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Appropriating Identity: William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough, and Britain's Myth of the Self-Made Man

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Britain's self-made man was defined by taste, money, influence, and most importantly, middle-class rank in the early decades of the Industrial Revolution. During the mid-1700s, a change began to take place between the social classes, stripping the aristocracy of their role as Britain's foremost connoisseurs and trendsetters. The shift from aristocratic indulgences to those of the newly wealthy middle class stemmed from a number of factors. For one, the economy was changing during the 18th-century. An industrial environment, which often included factories and workers, was the new-found key to the financial success of self-made men. As David Kutchka explains, "late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English aristocrats lost control of the meanings of consumption, as political, economic, and clothing reformers succeeded in portraying aristocratic men as prodigal parasites living off of a virtuous and industrious nation" (135). To prove that the individuals in England's highest social class were unworthy of their role as connoisseurs of taste, middle-class reformers attacked the aristocracy, declaring that the upper classes were unworthy of their status and were living off the successes provided by industry and self-made men.

Portraiture created in Britain during the 18th- and 19th-centuries, particularly paintings by William Hogarth (1697-1764) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), exemplifies the myth of the self-made man, as well as the shift in social class dominance. Moreover, portraiture emphasizes the middle-class's adoption of aristocratic visual language, while in turn depicting men as wealthy industrials who benefit the national economy and define the manly character of England. Although middle-class reformers were determined to prove that the titled class was effeminate and parasitic, it was the aristocratic ideal of masculinity that the middling ranks adopted as their own. English artists Hogarth and Gainsborough were influential in addressing the tension produced by the shifting social lines of the Industrial Revolution. Bound to Britain's wealth for their own survival, both Hogarth and Gainsborough sought the patronage of the rising

middle-class while sustaining their own notions of the self-made myth.

I argue that William Hogarth and Thomas Gainsborough appropriated the visual language and composition of Britain's aristocratic portraits in their depictions of middle-class individuals. In order to acquire wealthy patrons, as well as comment on the political and social environment during the 18th- and 19th-centuries, Hogarth and Gainsborough borrowed the myth of the self-made man to remark on both the imitation of middle-class identity by nobles, and the middle-class's renunciation of the aristocracy's identity and masculine ideal.

Looking at the myth in a wider context, Michael Kimmel contends that self-made individuals rely on the economy and public sphere for their identity and success. He argues:

The Self-Made Man, [is] a model of manhood that derives identity entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility... Since a man's fortune is as easily unmade as it is made, the Self-Made Man is uncomfortably linked to the volatile marketplace, and he depends upon continued mobility (137).

The British middle-class of the 18th-century conforms to Kimmel's model. The middling rank's wealth was dependent upon the marketplace, including the production, sale, and trade of goods, which often took place in the public sphere. These public business efforts helped to shape their identity and status as industrious, self-made individuals. As Peter Bailey notes in *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, "[the middle classes] were entering into the process of developing a new culture within the unique matrix of a maturing urban industrial society" (56). Bailey continues by describing the factors, which merged to form the identity of the middling ranks and the class's subsequent adoption of manly, moral codes in order to appear in contrast to the aristocracy. He states: "Moral integrity and the code of respectability which defined its public face were essential constituents of middle-class identity and class consciousness... [B]ourgeois morality... provided its class with an effective platform from which to challenge the aristocracy and subordinate the lower orders" (65). Historically the titled class was the image of manliness and taste; the example that the lower classes strove to emulate (Bailey 73). Yet, with the rise of industry, the self-made men of the middle-class found that they could subvert the aristocratic notion of masculinity and use the noble definition of taste to stake their own claim on British identity, wealth, success, and morality. The tact of the middling ranks was to attack the titled class with their own ideology; an imitation that was a visually scathing review of upper crust

identity. A new political and social structure was not created by the middle-class; instead, “middle-class men...became middle-class men by adopting and transforming the aristocratic political culture to which they sought inclusion” (Kutchka 137).

Dependent upon both the traditional aristocracy and the newly influential middle-class for commissions and sustained patronage, artists such as Hogarth and Gainsborough were forced to carefully straddle the line between the classes while maintaining their own sensibilities and style in 18th-century England. For these artists, one visual misstep, such as the inclusion of inappropriate dress, could cause tensions between middle and upper classes to emerge from a thinly veiled set of shifting societal concerns. Any missteps could also result in a loss of commissions.

