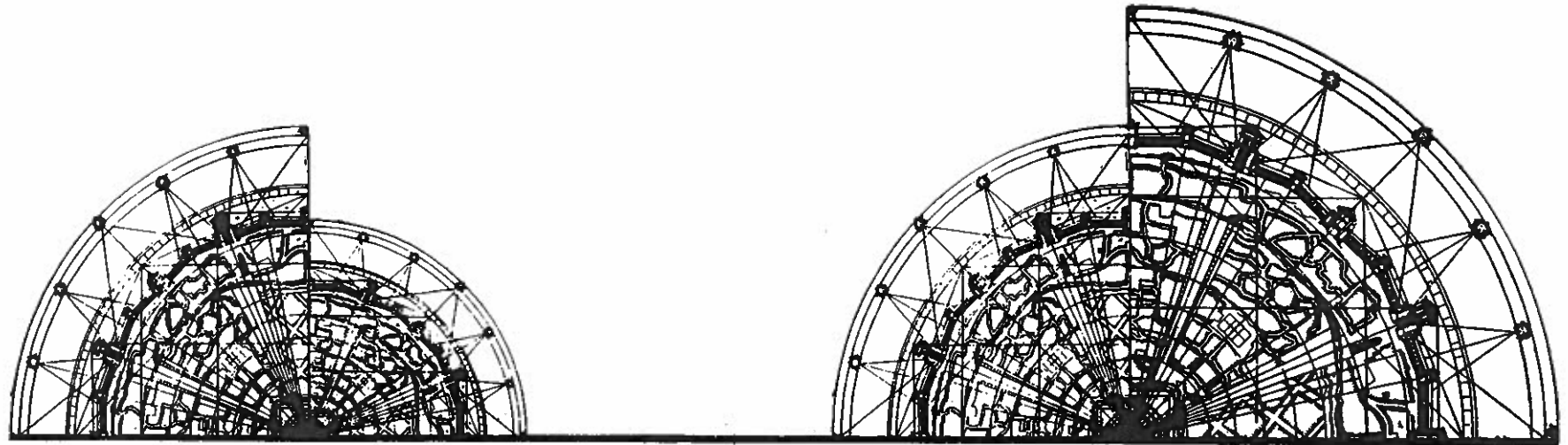


*New*COMPARISON

A Journal of Comparative and
General Literary Studies



Number 24
Autumn 1997

Feasts

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TEA DRINKING IN ENGLAND:

Ceremony, Scandal and Domestic Bliss¹

Tea, as British writers continually remind us from 1658 to the present day, is not nutritive. Taking part in any drinking of tea in a group, is about performance and representation in an overtly artificial manner. The question this essay attempts to address is: why drink it if it isn't nutritive? During the eighteenth century when tea becomes firmly part of a British way of life, a number of reasons are put forward ranging from the medicinal to the intoxicating, the religious to the social. Precisely because it is not nutritive, it becomes a powerful and free-floating cultural signifier, associated from the start with women in particular and more broadly with definition of gender.

The practice of tea-drinking was brought to Europe by countries trading with China during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.² The Portuguese court was using it in the 1550s and the practice spread through The Netherlands, France and into Russia during the early seventeenth century, arriving in England in the 1650s. Two of the earliest documents we have that relate to tea-drinking in England are Thomas Garway's 'An Exact Description of the Growth, Quality and Vertues of the leaf TEA' and Edmund Waller's poem 'Of Tea, Commended by her Majesty', to the Portuguese wife of Charles II, Catherine of Breganza, dated 1658 and 1663 respectively. Waller's paean to the Queen ties tea to notions of sobriety, clearheadedness and aristocratic femininity:

¹ A version of this paper was first given at the Cardiff Centre for Performance Arts in January 1994.

² ROBIN EMMERSON, *British Teapots and Tea Drinking, 1700-1850* (London: HMSO, 1992), p. 2.

Venus her myrtle, Phoebus has his bays,
Tea both excels, which she vouchsafes to praise
The best of queens, and best of herbs, we owe
To that bold nation which the way did show
To the fair region wherre the sun does rise,
Whose rich productions we so justly prize.
The Muse's friend, tea does our fancy aid,
Repress those vapours which the head invade,
And keeps that palace of the soul serene,
Fit on her birth-day to salute the Queen.³

In contrast, Garway's text is a broadside advertisement for his coffee-house, and it captures the curious mixture of social high fashion, exotic ceremony and medicinal virtues that come to typify the public drinking of tea.

