), 185.
[19] *Penny London Post*, April 24, 1749.
[20] Hunter, "Rode the 12,000," 20.
[21] Constructions of race at Vauxhall, signaled by this troubling object, will be addressed in chapter five.

or "the fastidious spectator troubles himself." Considering the role that spectatorship will come to play in our study of Vauxhall and its traditions, the placement of the obelisk bearing this sentiment along the central Grand Walk is significant. As the Grand Walk draws visitors into the gardens, they immediately confront the truth of their position as spectators, a role which inspires a certain set of social behaviors and expectations that came to shape the whole institution of the Vauxhall Gardens.[22]

If the visitor chose not to venture down this immediate pathway, they could turn to their right and admire the Grove, a large square planted with trees surrounding the orchestra. The orchestra boasted an organ on the top story, beneath which the musicians would be seated to play popular and enchanting music for the pleasure-seekers. The bottom level housed supper-boxes. A Turkish tent lay beyond the orchestra, distinguished by its carved dome, which was supported by 20 pillars. Inside, the tent was illuminated by five glass chandeliers and furnished with fourteen dining tables. Further to the right was the Prince's Pavilion, built with a royal box for the Prince of Wales's use. The royal retiring room was built behind the box and had a direct exit to the street.

To the left of the Grand Walk was the Rotunda, which offered musicians protection from bad weather during performances. During Tyers's renovations, the Rotunda gained a saloon that would come to be known as the Great Room. To the right of the Rotunda was a cluster of pavilions that housed additional alcoves and supper boxes, stretching across the Grand Walk to the Grove. On the other side of the Grove facing the orchestra was an additional semi-circular

[22] Miles Ogborn and Peter de Bolla have commented upon these themes of spectatorship and visuality at the pleasure gardens. See Ogborn, " Locating the Macaroni: Luxury, Sexuality and Vision in Vauxhall Gardens," *Textual Practice* 11, no. 3 (1997): 455, and de Bolla, "The Visibility of Visuality," *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 72-103.

arrangement of pavilions. The famous statue of Handel created by Louis François Roubiliac was the focus of this space.[23] This set of pavilions laid adjacent to the Italian Walk, which ran parallel to the Grand Walk and was distinguished for its three triumphal arches and the artificial Ruins of Palmyra that terminated the lane. On the opposite side of the Italian Walk was the Dark Walk, where the boughs of the lofty trees lining the lane had entwined to create a canopy. These three major walks were intersected by the Cross Walk, which spanned the total width of the gardens and divided the Grove and edifices near the entrance of Vauxhall from the illusory attractions located at the north end of the gardens: the Wilderness, the Rural Downs, and the Cascade.

Fig. 3. Samuel Wale. *A General Prospect of Vaux Hall Gardens*. 1751. Public domain.

[23] Over the years, the statue was moved to various part of the garden and eventually found its way into the supper room north of the Rotunda for protection from the elements.

What transformed Vauxhall into the lively, imaginative space that was valued by society and its fiction writers and record-keepers were the illuminations, artwork, and other furnishings that Tyers introduced into the gardens. The dispersal of sculptures, pavilions, arches, *fabriques* and transparencies throughout the lanes and lawns varied the amusement offerings, capturing and directing guests' attentions and, as David Coke and Allan Borg suggest, their actions and pursuits while at the gardens.[24] The result was an immersive experience, and an ideal space for people looking to narrativize their lives. Like the novel, Vauxhall encouraged pleasure-seekers to imagine themselves as a main character in a story with its attention to detail, set building, and imaginative potential. This immersive quality is the key to understanding Vauxhall's attraction for novelists: it becomes like the world of a novel itself to the visitor enchanted by its layers of trickery and illusion and willing to suspend their disbelief. A visitor to Vauxhall could enter the pages of beloved novels and imagine themselves in a novel of their own making.

An Imaginative Space

The Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens exist now only in memory and literature. In novels, travel literature, and social histories, the gardens function as a site of leisure, spectacle, conflict, and intrigue. Though travel writings and social histories have recorded and preserved Vauxhall's outward splendor and internal conflicts in management and ownership, the *experience* of Vauxhall has been more thoroughly and successfully captured in novels. This project will come to reveal how narrative realism depends upon the experience of Vauxhall, which essentially becomes synonymous with spectacle.

[24] David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 85.

Vauxhall's long history of literary entanglements have prompted its study as a leisure destination for the *beau monde*, a psychosocial space, and a space of modernity. In historicocritical terms, Vauxhall unites commodification and fashion, operating as a "key site in the geography of eighteenth-century cultural production."[25] Miles Ogborn posits that, as a space of modernity, Vauxhall was the exciting rendezvous point for pleasure and danger in the commodification of leisure and transgression for risky entertainments. Distinctive for its illusory effects, Vauxhall is an ideal site for Ogborn to investigate how the processes of commodification are interpreted through social and cultural relations between people and between reality and representation.

As a psychosocial space that establishes subjectivity through visual representations and novels, Steven Gores suggests that Vauxhall hosts the production of individual identity. This effect is a result of cultural production and reciprocity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: "Together, the literary and visual arts during this time constituted forms of emergent mass media that created cultural spaces; in turn, these cultural spaces were used as vehicles for both cultural and individual self-representations."[26] For Gores, psychosocial space is "manifold and is constructed imaginatively by each individual, both consciously and unconsciously" while simultaneously existing as physical and aestheticized places, both geographically grounded and situated in "the microcosmic world of a novel," for example.[27] Thus, Vauxhall enjoys a simultaneous presence in reality (regardless of temporal limitations), in the experience of fiction, and within individual subjectivity. The reciprocity that Gores implies is happening between cultural spaces and literary and artistic representation resembles the

[25] Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780.* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 118.
[26] Stephen Gores, *Psychosocial Spaces: Verbal and Visual Readings of British Culture 1750-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 13.
[27] Ibid., 13-14.

reciprocity between fiction and reality and history and literature that I wish to trace in the Vauxhall Gardens of Jonathan Tyers's eighteenth-century redesign. Thus, Gores's psychosocial understanding of cultural spaces informs my reading of Burney's, Opie's, and Thackeray's representations of Vauxhall as both a real and fictional presence throughout this project.

Further, while historical readings of Vauxhall have helped to further our understanding of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century London and leisure society, I propose a more fluid model for examining Vauxhall as a historical and literary space, a space that, with its own literary and historical timelines, illustrates the history of the novel: and that can be defined by studying Vauxhall as an *imaginative space*. This term "imaginative" bridges the gap between Vauxhall's historical identity (a real space) and literary representations (a space existing in the imagined world of the novel). In the cases of Vauxhall's appearance as an imagined space, its usage is authentic and plausible; its familiarity and reputation eases readers into or helps to maintain the necessary suspension of disbelief for the relation of the narrative.

Vauxhall's imaginative quality accounts for the persistence of the literary past in the space during its heyday and its persistence in cultural memory after its closing in 1859. Frances Burney, Amelia Opie, and William Thackeray had a physical place with buildings and landscaping to reconstruct in their novels. Thomas Rowlandson had the edifice of the Orchestra and Vauxhall's regular hordes of people to populate his famous print with a fictionalized crowd of distinguished persons. Now, period dramas like *Poldark* (1975, 2015) and *Bridgerton* (2020) must work backward from these representations, referring to novels, illustrations, historical documents, and social histories to reconstruct the gardens. And that source material, that media, reflects the creator's own perception of the space and intentional perspective, shifting the

documentation of this real place into the realm of imagination and invention. Thus, imagination itself is the mechanism for Vauxhall's persistence.

With Jonathan Tyers's vision for and renovation of the pleasure gardens came Vauxhall's function as a living fantasy. Designed for pleasure-seekers, this aestheticized space promised an experience, and its illusory designs and attractions translated neatly into fiction as imaginative elements. Amelia Booth's and Lydia Medford's enchanting experiences within a novel could be recreated and enjoyed by a reader outside of the novel: literary fantasy becomes an attainable reality for the inspired Vauxhall visitor wishing to transcend the boundaries of class, time, or simply the banality of everyday life.

This imaginative space bridges social and narrative engagement, making it an ideal stage for conflict. Narrative affordances collide here, at once a real and imagined place. To examine these affordances and their interactions is to study both the literature and society, creating a useful perspective for investigating the construction of the novel that complicates traditional delineations of literary and historical periods. Through their varying narrative experiments in early modes of realism, Frances Burney, Amelia Opie, and William Thackeray each create lenses through which we can examine Vauxhall's place in history and literature. Bounded geographically, architecturally, temporally, and historically, the pleasure gardens span several contexts, occasionally overlapping in troublesome ways for more conventional approaches to studying literary representations of cultural artifacts. It might be tempting to call Vauxhall and the novel parallel amusements of the long-eighteenth century, but my reading of the public pleasure space as it is occupied in fiction and reality at this time collapses the tension holding these amusements apart to reflect their inextricable resemblances in the social, the dramatic, and

the aestheticized familiar. And thus, we will come to see how the space of Vauxhall might be read as we read a novel.

The Narrative

Tracing a broad chronology between fictional visits to Vauxhall made in novels published between 1778 and 1848, I examine the pleasure gardens as a vessel of both society and history, considering the ways in which the space foregrounds and complicates questions of realism and temporality across these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts. Vauxhall made its way into the social plots of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels as a site of leisure and spectacle that attracted fashionable crowds of both the upper and middle classes. As the actions of the literary characters who visited this space suggest, Vauxhall afforded countless opportunities for advancement in terms of conflict or personal agenda, solicited or unsolicited sexual conquest, and the confusion of status in the crowd's mixing of classes. With each new literary representation of Vauxhall comes a remembering of past spectacles, trysts, and maiden terrors. We ought not think of Vauxhall as belonging to the narratives that deploy it as a setting; instead, we should recognize how the casts of these stories occupy and utilize the space.

By conducting case studies of Vauxhall's representation in *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), *Valentine's Eve* (1816), *Vanity Fair* (1848), and *Pendennis* (1848-50), I approach questions of realism, setting, and the disorienting blur between fictional containers and the affordances of their real referents. Rather than examining Vauxhall as a constituent element of prose fiction, my project promotes a consideration of the geographical location as it is occupied by the characters of their respective novels. Instead of studying fictionalized social spaces unique to each novel's microcosm, I imagine our casts of characters stepping out of their bounded pages

and communing with the public at Vauxhall. Unlike Queen's Crawley or Thornfield Hall, for example, an author's depiction of Vauxhall calls upon the reader's social and historical knowledge to produce an accurate representation of not just the space but of the fictitious events that unfold within the galleries and walks of the pleasure gardens. Thus, I argue that real geographical locations like Vauxhall demand further historicocritical attention when they appear in novels. With its doubled identity as a real and a fictional setting, Vauxhall's history across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries entangles the space's evolving appearances in fiction with the rise and development of the novel.

By directing critical attention toward settings with fictional and real provenance, my project introduces the concept of fiction to the historical and archaeological discourse concerning the pleasure gardens. As a real setting occupied in these late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, Vauxhall becomes a way of thinking through ideas about realism and periodization in the history of the English novel. The alignment of Vauxhall's real and literary existences in its function as a site of fiction and fantasy allows this space, a monument of eighteenth-century design, to transcend time, first by maintaining relevance to changing social and cultural tastes, and finally as a cultural and historical icon. Ultimately, this project addresses the question of why Vauxhall—as a real, historical place—appears so frequently as a literary venue in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As we will soon discover, the gardens' significant attractions for both pleasure-seekers and authors were its visionary leaders like Tyers and C.H. Simpson and the amusements they institutionalized such as fireworks and performances. But across this time period of 1778 to 1848, a dominant vision of Vauxhall—one that permeates period drama today—began to materialize. The Royal Gardens, Vauxhall of Georgian and Regency England have proven, through these texts, to be the most enduring curation of this

public assembly space, from its music and firework spectacles to its physical affordances for privacy and visibility. They are the legacies of Jonathan Tyers's vision and C.H. Simpson's revival and preservation of that vision into the nineteenth century. Vauxhall's fostering of enchantment, illusion, entertainment, and drama meet fiction's need for imaginative play and simultaneous reality through cultural allusion, and this is largely the role that Vauxhall plays in the texts to be discussed as we attempt to pin down "Old Vauxhall" through literary historical means.

The next chapter, "A Truly Tyer-some Place: Frances Burney's Vauxhall Gardens," establishes a literary purpose and identity for Vauxhall as the product of proprietor Jonathan Tyers's vision. In making a case for Burney's deliberate staging of events at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, I draw upon the conventions established by Fanny Burney's representation and employment of the social and material affordances of Vauxhall. I argue that the shared cultural perception of Vauxhall as a stable and established container for various human behaviors offers Burney an ideal venue in which to stage the conflicts endured by Evelina and Cecilia. Through close readings of Burney's Vauxhall scenes, I uncover a social map imposed upon the gardens that orders, informs, and regulates the actions that occur there, which culminates in a meditation on Burney's contributions to the history and theory of the novel.

In Chapter 3, "*Spectator fastidiosus sibi molestus*: Vauxhall's Voyeurs," I begin to trace literary inheritances from Burney in Amelia Opie's fictional re-creation of the pleasure gardens in her 1816 novel *Valentine's Eve*. While Opie certainly innovates upon Burney's staging of social threats to female reputation, she also captures the increasing sense of nostalgia among British society in Catherine Shirley's retellings of her childhood visits to Vauxhall. Readers begin to see how Vauxhall becomes a container for history in Opie's uses of the gardens, as she

appears to anticipate Thackeray's exhibition of public history in *Vanity Fair* with her character's private recollections. Beyond paving the way for Thackeray's adaptation of the gardens for his historical and autobiographical novels, Opie orchestrates a present-day Vauxhall excursion that centralizes role play and illusion, behaviors both encouraged and taught by the gardens that are traceable in subsequent scenes of public gathering and spectacle. One social custom of order and amusement, autovoyeurism, is made most demonstrably present in Opie's Vauxhall, where its form and influence show how it persists as a principal narrative mechanism for the duration of the novel.

A brief interlude between Opie and Thackeray's novels, Chapter 4 considers the historical period between these authors' deployments of Vauxhall. Titled "'A morbid consciousness of approaching disappointment': Vauxhall's Dickensian Interlude", this chapter first explores the historical site of Vauxhall during the 1820s and 1830s in order to form a more complete impression of Thackeray's Vauxhall and its history since the publication of *Valentine's Eve*. An important figure emerges in this exploration: Charles Herbert Simpson, Vauxhall's Master of Ceremonies from 1798 to 1833*ish*. My study of this character—for the real Simpson was, indeed, a character in his own right—brings into focus persistent issues of historical timeline and periodization, as Thackeray is writing of Vauxhall's golden age at the time of its historical decline in popularity. As the embodiment of this golden age, Simpson also plays a supporting role in Thackeray's greater realist projects by serving as one of those "particulars of common life" in Regency and 1820s London.[28]

Chapter 5, "'A chapter about Vauxhall, which is so short that it scarce deserves to be called a chapter at all'", follows Vauxhall into the Victorian era via William Makepeace

[28] See Ilsu Sohn, "An Impossible *Bildung* and the Bounds of Realism and Britishness in *Vanity Fair*," *CEA Critic* 80, no. 1 (March 2018), 81.

Thackeray's *History of Pendennis* (1848-50) and *Vanity Fair* (1848). I consider these two works, belonging more or less to the historical novel genre, for scenes set in Regency-era Vauxhall. I investigate Thackeray's occupation of the pleasure gardens and its occurrence out of real time, as he transports readers to a glorious "Old Vauxhall." He does so, I argue, through his resurrection of C.H. Simpson as a means to impart elements of the real and the historical, into his fictions. Thus, Thackeray's deployment of Vauxhall in two novels shift the conversation about the geographical site to a discussion of historical fiction and fantasy, as Thackeray invokes a Vauxhall that readers cannot visit (unlike Burney's and Opie's Vauxhall Gardens) but instead must remember or, as we contemporary readers do, imagine.

The consideration of Vauxhall as only a literary relation and not a lived one culminates in Chapter 6, "Remembering Vauxhall: Cultural Memory and the Literary Past." This coda meditates on the literary legacies of Burney, Opie, and Thackeray as they relate to Vauxhall, realism, and the history of the novel. When these inheritances are mapped onto the space of the pleasure gardens simultaneously, the vibrant power that Vauxhall exerts over its visitors and their interactions comes into focus. One such kaleidoscopic moment for our cultural landmark is a scene from the first episode of *Bridgerton* (2020), in which the protagonists formulate and set in motion a plan for social deception across familiar enclaves of the gardens. In my study of Shonda Rhimes's fantasy Regency adaptation, Daphne Bridgerton's experience at Vauxhall recalls many who have come before her, beginning with the sense of awe and wonder she shares with Thackeray's Fanny Bolton and Opie's young Catherine Shirley at the enchanting lights glittering in the trees. The allusive echoes of Evelina Anville's interactions with the men she encounters along the Dark Walk whisper through the galleries of men taking inappropriate notice of Lucy Merle. In Thackeray's suggestion of those "dark walks so favourable to the interviews of

young lovers," we may also sense Evelina's terror.[29] Dining in "the twinkling boxes, in which the happy feasters made believe to eat slices of almost invisible ham" we remember the Shirleys' discovery of Lord Livesay and Lucy's momentary shame.[30] While Catherine Shirley remembers her family's pre-war visit to Vauxhall, it seems that Jos Sedley was within, ordering that fateful bowl of rack punch. Imagining these scenes as living pictures, we begin to understand Vauxhall as an atemporal mosaic of the spectacles, customs, fears, and relationships it hosts simultaneously in narrative time and in historical memory.

Considering implications of Vauxhall's use in contemporary historical fiction, *Bridgerton* poses important questions about fantasy building. Shonda Rhimes's surreal vision of an Afro-British aristocracy prompts essentially the same questions that Thackeray invites of reality and realism with race in the casting of the show. The challenges of translating imagination, history, and fantasy into narrative realism to create an immersive experience persist along with Vauxhall's literary past.

[29] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, ed. Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63.
[30] Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

A TRULY TYER-SOME PLACE: FRANCES BURNEY'S VAUXHALL GARDENS

By the late 1770s, Vauxhall had become a staple of London society. This was a place to see and be seen at, to marvel at a spectacle or create a spectacle of one's own. Every individual who entered its gates brought with them a set of intentions. Under the glow of a thousand lanterns, designs upon the pleasure-seekers were carried out—some harmless, some detrimental to a person or family's reputation.

To determine how Vauxhall took shape in the minds of readers and writers, this chapter investigates Frances Burney's literary construction of Vauxhall as a recognizably instructive space for society as she builds upon cultural memory and public associations of the pleasure gardens.[31] Simulating social education in *Evelina* and exploring the mechanisms of social mixing and spectacle with Mr. Harrel's use of the gardens in *Cecilia*, Burney articulates the literary and historical affordances of Vauxhall—many of which are dangerous to a young lady's reputation—that later generations of writers like Opie and Thackeray will inherit. Burney reveals Vauxhall to be a suitable venue for these educational and social experiences to be depicted in fiction. Burney's narrative realism develops around the plausibility of her characters' experiences occurring at this knowable, culturally recognizable, physical place. Her attention to Vauxhall's materiality in her staging and descriptions also illuminates the varied affordances of the gardens'

[31] Frances Burney has attracted much critical attention over the years. Influential and landmark Burney scholarship includes Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1988), and Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

design and its capacity to influence visitors' experiences. In this way, readers become acquainted with the gardens' physical and social geography alongside Evelina Anville and Cecilia Beverley.