Hogarth is best known for his satirical approach to commenting on the shifting British social classes. Besides his successful and witty *Marriage à la Mode*,¹ Hogarth produced additional narrative series including, *The Harlot's Progress*² and *The Rake's Progress*,³ which followed the demise of an illiterate country girl and a gambling, corrupt young man as they lived in industrial London. The common thread among these three satirical views of society and its ills are the themes of aristocratic emulation by the middle-class and societal debauchery. Although his pictorial narratives were not singular portraits of upper or middle-class individuals, Hogarth utilized the narrative series as a class portrait; middle-classes mimic and poke-fun at the aristocracy, while the aristocracy mimics and pokes-fun at the middle-classes in return. Commenting on the harlot's imitation of the upper classes in her dress, furnishings, and attempted lifestyle in *The Harlot's Progress*, Hogarth did not portray her worst sin as living the life of a prostitute; rather, the harlot's ultimate offence was an attempt to appropriate an upper-class lifestyle. Yet, the harlot and her attempts at noble imitation are not only an attack on the middle or lower classes; rather, they are additionally an attack on the aristocracy. Hogarth, while depicting the harlot as an impostor, simultaneously comments on the lavishness and taste of the highest social class, noting that the lifestyle of the aristocracy could be emulated by almost anyone, including a lowly prostitute. In his pictorial narratives Hogarth utilized the language of

¹ See The National Gallery, London for images: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/william-hogarth-marriage-a-la-mode-1-the-marriage-settlement>.

² See Tate Britain for images: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/hogarth/modernmorals/harlotsprogress.shtm>.

³ See The British Museum for image: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pd/w/william_hogarth_a_rakes_progr.aspx.

middle-class reformers, an ideology originally constructed by the aristocracy, to comment on the shifting societal classes in 1700s Britain. The artist utilized masculine, self-made visual rhetoric to describe the actions of both the upper and middle classes. Originally painted in oil, these series of “modern moralizing subjects” did not find success until they were engraved and mass-produced as prints, which additionally indebted Hogarth to the middle classes, industry, and the self-made man (Cowley 6).

Further tangling himself in the web of appropriation, Hogarth produced an influential portrait of his friend and former sea captain, Thomas Coram, in 1740.⁴ Following in the traditional style of state portraiture, Hogarth depicts Captain Coram, the founder of the Foundling Hospital, in a distinguished manner previously reserved for the titled class. Scholar Ellis Waterhouse described in relation to *Captain Coram* that, “It is not an aristocratic portrait painted for a palace, nor even a full-length to fit in with the family series in the house of a country gentleman. It is, as it were, a ‘state-portrait’ of a middle-class philanthropist” (121). Hogarth adopted the myth of the self-made man to depict Captain Coram as an influential individual of wealth, honour, and taste. As Kutcha explains, “In the new politics of character, political legitimacy was determined by manliness, modesty, and industry—now the attributes of the self-made man. In redefining aristocratic men as effeminate fops, middle-class men claimed sobriety and ‘honest English feeling’ as something ‘genuinely’ their own” (149).

In the case of *Captain Coram*, Hogarth appropriated the masculine ideal of the self-made man in the manner of middle-class reformers and applied it to portraiture. Coram sits in a high-back chair, framed against an imposing architectural column, stone steps, and ocean view. Symbolic of Coram’s past as a sea captain and acquired wealth through ship-building, Hogarth placed numerous boats in the distance and a globe at the Captain’s feet, evidence of Coram’s involvement in trade. The globe is executed with detail, as the Atlantic Ocean and east coast of America are meticulously represented. Coram took part in establishing a colony in Georgia, as well as developing a colony in Nova Scotia; therefore, the geographic representations on the globe speak to the Captain’s political and social endeavours (Paulson 163-164). On the wall behind Coram is a plaque depicting a charity group, and near his right foot is a black hat, which symbolizes the hatters of London (Paulson 164). The London hatters believed that they were being poorly represented in trade dealings with the colonies and to express thanks to Captain

⁴ See Tate Britain for image: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/hogarth/rooms/room7.shtm>.