Foreign, medicinal and fashionable: Tea-drinking as a new drug

The advertisement for Garway's coffee-house starts out by telling us that the leaf is from China, with some information about the plant and its growing locations in Japan and elsewhere, and then moves swiftly on to describe the social customs and how the Chinese keep the leaf in pots especially made to preserve "their drink Tea, which is used at Meals, and upon all visits and entertainments in Private Families, and in the Palaces of Grandees". The reader is also told that tea is gathered only by virgins destined for this work. The overt focus for Garway's advertisement is on health: that tea is appropriate for winter and summer, and that it is wholesome and preserves people in health until "extreme Old Age". Much of the information provided is about its medicinal qualities, and Garway explicitly notes that it is not nutritious if drunk without milk. Yet the underlying emphasis is upon Garway himself, and the fact that he is making available to all a drink that was only available to the very wealthy "Grandees" until 1657. In effect he is only making it available to men: Samuel Pepys records his first cup of tea at a coffee-house in 1660. Seven years later, Sarah Pepys has tea brought to her from the apothecary.⁴ This separation between male public tea-drinking and female domestic tea-drinking, illustrates the early gender definitions generated by the social

³ EDMUND WALLER, *Poems*, ed. G. Thorn Drury, 2 vols. (London: Muses' Library, 1901), Vol. II, p. 94.

⁴ EMMERSON, *British Teapots*, cit., p. 2.

practices around tea, that are only crossed in the liminal public/private spaces of the tea-garden.

Garway's stress on the medicinal and scientific properties of tea is paralleled or carried forward over the next four decades in incidental contributions to Beal's *Philosophical Transactions* (1676) or Robert Boyle's *Useful Experiments in Natural Philosophy* (1663), and in substantial monographs such as John Chamberlayne's *The Manner of Making of Coffee, Tea and Chocolate* (1685) culminating in John Ovington's *An Essay upon the Nature and Qualities of Tea* (1699).⁵ Chamberlayne's book is in fact a translation of a text by Simon Paulli published on the continent in 1665. What it indicates is the direct association of tea-drinking with the Chinese and Japanese tea ceremonies, that allies its medicinal properties with the exotic practices of an aristocratic class in a country then perceived to be at the height of civilised culture. Paulli's book even provided carefully detailed engravings of the full Chinese tea equipage, engravings that were not reproduced in England until a much later (1746) translation.⁶ Chamberlayne restricts himself to the elaborate written descriptions, quoted here at length because it lays the ground for so many signifiers that will accrete around the drink:

but the Chinese only boil it in some liquor, adding thereto a few grains either of Salt, or Sugar, which decoction, as yet hot, they present afterwards very courteously, as well to those that being invited to dinner they treat at home, as to them that come to render them a visit. This drink they make with so great care and so nice an application of their mind thereto; even persons of the highest quality are not ashamed, but on the contrary they take great pride to make with their own hands the decoction of this herb for their friends [...] having expressly for that purpose in the middle of their Palaces Rooms set apart, wherein there are little Ovens made of the most pretious stones, and of the most exquisite wood, reserved particularly for the aforesaid preparation, keeping, also curiously in these Rooms the pots, trivets, funells, bowls, porringers, and other vessells belonging to this sort of kitchin, perfectly well wrought, and on which they freely bestow some thousands of Crowns, keeping them handsomely wrapt up and folded in peices [sic] of silk, and not

⁵ JOHN BEALE, in *Philosophical Transactions*, XI (1676), p. 586; ROBERT BOYLE, *Useful Experiments in Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Henry Hall for Richard Davis, 1663), p. ii; JOHN CHAMBERLAYNE, *The Manner of Making of Coffee, Tea and Chocolate. As it is used in most parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and America. ith their virtues* (London: William Crook, 1685); JOHN OVINGTON, *An Essay upon the Nature and Qualities of Tea. Wherein are shown I. The Soil and Climate where it grows. II. The various kinds of it* (London, 1699).