Fig. 4. Thomas Rowlandson, *Vauxhall Gardens*. 1784. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

The pleasure gardens as experienced by Burney's heroines are the legacy and vision of the late Jonathan Tyers. Upon becoming the new proprietor of Vauxhall in 1728, Tyers began an aggressive campaign to transform the pleasure gardens' reputation and management. As part of these revamping efforts, designers Hubert-François Gravelot and George Michael Moser adapted an English expression of Rococo to create an atmosphere of lightheartedness and enchantment,

and also to reflect Tyers's "libertarian attitudes and enlightened management style".[32] This rebellious expression was embodied at the gardens through musical associations, most famously George Frideric Handel, and the visual arts of painters William Hogarth and Francis Hayman and sculptor Louis François Roubiliac. David Coke and Alan Borg draw further parallels between Vauxhall and its Rococo décor through "the energy, informality and experimentation" that the gardens' so famously inspired.[33]

Images embedded in this Rococo design reflected the gardens' amusements and appeals of intimacy, allowing the artistic subjects to become self-reinforcing features. Sometime between 1751 and 1762, a white plaster model of Jupiter's Rape of Semele was added to the chandelier in the Rotunda.[34] The model depicts Jupiter appearing to Semele in the guise of thunder and lighting. Coke and Borg identify parallels between this sculpture and its vessel as Jupiter's assumption of the storm for his form "was an eminently appropriate subject for the night-time resort of Vauxhall and its vulnerability to the weather" and the offspring of the rape, Dionysus, was the god of wine—also a fitting symbol for the venue.[35] Anticipating our discussion of Evelina's experience in the Dark Walk, the metaphorical resonances of such artwork as this sculpture furnishing the gardens become amplified as they often simulate or foreshadow visitors' experiences.[36]

In addition to three-dimensional artwork, Tyers commissioned a great number of paintings to decorate the gardens' edifices and embody his vision for a diverting, enchanting leisure scape. Over fifty of these paintings would appear in the supper boxes. They were

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[32] David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 85.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid, 96.
[35] Ibid.
[36] For a related reading of the function of Vauxhall's artwork see Steven Gores, *Psychosocial Spaces: Verbal and Visual Readings of British Culture 1750-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 57.

designed by Hayman and Gravelot and painted by members of William Hogarth's St Martin's Lane Academy.[37] Mounted on the walls of the supper boxes, these paintings were large landscapes measuring approximately 8 by 5 feet. The paintings were simple meditations on eighteenth-century life in England: described as "carefree," the paintings depicted ordinary people engaging in a variety of everyday activities in and out of doors. While each box had its own painting to serve as a kind of "window onto another world", the subjects of the paintings—the villagers, peasants, children, milkmaids, aristocrats, and fashionable people—often reflected the very population of the pleasure gardens.[38] Coke and Borg posit that the "validation of the commonplace and the unsophisticated, and the concomitant social inclusiveness it implies" account for the paintings' prolonged display in the gardens.[39]

This "social inclusiveness" spread out into the leisure lanes, as the garden walks were designed to support and encourage social mixing with their crisscrossed pattern, which caused multiple paths to intersect. The outdoor setting and layout of the gardens promoted varied interaction across class boundaries, as the walks corralled guests at their numerous intersections to form a diverse "mobile, throbbing crowd".[40] The mixing of society and thronging of visitors in this public space promoted a confusion advantageous for social and sexual predators. For the new or infrequent visitor, spontaneous encounters were a reasonable expectation, one that Burney adopts in composing *Evelina*'s and *Cecilia*'s Vauxhall scenes.

The gardens' walks were delineated by tall hedges and punctuated with a statue or painting at the end of each alley depicting some kind of illusion or visual/mechanical trickery. While most of the gardens' lanes were illuminated, the Dark Walk, as its name suggests, did not

[37] Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 96.
[38] Ibid., 97.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 69.

receive direct lighting. It remained a dangerous attraction until 1763, when magisterial regulations banned the Dark Walk and like entertainments from public spaces.[41] Jonathan Tyers dutifully barred entry to the walks, but that wouldn't stop visitors from trespassing to use them as a cover for illicit activities.

A significant population of these pleasure-seekers belonged to what Hannah Greig describes as the *beau monde*. Greig has defined Vauxhall as a public space based on accessibility and its encouragement of certain social behaviors by this group.[42] Though Vauxhall was accessible to all who could afford the one-shilling admission, the fashionable elites upheld their characteristic exclusivity by populating certain areas of the gardens and visiting during selective times and seasons. Deep pockets and customary entertainment brought the beau monde to Vauxhall with such a frequency that they quickly learned the layout of the gardens and began to capitalize on its spatial delineations. These elites were able to shield themselves from the theoretical mixing and mingling that attracted lower-class visitors behind the functions of zoning—supper boxes were available only to those who could pay the exorbitant prices for concessions, for example. Greig notes, "Vauxhall's famously overpriced refreshments may have quickly racked up the bill for the unwary, suggesting that further layers of financial division may have operated with in the grounds distancing those who supped and those who did not".[43] Though anyone who could swing the shilling price of admission could enjoy the gardens, not all had complete access to Vauxhall's offerings. In the financial tiering of the pleasure garden experience, Vauxhall supported the elites' imposing of class distinction and encouraged their congregation in such exclusive zones as the supper boxes (pictured below).

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[41] Walter Sidney Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859* (London: Odhams Press, 1955).
[42] Greig's focus on the *beau monde*, or titled elite, aligns with my examination of Burney's aristocratic characters and their visits to the pleasure gardens.
[43] Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 75.

Fig. 5. T. Bowles after S. Wale, *A View of the Chinese Pavillions and Boxes in Vaux Hall Gardens*, engraving, c. 1840. David Coke's collection.

This practice of defensive sociability derived from an education on the sorts of activities that occurred in the secluded or poorly lit nooks of public gathering spaces. Apprised of the spatial affordances that supported these activities, the elites could either act on these opportunities or avoid them. Regardless of the decision being made about how to conduct oneself in a space like Vauxhall, the social expectation and understanding is that these were *informed* decisions to act. This will prove to be a hard lesson for some who, like Evelina Anville, are making a first entrance into the world with inadequate guidance. It should be noted that Burney's heroines Evelina Anville and Cecilia Beverley are not participants of the *beau monde*, but they do have peripheral ties to and encounters with these fashionable elites. In *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, Burney

certainly takes opportunities to comment upon this social sect's values and practices, but her narratives (and the eighteenth-century novel more generally) do not focalize the *beau monde*. Rather, Burney and the other novelists of her time are concerned with creating heroes and heroines of character, of modest and moral worth. Greig points to the elegant Lord Orville to explain Burney's literary relation to the *beau monde*: "it is the modest and genteel Orville who Burney positioned as the ideal and truly fashionable man".[44] The conspicuous displays of leisure and expense characteristic of the *beau monde* disqualify them from serving as appropriate subjects for emerging novel traditions, though they do contribute to the establishment of a specific social setting referent to reality (or history). Noting this narrative treatment of the group, Greig interprets Burney's inclusion of them in *Evelina,* suggesting that the novel is not a "straightforward critique of the beau monde in its entirety, for the most ridiculed characters were those lurking at the edges of the world of fashion rather than those securely positioned at its centre".[45]

Solicitation and pleasurable consumption are, however, acknowledged and built into the architecture and cultural memory of the physical space of Vauxhall Gardens. The gardens' geography reflected the eighteenth-century consumer revolution, in which people acquired more material possessions and leisure experiences than ever before.[46] As Miles Ogborn has suggested, Vauxhall's culture of conspicuous consumption did not exclude promiscuity. Exploring the relationships between commodification, sexuality, and visual illusion, Ogborn argues, "That Vauxhall's walks and shades were heavy with sexual tensions cannot be separated from the fact

[44] Ibid., 251.
[45] Ibid.
[46] This notion of the eighteenth-century consumer revolution is established by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

that the space within which they were placed was one that was constructed through commodification and commercialization".[47] These established notions of pleasure garden commerce materialize as an affordance of the Dark Walk—it's not just that the Dark Walk provided the conditions for these kinds of solicitations, but that these opportunities are built into society's estimations of the space's purpose and function. In this way, conspicuous consumption encompasses commerce and sex. Greig reflects on this custom, which clearly plays a role in Evelina's experience in the Dark Walk: "The personages present were unknowable and complicit in a world of falsified appearances. Here, if anywhere, it was believed that the prostitute could present herself as a peeress and the rake as a respectable man".[48] Beyond the gardens' capacity for deception, Greig's evocation of the prostitute and the rake—stock figures of Vauxhall from the eighteenth century—gestures at the possibility for decades of remembered institutions to be reimposed upon the gardens, quietly influencing the customs, behaviors, and inhabitations of its spaces at any given moment. History assigns meaning to the space and colors its entertainment offerings, while the lively landscaping and architecture exert a strange power over the visitor's experience. Simply following the paths specifically designed for mixing and mingling with the diverse crowd of the gardens, Evelina does not possess an awareness of or experience in the gardens to know to resist the supposed "natural" order of the landscape. Seasoned visitors recognize these affordances as either threats or opportunities built into the notion of going to Vauxhall for an evening's entertainment.

"Is this a place for Miss Anville?": Evelina at Vauxhall

[47] Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780* (New York: Guilford, 1998), 122.
[48] Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 59.

The illusory effects of the pleasure gardens' design and amusements obstructed social stratifications and blurred boundaries of propriety, as evident in Evelina's visit to Vauxhall in Frances Burney's 1778 novel. The social knowledge of Vauxhall's signature spaces makes this an attractive location for Burney's education of Evelina. She selects this space for one of the many stages on which Evelina performs this education, learning many of these lessons as an outsider not raised in London society with an urgency for self-preservation, as Julia Epstein suggests, to replace her ignorance with experience.[49] Evelina is not privy to the local knowledge of the space, so she enters Vauxhall and experiences it innocently, the way the landscapers have designed it to be encountered.[50] This innocence has been the topic of much *Evelina* scholarship; of late, Evelina's innocence has been read in tandem with, rather than contrary to her intelligence. My reading of Evelina's social education experience furthers Lillian Lu's perspective of Evelina as dually ingénue and satirist. Doing so allows us to understand Evelina's innocence as a mechanism for defamiliarizing people and places to furnish her critiques of London society.[51]

One of the ways in which Burney explores the limitations of Evelina's social education is by resigning the seventeen-year-old to a company of mixed morals and notions of propriety for her first visit to Vauxhall. Here, I invoke Joanne Cutting-Gray's claim that Evelina is not to be perceived as a "*tabula rasa* of innocence upon which experience is engraved," as she has demonstrated the "reflexive ability" to discern multiple meanings from social behaviors in recognizing Mr. Lovel's hypocrisy, the Branghtons' bad taste, Sir Clement Willoughby's

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[49] Julia Epstein, "Evelina's Deceptions: The Letter and the Spirit" in *Fanny Burney's Evelina*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 111-129.
[50] For more comprehensive studies of Evelina's innocence, see Doody (1988), Joanne Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence: Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9 (1990): 43-57, and Lillian Lu, "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (2020): 57-76.
[51] See Lu (2020).

impertinence, and general codes of propriety.[52] Evelina's trials come to reflect errors in society more than they reveal deficiencies in her character or person.[53]

The Branghtons create particularly colorful opportunities for Evelina to exercise this reflexive discernment. During her second visit to London, Evelina endures a number of the mercantile family's humiliating *faux pas*. After first meeting her cousins, she concludes her letter to Mr. Villars with the declaration that she "shall not be very ambitious of being known to any more of my relations, if they have any resemblance to those whose acquaintance I have been introduced to already".[54] Evelina is put off by their intrusive, inappropriate questions and immediately forms a judgment of their vulgarity. Her intuitive disdain for the Branghtons' crassness is proved to be well founded, as they begin a fierce campaign of indecorous social ignorance by calling on Evelina, unannounced, demanding that she shirk her engagement to Miss Mirvan and her party to attend the opera with them.[55] The Branghtons continue to humiliate Evelina with their loud, tactless behavior and cheapness in dress, transportation, entertainment, and accommodations.

By the time Evelina arrives at the gardens, she has already begun to form a judgment of her chaperoning party's character. Despite being overwhelmed by the gardens' crowds and spectacles, Evelina maintains a wariness of the space and her company. She has been partially educated by her past experiences with the Branghtons, which makes her internally defensive and anxious, but she is not empowered enough to completely resist their whims. Evelina must choose between remaining in an elite enclave of the gardens with the guarantee of unwanted male

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[52] Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence," 46.
[53] Doody, *Frances Burney*, 46.
[54] Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, ed. Kristina Straub (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 1997), 116. All subsequent references to *Evelina* come from this edition and are noted parenthetically.
[55] Ibid., 130.

attention and submitting to the Misses Branghton's reckless desire to leave this enclave and explore the more unpredictable amusements of Vauxhall.

A certain amount of social knowledge was required for a woman to navigate the gardens safely and without danger to one's reputation. Having never been to the gardens, Evelina is not aware of the hierarchical organization of Vauxhall. While she understands the importance of keeping close to her company, she does not demonstrate an awareness of the social security afforded by the supper box her party dines in. She does, however, recognize the attraction that the supper boxes hold for her group, as she notes in her letter recounting the Vauxhall visit that Mr. Smith chose a box "in a very conspicuous place" so that the party may be seen indulging in the gardens' overpriced victuals.[56] This conspicuous consumption is quite on-brand for the Branghton brood, as Evelina has divulged her judgment of their tactlessness to Mr. Villars (and readers) repeatedly, noting how their vulgarity and low-breeding are constantly on display.[57] After many a Branghton-sponsored *faux pas*, Evelina has learned to be wary of her company's conduct.

Beyond the supper boxes lies the social map imposed upon the rest of the gardens. There are performers on display, sex workers soliciting business, rakes stalking their prey, and deviants who have laid claim to the shadows just as the beau monde has colonized the supper boxes. Of course, Evelina does not realize that the respectable elites are not the only ones who have located and claimed an enclave of entertainment for themselves. Readers witness the diverse activities of the public stages and shadowy lanes during Evelina's visit to Vauxhall. After dining in their supper box, Evelina's cousins decide to take "a *little pleasure*" and make their way to the Dark

[56] Ibid., 236.
[57] Ibid., 140.

Walk.[58] Evelina reluctantly joins her cousins on a walk around the gardens, without their gentlemen chaperones, to escape the unwanted attentions of one of her own party—Mr. Smith: "This reflection, which I feared would flatter his vanity, made me, most unfortunately, request Madame Duval's permission to attend them".[59] Though Evelina does not fully conceive of the gardens' social or geographical landscape, she is familiar enough with her party to exercise some caution at the Miss Branghtons' notions of entertainment. Alas, she finds herself in the Dark Walk: "quite by compulsion, [she] followed them down a long alley, in which there was hardly any light".[60]

Unsurprisingly, though to Evelina's terror, the girls encounter a large, "riotous" party of gentlemen loitering at the end of the lane.[61] When the two parties meet, the men detain the girls, simultaneously imprisoning them and forcing them into the position of a spectacle. Evelina recalls how the men "seemed to rush suddenly from behind some trees, and, meeting us face to face, put their arms at their sides, and formed a kind of circle, that first stopped our proceeding, and then our retreating, for we were presently entirely inclosed".[62] It seems that these men were lying in wait among the trees, ready to act upon any opportunity that appeared at this dark end of the walk. The men respond to the women's screams with laughter, detached from the reality of the terror they impose by forcing the women into a spectacle. Evelina and her cousins are encircled by men, not only prevented from moving but also surrounded by the male gaze, completely on display for male consumption. Evelina manages to break free from the ruffians,

[58] Ibid., 237.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

only to find herself in the midst of a second group of gentlemen enjoying the shadows. It is in this new disorienting throng that Evelina is mistaken for an actress.[63]

These men "mistake" Evelina for a prostitute,[64] though it's not clear if they genuinely believe she is an actress looking to supplement her income or if it is a label of convenience and opportunity. Deborah Epstein Nord subscribes to the possibility that the drunken men truly believe she is a prostitute, attributing all of the cause to the obscuring effects of the gardens' lighting.[65] The image of an unaccompanied woman moving about in the "nocturnal city" points to what Nord describes as the "interchangeability of women's bodies—the impossibility of distinguishing between a respectable woman and a prostitute (or an actress), especially in the dark".[66] This image, Nord explains, became a nineteenth century trope of writing about city nightlife, and its origins can be traced back to Burney's staging of Evelina's social education experience in such a threateningly fluid setting. Thus, I maintain that Burney's intentions for the men's "mistaken" perception of Evelina's status are purposefully ambiguous. By the publication of this scene in Burney's first novel, it was common knowledge that actresses performed sex work to supplement their income, but the generic conventions of the female bildungsroman also require a relatively naïve protagonist who could easily find herself in this predicament without knowing those implications. Evelina simply follows the dark path while attempting to keep pace with the Misses Branghtons.

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[63] Ibid., 238. Barbara Zonitch interprets the violence of this encounter to be a consequence of the breakdown of aristocratic domination and the rise of competing social systems playing out in the public site of volatile class mixing.

[64] Straub's note: "While many English actresses achieved social respectability in the 1770s, young and relatively unknown women who worked on the stage were often assumed to be engaged in or at least open to casual prostitution as a supplementary source of income." (*E* 238)

[65] Deborah Epstein Nord, "Night and Day: Illusion and Carnivalesque at Vauxhall" in *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island*, ed. Jonathan Conlin (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 177-194.

[66] Ibid., 183.

Without fully comprehending the design of Vauxhall and expected behaviors of each delineated area, Evelina cannot be certain of the dangers that lurk behind every corner. Critics have noted how Evelina perceives some threats to her person and virtue, but she doesn't really know the specifics or what forms they might take. Susan Staves remarks upon the imprecision with which Evelina attempts to describe the threats she feels alone in Sir Clement's presence, asking "how could she" know exactly what Sir Clements wants to do to her in her state of innocence.[67] Cutting-Gray highlights this "gap" in Evelina's understanding as it indicates a larger issue of how "the conceptual model of vulnerable innocence conceals from a female not only her own sexual desire but her sexual power as well."[68] Further, Mary Poovey has argued that "if a woman indicated any sense that she had a knowledge of the world or of her own sexuality—even just by blushing—then she might lose men's protection and instead be considered their ready prey".[69] So, Evelina is pressured to remain simultaneously ignorant of the threats and wary of how these nameless dangers could manifest at any time in public assembly spaces. By this logic, she is expected to determine what conditions could best support these unknown dangers—what she can only presume to be murder—and promptly avoid them.

Many of Burney's other Vauxhall visitors take full advantage of the landscaped darkness and seclusion, as evidenced by Sir Clement Willoughby's attempted removal of Evelina to another dark space.[70] Evelina breaks free from the first raucous group of men, only to run into the fray of a second group of rowdy men. Evelina's "rescue" by Sir Clement Willoughby does not remove the capitalist context Miles Ogborn maps onto the gardens, only Evelina's mistaken

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[67] Susan Staves, "*Evelina*; or Female Difficulties" in *Fanny Burney's Evelina*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 13-30.
[68] Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence," 47.
[69] Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 26.
[70] Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 59.

identity. No longer can Sir Clement's actions be conflated with the traditional illusions and confusion of identities that Vauxhall provides. Instead, he takes full advantage of the gardens' dark periphery, dragging Evelina to a part of the walk "where we shall be least observed"—where Evelina would be subjected to Sir Clement's aggressive advances.[71] Evelina does resist Sir Clement, indignantly asking him, "do you suppose I am to be thus compelled?—do you take advantage of the absence of my friends, to affront me?".[72] Though Sir Clement has already experienced Evelina's innocence, he ignores—or really, he capitalizes on—the fact that she has lost her companions to determine that her presence in the Dark Walk signifies her sexual availability.[73] Whether the delinquents believe Evelina is truly an actress, the very possibility is enough of a convenience for the men to act upon.

Solicitation and pleasurable consumption are built into the architecture and retained in the cultural memory of the space. As Miles Ogborn has suggested, Vauxhall's culture of conspicuous consumption did not exclude promiscuity. He claims, "That Vauxhall's walks and shades were heavy with sexual tensions cannot be separated from the fact that the space within which they were placed was one that was constructed through commodification and commercialization".[74] These established notions of pleasure garden commerce materialize as an affordance of the Dark Walk—it's not just that the Dark Walk provides the conditions for these kinds of solicitations, but that these opportunities are built into society's estimations of the purpose of the space. In this way, conspicuous consumption encompasses commerce and sex.

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[71] Burney, *Evelina*, 198.
[72] Ibid., 240.
[73] Judith Lowder Newton, "*Evelina*: A Chronicle of Assault" in *Fanny Burney's Evelina*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 70.
[74] Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, 122.

One does not have to snack on tiny slices of ham to be perceived as a privileged participant in the amusements of the pleasure gardens.

Uncovering the unspoken attractions of Vauxhall's various zones of amusement reveals the conditions and reasons for Evelina's traumatic experience. At this point in the novel, Vauxhall itself may be seen as a metaphor for Evelina's uncertain conditions more generally. Evelina struggles to find her place in London society between the care of the Mirvans and the Branghtons. She unknowingly commits many *faux pas* with regard to socializing and dancing. Perhaps most challenging of all, though, is the question of her individual identity, as her mother's history and the conditions of her birth are concealed until the end of the novel. The legitimacy of Evelina's mother's marriage to her aristocratic father, Sir John Belmont, and Evelina's own swapping of identities with the child of her mother's wet nurse, Polly Green, are ultimately revealed in Madame Duval's scheme to restore Evelina's claim to the Belmont station and inheritance, but not before they have been harshly scrutinized.

At Vauxhall, Evelina is endangered by her ignorance of the space's social organization and her separation from her party. Her only means of procuring safety is to return to the populated, better lit area of the garden: arriving "in the midst of the general crowd," Evelina feels her "own safety being then insured".[75] She emerges with a greater working knowledge of the space she and the Misses Branghtons explored and its accompanying dangers. This knowledge informs her concern for her cousins, as they have not yet returned: "I grew extremely uneasy for the Miss Branghtons, whose danger, however imprudently incurred by their own folly, I too well knew how to tremble for".[76]

[75] Burney, *Evelina*, 241.
[76] Ibid.