Coram for his aid in their financial endeavours, the group provided him with a new hat whenever needed (Paulson 164). In addition to the architectural column in the central background of the portrait, Coram is framed on the right-hand side by darkly coloured hanging draperies and his over-sized, scarlet-coloured overcoat. Although not fully facing the viewer, Coram does glance away from the sea toward the audience. Even though the lace, velvet, jewels, and lavishness of the aristocracy are missing from *Captain Coram*, the composition of the portrait, its symbolism, and stylistic details speak to the middle-class vocabulary of the self-made man, including the reclaimed masculinity that this newly influential class championed. Richard Wendorf comments on Coram's appearance as a middle-class individual set within a stately portrait, noting that, "[Hogarth] successfully blended the traditional elements of monumental portraiture with the individual character and middle-class appearance of his sitter" (202).

However, Captain Coram does not sit gracefully or comfortably within the composition. Not only does Coram look uneasy in his high-back chair, his jacket is unbuttoned, his stockings are rolled and rumped at his ankles, his arms look stiff as well as rigid, and his veins nearly pop out of his hands. Further, it seems that Coram's feet barely touch the ground, and his facial expression is one of uncertainty. Ronald Paulson argues that in *Captain Coram*, Hogarth's intention was to redefine the influential male. He contends:

Coram...boldly mix[es] the conventional props and attributes of heroic portraiture with the representation of a ship's captain, homely, oddly clothed, and with legs hardly long enough to reach the ground. The portrait of Coram is, indeed, directly parallel to the progresses in which Hogarth introduced country girls who became harlots and merchants' sons who became rakes into the iconography of history painting; but, in this case, with the intention of redefining heroism in contemporary terms (162).

According to Paulson, Hogarth positions Coram as a heroic and philanthropic self-made man, or in other words, the poster-boy of middle-class masculinity and national character. The aristocratic heroes and titled men of taste were replaced by men of the middling ranks who assumed the roles of consumer, as well as economic and political authority, while taking their place before the columns and globes of the stately portrait.

The 18th-century portraiture of Thomas Gainsborough reveals commonalities to Hogarth's *Captain Coram*, including the appropriation of the self-made, masculine rhetoric of the middle-

class. Kutcha explains that, “While middle-class productive consumers accumulated capital, pampered aristocrats merely consumed wealth...aristocrats were by definition a ‘leisureclass’ of ‘respectably dressed’ conspicuous consumers who by living off rent produced no value of their own” (157). Gainsborough’s *Samuel Kilderbee, c.1757*,⁵ and *Sir Benjamin Truman, 1770-1774*,⁶ exemplify middle-class masculinity defined by frugality, national pride, taste, and influence.

Painted in London after a fifteen-year stay in Bath, Gainsborough places Kilderbee, a “rising lawyer who became Town Clerk,” into a dark and brooding landscape setting (Lindsay 36). Dressed in a blue-buttoned jacket, a white, high-neck shirt, tan pants, and low-slung brown belt, Kilderbee stands awkwardly within the landscape scene. Like Captain Coram, Gainsborough’s sitter looks intently at the viewer while slightly smirking. The uneasiness of Hogarth’s and Gainsborough’s middle-class subjects reflects the changing class roles of 18th-century Britain. Apart from Kilderbee’s facial expression and awkwardness amongst the landscape, his hands are tense and replicate the gentleman-like pose that consists of a figure standing with one glove on and one glove off. To the subject’s right is a large hound, staring up at his master and further elongating the scene, as the dog’s body mimics the upward thrust of the twisting trees, again adding to the uneasiness of both the landscape and the overall composition.

Sir Benjamin Truman, on the other hand, is wearing a sombre, earth-toned ensemble that matches his direct gaze and solemn facial expression. A self-made industrialist who founded the Truman brewery, the subject is a no-nonsense, down-to-earth individual (Vaughan 121-122). Like Samuel Kilderbee, Truman’s dress is devoid of any embellishment, ornamentation, or jewellery. Further, the brooding landscape background adds to the dramatic nature of the portrait, especially when considered against Truman’s emotionless face. Even though Gainsborough depicts the subject as a no-nonsense, self-made industrialist in a gentleman-like manner, he appropriates the artistic setting and structure of the titled class while using the portrait to poke fun at the sitter. William Vaughan explains:

Stout, plain-dressed, and proud of it, [Truman] is the epitome of the forthright manufacturers who were driving the country to a new level of commercial achievement. Gainsborough has noticed all this and recorded it with, one suspects, some slight amusement. In the crown of the hat that Truman holds so firmly in

⁵ See Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for image: <http://legionofhonor.famsf.org/search-collections>.