⁶ DR JAMES, *A Treatise on Tobacco, Tea, Coffee and Chocolate* (London, 1746).

shewing them to any but their most intimate friends. They do also make as great account thereof as we do of our Diamonds, pretious Stones, Necklaces of pearls of the highest Price.⁷

Chamberlayne is also concerned elsewhere in the treatise to discuss ways of dealing with what he clearly perceives as an unknown foreign drug, how to deal with its effects, and control its use within English culture. He focuses his concern on the medicinal benefits that tea offers: it purges; it prevents gout and spleen; it keeps one alert; but it also causes nervousness when drunk to excess. The analysis duplicates a growing concern at this time with tea and coffee as antidotes to alcohol. Nearly 200 years later when tea-drinking was being massively introduced into working-class social practice, Charles Dickens quotes a writer of 1682 saying: "I know some that celebrate good thee for preventing drunkenness, taking it before they go to the tavern, and use it very much also after a debauch".⁸ A broadside ballad, *The Rebellious Antidote*, published in the same year as Chamberlayne's book of 1685, echoes the theme of concern with alcohol.

TEA: What 'tis occasions death and hell?

[...]

COFFEE: 'Tis wine and ale and eke the crape

Has spawn'd this spurious bestial rape;

[...]

Rapes, murders, thefts, and thousand crimes

Are gender'd by foul ale and wines;

These are but trifles to the woe

That wine and ale, and beer can do

[...]

TEA: One dish of twist [tea] will force the devil out

COFFEE: Tho' hast hit the in, and twist's the sovereign portion

To turn the tide, reverse the alewines ocean,

Disgorge, god, Bacchus, and prepare a stope

Once more to entertain a golden age.⁹

Shortly after this period the import of spirits into England becomes substantial, and there is a clear parallel between the foreign, strange and ill-defined effects of alcohol as against those of tea and coffee, with the latter

⁷ CHAMBERLAYNE, *The Manner*, cit. pp. 50-52.

⁸ In *Household Words*, quoted by CHARLES PIERCE, *The Household Manager* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1857), p.99.

⁹ J. C. B., *The Rebellious Antidote* (1685) (BL broadsides collection: c.20.f.2(378))

gradually gaining popularity as the pub became increasingly associated with the excesses of spirits rather than the more innocuous effects of ale, perry and cider. In 1660 there were 60 coffee houses, which also sold tea, in London; by 1706 the number had risen to 2000.¹⁰

John Chamberlayne elaborated the grounds for the elements of high status, the strange, exotic and the medicinal, found in Garway's advertisement. But Chamberlayne was also the writer of another translation, *A treasure of health*, published in the following year of 1686. This book is a dietary addressed to domestic householders and is again concerned primarily with defining the sensible use and the excesses this time of eating meats and other foods. The pairing of these two books indicates not only a public coffee-house audience for the treatise on tea, but also a growing domestic audience. Tea-drinking outwith the public coffee-houses, and as we shall come to, outwith the leisure gardens, was at first associated mainly with the aristocratic woman. Waller's poem underlines the connection of status, women and tea; and by 1683, for example, Elizabeth, Duchess of Lauderdale, who lived at Ham House in Surrey, had her own Chinese tea equipment with the table mounted on a special platform since unlike the Chinese, she would have drunk her tea sitting in a chair.

The culturally defined role of the gentlewoman as one who was responsible for preparing a wide range of medicinal, nutritive and intoxicating beverages, often in the laboratory-like environment of a large kitchen or brewery, would have fitted neatly with the cluster of images of tea-preparation being medicinal, scientific and exotic. Furthermore, tea-drinking probably required social status not only because of the connection with the court, the cultural practices of gentlewomen, and with the expense of the tea itself, but because the equipment necessary to make and serve it had to be imported as well. The English did not perfect the process of porcelain-ware, which could withstand the heat of the boiling water necessary to tea-making, until the 1740s. Until that time the whole process of tea-drinking at home required a paraphernalia that was both expensive and exotic, and called upon the person making and serving the tea to assume a role in a foreign performance. The women who increasingly took over this role were participating in the definition of themselves as culturally "other", exotic and foreign.