As Evelina reflects in her letter to Mr. Villars, her party is acutely aware of her ignorance, depending upon it for amusement during their visit. Her companions are familiar with the space, and they wish to see it challenge and consume Evelina's innocence. Social predators are not relegated to the shadows in Vauxhall; as Evelina realizes, "my surprise and ignorance proved a source of diversion to them all, that was not exhausted the whole evening".[77] For this group, Evelina is another Vauxhall pleasure, another spectacle to be enjoyed in this space: "They led me about the garden, purposely to enjoy my first sight of various other deceptions".[78]

But while they revel in her ignorance, Evelina's companions paradoxically hold her accountable for the social knowledge she doesn't have—or shouldn't have, considering the standards for female virtue and expectations of vulnerable innocence that prohibit a young woman's awareness of sexuality and desire.[79] Cutting-Gray goes so far as to suggest that "the patriarchal model for female virtue appears to posit innocence merely in order to assault it."[80] Mr. Branghton, a man, suggests that Evelina sought out the attentions of her attackers, asking "what had you to do in the long alleys? Why, to be sure, you must all of you have had a mind to be affronted!".[81] Compounding this paradoxical accountability, Mr. Smith assigns coyness to Evelina's ignorance of Vauxhall amusements: "Such a demure looking lady as you are, who'd have thought of your leading one such a dance? —Come, now, don't be so coy,—only think what a trouble I have had in running after you!".[82] As Evelina becomes increasingly familiar with these patterns of male thought, she reflects on Sir Clement's behavior towards her in the different setting of the Dark Walk. Sir Clement "seems disposed to think that the alteration in my

[77] Ibid., 236.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, 26.
[80] Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence," 47.
[81] Burney, *Evelina*, 241.
[82] Ibid., 242.

companions authorizes an alteration in his manners" when it becomes clear that she has changed hands from the respectable Mirvans to the coarse Branghton family.[83] In the spirit of satire, Burney pits patriarchal ideology against utterances of masculinity to illustrate the impossible position an innocent, naïve young woman assumes when she is introduced into a new, high-stakes public context.

From Evelina's terrifying experience at Vauxhall, readers discover the importance of both where one is located within the gardens and the company one keeps amongst the threats of this space. Staves has considered the comic characters comprising Evelina's company as projections of Evelina's anxieties, for the Branghtons commit the "solecisms she is afraid of committing or of being thought to have committed" at Vauxhall.[84] Indeed, the pleasure gardens provide these comic figures with a public stage on which to enact this social harm. Maintaining these tenets of spatial occupation and socially adept company for determining one's experience at Vauxhall, Burney takes up Vauxhall's encouragement of social mixing in her experimentation with different socioeconomic class interactions in *Cecilia*.

"Surely that is no place for a parting so melancholy": Cecilia at Vauxhall

Cecilia Beverley's visit to Vauxhall introduces Burney's readers to the supper boxes.[85] This area is supposedly an exclusive place, safe from potential mixing with the lower orders, but Cecilia finds her reputation in danger by her guardian's inappropriate usage of the space. Mr. Harrel's disregard for the class boundaries maintained by the fashionable elites results in the

[83] Ibid., 243.
[84] Staves, "Female Difficulties," 24.
[85] Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). All subsequent references to *Cecilia* come from this edition and are noted parenthetically.

double collapse of his social identity and ultimately his life. Mr. Harrel's abuse of this enclaved area reveals an intolerance for social instability in the theoretically fluid and illusory public assembly space. When unqualified and unwelcome visitors find their way into these exclusive zones, it is not the social order that breaks down, but the identity, credit, and credibility—effectively, a person's entire social existence—of those responsible for the breech that are destroyed.

As the Harrels' financial ruin is on the brink of complete public exposure, Mr. Harrel frantically arranges a visit to Vauxhall for himself, his wife, and Cecilia—his unofficial benefactress—in hopes of portraying a convincing front of normalcy and leisure to dispel the circulating rumors. Though Burney's depiction of this scheme emphasizes Mr. Harrel's frenzy, I look to Vauxhall's affordance of a grand theatrical site for Harrel's self-destruction. Doing so will help us to understand the many functions of the pleasure gardens in eighteenth-century society and the possibilities they held for Burney's writing peers and future novelists. If Harrel's social existence has always been defined as a performance of luxury, I consider why, when exposed for his impecunity and fraudulence, he chooses to indulge his audience of anonymous pleasure-seekers, creditors, and aspirational peers with even greater theatrics by staging his suicide at Vauxhall.

One explanation for Mr. Harrel's orchestration of this event is its reflection of the social elites' strategic performance of association at Vauxhall. Burney's readers are familiar with some of the effects of social mixing and poor judgments of character in Evelina's experience with the social strata populating Vauxhall. To avoid these kinds of snafus, members of the beau monde would often cancel their visits to Vauxhall if company of a commensurate rank could not be

procured in time for a night out.[86] By appearing with Cecilia at the pleasure gardens, the Harrels benefit socially and financially from the association of her status and wealth, the public perception of an alliance. [87] Mr. Harrel depends upon Cecilia for admission into the gardens and for her company to make his performance of typical leisure and entertainment seem authentic. Supporting the Harrels outwardly with her company and discretely with her fortune, Cecilia has become the vehicle for the Harrel's attainment and exchange of credit.[88]

Beyond performing normalcy, Mr. Harrel seeks to portray that no disruption has occurred in their consumption of leisure or luxury. This marks one of Burney's sustained meditations on eighteenth-century finance in the novel, particularly in the wake of the 1770's credit crisis. Mr. Harrel could have chosen any other venue for this performance, but Vauxhall was a space in which he could perform extravagance and attempt to reestablish credit. D. Grant Campbell traces Burney's critical engagement with her socioeconomic climate through the Harrels in how they "reflect" these conditions in England and "a complex of prevalent ideological responses to that climate".[89] Campbell draws parallels between the Harrels' spending habits and greater consumer spending in England at the end of the eighteenth century. This "explosive" spending was performed against unstable credit and rapidly changing fortunes.[90] In the figures of the Harrels, *Cecilia* provokes and embodies the British skepticism and mistrust of extended credit that had been growing since the beginning of the century when the National Debt was created.[91]

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[86] Greig, "'All Together and All Distinct': Public Sociability and Social Exclusivity in London's Pleasure Gardens, ca. 1740–1800," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (2012): 69.
[87] Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 69.
[88] It is worth noting that Cecilia is regarded as a commodity in the Harrels' world. Barbara Zonitch suggests that Mr. Harrel views his wife and Cecilia as "tokens to be manipulated in his socioeconomic struggles" in *Familiar Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney*, 71.
[89] D. Grant Campbell, "Fashionable Suicide: Conspicuous Consumption and the Collapse of Credit in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 20 (1991): 133.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 135.

Furthering this analysis of the Harrels' conspicuous consumption and Mr. Harrel's suicide, I suggest turning to Vauxhall as the setting for this culminating spectacle of social and financial dysfunction. As a site notorious for its social and architectural encouragement of performance, the pleasure gardens offer the means to alter one's reputation, possibly for better, but more likely for worse. This quality of chance, I argue, is the gardens' greatest attraction for Mr. Harrel in his current state. Appearing in public and accruing more debt from a night of entertainment were practical risks, but Mr. Harrel considers *not* being perceived as an affected man about the town to be a guarantee of his social—though completely entwined with his financial—ruin. Attending Vauxhall on the brink of exposure, despite the likelihood of running into a creditor or two, to secure the public's perception of his maintenance of a leisurely and luxurious lifestyle is an irresistible speculation scheme, a gamble to see if Vauxhall will operate in his favor.[92]

As Lawrence Klein and John Brewer have established, England's economy depended on extensive and fragile networks of credit in the eighteenth century.[93] More specifically, Ogborn explains, "Credit depended upon reputation which, in turn, depended upon self-presentation within the marketplace and, more importantly, within tight and sociable networks of similarly placed traders".[94] Burney offers a glimpse into this entanglement of socialization and economics when Mr. Harrel prods Cecilia to join their party in a visit to the Pantheon, insisting "if we do not all go, we do almost nothing: you are known to live with us, and your appearance at this

[92] Campbell shares a similar view of Mr. Harrel's skewed risk assessment in attending the pleasure gardens that night. He concludes that "Harrel has staked his entire life on a losing gamble" after noting the suggestive effects of Burney's language of nothingness in the Vauxhall scene (139-140).
[93] Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness for Plebs: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England" in *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800*, eds. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1995), 374. See also John Brewer, "Commercialisation and Politics" in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, eds. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982), 197-262.
[94] Ogborn, "Locating the Macaroni," 456.

critical time is important to our credit".[95] Put in simpler terms, "reputational and financial credit are conflated" in this elite ideology; in this capitalist society, credit serves the same purpose that an ancient, distinguished family name would among aristocrats.[96] So, what happens when these competing value systems collide as Harrel mixes his acquaintances and credit associations at Vauxhall?

In *Evelina*, Burney captured Vauxhall's well established mixed population that would come to influence Harrel's decisions at the pleasure gardens in *Cecilia.* Thronging with people of different ranks and stations, Vauxhall's landscaping and architecture promoted the notorious mixing of society within the walks and other gathering nooks. Additionally, much satirical commentary exists regarding the diversity of Vauxhall's crowds. In his 1737 poem "A Trip to Vauxhall" 'Hercules Mac-Sturdy' details the varied population one would encounter in a visit to the pleasure gardens:

> The motley Croud we next with Care survey,
> The young, the Old, the Splenetic and Gay:
> The fop emasculate, the rugged Brave,
> All jumbled here, as in the common Grave.
> Here sat a Group of 'Prentices and there,
> The awkard Daughters of a late Lord Mayor;
> Next to them a Country Bumpkin and his Cousin,
> And, stuck about, Red-Ribbon'd Knights a Dozen.[97]

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[95] Burney, *Cecilia,* 273. Zonitch conducts a similar reading of Cecilia's value to the Harrels, suggesting that the word 'credit' "testifies to the idea that capitalist practices have converted people, especially women, into currency. Cecilia is Harrel's collateral, as it were, because he hopes that her appearance will allay the fears of his angry creditors" (71).
[96] Ibid.
[97] David H. Solkin offers an extensive analysis of this satirical poem in *Painting for Money,* 121-4.

In this jumble of professionals, elites, and paupers, the attendance of Mr. Harrel's creditors at the pleasure gardens does not appear to be so unusual. Mr. Hobson, the more outspoken of Mr. Harrel's two creditors, explains his presence at Vauxhall as his simply "taking a little pleasure," with "no objection" to "such a place as this may be".[98]

What *is* unusual about the social mixing that Mr. Harrel orchestrates is the elite enclave in which it occurs. Mr. Harrel brings the socially diverse group of his own party and two of his creditors together in "one of the best [supper] boxes in the garden" already occupied by the bored Mr. Meadows.[99] Once seated, the individuals resist the design of the supper box's encouragement of conversation and shared amusement. What results is an awkward cacophony of misunderstanding and resentment deriving from the mismatching of status within the space. Perhaps even more exaggerated than the two creditors, Mr. Hobson and Mr. Simkins, unbelonging is the higher-ranking members of the group's intolerance of their presence. Notable responses (and dismissals) of the creditors' speech include "Mr. Meadows deigned no other answer to this speech [by Mr. Hobson] than a look of contempt"[100] and "Captain [Aresby], after looking at [Mr. Hobson] with a surprise not wholly unmixt with horror, turned from him without making any answer".[101] The elites do not entertain Mr. Hobson's "air of defiance," and though Mr. Simpkins adopts a more servile demeanor, he is equally dismissed by Mr. Harrel's aristocratic companions.[102] He cannot follow the Captain's use of French idioms, and, in turn, the Captain does not understand Simkins's talk of gaming and the lottery.[103] Both creditors remark on the elites' inaccessible language, with Simkins concluding that the Captain "has a mighty

[98] Burney, *Cecilia*, 411.
[99] Ibid., 402.
[100] Ibid., 406.
[101] Ibid., 407.
[102] Ibid., 400.
[103] Ibid., 408.

peticklar way of speaking".[104] Frustrated, Hobson makes a declaration about his preference for explicit communication:

> Let every man speak to be understood, that's my notion of things: for as to all those fine words that nobody can make out, I hold them to be of no use. Suppose a man was to talk in that manner when he's doing business, what would be the upshot? Who'd understand what he meant? Well, that's the proof; what i'n't fit for business, i'n't of no value: that's my way of judging, and that's what I go upon.[105]

To the creditors, the elites' speech is utter nonsense because it reflects consumption and leisure rather than business and commerce. There is no explicit purpose or objective behind such fashionable talk—like the amusement of aimless walking in the gardens already remarked upon—, nothing more to be gained as they are already at the top of the social hierarchy. Precisely as he should, Simkins misunderstands the elites' critique of the crowd at Vauxhall when they say "nobody" *worthwhile* is in attendance that evening: "As well as I could make it out, I thought I heard him say there was nobody here! What he could mean by that, I can't pretend for to guess, for I'm sure the garden is so stock full, that if there was to come many more, I don't know where they could cram 'em.".[106] This suggests that the elites don't acknowledge the crowd (or anyone else) that is not of commensurate rank. Sir Robert and Mr. Hobson almost come to blows in the face of this tension.[107]

Countless sources discuss Vauxhall's crowds and the gardens' encouragement of social mixing, but this theoretical breakdown of social barriers is not always desired or found to be agreeable, as readers observe in the case of *Evelina*. Harrel's socially diverse party is corralled

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 409.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 411.

into the single space of the supper box; though they all share in the access and experience of the gardens, the guests' attitudes and hostile exchanges reinforce their social distinctions. The aristocrats and the middle class mix here as well as oil and water can be expected to. From the outside, they appear as an enviable party as Mr. Harrel's drunken performance escalates with "noisy and riotous" singing, which attracts further attention.[108] Vauxhall's amusement-seekers stop and stare from a distance "to observe what was passing, and to contemplate with envy and admiration an appearance of mirth and enjoyment which they attributed to happiness and pleasure!".[109] Thus, Harrel achieves his goal for the anonymous public's perception of him as a man of fashion, but the sober Mrs. Harrel is "shocked to be seen in such mixed company".[110]

A close examination of the exchanges made at the supper box has shown the failure of social mixing at Vauxhall for Mr. Harrel, but it also demonstrates how the creditors supporting Harrel's lifestyle (and presence at the gardens) do not actually offer him any stability. Harrel has built himself upon this insupportable façade. If this table scene is a manifestation of his clashing identities, the pressure increasing with Sir Robert's confrontation of the arrogant Mr. Hobson reveals another destructive tension resulting from this mixing of company internalized by Mr. Harrel. Campbell discusses the dangers of a credit relationship's enactment at a place like Vauxhall in its potential for reciprocity: "If the credit relationship fosters an opulent and delusive fantasy for Harrel, it also provides an intoxicating opportunity to his creditor to invade fashionable parties and mingle with his social superiors. Hobson's power over Harrel disrupts the social order, and Mrs. Harrel is appalled at having to share her table with him."[111] Vauxhall's design displays, or rather exposes, this mismatched relationship and the threats it poses to the

[108] Ibid., 412.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Campbell, "Fashionable Suicide," 138.

social order. Barbara Zonitch arrives at a similar conclusion in her reading of the Vauxhall events: “That Harrel should suddenly insist that Sir Robert dine next to a hosier testifies to the burden he has been carrying; he has been trying to keep these two orders separate, aspiring to one and indebted to the other.”[112] Readers witness the failure of this arrangement while Harrel is “struggling to appear in high spirits and good humour”.[113] Zonitch attributes this instability to Harrel’s loss of a sense of identity, but perhaps this is more significantly another instance of a character’s consumption by the space: Harrel falls victim to the public gardens’ demand for spectacle, ultimately assuming the identity of a Vauxhall staple: the Macaroni.

Miles Ogborn describes the Macaroni as a fashionable, affected man defined in terms of what he consumed, particularly through how he dressed.[114] One notable incident involving these fashionable fellows has come to be known as "The Vauxhall Affray." During the summer season of 1773, a group of fashionable men, later identified as Captain Croftes, Thomas Lyttelton, and George Robert Fitzgerald, caused a ruckus at Vauxhall Gardens when they were caught staring inappropriately at the actress Elizabeth Hartley, who was accompanied by her husband and a parson named Henry Bate. Allegedly, Mrs. Hartley's company sought to block the men's view of her, making faces and exchanging insults. The spat carried on for the duration of the evening, eventually devolving into a debate about the "rights and wrongs of men looking at women" and attacks on the fashionable men's dress. A challenge was issued for a duel, but the situation dissipated with only minor fights between the gentlemen. The newspapers reporting on the skirmish referred to Croftes, Lyttleton, and Fitzgerald as "the Macaronis" for their dress and accessories, likely drawing upon insults from Mrs. Hartley's company. Specifically, Bate

[112] Zonitch, *Familiar Violence*, 72.
[113] Burney, *Cecilia*, 407.
[114] Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, 118.

targeted Fitzgerald's appearance, mocking his "dress, hat and feather, -- miniature picture [of himself], pendant at his snow-white bosom, and a variety of other delicate appendages to this *man of fashion*".[115] Investigating the varied meanings of the term Macaroni as it was used in publications detailing "The Vauxhall Affray," Ogborn argues for the significance of the setting of the debacle at Vauxhall, drawing connections between the skirmish's points of tension in masculinity, illusion, commodification, and commercialization and those institutions that "structured and troubled the meanings of" the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens.[116]

Though Burney does not explicitly characterize Mr. Harrel as a Macaroni, she does grant him similar characteristics to those Vauxhall frequenters who had captured critical attention in the 1770s.[117] In many ways, Harrel's scheme to be seen at Vauxhall in an effort to dispel the rumors of his ruin resembles the Macaroni's entry into the "competitive and European world of men turning themselves into spectacles to impress other men"—in this case, his aspirational aristocratic peers.[118] By fusing two contradicting class qualities—wealthy luxury and excess with a middle-class morality grounded in respectability and proper appearance—the Macaroni embodies the instability demonstrated through Harrel's tense social mixing in the supper box. As Harrel creates an illusion of support and alliance through his appearance at the gardens with Cecilia, Macaronis similarly targeted systems and means of establishing credit through visual deceptions: they were "dangerous fakes whose world of refined appearances and ambiguous spectacles threatened to undermine gender and class boundaries, and the systems of credit and value that depended upon them".[119]

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[115] *The Vauxhall Affray; or, the Macaronies Defeated* (London, 1773), 14.
[116] Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, 118.
[117] Ogborn locates a variety of satirical pieces critiquing and depicting Macaronis from the 1770s and deduces that most had a political edge to them in their attacks on the legitimacy of the current aristocratic political system. See *Spaces of Modernity*, 133-142.
[118] Ibid., 137.
[119] Ibid., 153.

By inviting his creditors to dine with them, Mr. Harrel deploys a Macaroni strategy: "Those seeking credit sought to create a spectacle of gentility . . . and a fiction which *would* provide the otherwise absent gold standard".[120] In this case, his spectacle of gentility is directed at the creditors but performed at the cost of his aristocratic façade. Ogborn recognizes a similar socioeconomic tension in the appearance of the Macaronis during the 1770s credit crisis: "The Macaronis threatened to show that the modern self was an illusion made of commodities and fantasies with no real, knowable substance. Because their illusions were ones of masculinity, class and commodification they threatened to erode boundaries and destroy realities that others sought to protect".[121] Considering Burney's emphasis on visibility and Harrel's performance of luxury and excess in the two chapters detailing the Vauxhall scheme, Harrel's presence at the gardens aligns with that of the 1770s Macaroni.

With his creditors seeking to cash in, Harrel's identity is revealed to the public at Vauxhall to be an "illusion without solidity".[122] Harrel senses this loss profoundly, particularly in his moments of despondency at the gardens. Barbara Zonitch interprets the grounds for his self-destruction, concluding, "Harrel thinks his social rank is a mere reflection of his public image. Accordingly, if he cannot appear extravagant in public, then he is at best a social nonentity. He aims to mediate his status uncertainty by projecting the role of a wealthy gentleman. But in his attempts at aping the aristocracy, he soon discovers that he has lost the core of his identity."[123] And as Ogborn demonstrates in his analysis of the *Vauxhall Affray*, threats made to the social order by misrepresenting oneself—or "aping the aristocracy"—are not to be borne. At Vauxhall,

[120] Ogborn, "Locating the Macaroni," 456.
[121] Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, 154.
[122] Ogborn, "Locating the Macaroni," 458.
[123] Zonitch, *Familiar Violence*, 71.

Harrel is met with these same anxieties. He collapses under the pressures of credit and image, ultimately "quitting the box" to destroy himself in totality.