⁶ See the Tate Collection for image: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=4958&searchid=5121&roomid=false&tabview=text&texttype=8>.

front of him, the artist has clearly inscribed the name of the maker, as though to mock his client's literalness and insistence on value for money (122).

Besides adopting the gentleman-like pose of aristocratic portraiture, Gainsborough's *Samuel Kilderbee* and *Sir Benjamin Truman* also represent the middle-class's turn away from the fashion of the titled class. The "great masculine renunciation," a term coined by John Carl Flugel in 1930, defines the abandonment of extravagant dress by English males. Because the aristocracy was viewed by the middle-class as indulgent, parasitic, wasteful, and subsequently draining to the English economy, it is no wonder that men of the middling ranks utilized the titled class's display of wealth to argue for their own superiority. By simplifying their dress, industrious men were able to legitimize their condemnation of the aristocracy while displaying their masculine identity. With regard to the factors that influenced the great masculine renunciation, Kutcha explains that political and economic shifts, as well as a rise in middle-class consumers, increased the self-made man's desire for change. He argues:

While the early eighteenth century renunciation was propelled by an aristocratic political, social, and economic disdain for the presumably effeminating effects of unregulated consumer culture, the 'great masculine renunciation' from 1750 to 1850 was propelled by a struggle between aristocratic and middleclass men for political, social, and economic superiority, for the moral high ground that allowed them to claim to speak for the nation (164).

Both *Truman* and *Kilderbee* are examples of the middle-class renunciation of "unregulated consumer culture" and the tension between the aristocracy and the middling ranks. Gainsborough has appropriated the subdued middle-class visual language of the time period to comment on the tension between the classes, as well as the economic and political climate that affected the class conflict.

To a greater extent than Hogarth's *Captain Coram*, Gainsborough's portraits reflect the 18th-century shift in dress and class taste. No longer was lavishness the sought after ideal. The middle-class reversed the fashion trend and deemed the nobility foppish and effeminate, usurping them from their post as influential connoisseurs of taste and symbols of national masculinity. Subsequently, *Kilderbee* and *Truman* embody the middle-class combination of genteel and self-made while subscribing to the fashion renunciation brought on by the class struggle for

masculine superiority and national character. Kutchka contends:

Aristocratic men saw masculine renunciation as being in their own class interest. . . . Just as middleclass men had appropriated an originally aristocratic critique of luxury and effeminacy in order to help define middle-class masculine identity, aristocratic men used that middle-class critique of aristocratic luxury and effeminacy to redefine their own class and gender identity. Thus aristocratic and middle-class men used a common language of masculinity for divergent ends (171-172).

A visual display of the aristocracy's reclamation of masculinity and subscription to the renunciation championed by self-made, middle-class men can be seen in Gainsborough's *William Poyntz*, c.1762.⁷ Poyntz was a class-straddler, at once stuck between his newfound membership in the titled class, (his mother was a Countess), and the role of middle class labourer (his grandfather was an upholsterer). This dual identity is addressed by Gainsborough in his informal portrait of Poyntz in a muted brown outfit leaning against a dramatically positioned tree-trunk (Leonard 128). There is no doubt that Poyntz's casual attire speaks of the titled class's adherence to the simplified dress of the middle-class. Likewise, his casual pose mimics his casual dress. The background of *William Poyntz* is similar to those found in Gainsborough's other portraits, consisting of a brooding, gloomy, and slightly stormy sky, as well as a dark and damp foreground landscape. Yet even in Poyntz's informal pose, sideways glance, and plain dress, Gainsborough connects his sitter to the aristocracy. Poyntz, in his leaning pose and averted gaze, is not closely linked to *Kilderbee* and *Truman*. Further, he is not uncomfortable in his surroundings, nor is he in a stiff and rigid pose like *Coram* or *Truman*; rather, Poyntz is every bit the dashing male and heroic gunslinger. Gainsborough reappropriates the masculine visual language once used by the aristocracy to justify their lavishness, and instead, legitimates a new, simplified identity for noble men. By subscribing to the middle-class's renunciation of extravagant dress, the aristocracy was able to reclaim their identity. Additionally, it is essential to note that dress is an ever-changing, tenuous symbol of identity. Therefore, the middle-class' and the aristocracy's claims on the renunciation of lavishness in male dress were fragile and fraught with the potential for social class conflict.

⁷ See the Scholar's Resource online, the collection of Earl Spencer, Althorp, for image: <http://www.scholarsresource.com/browse/museum/8848>.