Another indication of the growth of domestic tea-drinking is a change in the pattern of importation and taxes. The coffee-houses made tea in

¹⁰ This information was given by the Victoria and Albert Museum in Room 57, beside the portrait "Family of Three at Tea" by Richard Collins..

large barrels, and were taxed 18 pence per gallon from 1657. It is not until 1678 that the East India Company begins to import tea to retail *dry* to avoid the tax on the liquid, and for domestic use. Tax on dry tea is only introduced in 1698, at 1 shilling and 6 pence per pound for East India Company tea, and 2 shillings and 6 pence for others. This tax was doubled in 1704. But during the period 1678 to 1698 it appears that tea-drinking became a fairly widespread practice not only among the upper classes but also with the emerging middle-class housewife. The then well-known pauper's doctor, Thomas Tryon, included among his many attempts to reform the guilds of apothecaries, of surgeons and of physicians, two household medicine books. The first, *Wisdom's Dictates* (1691) is addressed primarily to men, but the second *The Good House-wife Made a Doctor* (1692) is addressed, as the title suggests, to women. It is this latter book that includes Tryon's comments on tea-drinking that clarify its significance as "fashion", the conscious construction of a self-representation:

that 'tis a pretty innocent harmless liquor, it hath an opening Quality, and purgeth by Urine, but not so much as many of our own Country-Herbs, and its great esteem is not from the more than ordinary vertues that it is endued withal, but chiefly for Novelty-sake, and because 'tis Outlandish, and dear, and far fetcht, and therefore admired by the Multitude of ignorant People, who always have the greatest esteem for those things they know not.¹¹

That domestic tea-drinking was increasingly associated with women is borne out by John Ovington's *Essay* of 1699. This text, by the "Chaplain to his Majesty", is dedicated to a woman, the Countess of Grantham, and makes a point of quoting the Waller poem in full. From Waller, Ovington also repeats the association of tea-drinking with sobriety, rationality and civility, saying among other things that tea adorns a woman with "all that civility that even China it self can boast of".¹² But Ovington's is last of the relatively uncomplicated books in praise of tea and of women. In 1700 the following year, Nahum Tate published his *Panacea: a Poem upon Tea in two Cantos*, dedicating it to "British ladies", yet modulating his praise with a pervasive sense of excess as tea-drinking becomes more detached from

¹¹ THOMAS TRYON, *The Good house-wife made a doctor; or, Health's choice and Sure Friend, being a plain way of nature's own prescribing, to prevent and cure most diseases*. (London, 1692), pp. 215-16.

¹² OVINGTON, *An Essay*, cit., f. A2.

aristocratic status and from the medicinal, and released into the cultural freeplay of fashion.¹³

There are a number of earlier comments outlining a worry with the "excessive" drinking of tea, including Congreve's association of women's conversation around a tea-table with scandal in *The Plain Dealer* (1694). Tate's poem is far more extensive and specific. The word "Indian" at this time referred generally to Asian people. When the East India Company sold Indian tea, they were in fact selling Chinese tea: that India itself produced tea was not discovered until 1823. The definition is important to an understanding of Tate's semiotic fields. Like Ovington, Chamberlayne and Garway, Tate repeats the commonplace "none he found, his gentle soul to please / Like the refin'd and civilis'd Chinese"; yet at the same time he sets up this standard of civility against the "brutal savage" of India.¹⁴ Tea is not only foreign and exotic but strange and unknown: respected but feared. In describing the properties of tea, Tate says that it "doth sobriety and mirth reconcile", bringing together two potentially opposing emotions or responses. Just so, tea is "grateful": another word with quite specific connotations at the turn of the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, meaning something that both satisfies yet whets the appetite. This dualism of the civil and savage, the sober and excessive, the domestic and the scandalous, informs English attitudes to things foreign, to tea and increasingly also to women, for the next 200 years at least.

Exotic leisure gardens: public tea-drinking

The split between the civil and the savage, the civilised and the barbaric, is mediated more generally by tea-drinking in its association with the leisure gardens of London. The association becomes so specific that these gardens are usually referred to as tea-gardens during the eighteenth century. During the reign of Charles I the practice of walking in public urban gardens began to be established, one of the first being the Spring Gardens at Charing Cross. However it is not until the Restoration that leisure gardens and health spas begin to become popular. Vauxhall Gardens were established in 1674 and followed soon by Marylebone and Ranelagh Gardens. Islington Spa near King's Cross opened in 1685, and soon after Bagnigge Wells

¹³ NAHUM TATE, *Panacea: A Poem upon Tea in two Cantos* (London, 1700); second edition, *A poem upon tea: with a discourse on its sov'rain virtues; and directions in the use of it for health [...]* Also a preface concerning beau-criticism (London: J. Nutt, 1702).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

formed on the Gray's Inn Road around the country residence of Nell Gwynn (Figs. 1 and 2).¹⁵