Critics have considered Mr. Harrel's suicide in the contexts of violence, socioeconomic consequence, and narratology more broadly. Margaret Anne Doody attests that "the Vauxhall scene is one of the best things in the English novel of the eighteenth century" for Burney's manipulation of momentum in her uses of counterclimax, frustration, and hindrance.[124] Specifically when Harrel leaps out of the box and out of sight to end his life, Doody contends that this episode crosses the threshold of tension into utter breakage in preparation for Cecilia's coming trials with the Delviles. Doody imagines the occasion of Mr. Harrel's suicide at Vauxhall with his creditors present as the effective annihilation of the public identity, which Mr. Harrel has been desperately cultivating through an exploitation of a credit ecology to his detriment. The pain of public rejection, being "left without the public mask," is unendurable for the Harrels and their aspirational peers: "The annihilation of the loved identity is more inconceivable than death itself—Harrel literally cannot bear to disappear from the scene of the party."[125] Barbara Zonitch further engages with the social implications of Harrel's ruin and suicide, defining the "shame" that Harrel will die of as "pecuniary embarrassment and the ensuing public rejection".[126] Zonitch remarks upon the violence that characterizes the conflation of "physical death and social ruin" in these socioeconomic conditions and concludes "that Harrel should kill himself in such an atmosphere of class hostilities underscores the ways in which violence is a pained response to the vertiginous experience of social upheaval".[127] Readers observe the accumulation of this discomfort with the addition of stock characters belonging to different social classes to Mr.

[124] Doody, *Frances Burney*, 133.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Zonitch, *Familiar Violence*, 72.
[127] Ibid., 73.

Harrel's supper box. In considering the period of senseless lingering before Mr. Harrel's expiration, Zonitch reveals further implications of society's conflation of death and ruin: Harrel's body symbolizes the "ramifications of an endless lust for money and social advancement", further exposing how he has been victimized by the "arbitrary forces of the market."[128]

Campbell explores these market forces in his analysis of conspicuous consumption in *Cecilia*, noting how three major economic threads in the Harrel plot terminate simultaneously at Vauxhall.[129] Campbell traces the many references made to blanks and nothingness during the supper box conversations, noting how they "equate fashionable life with a losing lottery ticket: something empty and meaningless."[130] I suggest that the scene's value extends beyond the dialogue into the larger site of this conversation. Beyond surveying the social inclinations motivated by conspicuous consumption, acknowledging the architectural elements that determine one's experience at Vauxhall bridges gaps in the collective critical rationale for Harrel's final performance. This illusory environment diverts "forward movement" into a "wild eddy", revealing the senselessness entrapment of the Harrels' vision of aristocratic leisure and consumption. The forward motion of the scene, of progress, dissolves into vapid amusement with people "walking after nothing" and "strolling about without view or object".[131] In this sense, Campbell suggests that the beau monde, the society that Burney is portraying here at Vauxhall, appears "condemned to an endlessness of petty disasters".[132]

As pessimistic as Campbell's view of the Vauxhall crowd might be, his estimation of the pleasure gardens' use and appeal at this time is fairly accurate. Burney seems to anticipate the

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Campbell, "Fashionable Suicide," 133.
[130] Ibid., 139.
[131] Burney, *Cecilia*, 405; Doody, 133.
[132] Campbell, "Fashionable Suicide," 140.

regular "petty disasters" that befall her literary inheritors' future visitors to Vauxhall. Vauxhall's traditions are continually invoked to create more plot-driving, plausible missteps and misadventures as Amelia Opie and William Thackeray adapt the space to fit their own literary containers. As the first point on my literary historical timeline of Vauxhall, Burney also serves as a foundational pillar in my estimations of realism under formation with her deployment of what Ian Watt refers to as "formal realism." This narrative method describes a novel's embodiment of a circumstantial worldview. For the eighteenth-century novel, Watt claims, this worldview materializes in individualized characterizations and the detailed presentation of the background.[133] Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding offered authentic reports of human experience in their unique prose styles.[134] Watt qualifies Defoe's formal realism with his historic specificity, Richardson's with his development of round, individual characters, and Fielding by his attention to the social. In her Vauxhall scenes, Burney meets these qualifications in one way or another. For Burney, historic specificity can be found in her detailed depictions of Vauxhall Gardens in the late 1770s and into the 1780s, with close attention to such real elements as supper boxes, the Dark Walk, and the modes of transportation employed in bringing her characters to the pleasure gardens. Mr. Harrel's financial situation reflects the anxiety that British society began to feel towards delicate networks of credit that were beginning to conflate a person's financial status with their morality and reputation in the 1770s. From *Evelina*'s epistolarity and *Cecilia*'s authentic representations of interiority, Burney exercises her development of individual characters with distinguishable subjectivities.[135]

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[133] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 17.
[134] Ibid., 27.
[135] Emily Allen has also recognized Burney's enactment of Watt's triple-rise qualifications, particularly in her analysis of gender and genre in *Evelina*. See Emily Allen, "Staging Identity: Frances Burney's Allegory of Genre," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 4 (1998): 433-451.

Perhaps most significant for Amelia Opie's inheritance of Burney's legacy, though, is the attention paid to the social at Vauxhall. At this historic public assembly space, Burney crafts realistic depictions of everyday people in the background and swarming as a crowd of pleasure-seekers. In further exploring Watt's theories of the novel, Burney's attention to the social in her mixing of classes to either establish Vauxhall as a setting or initiate a spectacle such as the one caused by Mr. Harrel's creditors could be said to reflect an acknowledgement of the rising middle class. Watt considers the rising middle class deeply, posing a triple-rise thesis to explain the emergence and development of the English novel in the eighteenth century. The conditions of the time were favorable for Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding to create the new literary form; thus, the rise of the middle class, the rise of literacy, and the rise of the novel, Watt claims, were all inseparable and mutually inclusive events. The rising influence of the middle class accounted for the change in literary production: writers no longer had to serve the tastes of aristocratic patrons as booksellers and a growing reading public brought literature under the control of the laws of the marketplace.[136] In both *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, Burney depicts characteristically judgmental societies that monitor behavior, thereby posing a threat to personal or familial reputation. These are societies organized around status, and Burney regularly includes marginal characters and investigates sites of social mixing in which status identities may be either confused or acutely delineated. Vauxhall's guaranteed social mixing affords Burney a valuable narrative quality, which has a corroboratory equivalent in the real and/or historical world. Four decades in the future, Amelia Opie will come to examine this very affordance in her novel *Valentine's Eve*, fusing eighteenth-century and Romantic notions of subjectivity in the development of her own characters who will find themselves at these pleasure gardens. Burney lays the groundwork for

[136] Ibid., 56.

these subsequent narratives in her characters' interior lives, reflecting the eighteenth century's growing sense of individualism. Settings like Vauxhall, which dissolve delineations of the public and private realms, engender self-consciousness in narration and observation. The drama that unfolds in these public spaces, whether it be a skirmish recorded in periodicals or a violent crime invented for a novel, enacts an uncovering of the private. This reveal also happens to be one of the novel's greatest appeals at the time of Burney's writing, offering a look into the secret recesses of people's lives and behaviors. As an inheritor of this legacy, Opie takes as her subject the private, the interior, with her pious heroine who becomes an object of social scrutiny. Burney helps to create the self-consciousness that results from such exposures of privacy in social settings that may be traced in Cecilia's narrated interiority and Evelina's epistolary "shield" that protects Burney from the impropriety of public authorship.[137]

Emily Allen argues that the idealized bourgeois subjectivity that Evelina embodies in her letters "achieves its most acute articulation … in hysterical response to the objectifying and implicitly male gaze of the spectator".[138] For the bourgeoise individualism that *Evelina* promotes, a young woman like Evelina or Cecilia being the near or the center of attention is too risky. Allen describes Evelina's particular kind of social anxiety, which centers around "her fear that being seen is a kind of violation, that sight alone gives the viewer a knowledge of the viewed".[139] Whether considered as stage fright, social anxiety, or both, the self-consciousness exhibited by Burney's heroines anticipates one of Opie's primary narrative mechanisms: voyeurism. Spectacle, spectatorship, optics, and misrepresentation—all symptoms of society's vigilance in *Valentine's Eve*—bring the security of established public and private identities under

[137] Allen, "Staging Identity," 436.
[138] Ibid., 438.
[139] Ibid., 439.

threat. The confusion of Evelina's virtuous and naïve identity with that of a sexually available "actress," along with Sir Clement's rakish behavior, invites a similar misunderstanding rooted in the tensions inspired by mixed society—that of Lucy Merle and Lord Livesay in Opie's narrative occupation of Vauxhall.

CHAPTER THREE

"SPECTATOR FASTIDIOSUS SIBI MOLESTUS": VAUXHALL'S VOYEURS

The inscription *spectator fastidiosus sibi molestus*, or "the fastidious spectator troubles himself," appeared on an obelisk at the back end of the Grand Walk at Vauxhall Gardens. As pleasure-seekers made their way down this central walk, they approached a self-reflective rebuke of the very behaviors the venue encouraged. Miles Ogborn has interpreted this statement piece as a reminder to the spectators of their participation in the persistent "fictions" necessary to create the gardens' air of pleasure and illusion. Simultaneously, Ogborn insists, the obelisk's inscription promoted an awareness of visitors' position as spectators. This monument to self-awareness at the gardens anticipates, perhaps even welcomes, Amelia Opie's attention to visuality and surveillance in her re-creation of Vauxhall and depictions of the social behaviors that determine the outcomes of her 1816 novel *Valentine's Eve*.

In *Valentine's Eve,* Vauxhall's role hearkens back to Burney's usage of the gardens in hosting young women who were inexperienced in the ways of British society. Innovating upon Burney's depiction of Vauxhall's affordances, Opie pays close attention to the attitudes and behaviors informed by less tangible traditions of the space. Visuality and surveillance drive the entirety of *Valentine's Eve*, but Opie's narrative occupation of Vauxhall provides a means of interpreting the social mechanisms of voyeurism and misrepresentation that drive the plot. On the surface, Vauxhall appears to fulfill its obvious, conventional role as the setting of a dramatic incident, inheriting these associations from Burney. However, the ways in which Opie's cast of characters interact with the space reveal a more complex social role for the gardens.

Burney established Vauxhall as a regular host to a wide range of classes and characters. Considering the Vauxhall crowd as a cohesive, though fairly heterogeneous, mixture of classes, Jonathan Conlin brings attention to the one activity that all pleasure-seekers found themselves participating in—autovoyeurism, or the practice of seeing others and being seen by them. As the "central activity" of Vauxhall, autovoyeurism was enjoyed "consciously and deliberately" by both men and women of all ages and classes at Vauxhall.[140] Not wishing to be seen with undistinguished (or competitive) company, Mrs. Baynton, the hateful great aunt of Opie's heroine and a seasoned autovoyeur, attempts to stage her visit to Vauxhall so that she may not be seen with Catherine Shirley and middle-class republican Lucy Merle, for example.

In describing the visual customs of gazing, watching, observing, and surveilling at Vauxhall, Ogborn asserts that "what was made visible at Vauxhall was visuality, the act of looking itself."[141] While autovoyeurism seems to be an obvious component of public assembly spaces, it is important to note how this self-conscious act was revered as a "truly British" spectacle to help contextualize its role in turning Vauxhall into a symbol of national heritage, particularly at the turn of the nineteenth century.[142] Peter De Bolla describes the sensation of autovoyeurism as a successful "insertion of the subject into visuality: into the visual field constructed according to the phantasmic projection of an imaginary third person."[143] This imagined third person allows for the realization of self-image and the resulting triangulated gaze regulates one's actions; in De Bolla's estimation, "one looks at oneself as if one were a spectator for another."[144] This self-policing or monitoring of the space created an impression of adequate

[140] Ibid., 719.
[141] Ogborn, "The Vauxhall Affray," 455.
[142] Ibid., 720.
[143] Peter De Bolla, "Vauxhall Gardens: The Visibility of Visuality," *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 79.
[144] Ibid.

social order in pleasure-taking that reflected a national identity strong enough to withstand the mixing of different ranks and stations (within clearly delineated bounds, of course). Conlin traces this persistent link between "politeness" and liberty back to the early eighteenth century in comments made by the Earl of Shaftesbury. In *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Shaftesbury promotes the "amicable collision" that take place in mixed company, as "we polish one another and rub off our . . . rough sides," which Conlin suggests reading as a celebration of Vauxhall's social and political dynamics.[145]

This point of view conditions readers to British society's vigilance and constant awareness for an attentive engagement with *Valentine's Eve*. Set during the Napoleonic Wars, the novel opens with General Shirley, the grandfather of the heroine newly orphaned by war, receiving news of a victorious naval engagement that cost the life of his son, Captain William Shirley. Grief-stricken, he makes his way through the celebrating crowds of London "in one blaze of light" to his home, the only residence not participating in the "general illumination" to observe the death of his son.[146] At first, the General is accused of failing to demonstrate national pride, until the news of his son's death is more widely circulated. Whispers of the General's loss reach the ears of the newly orphaned heroine, Catherine Shirley, and Opie's narrator introduces her as "an anxious eye…watching" General Shirley, following him in anticipation of his collapse.[147] Upon entering the General's residence, the familial relation between the General and his granddaughter is revealed. In these few opening pages, readers are exposed to the most powerful forces at work in this novel: surveillance, gossip, spectacle and illumination, and mysterious character identities. This wartime setting is a moment of national pride, amplifying

[145] Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1990), 31.
[146] Amelia Opie, *Valentine's Eve* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), 5.
[147] Ibid., 9.

society's suspicion of outsiders, as readers experience with Catherine Shirley's peculiar introduction to her deceased father's family and the novel at large. With circumstances of war underpinning the narrative, *Valentine's Eve* concerns itself with rank, jealousy, morality, illusion, suspicion, and misrepresentation. Bearing witness to something cannot guarantee truth or fact in the spaces of this novel, a fact proven by society's suspicion and the ways in which Opie's narrator preys upon that often-malicious vigilance. The illusions, manipulative lighting, and mechanical trickery ooze out of Vauxhall's gates and into London's West End, so readers must be conditioned to view things with a wary eye and know that what is being "witnessed" is unlikely to be seen in the complete illumination of day, of truth.

"Something unreal though distinct": Opie's Vauxhall

The *Valentine's Eve* cast make plans to go to Vauxhall for diversion and public display in chapter two of the second volume. Our first exposure to Vauxhall is through a veil of fictional recreation and memory, as the pleasure gardens readers first encounter in the novel are those of Catherine Shirley's childhood recollection. During the carriage ride, Catherine recalls her first visit to Vauxhall, describing the pleasure gardens as "living in her memory".[148] For the young Catherine, Vauxhall was "like a bright vision—a something unreal though distinct, and as unlike a common every-day scene, as the brilliant hues of an evening sky are unlike a ploughed field".[149] In this circumlocution, Catherine grasps at the imaginative (in this sense, the fictional and fantastical) and the real with her detailed, visual attempt at a comparison. Perhaps this failed articulation is only reflective of the impression made when she was very young, though the "bright," "brilliant," dazzling flashes of light in the night sky do sketch one of Vauxhall's

[148] Opie, 36; vol. 2, ch. 2.
[149] Ibid.

trademark qualities, be they results of the firework shows or carefully orchestrated illuminations.[150] Comprising Opie's narrative realism here is the recognizable image of the fireworks and the shared cultural knowledge of Vauxhall's visual markers. Readers can identify with Catherine's memories of the display because, at the very least, they would have knowledge of this customary spectacle if not a personal experience of their own witnessing fireworks.

Catherine describes her second visit, only five years prior, as leaving a much stronger impression on her imagination. It is a memory steeped in emotion rather than youthful awe and wonderment. Catherine describes this intimate visit with her loving parents as an exhibition of tenderness, imagination, and possibility:

> It was a rainy and tempestuous evening; and the gardens were a desert, but a splendid one; and as we paced along the glittering walks in utter solitude, we seemed the possessors of this magic land.
>
> "It is Aladdin's garden," cried my mother, "and that happy child bounding before us, and gazing delighted on all she sees, is like Aladdin himself. But still it is a desert, though a magnificent one," added my mother.
>
> "It is no desert to me, as you are with me," replied my father tenderly; "and I remember, as he said this, the wish that swelled in my young heart. . . . It was, that if I married I might have such a husband as my father."[151]

The security and tenderness afforded by Catherine's parents in this scene are atypical sensations for our heroines to experience at Vauxhall, since readers are accustomed to young female visitors experiencing some form of social or emotional turmoil. But the play and exoticism encouraged

[150] Though fireworks were first used at Vauxhall in 1783, they did not become a standard form of entertainment until 1798 when the gardens were directed by C.H. Simpson, who will be discussed at greater length in chapter four.
[151] Ibid., 36-37.

by the space does align with the gardens' urging of visitors to indulge their imaginations.[152] Given that Catherine is now an orphan, the gardens afford an imaginative re-creation of family. This illuminated familial image hearkens back to the civic spectacle that brought Catherine to General Shirley's door, with her grandfather's residence being distinguishable for its mournful lack of illumination in observance of the naval victory that claimed his estranged son's life.

Catherine concludes her Vauxhall recollections with a more objective curiosity about the lighting displays.

> "I was much interested in observing the rivalry between art and nature; for with the artificial light of the fire-works mingled the blue and red flashes of the lightning, while the whizzing of the rockets, as they played upon the deep black clouds above us, was drowned in the solemn tones of the rolling thunder. The heavy rains at length converted the open part of the ground into a piece of water, which reflected every object on it, and doubled the sparkling edifices on its bosom."[153]

Catherine appears to share the architects' visions for the gardens in her recognition of the dynamics of art and nature, admiring how nature—the manicured landscape along with the rain—enhances the effects—the beauty, the illusion—reflective of man's designs on the natural scene. Her observations about the fireworks and lighting bring readers of past memory and into the present, as such sights are still, at the narrative present, the gardens' primary attractions.

Opie deploys two types of literary memory to construct the site of Vauxhall: that of individual recollection and of cultural inheritance. As Catherine recalls her previous visits, readers are taught to expect luminosity, fantastical sights, and the pleasant intimacy of our companions. But this imagined space quickly topples in its collision with the real one, where

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[152] Conlin discusses the encouragement of role playing at Vauxhall in his article, p. 719.
[153] Ibid., 39.

cultural memory overtakes our reading and experience of the space. The loving, familiar figures of Catherine's protective parents are replaced by a thronging, anonymous crowd with the power to organize and shape one's social identity. Collective cultural memory welcomes readers into Vauxhall at present, guides our interpretation of the night's proceedings, and gives us, at the cost of our innocence, the exclusive social map that orders the gardens and all of its entertainment offerings, both seen and unseen. Encountering a post-Burney Vauxhall in Opie's text, the reader expects the present dangers, understanding how and why to avoid them as visitors' apprehensions and behaviors are well known and well documented. Opie calls upon this knowledge—these personal, fictional, and cultural memories—when choreographing successive spectacles and illusions in the novel, as the plot's central concern for misrepresentation becomes increasingly pronounced.

Seeing and Being Seen: Witnessing the Young Lucy's Entrance into the World

Opie employs Vauxhall's social atmosphere to the fullest advantage for its accompanying expectations and potentially reputation-threatening connotations. The hateful Mrs. Baynton's vain designs for the group's evening exemplify the general purpose of the pleasure gardens at this time: "Her dislike to appear where her niece was to be seen, and in company with a Lucy Merle, was conquered by the wish of exhibiting her still fine figure at Vauxhall, the scene of her former triumphs, and a place peculiarly adapted, by the position of the lights, to heighten beauties, and throw defects into shade".[154] Mrs. Baynton's intentions illustrate Conlin's claims about Vauxhall's enduring appeal of autovoyeurism. Opie expounds on this affordance through

[154] Ibid., 34.

Mrs. Baynton's designs by noting how the pleasure gardens' manipulation of light and selectively cultivated social atmosphere combine to display persons at the greatest advantage.

Mrs. Baynton's extreme vanity expressed during the group's preparation to depart for Vauxhall hints at the foregrounded concern for public spectacle at the pleasure gardens. Through Mrs. Baynton's obsession with her physical appearance, Opie traces the effects of Vauxhall's distortion of undesirable personal or physical attributes. Vauxhall's attractiveness to Mrs. Baynton lies in the promise of public perception: first, her maid assures her that "at Vauxhall she did not look above five-and-twenty," and finally, her impatience to leave and resistance to foregoing plans for the sake of male protection and propriety is motivated by her own vanity when "in putting on her new hat and mantle for the occasion, had found them so becoming, that she too was unwilling to defer any longer her hour of expected admiration".[155] Though likely not her intention, Mrs. Baynton's awareness of the potential for public consumption of her appearance could be seen as a protection of her reputation.