Quentin Bell comments on the great masculine renunciation and masculinity in 18th-century England, explaining that the wealthiest class was now the middle-class, and closely connected to “sartorial sobriety” rather than to leisure and lavishness (141; Silverman 140). On the other hand, with the demise, or simplification, of the British male’s wardrobe, women became the showpieces of their husband’s wealth. Kaja Silverman contends that, “because leisure was still a way of life of the middle class woman, it became her ‘responsibility’ to display her husband’s wealth through her clothing” (140). Further, because men were forced to forgo any “showing-off” through their dress, they began to “seek out alternate routes of gratification,” eventually identifying with woman-as-spectacle (Silverman 141).

The visual representation of woman-as-spectacle and showpiece of her husband’s wealth is evident in Gainsborough’s portraits, such as *The Honourable Mrs. Graham, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, and *The Honourable Frances Duncombe*. Each painting was produced in the latter half of the 18th-century and exemplifies the heightened interest in woman-as-object.

The Honourable Mrs. Graham, c.1775,⁸ depicts Mary Graham, an eighteen-year-old noble and newlywed, in lavish dress. Set beside a massive architectural column borrowed from Dutch portraiture, and similar to Hogarth’s *Captain Coram*, Graham glances away from the viewer, almost as if she is avoiding the audience’s seemingly voyeuristic gaze. There is no doubt that Graham’s dress, jewels, and feathered hat place her in the category of woman-as-spectacle. Leaning against the column base, she holds up an extensive bunching of fabric with her left hand while her right arm falls at her side with a delicate white feather between her fingertips. The feather that Graham holds is repeated in her fashionable hat, as well as the lace and gauze around her collar and sleeves. Her dress is silver and slick, revealing satin trimmed with lace and pearls. The pearls that line her skirt’s silver-satin edges are repeated in her bodice, which includes a gold and ruby brooch, as well as her hat, which holds a large pearl at its centre. Mrs. Graham’s dainty silver shoes barely peek out from underneath her lavish dress.

Much like *Samuel Kilderbee* and *Sir Benjamin Truman* in pose and composition, *Mrs. Graham* suggests the alternative side of the great masculine renunciation. Graham stands in the centre of the scene as a display piece, almost as if she was a doll, or staged model. Nadia Tscherny argues that Gainsborough deliberately connected his painting style and portrayal of

⁸ See National Galleries of Scotland for image:
http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/online_az/4:322/result/0/4934?initial=G&artistId=3363&artistName=Thomas%20Gainsborough&submit=1.

women to the larger issues of consumption, fashion, and luxury in the 1700s. She argues:

Gainsborough was most definitely aware that his painting style would be deemed feminized and he emphatically aligned himself with this “effeminate” tradition of the ‘Ornamental Style’—decorative, colorful, lively, and surprising...It was Gainsborough’s genius to connect these qualities of pictorial style with the very timely issue of women’s consumption of culture, particularly fashion, and their demands for originality, value and luxury (106).

The issue of woman-as-spectacle and consequent commentary on consumerism and luxury are evident in Mrs. Graham’s averted gaze, limp body posture, and extravagant dress. Quoting the *Quarterly Review* of 1847 Kutcha remarks that in the case of women’s dress, “The responsibilities of a wife in this department are very serious. In point of fact she dresses for two [for herself and her husband]...Nature has expressly assigned her as the only safe investment for his vanities” (167-168). Kutcha continues by explaining that women were forced to negotiate the “conflicting demands of being supremely beautiful, and equally modest” (168). Gainsborough’s *Mrs. Graham* negotiates the divide between the modest and the beautiful, the role of women as fashion-forward consumers and displays of male wealth, as well as the identity of woman-as-mere-spectacle. Moreover, Mrs. Graham’s dress represents the effects of the great masculine renunciation and the aristocracy’s quest to reclaim their own masculine rhetoric.

In describing the male renunciation, Kutcha contends that both middle-class and aristocratic men excluded women from institutions of power, a sentiment echoed by Silverman, who notes that because of the renunciation, women were deemed lavish spectacles. Gainsborough’s *The Honourable Frances Duncombe*,⁹ *Lady Sophia Charlotte Sheffield*,¹⁰ *Mrs. Grace Dalrymple Elliott*,¹¹ and *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*¹² support Kutcha’s and Silverman’s explanations of woman-as-spectacle and women as displays of male wealth. Each portrait was produced between 1777 and 1785, with the subject set against a dark, stormy landscape. Additionally, each of the women represented is dressed sumptuously, particularly

⁹ See The Frick Collection for image: [http://collections.frick.org/Obj862\\$41581](http://collections.frick.org/Obj862$41581).