The key to all of these sites was that they were located in the "country", on the edge of what was then urban London. This period 1680-1740 also sees the opening of for example Tunbridge Wells and the Harrogate Spa as places even further into the country to which the leisured and monied classes could travel for health reasons. Vauxhall Gardens across the river was initially an aristocratic and upper-class leisure area "protected" by the need to hire a boat to cross the river in order to get to it, while Bagnigge Wells was of much easier access to the broader population. But the point was to travel away from the city to the gardens, to participate in an artificial countryside, a civilised wilderness, and to drink the waters, or coffee, or increasingly tea. The gardens offered not only a civilised wilderness, where bandstands and other entertainment-related buildings, led on to carefully built "natural" vistas, but also a place that combined the public with the private. Unlike coffee-houses, which were unavoidably public, the tea-drinking areas of leisure gardens provided small cubicles all along the central walks, which could be closed off with doors or curtains and made private. Hence they could be visited by women.

These analogous but often contradictory pairs of civilised/wild, city/country, public/private, culture/nature, corruption/purity, are also tensely yoked together in evocations of tea itself. Pierre Motteaux's *A Poem in Praise of Tea* (1712) refers to "Tea, heav'n's delight, and nature's truest wealth". Nahum Tate's *Panacea* tells the story of tea solving court corruption in China: before tea, "this soft contagion [of idleness and alcoholic drink] in the Palace bred / from court to town, from town to country spread".¹⁶ Yet China was saved by the new prince's pilgrimage to the country, where the spiritual forces of nature reveal the civilising properties of the herb, tea. Later in the century, the conflation of nature and civilization begins to draw apart and entrench the contradictions in Tate's 1700 poem. *To The Long-Conceal'd First Promoter* (1746), a broadsheet poem on the taxes on tea and cloth needed to protect the British market, describes the foreigner or

The Indian, Nature's pupil, [who] glides with ease
Down life's wide stream, fann'd gently by a breeze.

¹⁵ See WILLIAM BOULTON, *The Amusements of Old London. Being a survey of the sports and pastimes, tea gardens and parks*, 2 vols. (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1901).

¹⁶ PIERRE MOTTEAUX, *A Poem in praise of Tea* (London, 1712), l. 128; TATE, *Panacea* (1702), cit., p. 6.

[...] Nor avarice him, nor vanity allure;
From vice, by sky-taught poverty, secure

and contrasts this individual with the civilised:

How wretched, He, with luxury o'er run,
Who, slave to sense, with plenty is undone
[...]
He crawls, a meer machine, and scarcely lives.

The point of the poem is that British exploitation of the Indian is ruining Britain, creating crime and smuggling. Yet the writer goes on in a rather complicated way to ally the smugglers first with banditti, and then the "Kouli Kan" or "Caitiffs (still blacker)" and tartars: the unacceptable Indian.

That tea had to be imported ties one line of development of its cultural significance firmly with economics and taxes, with issues of smuggling and adulteration in close alliance. Motteaux's *Poem* runs a narrow balancing act against cloth but for tea:

To frugal senates, by a timely doom,
From clothing Britain ban the Indian loom,
Yet still its product bear abroad her charge,
And chang'd for foreign treasures, her in large;
And Asia give, while Europe's sons agree,
Her spice, her pearls, her diamonds, and her tea.¹⁷

By 1733, John Waldron's *Satyr Against Tea* is more damning but also less rational, saying in the voice of the society "fair lady",

"Cloath made of wool Become a home-spun countrey fool;
But I chuse silk, by silk-wormes wrought,
Tis foreign and more dearly bought."
Thus she pursues her forreign Talk,
Whilst Weavers must or beg, or walk.
[...]
They may all starve, kind Flirt, for you.
[...]
If any virtue we can find
In foreign Tea of any kind
The sugar works the powerful cure,

¹⁷ MOTTEAUX, *A Poem*, cit., ll. 252-57.

And not the Tea, we may be sure.¹⁸

(Conveniently forgetting that at this time sugar itself was still imported.)