In contrast to Mrs. Bayton's confident designs upon the Vauxhall crowd, Lucy Merle feels tremendous unease and concern at the pleasure gardens. Lacking exposure to the pleasure-taking classes populating Vauxhall, Lucy finds the throngs of people threatening and overwhelming. Despite Mrs. Baynton's outward hostility, Lucy keeps close to Mrs. Baynton as a chaperone, as she is "really rendered uncomfortable" by the aggressive and unsolicited attention she receives.[156] Lucy also requires the protection of the general and Catherine's company in this space,[157] noting the threatening effects of their separation by the crowd as "different groups of men walked alongside of, or followed her, and were lavish and loud in commendations of her

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 41.
[157] Ibid., 41-42. "While they were close behind the general and Catherine, and seemed to belong to them, there was no danger of Lucy Merle's being improperly accosted."

beauty".[158] The resultant anxiety for the reader is produced by the knowledge of the dangers modeled for Opie in *Evelina*. These rowdy gentlemen recall Burney's gang lurking in a dark alley of the gardens.[159]

Perhaps due to Lord Shirley's outward status as a bachelor and inward ambivalence, Opie does not assimilate him into the protective company of Catherine and the general at Vauxhall. Lionel offers a description of Lucy's appearance within the garden that moves beyond innocuous objectivity into sensual appraisal:

> Lord Shirley felt so favourably inclined towards her, that he turned round to look at her, and was really astonished into temporary silence by her beauty. Her height, her high colour, the brilliancy of her eyes, the spirit of her countenance, and her black hair, which, though it curled naturally, was cut close to her head, and showed the turn of the latter, and of her long and finely formed throat,—all together made her an object too striking and too lovely to be passed unnoticed; and he no longer wondered that she was, while unprotected, exposed to impertinent admirers.[160]

Lord Shirley actively partakes in Vauxhall's encouragement of voyeurism, regarding Lucy as an object of admiration and momentarily adopting the crowd's predatory perspective (predatory in the sense that he objectifies her and registers her exposure to unwarranted attentions) that prompts his recognition of her need for protection. As an attractive stranger in high society, Lucy is highly susceptible to public scrutiny and, particularly at Vauxhall, to reputation-challenging innuendo and speculation.

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[158] Ibid., 42.
[159] See Burney, *Evelina*, 197. "A large party of gentlemen, apparently very riotous, and who were hallowing, leaning on one another, and laughing immoderately, seemed to rush suddenly from behind some trees, and, meeting us face to face, put their arms at their sides, that formed a kind of circle, and first stopped our proceeding, and then our retreating, for we were presently entirely inclosed."
[160] Opie, 44-45, vol. 2, ch. 2.

These threats become viable when Mrs. Baynton abandons Lord Shirley's and Lucy's company upon meeting some of Lucy's "vulgarly dressed" acquaintances in the gardens. As soon as Mrs. Baynton leaves them, Lord Shirley registers the "embarrassment of his situation, knowing how improper it [is] for him to be seen at such a place with a young and beautiful girl on his arm, without another lady".[161] But the appearance of an intimacy between Lord Shirley and the mysterious beauty on his arm alone does not excite the scene of depravity that has been promised by Opie's positioning of characters in watchful, scurrilous crowds and the cautious anxiety expressed in her accounts of Lucy's and Lionel's thoughts. Lucy attracts the attention of a bold, drunken gentleman, who utters inappropriate verbal advances and ultimately makes contact with her body, "seizing her arm".[162] This affront recalls Evelina's experience at Vauxhall, first in her terrifying encounter with the drunken men "seizing hold of her", and again in her resistance of Sir Clement Willoughby's aggressive advances.[163] Lucy physically suffers from the spectacle of Lord Shirley and Lord Livesay's quarrel over her honor, intervening when the two suggest violence and, in turn, receiving Lord Livesay's blow for Lord Shirley on her shoulder.[164]

This spectacle actually encourages public recognition of Lucy's respectability. Apparently, people *had* been speculating about her status throughout the evening, as Lord Livesay justifies his behavior to Lord Shirley by claiming he did not "take her to be a lady".[165] Livesay offers additional insights into public and predatory perceptions of Lucy's personage

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[161] Ibid., 51-52.
[162] Jonathan Conlin's critical attention to the figure of the macaroni at Vauxhall plays out in Lord Livesay's atrocious display of "conspicuous and persistent staring and impertinent language". If, as Conlin suggests, "bad behavior could, in a curious twist, become a badge of class and fashion," Lord Livesay enters the narrative as a typified slave to the vain, indecorous appeals of Vauxhall's pleasure gardens (724).
[163] Burney, *Evelina*, 197-198.
[164] Opie, 60; vol. 2, ch. 2.
[165] Ibid., 66.

when he defends his behavior by sexualizing her: "Why she is as pale now as she was red before; and I believe she cannot help that suspicious-looking bloom".[166] Opie supplements these inappropriate remarks with details from the scene of the assault: a crowd gathers, and they discover that "though certainly in a suspicious situation, Lucy, whoever she was, was a respectable young woman".[167] Lord Shirley's defense and the arrival and embrace of Catherine seem to quell the primary concerns about Lucy's mysterious status. Though Livesay's liberties may be a personal affront to perceptions of her sexual purity, it appears that the general threat of Vauxhall and its crowds is the questioning of one's class ranking. Lord Livesay, for example, becomes belligerent at General Shirley's suggestion that his conduct threatens perceptions of his status. He exclaims, "A gentleman! To be sure I am; and whoever says I am not must fight me. Lord Shirley treated me as if I were no gentleman, and he might fight me".[168] Lord Livesay's urge to fight for his personal honor echoes the conditions in which Lucy feels forced to intervene in the men's argument about her respectability. While Lucy is physically struck during this threat to her character, though, Lord Livesay only faces verbal threats to his character.

As an evocation of society, the Vauxhall crowd is encouraged to scrutinize class and gender. Lucy's principles, strong will, and station put her at risk here, as the mystery behind her identity and connection with the Shirleys already make her an object of speculation. Her choice to intervene between the two violent lords supports her characterization of upholding principle over public perception and arbitrary social ordering, and the consequences eventually unfold to reveal her respectability and protection by the revered Shirley clan. In the tense atmosphere of

[166] Ibid., 67.
[167] Ibid., 61.
[168] Ibid., 67-68.

Vauxhall on this night, Lucy's long-sustained apprehension seems to awaken the ghosts of Evelina and the Miss Branghtons.

Vauxhall's Resonances

If autovoyeurism can clarify the stakes of this particular Vauxhall affray, then this type of spectacle and the perspectives of its spectators reveal Vauxhall's influence on the plot of the novel. Considered more broadly for the development of the novel's form, *Valentine's Eve*'s real-world settings facilitate the reader's interpolation into a narrative through cultural memory and association in addition to such emerging narration techniques as free indirect discourse. The shared jealousy and revenge plot of Sophia Clermont and Lord Melvyn taints the experiences of our central characters, the Shirleys, with illusion, manipulation, and misrepresentation. Put simply, Sophia and Melvyn exploit the public's inclination to gossip by choreographing and manufacturing scenes for the curious to witness and interpret for themselves. Once Melvyn's plot overtakes the novel, Vauxhall's lessons reveal how this monitorial society's judgments determine the heroine's tragic outcome. Illumination and surveillance are unsurvivable conditions for Catherine Shirley. She lives her truth in privacy. When she is the center of attention, the public gaze—however Lord Melvyn manipulates it—results in the destruction of her marriage, which ultimately weakens her constitution to the point of her death. Lucy Merle, on the other hand, receives a comic outcome with her marriage to Lord Livesay. While Catherine's modesty forces her to retreat in the face of public spectacle, Lucy's principled outspokenness allows her to insert herself into scenes with a distinctive moral certitude. Her transparency, as opposed to Catherine's often misunderstood modesty, allows her to withstand the public gaze. With these characters, Opie investigates the bounds of autovoyeurism in testing

the qualities that certain women possess that allow them to survive this social attention and self-monitoring or not.

The decisive plot of *Valentine's Eve* is driven by Lord Melvyn's jealousy of Lionel Shirley, which stems from their time as schoolboys. Melvyn's envy only increases with Catherine Shirley's entrance into society. With the joint frustration of Sophia Clermont over her failed seduction of Lionel, the two devise a scheme to ruin the Shirleys' marriage and disgrace the saintly Catherine: Melvyn muses, "The destruction of the husband alone would satisfy me, or rather the destruction of his happiness. . . . but if I can make her lord believe that I have seduced her, I shall be quite satisfied."[169]

Put off by the Shirleys' superiority, Melvyn recognizes an opportunity to launch his scheme at a semi-public affair at the duchess's house, where Catherine receives an invitation to sing.

> Melvyn, meanwhile, had not been unmindful of his deeply laid scheme. Such had been the coldness with which Lord Shirley had lately treated him, that, much as he wished it, he could not leave his card at the earl's house on his marriage; and as Catherine disapproved the manner in which Lord Shirley looked at Melvyn this evening, she made a point of being very courteous to him: while he, observing that whenever they spoke to each other some curious eyes were fixed on them, contrived to look mysterious whenever Lady Shirley addressed him, and always affected to whisper when he answered her, signing at the same time in a very significant manner. And now he took care while Catherine was singing, to look at her with the most marked and tender admiration.[170]

[169] Opie, 235; vol. 2, ch. 9.
[170] Ibid., 248.

While Catherine sings, she is aware of the crowd's attention on her, but she "sought only the approving eye of her lord";[171] meanwhile, Melvyn "was going about the rooms, saying with a meaning nod and a mysterious smile, 'This is not new to me—In the happy hours we passed at Hampton, Catherine Shirley used to sing to me for hours".[172] He continues feeding the rumor mill during Catherine's performance, assuring anyone who will listen how "that was his favourite song at Hampton," and that much meaning could be inferred from the lyrics to suggest that "Catherine had married Lord Shirley from pride, though *love* urged her to marry Melvyn".[173] Melvyn further exaggerates this fabricated parallel, thanking Catherine for singing *that* particular song to remind him of "past happy times." Catherine recalls their previous acquaintance and blushes, catching the anxious eye of Lord Shirley while doing so. Opie takes care to situate these slight but still public exchanges: "Nor was the confusion of one party, the anger of the other, and the lover-like look of Melvyn, lost on any one present: and various were the conjectures to which they gave rise".[174] Here, readers receive confirmation of Melvyn's success in activating the rumor mill.

Upon planting the seeds of suspicion about the town, Melvyn's attacks on the Shirleys become more aggressive, as he focuses on infiltrating their home and being seen more regularly alone with Catherine. Another successful campaign of Melvyn's is the spooking of Catherine's horses during her daily ride in Hyde Park. Though Catherine declines Melvyn's direct attentions and offering of accompaniment, he follows close behind as she returns home, staying out of sight of her coachmen: "Melvyn was able to reach Grosvenor Square as soon as Lady Shirley did: and

[171] Ibid., 249.
[172] Ibid., 250.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid., 251.

when she stopped at her own door the first person whom she saw was Melvyn".[175] Like Vauxhall, Grosvenor Square serves as another real, culturally significant landmark that signals to Opie's readers the Shirley's status and very visible geographical position within the social landscape. The narration continues:

> Lord Shirley was at this moment entering the square, and with no small surprise beheld Catherine not only handed out of her carriage by Melvyn, but actually leaning on his arm as she walked up the steps, where she seemed to take a most animated and even affectionate leave of him, while he with his hand pressed to his heart seemed to retire in great emotion.[176]

Melvyn deploys these small, outwardly innocent gestures to sprout the seeds of doubt and jealousy in Lord Shirley's mind. Melvyn piles on these opportunities, whispers, and encounters to create a compounding effect that Lord Shirley cannot ignore without risk to his own reputation. He even turns Catherine's charitable efforts into an opportunity to cast her as an adulteress. He begins showing up at the house she attends early in the mornings. Good-hearted and trusting as she is, "Catherine in the meanwhile was uneasy at having been seen in the street alone with Melvyn at so early an hour; and resolved that she would tell her lord all that had passed, to guard against very probably and dangerous misrepresentations".[177] Even Catherine begins catching onto Melvyn's inappropriate attentions.

Melvyn's plot brings things to a head in the third and final volume. Up until this point, the Shirleys have weathered Melvyn's ubiquitous presence and Sophia's cruel suggestions to Lionel. Lionel does believe Catherine's innocence when she regularly explains herself to him—

[175] Ibid., 317.
[176] Ibid., 317-318.
[177] Ibid., 382.

he even considers that Melvyn is preying upon her naivety: “But when she related the scene of Melvyn’s being discovered by her reading the Bible to the poor sick family [she was visiting in the mornings], Lord Shirley, angry as he was, could not help laughing aloud; nor could he help suspecting that Melvyn, having known of Catherine’s visits, was only acting a part in order to prejudice her in his favour”.[178] Pursuant to his designs upon the Shirleys, Melvyn steps up his gossip game, choreographing a scene of harmful chatter for Lionel to overhear. Here at Somerset House, Britain’s autovoyeurism evolves into full-on performance as Melvyn commissions two “vulgar-looking” youths to speak loudly and indecently about Catherine and Lucy within Lionel’s hearing.[179]

But the ultimate spectacle, the one most reminiscent of Burney’s naive, helpless heroines’ Vauxhall visits, is Catherine’s episode at the opera. Like Burney’s Cecilia, Catherine is wary of her chaperones, as they are acquaintances of Lord Melvyn. Catherine understands her husband’s disdain for Melvyn, and she wishes to avoid further enflaming his passions by engaging Melvyn or his cronies.[180] Her intuition is correct, as Melvyn comes to lure her into a dangerous situation. Melvyn, like Mr. Harrel, knows the geography of London, including the convenient location of the brothel at which Catherine is forced to take a rest. He gets Catherine and himself seen together there by people who will talk; “to execute his plan of getting her, in sight of a witness, the curious Sir Harry, into a *disreputable house*”.[181]

Opie's narrator speaks with finality about Melvyn’s triumph: “Melvyn had accomplished what he wished. Lady Shirley’s pure fame was blasted, he trusted; and even her doting lord would believe the tale of her guilt after this appearance, and he had it in contemplation to

[178] Opie, 11-12; vol. 3, ch. 1.
[179] Ibid., 14-16.
[180] Ibid., 20.
[181] Ibid., 25.

confirm her frailty to the earl in a manner which he could not doubt".[182] And the narrator divulges how the witness receives this information and confirms the success of Melvyn's plot: Sir Harry's "heart bled for the unhappy and injured husband".[183] Opie emphasizes Melvyn's reliance upon autovoyeurism as he continues with his scheme. When Melvyn leaves the brothel to secure a coach, he sees Sir Harry at a distance in the company of another gentleman. This, Opie writes, "was better and better for his designs; and having procured a coach by good luck which had just set down a fare, he came in it into the street, but desired it to draw up to one corner. He then let himself out; not at all doubting but that when he was re-entered into the house the spies would go and take the number of the coach".[184] Melvyn confidently anticipates these people's behavior; he knows how society's curiosity works, and he understands the meaning and implications of such a woman's association with a brothel. For good measure, though, he directs the hackney-coach to Grosvenor Square loudly enough for the "spies" to hear and confirm her identity as that of Lady Shirley.

Of course, the Shirley household is dramatically shaken by this unfolding of events. But of more significance to our focus here is London society's perception of the scandal. After all, when it comes to public assembly spaces and scandal, Opie is investigating the mechanisms at work, from dynamics of rank to approaches to socializing. Some of Catherine's peers delight at the notion of Catherine's hypocritical indecency. A few people question the credibility of the tale, considering that it may be the misconstrued chatter of busy bodies. The men of the town "knew not what to think", and others suspect a conspiracy to defame the pious Catherine.[185]

[182] Ibid., 26.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., 27.
[185] Ibid., 106.

Ultimately, readers receive conflicting views of Catherine's and Melvyn's characters from the conclusions society's personalities are drawing. But internally, the damage is more pronounced: Lord Shirley leaves for six months to process the scandal, and Catherine is made the worse for it physically, as she falls terminally ill. Regardless of belief, the circulation of this rumor attaches these destructive connotations to Catherine. It associates her inappropriately with Melvyn and with the brothel, and it reflects on her marriage too. It is not reported to have been forgotten by society or explained away by her piety; what gets reported is a complex response informed by people's jealousies and loyalties. For example, "Those women to whom the modest propriety of her dress and manner and the correctness of her conduct had been a tacit reproach," Opie writes, "gave eager and delighted credence to the tale of her guilt".[186]

These social consequences reflect greater implications for Opie's work in the context of the history of the novel. Opie's sustained focus on the social practices of spectatorship and spectacle embodies, for Georg Lukács, a defining quality of the novel. As she builds upon Frances Burney's foundation of social mixing, Opie examines the activities these classes engage in, both together and distinctly. Her varied narrative treatments of this culture of visuality exemplify Lukács's expectation for the social in novels:

> The novel, like drama, must represent the struggle of different classes, strata, parties and trends. But its representation of them is much less concentrated and economical … the novel [as opposed to drama] ... gives us not the concentrated essence of some particular trend, but, on the contrary, the way in which the trend arises, dies away, etc. For this reason, the way in which the character of a novel is typical, the manner he represents

[186] Ibid.

> social trends, is much more complex. The novel aims at showing the various facets of a social trend, the different ways in which it asserts itself, etc.[187]

Opie certainly explores social visibility as one of these complex trends in *Valentine's Eve*. Spectatorship does drive a significant portion of the plot. Perhaps more importantly, though, Lukács brings class into focus as the conducting force behind the social trends of voyeurism and autovoyeurism. Opie represents class struggle in Catherine Shirley's connection to the Merles and in her own parents' union. The premise of her father's estrangement from her grandfather derives from the younger Shirley marrying far below his station. The question of Lucy Merle's social status supposedly inspires the altercation with Lord Livesay at Vauxhall. These instances of class consciousness and social strata do not occur in a vacuum or in a "concentrated and economical" manner, as Lukács criticizes of drama. Instead, Opie treats class as something to be questioned, examined, challenged, and even disarmed through companionate marriage with the models of Catherine Shirley's parents and Lucy Merle's union with Lord Livesay. In its pervasiveness, class expands and contracts in influence throughout *Valentine's Eve*.

By filtering her revenge plot through the dynamics of public assembly, Opie demonstrates how these fictions enter the collective perception of a person and transform—or damage—a reputation completely. In *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, J. Paul Hunter articulates the value of such influential social forces in a narrative: "The novel is not, as it is sometimes said, only interested in individuals, subjectivity, privacy, and the inner self; its distinctive character involves the way it holds the individual will in tension with social and interactive values".[188] Catherine Shirley's pious convictions are

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[187] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 140.

[188] J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1990), 341.

frequently at odds with “social” and “interactive” values. As the object of the public gaze, Catherine cannot and does not survive. In Hunter’s estimation of the novel, such a tragic ending explains why Catherine is the heroine, rather than Lucy Merle who is interesting, convicted, and also well-turned in terms of her characterization. She expresses many contrarian views in the company of high society, but she also demonstrates tact, awareness, and adaptability with regard to society. Lucy withstands the spotlight, while Catherine is perceived to falter. When Lucy becomes the object of an argument at Vauxhall, she meets her future husband.

For Opie, spectacle and spectator monitoring teaches readers how to engage her social novel. Perceiving only public action, society's voyeurs speculate upon incomplete vignettes of a person's behavior. There is little to no public access into individual intentions unless they are announced plainly, which leads to spectators drawing the harmful conclusions that cost Catherine her life. Also positioned as a kind of spectator, the reader is encouraged to empathize with or condemn characters, forming judgments based on what they witness. The difference, though, is that Opie gives readers the means by which to process spectacles accurately through the added dimension of private life and characters' interiority. Like Vauxhall, *Valentine’s Eve* is about illusion and how spaces, lighting, and performance so easily and attractively manipulates and misconstrues what is real. Knowing the truth of Catherine’s innocence and Melvyn’s plot inspires empathy for Catherine, her marriage, and her reputation in readers, who are the only ones with access to the complete picture. Illusion supports Melvyn’s goals here, in the same way that Tyers and Simpson make sure people see and experience what they want them to at Vauxhall by night. What Opie accomplishes with Vauxhall's appearance, then, is a sustained investigation of the role of spectacle and illusion in driving plots, especially for novels with such

a presence of society as *Valentine's Eve*. As readers move along into the mid-nineteenth century, the need for illusion, performance, and choreography only increases for the sustenance of the pleasure gardens. For the naive and innocent, enlightenment is the logical, necessary trajectory in these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictions of Burney's and Opie's. But for fantasy, spectacle, and imagination, total illumination is a death knell, as Dickens will reveal in the 1830s.

CHAPTER FOUR

"A MORBID CONSCIOUSNESS OF APPROACHING DISAPPOINTMENT": VAUXHALL'S DICKENSIAN INTERLUDE

The Vauxhall depicted in Amelia Opie's *Valentine's Eve* (1816) is the pleasure gardens as they were directed by Master of Ceremonies Charles Herbert (C.H.) Simpson. From 1798 to 1833 (arguably, 1835), Simpson enhanced Jonathan Tyers's eighteenth-century vision for Vauxhall in his organization of the gardens' amusements and in the over-the-top fulfillment of his own role as host. Simpson's tenure at Vauxhall bridges a significant gap in the gardens' literary timeline between *Valentine's Eve* and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848). In the 32 years that pass between Opie's and Thackeray's novels, Vauxhall undergoes tremendous change. Thackeray's present-day Vauxhall is not the setting for his plots, however. Unlike Opie and Burney's novels, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* depicts Vauxhall in 1815, the time between Catherine Shirley's childhood and present-day visits to the gardens. The Vauxhalls of *Valentine's Eve* and *Vanity Fair* should look practically identical as a setting, but the transitions that occur between Opie and Thackeray's times of writing account for the drastic shifts in their uses and re-creations of the space.