¹⁰ See The Athenaeum for image: <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?ID=36677>.

¹¹ See The Metropolitan Museum of Art for image: http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/european_paintings/mrs_grace_dalrymple_elliott_1754_1823_thomas_gainsborough/objectview.aspx?collID=11&OID=110000876.

¹² See National Portrait Gallery, London for related mezzotint image: http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw65329/Georgiana-Spencer-Duchess-of-Devonshire?sText=Georgiana+Duchess+of+Devonshire&submitSearchTerm_x=0&submitSearchTerm_y=0&search=ss&OOnly=true&firstRun=true&LinkID=mp01280&wPage=1&role=sit&rNo=10.

Lady Sophia and the Duchess of Devonshire, who wear enormously oversized hats. The silk, satin, lace, feathers, jewels, dainty shoes, detailed fabrics, and elaborate hairstyles position each of these women as display pieces and manifestations of the renunciation's alternative side. Although the Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Sophia are high-class women with titles, Frances Duncombe and Grace Elliott found notoriety in their unfortunate love affairs, prompting one to believe that, apart from dress, their behaviour was also a spectacle. Both women were affected by the trials of love and society, as Elliott was a divorcee and demimondaine while Duncombe's engagement to a viscount was called-off after a note from an admirer fell into the wrong hands (Leonard 130, 134). All four portraits depict dresses, jewels, and lavish displays of fashion and taste as their main subjects. Although each woman's facial features and clothing details are individual and distinct, the emphasis lies on the extravagance of their ensembles.

The Honourable Frances Duncombe, 1777-1778, is similar to *Mrs. Graham* in setting, composition and pose. Duncombe's blue and silver satin, silk, lace, and jewel encrusted dress shimmers in the scene's fading twilight as she looks off into the distance, as though distracted by a loud noise. Framed, like Graham, by an architectural column, twisting trees, and a stormy sky, Duncombe is a spectacle of wealth, uneasiness, and uncertainty. There is a possibility that Gainsborough kept fashionable fancy dresses in his studio, which would explain the commonalities between the outfits depicted in *Mrs. Graham* and *Frances Duncombe* (Belsey 54). Additionally, the reuse of the lavish dresses positions Gainsborough as a creator of woman-as-spectacle. In dressing up both women to his own liking, Gainsborough can be viewed as a middle-class male partaking in the joint efforts of his class and the aristocracy to "exclude women from the increasingly shared institutions of power" (Kutchka 172).

William Vaughan explains with regard to Gainsborough's portraits of women that, "he is much better in the world of ambiguities and uncertainties, of desires and the sense of transience" (114). Not only does the uncertain, indirect gaze of these female portrait subjects reflect a sense of transience, so too does the underlying theme of woman-as-spectacle in Gainsborough's work. Vaughan concludes that the role of women in the 18th-century was changing and transitioning at a rapid pace, which may account for the uncertainty in pose and gaze, as well as the overall composition of Gainsborough's portraits of females (114).

Women in 18th-century Britain straddled the line between individual and spectacle, consumers and definers of taste, as well as fashion trendsetters and displays of male wealth. The

changing, uncertain nature of women's social roles and alternative side of the great masculine renunciation are reflected in Gainsborough's portraits of women, as is the appropriated language of the self-made man in his male portraiture.

Alison Lurie, in *The Language of Clothes* writes that, "clothes [are] expressive of hidden and largely unconscious aspects of individual and group psyche, as forms of usually unintentional non-verbal communication, a sign language" (Wilson 57). The portraits of William Hogarth and Thomas Gainsborough display a sign language through male and female dress while in turn borrowing and exhibiting the visual rhetoric of the self-made man. With Britain's social classes shifting in the 18th-century, connoisseurs of taste, displays of wealth and masculinity, as well as changes in consumerism and the economy, created an environment of uncertainty. The transformation of the industrial middle-class to definers of taste, coupled with the fall of the aristocracy as fashionable and influential, formed a transient English society set on appropriation. The language of masculinity and national pride became a defining factor in both the middle-class and aristocracy's self-image, while allowing artists such as Gainsborough and Hogarth to comment on the social class conflict through portraiture.

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