The satirical prose of "Tim Twisting to Dick Twining" (1735) is also much more inclusively against tea. It opens with a letter supposedly to the emperor of China, addressed as "most sublime, most magnificent, most puissant, and most illustrious, fo, souchong, chi, padre, ton congou, fum": bringing together a parody of diplomatic introduction with the names of the main tea imports. The content of the letter, couched in phrases that have become standard racist stock-in-trade, is to complain that tea brings scandal and corruption as if it is an insidious, intentional, herbal warfare being waged by the Chinese on the English. The address of the sender is a list of home-grown, healthy alternatives: "sage and balm's, the rosemary-tree, penny-royal-court, ground-ivy-lane, camomile street, London".¹⁹ But as R. Helsham spells out in his *Essay on the Nature, Use and Abuse of Tea* (1722) tea will not "be regulated because Tea pays too great a duty, and supports too many coaches, not to be prefer'd to the health of the publick, tea has too great interest to be prohibited".²⁰ Indeed by the 1750s, three to four million pounds of tea was being imported a year and a 100% tax being levied.

Significantly Helsham's essay is addressed "to a Lady" because "ladies drink tea", and we can note the references to women, tea and scandal that are beginning to surface more regularly in this early half of the eighteenth century. The participation of women in tea-drinking at the public gardens is gradually represented as more and more scandalous. The splendid *Tea: A Poem in Three Cantos* (1743), transfers the contradictions of desire and fear, civility and barbarity, from the foreign to women. The text will be discussed in more detail in the next section on gender but has pertinent descriptions not only of exactly what a tea service and its equipment should consist of and look like, but also of social behaviour at a leisure garden. The start of Canto 2 presents a pre-Romantic landscape of sublime combinations of rock, waterfall, and verdant landscape, cast as foreign and exotic. The text subtly invites the reader into an apparently virtuous natural scene, that is then skilfully revealed as corrupted, holding in its centre a temple to the goddess Scandal. Scandal turns out to be the

¹⁸ JOHN WALDRON, *Satyr Against Tea Or. Ovington's essay upon the nature and qualities of tea etc. dissected and burlesq'd* (Dublin, 1733), pp.5-6.

¹⁹ *Tim Twisting to Dick Twining* [1735 handbill].

²⁰ R. HELSHAM, *Essay on the Nature, Use and Abuse of Tea* (Dublin: E. Hamilton, 1722), p. 5.

goddess of tea who offers a competition for the best (scandalous) conversation for which the reward will be a complete china tea service. What follows is as clear a representation of what people actually said when talking in the leisure gardens as we are likely to get. It is entertaining and witty to start, only gradually turning to spite and burlesque self-importance. But no matter how appalling the conversation, the goddess cannot be satisfied, and drops the tea service so that it shatters over the group of contestants. The poem ends rather abruptly with the writer entering a more serious register and criticising British colonial exploitation as the source of domestic enervation and collapse. In a more interesting way than most of this writing,²¹ the poem offers a sophisticated and self-conscious awareness of the way the foreign is exoticised and desired as a representation, rather than a natural fact. Similarly, the contestants in this scandal are both men and women. However, the tea-deity is definitely female and definitely part of the foreign exoticised landscape.²²

The latter half of the eighteenth century documents the shift of the tea-gardens into sensualising fair-grounds, yet even in the 1790s it is clear from paintings and engravings that the double-image of the healthy walk in the country and the insalubrious scandal is still in play. Much of the shift is connected with the increasing popularity of tea-gardens with the urban population of all classes, as well as the introduction of alcohol consumption which was usually put in the tea itself. George Coleman's prologue to Garrick's *Bon-Ton* (1775) makes clear the way that people who worked used the weekends to mimic the activities of the leisured classes:

Says Madam Fussock, warm from Spital fields
"The Bon Ton's the space 'twixt Saturday and Monday
'Tis riding in a one horse chair on Sunday,
'Tis drinking tea on summer afternoons
At Bagnigge Wells with china and gilt spoons."²³

Far more explicit in its sexuality is Mr Churchill's 1779 verse:

Thy arbour Bagnigge, and the gay alcove

²¹ See *An Essay on Drinking Tea* (Salisbury, 1777), which crudely refers to tea as bringing "Scandal, heretofore a stranger amongst generous *Englishmen* [...] from *China*, enclosed in a canister" (p. 13), and as sacrificing English girls to "*Indian melancholy*" (p. 14).

²² *Tea: A poem in three cantos* (London, 1743).

²³ DAVID GARRICK, *Bon Ton*, in *The Plays of David Garrick*, ed. H. W. Pedicord and F. L. Bergmann, 7 vols (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980-82), Vol. II, p. 254.