In the Victorian worlds of Thackeray and Charles Dickens's occasionally greasy, cockney-speaking characters, youthful naivety and wonderment have different consequences. For Opie's Romantic novel, naive purity and virtue are rewarded, as demonstrated by the acquaintance and later marriage of Lucy Merle and Lord Livesay in *Valentine's Eve*. If the Romantic novel as a genre can be defined as a formal hybrid, then Vauxhall can be seen to share

qualities of both the fictional and the real as a historical site and an influence upon the lives of its fictitious visitors. I define much of Opie's realism by her narrator's presentation of subjectivity and interiority.[189] Opie creates characters with whom readers can sympathize; her narrator divulges more about them than what society observes, so readers can understand when they are misjudged or further wronged by society. With the Victorian novel, historical realism often presents as depersonalized world historical events or period settings. But spaces like Vauxhall and their cultural associations can be used to further a narrative on an individual, character level as they call up literary patterns. As a social mechanism, readers may observe the unfolding of plots in more telescopic ways, creating a more complete impression of a character's situation with regard to the world at large rather than individual consequences confined to the pages of a single novel. As readers encounter more caricature and social commentary from Thackeray and his Victorian contemporaries, the demand for nuanced characterization rises, resulting in such irony as the misalignment of prideful characters like Captain Costigan or Jos Sedley and others' perceptions of their external performances. The narrative tools and traditions exist by the time of Thackeray's writing to yield such complexities of character with interior and exterior lives that don't always match up.[190] The writing and treatment of characters changes, but the real-world settings and their affordances do not. The focus must shift to perspective and readings of the space and characters' actions within it.

Sketches by Boz (1836) provides evidence of this shift when contemporary Vauxhall is made the subject of Dickens's roast. This text will be discussed in greater detail soon, but for now, the significance of this sketch is its premise of a present-day Vauxhall seen by the light of

[189] Opie accomplishes this both through consistent, well-turned characterizations and dialogue and, more significantly for a consideration of narrative voice, through instances of free indirect discourse from the narrator.
[190] Many examples can be observed in Dickens' writings from as early as 1833 with *The Pickwick Papers*.

day. The daytime amusements are a failing product of new management in 1836, three years after the great MC's formal retirement. The unsatisfying experiences that Dickens details do not belong to the Vauxhall that Thackeray represents in his mid-Victorian novels and perpetuates into our present day. The space that Thackeray's characters occupy is a beloved Vauxhall directed by C.H. Simpson. Many of these characters are watching the fireworks alongside Catherine Shirley. After all, *Vanity Fair*'s 1848 pleasure gardens predate those of *Valentine's Eve*'s narrative present. In terms of its currency, Vauxhall just doesn't have a place in literature after 1836. Every time readers encounter it after that point, they are visiting a remembered Vauxhall. It holds no real relevance to Victorian culture in a way that would perpetuate its status as a national treasure; in fact, the Victorians let the pleasure gardens wither and die from the late 1830s until its closure in 1859. How could such a social, historical, and literary staple fall into such obscurity? Without its fearless leader, who died on Christmas Day, 1835, Vauxhall could not maintain its characteristic splendor. To many people, "Simpson *was* Vauxhall, as Vauxhall was Simpson – to continue to open the gardens after his death was meaningless madness; nobody could take his place. Without his greeting and his obsequious letters, Vauxhall was nothing".[191]

<u>"Gentle Simpson, that kind smiling idiot"</u>

Christopher Herbert Simpson, Master of Ceremonies and publicist for the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens from 1797 to 1835, has been described as the "very soul" of Vauxhall. Simpson was himself a trademark spectacle of the pleasure gardens with his old-fashioned costumes and exaggerated hospitality. Simpson institutionalized the Vauxhall firework displays and hot-air balloon ascents at the gardens while continuing the traditions of the concerts,

[191] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 28.

minstrelsy, and fetes for which Vauxhall had become famous—the very activities that served as a backdrop for Opie's *Valentine's Eve*. It is no surprise, then, that William Thackeray resurrects Simpson and Simpson's vision in his own literary constructions of the site for *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*.[192] Thackeray's penchant for masquerade and caricature echoes the very spectacles that Simpson organized for entertainment at Vauxhall.

C.H. Simpson assumed a larger-than-life personality for his service as Master of Ceremonies at Vauxhall. Outlandishly dressed in old-fashioned formal costume, Simpson regularly donned black buckled knee-breeches and stockings, patent pumps with black bows, and a close-fitting white waistcoat and black morning coat with a cascading cravat at the neck. He accessorized with a watch-chain with dangling seals and fobs, the occasional seasonal nosegay at the button-hole, and a black beaver hat usually courteously lifted off his bald head. He finished the look with white gloves and a tasseled silver-mounted ebony cane. This iconic costume was immortalized in both print and visual culture, with an intricate portrait by J.W. Gear (below) and a contemporary poem written in response:

On the Incomparable Portrait of the Inimitable

"C.H. Simpson, Esq., Master of Ceremonies at Vauxhall."

By the author of "Crayons From the Commons.

The painter's art unrivall'd we behold,
In seizing all that Nature's hand could mould –
In tracing forth each point on which we gaze,
While matchless Simpson fills us with amaze –
Simpson, who stands proclaim'd, by one and all,

[192] These texts will be discussed at length in chapter five.

The glorious guardian genius of Vauxhall!

That saltant form, with agile gait, appears,

A prancing comment on advancing years;

That face, despite of wrinkles, rude is seen,

A strong, perennial, stubborn evergreen.

The more we gaze, the more must we admire

Each nicer touch that pencils his attire:

His pliant pumps upon their surface show

Two tasteful knots, full bunching to a bow;

His silken hose are soften'd on the sight,

In sable contrast with the buckle bright,

Which, in its sparkling vividness, we see

Reflecting transient lustre from his knee;

His coat enhances his transcendant vest –

A costly brilliant blazes on his breast;

His hat, with rim convolv'd on either side,

Completes the acmé of his conscious pride.

But all the powers of graphic song were vain

To tune each movement of his ebon cane,

As onward still in greeting mood he trips,

The "Royal Gardens" on his lauding lips.

Ne'er could the Muse, in numbers meet, pourtray

The prostrate homage, studious of display,

Evinc’d, as each beholder must allow,

Within the circle of his sweeping bow.

These features rare the Sister Art alone

Describes, by means peculiarly her own:

Fam’d Simpson swells in ev’ry cut and caper,

The crowning climax of pictorial paper.

Such the great man whom fashion proudly stamps,

Flaming beneath five hundred thousand lamps.

The contemporary poet animates Simpson’s grand memorial with the vignettes of his prancing and prostrate bowing and the cartoonish ways in which they are accented and exaggerated by his ancient gentlemanly garb. Simpson’s bright liveliness reflects his gardens’ artificial illumination to create a fantastical, inseparable shared identity for both character and setting with neither able to outlast the other.

Drawn on Stone from Life by J.W. Gear 17, Gt. Russell St. Covent Garden.

C. H. SIMPSON Esq^re.

Thirty Four Years Master of the Ceremonies at the Royal Gardens Vauxhall.

"Welcome to the Royal Property."

Published by J.W. Gear, 17, Great Russell St. Covent Garden, & Sold at Vauxhall Gardens

W. Day Lith^r to the King 11 Gate St. Lincolns Inn Fields *Price 2^d*

Fig. 6. W. Day after John William Gear, "Welcome to the Royal Property," lithograph. 1831.

During Simpson's tenure at Vauxhall, as the poem indicates, pleasure-seekers came to expect a personal reception or acknowledgement by the MC as a sort of essential experience in itself. In this way, visitors can be made to feel like a main character in the narrative of their own making at Vauxhall. Welcoming guests to "the Royal Property," Simpson performed his iconic bow, taking a "polite step back to allow space for the elegant sweep of his arm, which was indiscriminately received by anybody standing close enough".[193] This exaggerated gesture proved to be one of Simpson's most memorable qualities, as the comedic frequency and commitment to a deep, gracious bend was fodder for writers inspired by Vauxhall and its attractions. Thackeray's "kind, smiling idiot" also enjoyed coverage in such publications as *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction.* One comic essay from 1830 focused almost entirely on his bowing:

> *THE BOWER, –A VAUXHALL VIEW.*
>
> We do not mean by "The Bower," that summer sanctuary, that sylvan asylum, that cool sequestered seat…The Bower that we allude to, is not that wherein hearts and promises are sometimes broken, which birds delight to haunt, and bards to describe. No, it is merely a human being, a living bower–an acquaintance most probably of the reader's;--we mean, in short, the Master of the Ceremonies at Vauxhall Gardens! We would be accurate, not extravagant, in our portrait; for the original must be known to many. Few that have visited Vauxhall, lofty or vulgar, in the days of its splendour or its gloom, but

[193] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 4.

> have seen him arrayed in his glory. “Oh!” saith the anticipating reader, “I think I know whom you allude to…Has he not a waistcoat white as once was Dignum’s, with a perpetual black ribbon streaming down it, like a dark torrent down a mountain of snow? Do not the skirts of his coat divide, as they fall, into the form of an A? Are there not fifty cravats on his neck, and fifty winters on his head?” Enough; we perceive that the reader hath observed him; he hath noted the silver hair and buckles, the invariable white gloves and politeness, the unblemished waistcoat and manners, of our aimable acquaintance. He hath descried the small smart cane, the spacious and seemly cravat, the precise, yet easy and graceful carriage, of our kind and accomplished friend.

In the imagined reader's recognition of Simpson—"saith the anticipating reader, 'I think I know whom you allude to'"—the author calls upon expectations of Vauxhall rooted in cultural memory. This gesture, though slight, recalls the eighteenth-century tradition of these nods to readers' cultural knowledge as evident in travel guides. As with Henry Fielding, who felt no need to sketch Vauxhall in detail for readers of *Amelia*, "The extreme beauty and elegance of this place is well known to almost every one of my readers," and so too is the reputation of Simpson known to nineteenth-century visitors.[194] As with any other spectacle of Vauxhall, Simpson is talked about and promoted as an attraction worth visiting the gardens to experience.

What makes this essay necessary to reproduce in almost its entirety is how it transcends comedy and provides another means of thinking about the relationship between Simpson and his beloved gardens. On the one hand, Thackeray's readers can begin to understand what audiences already knew or assumed about Simpson; on the other hand, the author, intentionally or not, replicates the process by which Simpson and Vauxhall are both established in cultural memory.

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[194] Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (Delphi Classics, 2013), vol. 3, bk, 4, chap. 9, Kindle.

> But perhaps he does not know the heart of the mystery that surrounds him,—perhaps he does not suspect that there is any mystery at all. While taking his supper, he has seen a gentleman appear suddenly at the entrance of the box, with a profound and perfect bow—something that has escaped the wreck of the last century–a reminiscence of the year 1730. He has at first sight mistaken him for a sort of Sir Charles Grandison in little; he has heard him, with a still small voice, inquire if any addition could be made to the comforts of the party—if anything was wished for—if the wines were satisfactory, or the punch pleasant; he has observed him decline the glass which had been poured out and handed to him, with a well-bred and courteous air; and then, with a bow and a smile, he has seen him depart. But this is all that he has seen—and yet this is nothing.

If Vauxhall is presented in fiction in ways that recall its literary predecessors, so is Simpson with the essay's recollection of Samuel Richardson's Grandison. As such, person and place are collapsed into an imaginative literary assemblage, however brief the allusion may be. Yet, the literary canon is not able to fully contextualize or describe the extent of Simpson's flamboyant character. What the author of this essay does is essentially make a case for Simpson's position within a civilian canon, one that reflects common knowledge, if not common experience.

> Where then is the mystery? It consists partly in the smile and the bow; not so much, indeed, in their quality as in their continuity. He never seems to leave off–they are always ready made–he keeps them perpetually by him fit for use. It is a smile without an end–a bow that has no *finis*. If you see him in an erect position—and he is sometimes particularly perpendicular—the very instant that he catches your eye he changes it to its more natural figure, a curve. One would almost say that, from the commencement to the

> end of the season, his body is not straight, his lips never in repose for two minutes together. Whatever is said, whatever is done—he bows.

The Mirror's sarcastic mystery of the Bower does not yield a nuanced or dimensional view of Simpson's true character. However, this article does create a reciprocal impression through its use of allusion. In popular eighteenth-century travel books, for example, literary references to dramatic plots and scenes are regularly used to describe the experiences a visitor might expect to have at the pleasure gardens. Just as fiction has contributed to Vauxhall's cultural identity, *The Mirror*'s essay reinforces Simpson's character as one of Vauxhall's many spectacles to encounter.

As these primary sources have indicated, Simpson took an obsequious approach to hospitality at the gardens. This proved to be a most practical strategy when dealing with unruly guests to maintain the ideal congenial atmosphere: "The general good behavior of the visitors in comparison with that shown at many another pleasure resort".[195] Simpson fiercely defended Vauxhall's standards of behavior to maintain the gardens' pleasant, jovial atmosphere, piercing "through the mob like an eel in mud to calm things down" at the first sign of any disturbance.[196] While his servile attitude and excessive bowing was viewed and satirized as the behavior of a simpleton, David Coke argues that Simpson's approach to his position was that of a "highly practiced diplomat and serviceman, well used to keeping order without aggression or violence– an ability of great skill.[197] Simpson's handling of rowdiness and disturbances was certainly unique and noteworthy, as a news article from 1833 reported his diffusing of a drunken mayhem:

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[195] Walter Sidney Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859* (London: Odhams Press, 1955), 86.
[196] William Clarke, *Every Night Book, or, Life After Dark* (London: T. Richardson, 1827), 187.
[197] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 5.

> One of them was a big, powerful youth, who discouraged any attempts by waiters or others to get in his way. The call went out for Simpson, who came out and made a most profound bow to the riotous swain, who, on seeing Simpson's hat flourishing in the air, his fine oval powdered cranium bare, cried out, with a thundering voice "who the h—l are you?" – the M.C. bowing to the ground, answered with the greatest complacency "Your very obedient humble servant" – "You be d—d.'; Simpson: "Sir, you do me honour." Buck: "Honour, the d—l." Simpson: "Sir, you are perfectly right, he ought to be honour'd." Buck: "Who ought to be honour'd and be d—d to you." Simpson: "Your own noble and generous self, who are the most good naturest gentleman I know." Buck: "What do you know of me, you puppy." Simpson: "Every thing that is valiant, courageous and manly." Another profound bow, hat off, which the ungracious youth kicked into the air; but the peace-making philosopher, quickly picked it up – replaced it on his head, with that elegance of gait and manner so peculiar to himself, that it made even the rebel to smile, of which the M.C. taking advantage, addressed him thus, "Sir, you are little aware that I have the honour to know your noble relatives; his lordship, your extinguished father, is a great patron of the Royal Property; on that account, permit me, right honourable sir, to conduct you to your carriage: clear the way there, lamplighters and waiters, don't commode his honour; this way, highly respected sir, this way." – The youth tickled with the high rank the witty M.C. had bestowed on him, suffered himself to be led out of the Gardens like a lamb.[198]

Here is a glimpse of what has been described as Simpson's "obsessive courtesy and ridiculous, fawning sycophancy".[199] This "kind, smiling idiot" became famous for these demonstrations of

[198] Lambeth Archives, Vauxhall Gardens Albums 5, f.185.
[199] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 7.

excessive politeness to everyone.[200] Simpson's creation of the overwrought, invariable master of civility attracted visitors from miles around—he became a "phenomenon, a wonder, a spectacle" in his own right, establishing himself as the trademark image of the Royal Gardens, Vauxhall.[201] Extended illustrations of his character appeared in popular publications and periodicals, furthering Simpson's work as Vauxhall's publicist. Such critical sketches as that which appeared in the *Sunday Times* did nothing but promote Simpson's legendary identity:

> Simpson, of bowing and letter-writing celebrity, was for years an attraction. It is impossible to conceive anything more solemnly absurd, more inexpressibly ludicrous, than this little fellow, who paraded in the gardens in unexceptionable black tights, carrying his beaver up a foot above his head, and bowing to everything he saw, animate or inanimate, from a lord to a lamp-post…[202]

Considered with *The Mirror*'s comic article featured above, this write-up of Simpson is typical of the publicity he gained for Vauxhall and, as Coke suggests, played a major role in ensuring the continued success of the gardens up until Queen Victoria's accession.[203]

Victorian Vauxhall: "a morbid consciousness of approaching disappointment"

Thackeray's descriptions of Vauxhall under Simpson offer an impression of "Vauxhall in its prime, by means of the comments of those who experienced it either directly or through the veil of a fictional creation".[204] At the time of Thackeray's writing, the Vauxhall that existed in reality and outside of these fictional containers was a shell of its former self. By 1848, Simpson

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[200] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 63.
[201] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 7.
[202] *The Sunday Times*, 6 October 1844.
[203] Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson," 10.
[204] Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 11.

had been dead for over a decade, and the gardens "splendor and vitality" had vanished.[205] Yet the gardens' and their preeminent director's demise would not mark the end of Vauxhall's existence within the Victorian literary record.

Simpson's (first) retirement in 1833 was an important moment for Vauxhall's permanent transition from lived reality to cultural and historical memory. Charles Dickens' *Sketches by Boz,* completed in 1836, or three years after Simpson's first retirement and the year after his death, made no effort to disguise the extent of Vauxhall's crumbling. According to T.J. Edelstein, "as early as 1836, the illusion of Vauxhall had disappeared; Charles Dickens visited it by day, and the observation of Boz can serve as the signal of the end of Vauxhall".[206] In this way, "Vauxhall Gardens by Day" became a literary tombstone of the once beloved cultural heritage site. For Dickens, like Thackeray, Vauxhall was once a site of bedazzlement and spectacular leisure:

> We loved to wander among these illuminated groves, thinking of the patient and laborious researches which had been carried on there during the day, and witnessing their results in the suppers which were served up beneath the light of lamps and to the sound of music at night. The temples and saloons and cosmoramas and fountains glittered and sparkled before our eyes; the beauty of the lady singers and the elegant deportment of the gentlemen, captivated our hearts; a few hundred thousand of additional lamps dazzled our senses; a bowl or two of punch bewildered our brains; and we were happy.[207]

Before its decay, critically aware or at least observant spectators understood the amount of work required to plan Vauxhall's events and transform and illuminate the gardens. The pleasure gardens were not an act of nature but an intentionally crafted artifice, one that could spotlight

[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., 15.
[207] Charles Dickens, "Vauxhall Gardens by Day," *Sketches by Boz* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1836), 94-95.

performers yet conceal in darkness the least well-behaved visitors.

Unfortunately, the amount of work required to retain Vauxhall's unique cultural position was not sustainable following the retirement and passing of its chief architect. Due to recurrent bad weather and financial hardships, Vauxhall's fortunes hit a low point during the 1830s. Bad weather caused frequent cancellations of firework shows. The quality of the musical entertainment dropped off. As one critic put it at the end of one of these poor seasons, "the fault of the Vauxhall managers had been to offer too much of a good thing."[208] To supplement the dwindling income of attendance, the gardens were opened for charitable events and shows such as a Ladies Bazaar, a Fancy Fair, and assorted fetes for causes ranging from "diseased of the ear" to religious building restorations. Unfortunately, these special events were often disastrous for their poor execution and their effects on Vauxhall's reputation for dependable, quality amusements. One of the most detrimental schemes proved to be opening the gardens for daytime visits. Note how quickly Dickens' tone shifts as he relays how the space was damaged when it appeared in natural daylight:

> In an evil hour, the proprietors of Vauxhall-gardens took to opening them by day. We regretted this, as rudely and harshly disturbing that veil of mystery which had hung about the property for many years, and which none but the noonday sun, and the late Mr. Simpson, had ever penetrated. We shrunk from going; at this moment we scarcely know why. Perhaps a morbid consciousness of approaching disappointment—perhaps a fatal presentiment—perhaps the weather; whatever it was, we did not go until the second or third announcement of a race between two balloons tempted us, and we went.[209]

[208] Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 316.
[209] Ibid.

In Chapter 14 of *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens frames his critical description of Vauxhall by targeting the gardens' latest gimmick of offering daytime entertainments. Arguing for the necessity of nightfall to account for the Gardens' signature ambiance, Dickens paints a grotesque, disillusioning picture of the once beloved social space.