Thy arbour Bagnigge, and the gay alcove
 Where the frail nymphs in amorous dalliance rove
 Where 'prentice youths enjoy the Sunday feast
 And city madams boast their Sabbath best.
 [...] Come, prithee make it up, Miss, and be as lovers be,
 We'll go to Bagnigge Wells, Miss, and there we'll have some tea;
 It's there you'll see the lady-birds perched on the stinging nettles
 And chrystal water fountains, and shining copper kettles...²⁵

The tea-gardens became associated, as had the banqueting houses in the previous century, with assignations, sexual affairs and prostitution. As the public display of the tea-gardens is perceived to be increasingly scandal-mongering, scandalous and more class-mixed, the upwardly mobile self-defining middle classes, especially their womenfolk, move more exclusively into domestic entertainment.

Gender, capitalist economics and structures of domesticity: Domestic tea-drinking as familial and social.

Domestic entertainment had of course been going on throughout the century, and this essay will now return to the representations of the private and domestic drinking of tea in the early part of the eighteenth century. In 1711 Pope's *Rape of the Lock* has Anna "sometimes Counsel take – & sometimes tea" (III:8); yet in the same year Addison in the *Spectator* can comment on "All well-regulated families, that set apart an Hour in every morning for Tea and Bread and Butter" (No. 10, p. 2). This is a significant formulation because it allies sober, familial tea-drinking with the consumption of food. The combination not only becomes increasingly important in distinguishing moral and domestic tea-drinking from corrupt and public tea-drinking; but also, in a manner that doesn't occur with coffee and chocolate, tea acquires a central place in the cultural definition of images for the household arrangements of early capitalist domesticity as it attempts to make the housewife private (Fig. 3).²⁶

Familial. In simple terms: tea is less intoxicating than alcohol and therefore less likely to get a woman into trouble. The product and its equipment were initially expensive and could be used as a sign of social

²⁵ Quoted in BOULTON, *Amusements*, cit., Vol. I, p. 55.

²⁶ See PETER STALLYBRASS and ALISON WHITE, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), Ch. 2, for a study of men and coffee houses.

status; medicinally it had been decided that tea was particularly good for women, since they were less "fiery" than men and needed the stimulation of this drink rather than the cooling effects of beer;²⁷ and socially it provided a relatively harmless drink for the whole family. Many early eighteenth-century family portraits show husband and wife and children, clustered around the tea-table. This complex set of terms hints at a wide range of performative context within the domestic realm itself: the sober and rational, the leisured, the care of the body which was vital given the expense of doctoring and medicines, and central to the unity of the "family". It is a domestic economy based on the privacy of the household.

Before 1640 the word "oeconomy" meant household economics; this oeconomy was the most important for maintaining any social structure of the community. After 1660, the word moves firmly to the connotative field of capital, profit/loss, marketplace finance and money; and as it does so its movement becomes fundamental to defining the public against the private. Economics is public activity, undertaken by men (often negotiating in coffee-houses), who gain and lose money in a separate sphere from the household or domestic economy which runs concurrently but isolated in the private. Indeed the private domestic household becomes the sign for successful public economics. Gentlewomen, about whom we know more than labouring women because they left more documents about themselves, were discouraged from work both because leisure was the sign of successful capital and because "work" was being redefined as "public" not household. And this move resulted in a rather complex division in cultural significance. Tea-drinking around the domestic tea-table becomes not only the primary visual sign of private domestic order, but also the site for sanctioned leisure entertainment in the home.

Essential to this movement, during the rise of the English bourgeoisie after 1660, is the simultaneous transition from still often quite feudal relations of service, to a salaried servant-class.²⁸ For work to be redefined as public only, the housewife had to have the image of potential leisure – yet household work was labour-intensive. By the early eighteenth century the role of servants in the aristocratic and monied bourgeois classes was well-established, so much so that the housewife could aspire to complete ignorance of economics. In 1737 *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, a book much copied for the next 30 years at least, says at the same time, that the

²⁷ See DANIEL DUNCAN, *Wholesome Advice Against the Abuse of Hot Liquors* (London 1706).

²⁸ See PETER BREARS, "Behind the Green Baise Door", in *The Country House Kitchen 1650-1900*, ed. P. Brears and P. Sambrook (Stroud: Sutton, 1995).