> Vauxhall by daylight! A porter-pot without porter, the House of Commons without the Speaker, a gas-lamp without the gas—pooh, nonsense, the thing was not to be thought of. It was rumoured, too, in those times, that Vauxhall-gardens by day, were the scene of secret and hidden experiments; that there, carvers were exercised in the mystic art of cutting a moderate-sized ham into slices thin enough to pave the whole of the grounds; that beneath the shade of the tall trees, studious men were constantly engaged in chemical experiments, with the view of discovering how much water a bowl of negus could possibly bear; and that in some retired nooks, appropriated to the study of ornithology, other sage and learned men were, by a process known only to themselves, incessantly employed in reducing fowls to a mere combination of skin and bone.[210]

Dickens's realism here is highlighted in the "secret and hidden experiments" behind some of Vauxhall's traditional fare and amusements, making this text a sober, scientific interrogation of Vauxhall's innerworkings. Readers don't want to see behind the curtain; they don't wish to see how the sausage gets made (or, in this case, how the ham gets sliced so thinly). Simpson made for a successful Wizard of Oz, but his successors could not keep critical, inquiring Victorians at bay. They did not appear to share the showman's vision for spectacle and illusion. In an attempt to create a new attraction at no financial cost to the gardens, the new proprietors removed far too much of Simpson's carefully woven veil of splendor. To cut costs, the new management replaced

[210] Ibid.

the oil lamps that had previously illuminated the gardens with gas lighting, ultimately sacrificing the dreamy, romantic aura that attracted such historic crowds for "efficiency and economy".[211] Walter Sidney Scott describes the consequences of this financial decision: "the dazzling light of the new form of illumination did not compensate for the disappearance of the faint and lovely glow of the old lamps."[212] The result of these changes was an overexposure of the truth by all-permeating daylight rather than charmingly curated nighttime illuminations that London society knew and loved. In daylight, the gardens lost the affordances of cover, concealment, and clever ocular manipulation. Total illumination cost the gardens their charm and the social appeal of the possibility for secrecy and scandal.

Readers do not want a disillusioned Dickensian Vauxhall—not for history, cultural memory, or adventure. In the real space of Vauxhall—Simpson's Vauxhall—history and culture unfold in the reenactment of military victories and exhibitions of foreign acquisitions. Performance and wonderment are described affectionately through Thackeray's satirical, though sentimental tone. Thackeray needs the whimsy, the vitality, the scandalous potentiality of Vauxhall—he calls upon reader's memories and the legends of the social space because he, unlike Burney and Opie, is working with a Vauxhall that no longer exists. Burney and Opie are engaging readers with a contemporary Vauxhall, while Thackeray must encourage readers to suspend their knowledge of the current, 1848 Vauxhall in decline to recall a beloved, spectacular, magical space bursting with potential. In this sense, Thackeray operates as a curious node in Vauxhall's literary and historical timeline, as his novels are being written and read about a Vauxhall at an earlier date, which is eventually what readers of Burney and Opie are forced to do. The physical referent disappears, in spirit, upon Simpson's death and completely at its closure

[211] Scott, *Green Retreats*, 107.
[212] Ibid., 107-8.

in 1859. Readers today have nothing but a literary relation to the space, but Thackeray's readers had to grapple with popular knowledge of two Vauxhalls, a real and an imagined one. It is actually this population of readers who would have the most to say about Vauxhall as the doubled subject of this very project. They would have the most comparative knowledge with which to investigate both the physical and literary spaces of Vauxhall for accuracy and affordance. Now that the site only exists in works of historical fiction, physical renderings of the space have a greater dependency on its literary record.

CHAPTER FIVE

"A CHAPTER ABOUT VAUXHALL, WHICH IS SO SHORT THAT IT SCARCE DESERVES TO BE CALLED A CHAPTER AT ALL"[213]

In both *Vanity Fair* (1848) and *The History of Pendennis* (1848-50), William Thackeray draws on cultural memory to recreate the experiences of night visits to Vauxhall and its captivating lighting and firework displays. Although published in mid-century, the version of Vauxhall that appears in Thackeray's novels is decisively not the version that existed in the earliest years of Victoria's reign. Instead, the Vauxhall that appealed to the Victorian reader is the Vauxhall of the Georgian and Regency periods, one that could be recalled in historical fiction intent on representing the British society of previous decades. As a historical novelist and one who, in the case of *Pendennis*, was writing in a partially reflective and semi-autobiographical mode, Thackeray persuasively recreated the sensations and significance of experiencing Vauxhall for readers who were unable to travel back in time to the pleasure gardens' heyday.

In previously discussed literary re-envisionings of the space, Vauxhall serves as a rendezvous point for cultural history and literary style as both a geographical site and social attraction. The intersection of the real, the historical, the ostentatious, and the imaginative at the pleasure gardens provides a hospitable environment to accommodate Thackeray's intentions in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. Generic identity embeds the expectation of relative historical accuracy in *Vanity Fair* as a historical novel and *Pendennis* with its semi-autobiographical qualities. Building upon Georg Lukács's principal claims about the historical novel with respect

[213] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, ed. Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 61.

to character and social life and the recent work of Christina Griffin on the panoramic experience of history in *Vanity Fair*, I investigate how and why Thackeray's experiences of Vauxhall occur out of time in these two novels. Both texts feature the pleasure gardens as they were under the programming and publicity of Master of Ceremonies, C.H. Simpson, during a time distinctly prior to the Victorian era. How then, I ask, did crumbling Vauxhall hold such literary and historical attraction for Thackeray's mid-Victorian novels?

Genre plays a significant role in considering Thackeray's staging of events at Vauxhall. A key element of Lukács's theory of the historical novel is the presence of famous historical figures featured among the dramatis personae with only oblique or marginal roles in the narrative.[214] As discussed in the previous chapter, the larger-than-life figure and influence of C.H. Simpson offers a recognizable historical landmark for the contemporary Victorian reader. His spectacles—evoked in *Vanity Fair* as ideal backdrops against which fantasies can play out—were legendary, and he himself was a well-turned, anachronistic caricature of hospitality. He gives readers both a familiarity and a nostalgia inherent in the historical novel form. Yet it is in Thackeray's other Vauxhall adaptation, *Pendennis*, that Simpson himself makes an appearance as a status-symbolizing acquaintance of our hero, Arthur Pendennis.

Recent scholarship on Thackeray and the historical novel by Cristina Richieri Griffin has considered the relationship between history and spectacle on an aesthetic level. In "Experiencing History and Encountering Fiction in *Vanity Fair*," Griffin argues that the historical novel and its panoramic representations of physical space are capable of "resuscitating history not as a prerequisite for progress but as a condition of originary experience".[215] Thackeray's invocation

[214] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 45.
[215] Griffin, "Experiencing History and Encountering Fiction in *Vanity Fair*," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 3 (2016): 432.

of Vauxhall is not an argument for a Victorian revival of the space; rather, its resuscitation is a means of illustrating what the space under Simpson's tenure afforded early nineteenth-century spectators in terms of both personal and cultural significance. If Vauxhall, like Waterloo, can serve as a case study for how the novel "teaches us how all history, whether great or trivial, might resist contemporaneous representation," then Thackeray tasks readers with considering not simply *why Vauxhall*, but why *Simpson's* Vauxhall.[216] Without Simpson's hand directing the version of Vauxhall present in Thackeray's fiction, readers would be left with a version of Vauxhall that is more akin to the decrepit space as it appeared in 1848 and was captured by Dickens in the early *Sketches By Boz* (1836).

Some critics have argued that *Pendennis*'s Vauxhall is questionable in its historical accuracy. In an explanatory note to his critical edition, John Sutherland suggests that the reference to Simpson is "somewhat anachronistic" due to the timing of his retirement.[217] However, I should point out that if *Pendennis* indeed follows an autobiographical model, Arthur Pendennis would have been at Vauxhall between 1830 and 1835, a period which overlaps with Simpson's employment as Master of Ceremonies. It is documented that Simpson "retired" as Vauxhall's Master of Ceremonies in 1833.[218] After two very lucrative benefit nights in Simpson's honor, he presumably "relish[ed] the celebrity and status" these events gave him and decided to return to service the very next season.[219] He continued at Vauxhall until his death in 1835.

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[216] Griffin, "Experiencing History," 418.
[217] W. M. Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1048.
[218] T.J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1983), 15.
[219] David Coke, "The Surprising Career of C.H. Simpson, Master of Ceremonies 1797-1835," *Six Essays on Vauxhall Gardens* (London: Caret Press, 2022), 25.

Regardless of dates, Vauxhall's greatest value, and the reason for the strength of Thackeray's narrative attraction to the space, emerges from the pleasure gardens' propensity for spectacle. For his autobiographical and historical novel writing, Vauxhall offers a backdrop of realism and vibrant imagination in its attractions, spectacles, and bills of fare. Thackeray draws upon the *experiences* offered by Vauxhall, which were trademarks of Simpson's direction. For Burney, Opie, and Thackeray too, an evolving realism of plausible experience depends heavily upon spectacle. Though the real and the spectacular might seem theoretically opposed, spectacle is consistently the most attractive, flexible affordance of the real space of Vauxhall for authors. The immersive qualities of Vauxhall's entertainments under Simpson are not unlike those of Pumpernickel, another aesthetically lauded (and loaded) space in *Vanity Fair*. For both Pumpernickel and Vauxhall, the "revival" of these spaces "is not only possible, but also necessary for producing historical experience".[220] Like Pumpernickel, where its visitors, including the narrator, "inhabit the past by residing in its present fictionalizations," Thackeray's Vauxhall is not the failing Vauxhall of the present. Rather, it is a decisively Regency-era version recalled to life as a means of presenting his characters with a theater for performing their debaucherous desires in a space as real as the Waterloo battlefield. Immersion in Thackeray's Vauxhall, therefore, is predicated upon the distance and mediation that is only made possible through fiction.

Vanity Fair at Vauxhall

Vauxhall plays a decisive role in the plot of *Vanity Fair*, though it is merely introduced as a venue for fashionable dining and entertainment. Thackeray's Vauxhall scene is set

[220] Griffin, "Experiencing History," 414.

retrospectively before Opie's narrative present; this "little chapter" of great consequence effectively slides in between the chronology of events in *Cecilia* and *Valentine's Eve*. Thackeray's dominant concerns about Vauxhall remain consistent with Burney's and Opie's in the requirement of qualified, protective male accompaniment of females, the site's encouragement of explosive spectacle, and the voyeurism supported by the staging of the space and the presence of a vigilant crowd.

As Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley appeal to Jos Sedley to take them to Vauxhall, Mr. Sedley insists that "the girls must have a gentleman apiece".[221] Conscious of the dangerous throngs that populate the gardens, Mr. Sedley recognizes that Jos's presence alone will not provide sufficient protection, as his vigilance will likely be compromised by his companion's innocence and his own desire: "Jos will be sure to leave Emmy in the crowd, he will be so taken up with Miss Sharp here".[222] Though this comment may initially register as another one of Mr. Sedley's critiques of his son's incompetence, Mr. Sedley identifies two of Vauxhall's greatest dangers, as outlined in *Evelina* and *Valentine's Eve*,—the crowd and (male) attention to female characters.

Resounding from both Burney's and Opie's texts, the staging effects of framing, lighting, and "private" walks working in tandem with its visiting crowd support the pleasure gardens' demand for spectacle. Conscious of the affordances of and expectations for the space, Becky, Jos, and Amelia imagine their own individual spectacles in preparation for their visit to the gardens. Jos plans to propose to Becky at Vauxhall,[223] and Becky suspects that he will do so.[224] Quiet and timid as she is, it is Amelia who begins an exaggerated performance of giddy

[221] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 34.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., 47.
[224] Ibid., 62.

femininity in preparation for the departure to Vauxhall. She is described as "tripping into the drawing-room in a white muslin frock, prepared for conquest at Vauxhall, singing like a lark, and as fresh as a rose".[225] The ambiguity behind Amelia's "conquest"—is it conquest of George Osborne's affections, or rather her desire to be conquered by George?—is sustained in Thackeray's resistant narration of her subsequent experience at Vauxhall. Refusing to offer an account of the couple's progress, the narrator only teases that the nature of Amelia and George's adventures at Vauxhall "is a secret".[226] In this way, the narrator, who reveals himself to be the "Manager of the Performance" of Vanity Fair calls attention to expectations of voyeurism at Vauxhall in his refusal to indulge readers with these details.[227]

Jos and Becky's intentions for spectacles play out to reveal that their estimations of Vauxhall's potential do not account for a space outfitted with people, amusements, strategic lighting and landscaping, and rack punch. This misalignment is far more attractive to the narrator than the fulfillment of Amelia's amorous expectations. Instead of a threatening crowd or companion clawing at Becky's feminine virtue, Thackeray depicts Becky's own machinations for making contact with Jos:

> …now or never was the moment, Miss Sharp thought, to provoke that declaration which was trembling on the timid lips of Mr. Sedley. They had previously been to the panorama of Moscow, where a rude fellow, treading on Miss Sharp's foot, caused her to fall back with a little shriek into the arms of Mr. Sedley, and this little incident increased the tenderness and confidence of that gentleman to such a degree, that he told her several of his favourite Indian stories over again for, at least, the sixth time.[228]

[225] Ibid., 58.
[226] Ibid., 64.
[227] Ibid., 1.
[228] Ibid., 65.

Here, Jos is described with the language of femininity—he is timid, trembling, and affected. Becky and Jos approach the idea of union from reversed gender perspectives in Thackeray's characterizations of their dispositions and intentions, recasting Jos as the blushing Evelina Anville who is blinded by spectacle and disoriented by the illusory gardens.

These misalignments constitute the spectacular outcome of the Vauxhall visit in which a bowl of rack punch "influences the fates of all the principal characters in this 'Novel without a Hero'.[229] With Jos and Becky's unmet aspirations, Thackeray challenges the power and agency that comes with knowledge of such public assembly spaces upon which Burney's and Opie's narratives hinge. While Mr. Harrel and Mrs. Baynton seek to maintain optics and reputations by being seen at Vauxhall, and Lord Melvyn gets himself seen in close company with Catherine Shirley, Thackeray does not fulfill Jos and Becky 's schemes at Vauxhall. With restored confidence in Becky, Jos orders the group a feast at their box in the gardens. Thackeray describes him "in his glory, ordering about the waiters with great majesty".[230] Transforming expectation into reality, Jos demands the bowl of rack punch because "everybody had rack punch at Vauxhall".[231] Here, established (or perceived) customs of Vauxhall amusement influence our characters' experiences, driving the stake of realism into their plans and ambitions with plausible banality and inconvenience. Becky does not calculate Jos's tendency toward excess into her expectation of a proposal, overlooking the facts of food, drink, and fancy embedded in Vauxhall as reality bursting out of the narrative's fiction.

Arthur Pendennis Goes to Vauxhall

[229] Ibid., 66.
[230] Ibid., 65.
[231] Ibid., 66.

Similarly, the semi-autobiographical *History of Pendennis* follows Arthur "Pen" Pendennis to Vauxhall, where he goes to decompress and enjoy the gardens' usual amusements after a long day at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The narrator admits Pendennis into the gardens, speaking as a seasoned Vauxhall-goer ready to initiate any first-timers present in Thackeray's readership:

> Before you enter the enchanted ground, where twenty thousand additional lamps are burned every night as usual, most of us have passed through the black and dreary passage and wickets which hide the splendours of Vauxhall from uninitiated men. In the walls of this passage are two holes strongly illuminated, in the midst of which you see two gentlemen at desks, where they will take either your money as a private individual, or your order of admission if you are provided with that passport to the Gardens.[232]

Queued up at the admission gate, Pen finds himself in line behind the coarse Captain Costigan with an elderly, working-class mother and child. Pen shows sympathy for the disgraced group and procures admission for the Captain and his party. "How could he refuse his sympathy in such a case as this?" writes Thackeray. "He had seen the innocent face as it looked up to the Captain, the appealing look of the girl, the piteous quiver of the mouth, and the final outburst of tears. If it had been his last guinea in the world, he must have paid it to have given the poor little thing pleasure".[233] Conscious of his young companion's inferior station, which is most obviously reflected in her dress, Pen regards her with the utmost courtesy and grace, a stately politeness only matched by Vauxhall's own Master of Ceremonies, the obsequious C.H. Simpson.

Fanny is mesmerized by the display, "starting with wonder and delight as she saw the Royal Gardens blaze before her with a hundred million of lamps, with a splendour such as the

[232] Thackeray, *Pendennis*, 589.
[233] Ibid., 593.

finest fairy tale, the finest pantomime she had ever witnessed at the theatre, had never realised" (594) As is the custom at Vauxhall, Pen watches Fanny marvel at the sights and longs for her sense of youthful wonderment. Captain Costigan expresses his gratitude to Pen: "Mr. Pendennis, ye've been me preserver, and of thank ye; me daughtther will thank ye;—Mr. Simpson, your humble servant sir".[234] At this moment C.H. Simpson appears, if only on the periphery. But Simpson's influence, his recognizable character, resonates in Captain Costigan's own obsequious performance. As if taking cues from the Master of Ceremonies himself, Thackeray juxtaposes Pen's composure with the Captain's: "If Pen was magnificent in his courtesy to the ladies, what was his splendour in comparison to Captain Costigan's bowing here and there, and crying bravo to the singers?".[235]

In Captain Costigan's overdone attempt to blend in, he draws even more attention to himself. While he becomes far too easy a target for satire, he reminds us of one of Vauxhall's trademark qualities: a blurring of social stratification. As if an active, scrutinizing participant at the gardens, Thackeray's narrator offers observations upon the invitation for classes to mix just as any other judgments or gossip might be passed around Vauxhall on any given night:

> A man, descended like Costigan, from a long line of Hibernian kings, chieftains, and other magnates and sheriffs of the county, had of course too much dignity and self-respect to walk arrum-in-arrum (as the Captain phrased it) with a lady who occasionally swept his room out, and cooked his mutton-chops. In the course of their journey from Shepherd's Inn to Vauxhall Gardens, Captain Costigan had walked by the side of the two ladies, in a patronising and affable manner pointing out to them the edifices worthy of note, and discoorsing, according to his wont, about other cities and countries which he

[234] Ibid., 594.
[235] Ibid., 594.

> had visited, and the people of rank and fashion with whom he had the honour of an acquaintance. Nor could it be expected, nor, indeed, did Mrs. Bolton expect, that, arrived in the Royal property, and strongly illuminated by the flare of the twenty thousand additional lamps, the Captain could relax from his dignity, and give an arm to a lady who was, in fact, little better than a housekeeper or charwoman.[236]

This possibility and execution of mixed-status company is familiar. As Burney and Opie demonstrated in previous decades, the mixing of classes always creates opportunity for conflict and drama. As a Vauxhall tradition, the dangerous mixing of virtue and vice, seedy acquaintance and advantageous association modeled in previous works can help us to understand the lasting impact of Fanny Bolton and Arthur Pendennis's tender evening. The witnessing of their physical proximity at the gardens serves as adequate grounds for a plot-propelling rumor and joke that lasts for the duration of the novel.

Thackeray and The Historical Tradition

Vanity Fair's status as a historical novel is predicated upon how convincingly Thackeray is able to reconcile historical events with his characters' experiences. To put his historical novel in the most simplified terms, *Vanity Fair* is a novel that reflects British and European political tensions in the early nineteenth century. More specifically, the novel's setting within the context of the Napoleonic Wars is by-and-large how *Vanity Fair* becomes classified as a premier example of Victorian historical fiction. This doorstop of a novel grounds its retelling and reimagining of the social and personal histories behind the wars across a vast body of geographic terrain. Thackeray is able to cover much ground in the novel in the literal sense that the

[236] Ibid., 594-595.

characters navigate the sociopolitical ramifications of the Napoleonic Wars and British imperialism, not just in England, but also in India and much of the Continent.

Though it might be the tendency of critics and readers alike to locate history in its most obvious settings, such as the ground at Waterloo, there are other spaces in the novel where history constantly and provocatively jumps up to meet the present. Most recently, Griffin's work has shifted the focus to the small German principality of Pumpernickel. Griffin's consideration of Pumpernickel, rather than simply the battle as it unfolds at Waterloo, is another means of considering the many spaces that must come together in order for Thackeray's project of historical fiction and realism to become truly immersive. Griffin employs the concept of the panorama as a means of thinking about how completely history can be represented; instead of focusing on a flash in time, the panoramic aesthetics of Pumpernickel become a means of aesthetic and plausible immersion. Building on Griffin's argument, I argue that the presence of Vauxhall in Thackeray's fiction is an understudied setting of Thackeray's dual realistic and historical project.

Vauxhall is just as important as Pumpernickel for revealing how certain spaces allow spectators to understand how history is made present, as well as how and why certain spaces afford spectators the ability to experience the copresence of past and present. Additionally, if India's presence in the novel is "[partially] a metonym for domestic financial mismanagement in *Vanity Fair*," then Vauxhall can be understood as a metonym for [Regency-era] sexual politics – the very kind that Burney previously established in her own fictional renderings of the space.

Vauxhall plays a similar role in *Pendennis* with lasting consequences from its minutiae in the novel. Like Jos's fateful bowl of rack punch, Arthur's kindness towards Captain Costigan and his party prolongs his association with Costigan in the novel. This connection leads to rumors

about Arthur's immoral relationship with a low-born girl (with the sighting of Arthur and Fanny Bolton together at Vauxhall and their short-lived romance to corroborate them) that persist for much of the narrative and become a point of contention in his familial and romantic relationships. Though not situated as a historical novel based on referents like the Napoleonic Wars or *Vanity Fair*'s relation to Waterloo, *Pendennis*'s quality of personal history adds range to the genre. Historical spaces like Vauxhall and real-life characters like Simpson serve as markers for realism that can and should qualify a critically overlooked text like *Pendennis* in the trajectory of the history and theory of the novel. Through the work of Griffin and this project, physicality and materiality can change the meaning of markers and qualifiers for the historical novel with a realism that is rooted in very real spaces that simultaneously embody past, present, and, in some cases, future.

CHAPTER SIX

REMEMBERING VAUXHALL: CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE LITERARY PAST

In both historical and contemporary travel literature, Vauxhall is described through literary references to characters and plots because the space itself operates like a British novel. Changes in genre, narration, and generational inheritances manifest as changes in amusements, leadership, and landscaping, but Vauxhall, perhaps most like the novel, adapts for its consuming public. Both are forms of entertainment with oft-questioned moral value, as they are both venues with the capacity to teach lessons about class, education, social order, economics, and history. Aside from staging Evelina's social education in such public assembly spaces as Vauxhall, Frances Burney captures socioeconomic order and conflict in her novel *Cecilia*. Amelia Opie builds upon Burney's use of the space by creating an emotional and personally historic association between our heroine and the pleasure gardens. As Vauxhall and novels persist longer into the nineteenth century, William Thackeray spotlights the inextricable ties of history in both entertainment forms. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray recreates a Regency Vauxhall, resurrecting its legendary Master of Ceremonies, C.H. Simpson. Later in the British historical timeline, Thackeray stages yet another visit to Vauxhall by a hero who is personally acquainted with Simpson. As Thackeray occupies the past to engender his fictions, so too does Vauxhall with its referential attractions. In 1827, Vauxhall staged *The Battle of Waterloo*, a reenactment of the decisive battle, with ninety equestrians, premier actors, hundreds of foot soldiers, and booming special effects. And, as discussed in chapter three, Simpson himself performed as a character modeled after an eighteenth-century gentleman. For roughly 70 years, Vauxhall's hosting of

society provided a venue for narrative realism under formation, a realism that depended upon not only the historical and physical site of Vauxhall but its reputation for spectacle as well. Today, with only literary documentation, primary accounts, and illustrations to reference, I question how Vauxhall's imaginative qualities materialize in contemporary depictions and uses of the space.

The Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens became what they were to Georgian and Regency Londoners in large part because of Jonathan Tyers's vision and C.H. Simpson's commitment to that vision and his own virtues of hospitality. Long since demolished, Vauxhall now exists only in memory and media as a cultural nexus for leisure, spectacle, conflict, and intrigue. The public park present at the site was not developed as a historical attraction, and now the geographical space serves a quieter purpose. Where the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens of Tyers and Simpson reside, then, are in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels that memorialize the gardens' spectacular amusements in their heyday and in contemporary media depictions of Georgian and Regency England.

In the coming examination of Vauxhall's appearance in the 2020 Netflix series adaption of Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* novels, I argue that Vauxhall's imaginative, novelistic qualities account for its persistence in cultural memory since its closing in 1859. By mapping the expressions of Vauxhall's cultural heritage onto the first episode of *Bridgerton*, this coda punctuates the historical and contemporary functions of the space and its dependence on the literary historical mechanisms that continue to influence its identity. It also takes into account possibilities for fantasy in considering Shonda Rhimes's multicultural Regency ton and the imaginative affordances of public assembly spaces like Vauxhall to support such a vision.

The first installment of Julia Quinn's Regency romance series about eight siblings and their varying journeys to love and marriage, *The Duke and I* (2000) focuses on the

unconventional courtship of Simon Basset, the new Duke of Hastings, and Lady Daphne Bridgerton. As the eldest Bridgerton daughter out in society, Daphne seeks a marriage of genuine affection that will yield her many children, but she finds that she is only able to form friendships with men or reject unwanted proposals—she has yet to be desired by a real prospect. Simon, a friend of Daphne's older brother Anthony from school, has vowed to be the complete opposite of his cruel father, and thus will never marry or have children. From these opposing goals, Simon proposes a mutually beneficial ruse to Daphne, that they feign a courtship. In theory, Daphne will become more romantically desirable to the men of the ton, and society's mothers will leave Simon alone assuming he is no longer an available prospect for their daughters.

For *Bridgerton* producer Shonda Rhimes, Vauxhall is an ideal setting to instigate Daphne and Simon's courtship ruse. The traditional amusements, social gatherings, illusions, and affordances of Vauxhall with its public and private stages that are of interest to this project culminate in the formation of this false union. The staging of this invention of Daphne's and Simon's in the Dark Walk and its debut in an environment characterized by trickery and illusion exhibits traceable inheritances from Thackeray, Opie, and Burney. In this way, *Bridgerton*'s depiction of the pleasure gardens becomes an atemporal mosaic of the spectacles, customs, fears, and relationships they host simultaneously in narrative time and in historical memory.

The layering of literary and social traditions onto this public assembly space begins with its establishment as both setting and film set. In the background of this image of Penelope Featherington speaking with Colin Bridgerton, we can see the full and lively supper boxes positioned around the perimeter of the gardens. Production designer Will Hughes explains that the supper boxes in this shot occupy the lower level of the bandstand as a "direct reference to

Vauxhall in the period" with the details of its setting including the boxes themselves and their furnishings of paintings and period-specific table settings.[237]

Fig. 7. Penelope and Colin converse in front of the supper boxes. *Bridgerton,* 2020, Netflix.

Also visible are the reflective globes used to catch the lights of the lamps and fireworks. Hughes explains that the globes are a Regency-era lighting illusion that the crew sought to recreate on all of the structures used in the scene to throw additional light from the torches and fireworks around the gardens.[238] Even as a transplanted, partially constructed set, Vauxhall has a way of making people and things materialize. Hannah Greig, author of *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London*, which informs much of my preliminary social analysis, enters this world of fantasy as its historical advisor. In an interview with Shondaland, she describes

[237] Will Hughes. "Inside the Sets of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens." *Behind the Scenes of 'Bridgerton.'* By Shondaland Staff, 2021.
[238] Ibid.

"something so transporting" about the historical Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens that she and the crew aim to capture in the set design.[239]

The production team selected Stowe Park, a National Trust site in Buckinghamshire, England, for its Georgian landscape and park. Hughes details the construction of the set, which included thousands of polished globes and the crew's clever concealment of modernity to create an enchanting yet believable Regency spectacle. A real blurring of fiction and reality comes with hearing directly from the costumed pleasure-seekers about their impressions of the set. Phoebe Dynevor, who portrays Daphne Bridgerton, describes the pleasure gardens set as "overwhelming," while Adjoa Andoh (Lady Danbury) comments, "What's not to love? . . . It's very romantic and lovely".[240] Both are historically resonant reactions to Vauxhall, which itself was a sort of social set, as we know the site comprised both natural landscape and man-made edifices.

In the filming of the Vauxhall gathering, *Bridgerton* captures familiar gazes in its construction of Daphne and Simon's false romance plot. Upon entering the gardens, readers of Opie, Burney, and Thackeray can imagine Catherine Shirley's (*Valentine's Eve*) and Fanny Bolton's (*Pendennis*) amazement at the enchanting light displays through Daphne's wonderment.

[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.

Fig. 8. Daphne Bridgerton marvels at the illuminations upon entering the pleasure gardens. *Bridgerton*, 2020, Netflix.

In an interview with Shondaland, special effects foreman Mark Wynne-Pedder remarked on the fireworks and pyrotechnics used in the first episode: "It's the moment that people remember, and it's brilliant".[241] Indeed, the institution of fireworks at Vauxhall had been well established since their implementation in 1798, and the dazzling displays became a regular backdrop for such spectacles as hot air balloon ascents, panoramas, and rope dancers beyond serving as an attraction in their own right.[242]

In addition to the firework displays, *Bridgerton* captures several other Vauxhall traditions and trademark experiences. Like Evelina Anville, Daphne finds herself "merely a few steps

[241] Ibid.
[242] David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 256.

away" from the Dark Walk, alone, with two men.[243] The first man, Nigel Berbrooke, offers Daphne unwanted attention, and the second man, Simon Basset, gets her involved in a scheme, reminiscent of Becky Sharp's machinations on Jos Sedley for an advantageous marriage.

Fig. 9. Daphne spurns Nigel Berbrooke's aggressive advances. *Bridgerton*, 2020, Netflix.

In Nigel Berbrooke's assertions, we hear echoes of Sir Clement Willoughby's threats and designs upon Evelina. This is a place where they "shall be least observed",[244] where Daphne "will find out soon enough" what Berbrooke intends as he violently grabs her.[245] Rather than questioning his intentions as Evelina does ("do you suppose I am to be thus compelled?—do you take advantage of the absence of my friends, to affront me?"), Daphne punches Nigel when he

[243] *Bridgerton.* Season 1, episode 1, "Diamond of the First Water." Directed by Julie Anne Robinson, aired December 25, 2020, on Netflix; 50:08.
[244] Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, ed. Kristina Straub (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 1997), 198.
[245] "Diamond of the First Water," 49:30.

advances in spite of her horrified resistance. In a way, Daphne gets to do what many current readers of Burney wish Evelina could have done to Sir Clement Willoughby in the Dark Walk.

Upon discovering Daphne with an unconscious Berbrooke so close to the Dark Walk, Simon discloses the reason for his presence so near the taboo enclave—avoidance of the public, specifically mothers. Daphne soon considers the optics of her current "compromising" situation—appearing alone with two men so near the Dark Walk.[246] But in the resultant dialogue between Daphne and Simon, both consider hypothetical outcomes of being discovered by the public in this situation with desirable effects. First, Daphne "suppose[s] if someone were to find me here, it would be one way out of marrying [Berbrooke]," disregarding the larger implications of a ruined reputation to use the Dark Walk to her advantage.[247] After further conversation, Simon plays upon the illusion and secrecy afforded by their enclave in developing their false romance scheme. "Perhaps," he says, "there is an answer to our collective Lady Whistledown issue… We could pretend to form an attachment".[248]

[246] Ibid., 50:10.
[247] Ibid., 50:36.
[248] Ibid., 51:50.

Fig. 10. Daphne and Simon debut their false courtship. *Bridgerton*, 2020, Netflix.

Fig. 11. Members of society stare scornfully at the couple. *Bridgerton*, 2020, Netflix.

At this moment, the view changes to Simon and Daphne's reentry to the most public gathering space at Vauxhall. The 'couple' emerges during an illumination–the gardens' assemblage of artificial lamp lighting, reflective globes, and fireworks, man-made and controlled. This false

relationship is born under the lights of illusion and spectacle. Upon the visual debut of their union, we overhear the truth of the scheme through voiceover. This layering technique evokes our literary layering of spectacles and autovoyeurism, as the success of their false romance plot depends upon their being seen together and believed by the public here.

This is popular culture's most recent visit to Vauxhall, and it is set in 1813. Immersive period drama demands an immersive, enchanting space to foster its plots. Understanding the legacies of Burney and Opie and the Victorians' return to a Vauxhall of old allows viewers to recognize the Vauxhall that has taken shape in the public imagination. The status and offerings of Vauxhall during Britain's late Georgian and Regency eras keep viewers and readers coming back for period drama and adaptation. Countless film and television series remakes of *Vanity Fair* exhibit C.H. Simpson's pre-Waterloo pleasure gardens, as do both existing television adaptations of Winston Graham's *Poldark* series. During Vauxhall's heyday, travel guides borrowed from eighteenth-century novels to describe the sorts of experiences one could expect to have there. More significantly, though, is the fact of these historical records entangling the real space with fiction—a recording of fantastical, imaginative impressions on society that persist today. Vauxhall has been and continues to be immortalized for these qualities, which is why fiction is still being staged at Vauxhall. Today, the pleasure gardens have more than cultural capital; the gardens that Jonathan Tyers conceived and C.H. Simpson championed have recognizable historical worth, even if the physical structures on the geographical site have disappeared.

From Affordance to Escapism?

The absence of this historical venue has, as noted above, necessitated re-creation and set building for film and television period drama. The creative affordance of Vauxhall's absence stretches beyond the visions of set and production designers, however. The pleasure gardens must be reimagined for depictions on screen today, and Shonda Rhimes has engaged its historical, literary, and imaginative affordances in *Bridgerton*. At the end of the first episode of the series, the cast visits Vauxhall, where the hero and heroine form the plot that drives the rest of the season. This seems like an appropriate setting from which such a scheme should emerge, but this setting is not consistent with Julia Quinn's source text. Quinn sets the false courtship plot in motion at Lady Danbury's ball in *The Duke and I*. Shonda Rhimes reimagines such a crucial element of the story originating from a more public space—Vauxhall Gardens—with the recognizable provenance of narrative and historical realism to support her fantasy of Regency London.

Bridgerton's Vauxhall Gardens set at Stowe Park does not include the prominent racialized and imperialist elements of décor that were present at Vauxhall in 1813. The imperialist décor such as the Triumphal Italian Arches, the Chinese Gardens, and especially the obelisk depicting enslaved people in chains[249] have no place in Shondaland. But the reason for this is difficult to parse out because Rhimes's fantasy leans heavily upon elements of the real and the historical in its setting.

Shonda Rhimes does not just reimagine the sets of Vauxhall, Somerset House, and Grosvenor Square; she reimagines the entire setting of Regency England. And the real geographical locations represented in *Bridgerton* afford Rhimes same the detail, plausibility, narrative realism, and cultural associations that Burney, Opie, and Thackeray deployed, except

[249] Discussed in chapter one and chapter three.

Rhimes also has around 200 years of distance and American culture informing her vision. In the stringed covers of contemporary music by artists such as Ariana Grande and Billie Eilish and Eloise Bridgerton's frequent declarations of disdain for Regency-era gender expectations, Rhimes pushes the boundaries of temporality to create a surreal effect, allowing viewers to see some of themselves and their values reflected in this relatively distant historical fantasy world. This surrealism makes a multicultural Regency possible, but how compelling viewers find this integrated society to be is the topic of much debate.

Critics and viewers have expressed differing opinions about Rhimes's envisioning of an Afro-British aristocracy and *Bridgerton*'s position on historical accuracy more generally. Most reasonable responses agree upon the notion of Rhimes's intentionality behind historical inaccuracy, with many writers like Patricia Matthew, Tressie McMillan Cottom, and McKenzie Jean-Philippe investigating the narrative mechanisms that replace history in shaping Rhimes's fantasy.[250] Cottom and Jean-Philippe identify romance as the principal reason for the existence of a multicultural British society. Asserting this position, Jean-Philippe points to a speech given by Lady Danbury to Simon in episode four of season one, in which she describes the transformative power of love in British society: "Look at our queen. Look at our king. Look at their marriage. Look at everything it is doing for us, allowing us to become. We were two separate societies divided by color, until a king fell in love with one of us. Love, Your Grace, conquers all".[251] While details of the Black experience in England prior to this union are not made explicitly clear,

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[250] See Patricia Matthew, "Shondaland's Regency: On 'Bridgerton'," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 26, 2020; Tressie McMillan Cottom, "The Black Ton: From Bridgerton to Love & Hip-Hop," Personal Blog of Tressie McMillan Cottom, January 4, 2021; and McKenzie Jean-Philippe, "Bridgerton Doesn't Need to Elaborate on Its Inclusion of Black Characters," *Oprah Daily*, December 29, 2020. See also Aja Romano, "The Debate over Bridgerton and Race," *Vox*, January 7, 2021; and Alyssa Rosenburg, "'Bridgerton' Meant to Integrate Period Pieces. So Why Is It So Hard on Black Women?," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2020.

[251] *Bridgerton.* Season 1, episode 4, "An Affair of Honor." Directed by Julie Anne Robinson, aired December 25, 2020, on Netflix.

Rhimes's closeness to history in her production implies an adequate parallel with the realities of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. Cottom finds Rhimes's explanation for Black people to be present in Regency England compelling, describing the reason as "surface enough that a viewer can project whatever they know about history into what is unsaid. It is substantive enough to keep a Black viewer in the story world without nagging questions pulling them out".[252] In this way, viewers of color can see themselves in the show. One might imagine themself as a main character, similar to the ways in which Vauxhall's immersive, novelistic qualities inspired this possibility in the imaginations of its visitors, but with the positive difference of an inclusive, twenty-first-century adaptation without the "nagging questions" of total historical accuracy. While the show is not explicitly dealing with slavery and abolition, Matthew points out that these topics are present in private conversations and debates with the example of the older generation of Black socialites often speaking to youths about the importance of respectability.[253]

Other journalists like Aja Romano and Alyssa Rosenberg are more critical of *Bridgerton*'s treatment of race, suggesting that the show does not go far enough in its efforts at representation and inclusivity. Romano concludes that *Bridgerton*'s "most interesting ideas – like Simon's precarious place in society as a duke of color or his mysterious time abroad – get almost no attention".[254] Indeed, *Bridgerton*'s portrayal of the Black experience is far from nuanced in the alternate history and ideology that sets up Rhimes's fantasy. Rosenberg critiques the show's stopping at color-conscious casting, remarking on its failure to deliver on the promises made by these casting decisions. She identifies such missed opportunities for critical engagement regarding the integration of society that supposedly occurred decades prior and how the greater

[252] Cottom, "The Black Ton."
[253] Matthew, "Shondaland's Regency."
[254] Romano, "Inclusion of Black Characters."

population of Britain, beyond the aristocracy, has responded to the King and Queen's socially transformative romance. The origin of Simon Basset's dukedom is entirely glossed over. Rosenburg concludes, "Telling us that the show is presenting a daring exploration of race and class is not the same as actually making it so".[255] Ultimately, critics are troubled by the show's acknowledgement of racism that is so vague, it cannot, as Romano puts it, "encroach on the fantasy of a history in which Black communities could leverage social power and climb to the heights of the aristocracy".[256] The elimination of racism through what has been perceived as lazy, convenient casting leaves many unsatisfied with the handling of racial identity.

This conversation reorients traditional estimations of setting and realism with challenging questions of historical and systemic injustice. Though critical of *Bridgerton*'s treatment of race in casting and character presence, Romano asks an important question that all current and forthcoming works of escapism reliant upon historical setting will be faced with: "Does historicity really matter if the lack of historical accuracy is part of the point?". The answer might be found in surrealist approaches like Shondaland's creation of a fantasy, which stirs more complicated questions about the roles that accuracy and realism in historical fiction can play in escapism.

I would not necessarily classify *Bridgerton* as totally escapist because of the appearance of these questions of history and fantasy, particularly with regard to race, throughout the series. It is, however, an immersive fantasy, which derives from its proximity to history in its production and its connection to the novel as a form that developed over time. *Bridgerton* shares a doubleness with Vauxhall in its flexibility and potential that is tied to history and reality, which materializes in the way it calls upon cultural memory for recognition and connotation. Beyond

[255] Rosenberg, "'Bridgerton' Meant to Integrate Period Pieces."
[256] Romano, "Inclusion of Black Characters."

the romance and historical fiction genres, the show is serial (it's literally episodic), as so many of the immersive sagas of the nineteenth century were. *Bridgerton*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Pendennis* all pretend to be historical fiction, enjoying a relation to realism through physical geographical settings and historical figures that creates an immersive fantasy world. Fantasy, however, is not to be conflated with escape, as these narratives are grounded by their referents to the real world.

Vauxhall does, in the moments of glittering lights and romantic encounters, seem powerful enough to transport a reader or viewer into total fantasy. But that is precisely the affordance of Vauxhall as a real, physical, and, depending on the text, historical site. Vauxhall's value lies in its reputation for spectacle, scandal, wonder, and illusion. For centuries, readers expected a show, an amusement, when Vauxhall appeared as a destination on a narrative trajectory. And viewers of contemporary period drama still do.

Before Thackeray introduced temporal ripples into Vauxhall's timeline, which was running parallel to the trajectory of the novel, Amelia Opie engaged readers in her immersive story as spectators, sharing purpose and responsibility with the characters in *Valentine's Eve*. Shonda Rhimes deploys Lady Whistledown's voiceover to a similar end, creating a point of access to the ton's consensus on private individuals and their relationships. Just as the goings-on of Vauxhall teach Opie's readers about the mechanisms of voyeurism and autovoyeurism to understand how the plot unfolds, Rhimes's introduction of Vauxhall informs viewers of the role that imagination, illusion, and fantasy play in the construction of a racially integrated Regency London. With her casting of an Afro-British aristocracy, Rhimes parallels one of Vauxhall's timeless affordances, expanding the pool of pleasure-seekers able to see themselves as the hero, heroine, or main character of the story. As a touchstone, Vauxhall offers *Bridgerton* the imaginative potential necessary for Rhimes's historical fantasy to be realized.

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