"economy of the house is indecent", yet that the mistress of the house needs to know how to instruct others to manage it, particularly if she wishes to use it as a place for semi-public entertainment.²⁹ The ambiguity about the status of the economics of the household underlines the fact that all that had changed was the "naming". What a woman does in the house is "manage", but this management is not recognised as part of the economic structure of the family. The focus of the book is on presenting the house as a place that others may visit. Explicit instructions are given on how to entertain, particularly when the family leaves London for the country-house, upon which occasion the necessary foods to take with it include: sugar, anchovies, olives, oil, vinegar, tea, coffee, chocolate and pistachio nuts.

The already cited 1743 poem *Tea* satirises the amorous swain and shepherdess goddess who have replaced the farm girl's "low domestick Care" which "Of long exploded Oeconomy, these / Savour too much our polished Fair to please". But while in the public tea-gardens images of pastoral romance replace the labouring woman, in private homes and private entertainment it is the image of the competent mistress who can command her servants to work for her that becomes more and more allied with tea-drinking as the century progresses. Significantly, Maria Rundell in *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (1800) which was to dominate the publishing of household books for the early half of the nineteenth century, refers to the table as a primary social sign by which the competency of the mistress of the house may be understood ("The direction of a table is no inconsiderable branch of a lady's concern, as it involves judgement in expenditure; respectability of appearance; and the comfort of her husband and those who partake their hospitality").³⁰

Yet by 1835, at the start of the period of intensive domestic service, this sign of competency is being transferred to the housekeeper and servant.³¹

²⁹ *The Whole Duty of a Woman: or, an infallible guide to the fair sex. Containing rules, directions, and observations for their conduct and behaviour [...] with directions how to obtain all useful and fahsionable accomplishments [...] in which are comprosed all parts of good housewifery, particularly rules and receipts in every kind of cookery* (London: T. Read, 1737; imitations included CATHARINE BROOKS, *The Complete English Cook* (1762) and LYDIA HONEYWOOD, *The Cook's Pocket Companion* (1756).

³⁰ MARIA RUNDELL, *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (London, 1800), p. v.

³¹ As for example in *The Servant's Guide and family manual: with new improved receipts, arranged and adapted to the duties of all classes of servants: housekeeper, cook, lady's maid, nurse, housemaid, laundrymaid, dairymaid, butler, valet, coachman, groom, footman, and gardner* (London: John Limbard, 1835).

Social. If one part of the cultural significance of the household tea-table in the eighteenth century focuses on domestic order, the other develops around entertainment in the home. Ladies' "visiting days" had become an established feature of the lives of early eighteenth-century upper-class and monied women, and the event centred around drinking tea. Eliza Haywood titled her 1720s magazine of politics, social comment and gossip "The Tea-Table", and unlike the entirely leisured aspect of the public tea-garden, the ladies' tea-table acquired specific connotations as a site for female wit and intellectual conversation – allied, as with the domestic image, to opposition to alcohol. It is also apparent from some comments in the texts, and from the cartoons and paintings, that upper-class tea-tables included men on a fairly regular basis. Associations of tea-drinking with scandal no doubt in part derive from the opportunity for sexual activities which the combination of public hospitality in a quite private space afforded. The tea-drinker in Fig. 4 has a classically-posed gesture of invitation, offering a simultaneous image of sexuality and defensive etiquette, desire and fear, which neatly replicates the private and the public. But middle-class women, and later on working women, do not appear to have invited men to their tea-tables, one good reason being that the men were out at work.

A varied and illuminating book from this period which underlines the gender-definitions accreting around tea and written just as the image was shifting once more, is Duncan Campbell's *A Poem Upon Tea* (1735). The preface to the "Masculine Reader" refers to "female love, and tea: / Let sober virt'ous women then / Find favour in the sight of men [...] / We see, they excell men as far, / As China does dull earthen ware", and goes on to say:

Now all philosophers agree,
That women shou'd drink Milk and tea,
It suits their constitutions best,
And pleases th' unpolluted taste
[...]
Who does not love a sober woman,
Shall hence be branded as inhuman!
Let him be doom'd to spend his life
With a thriftless drunken wife

The rest of the book consists of a narrative in verse about a Ladies' visiting day, a dialogue between Dick Rosy-face (beer drinker) and Amy Sweet-lips (tea-drinker), and a Tea-Table Song (anti-alcohol).³²

The narrative concerning the Ladies' visiting day is fascinating for what it offers concerning the household management and perception of tea-drinking, as well as for the primary effects it is held to cause. The Lady and her Visitor begin by discussing the quality of the tea they are drinking, but move quickly on to comments on how their servants use it, noting that "My Suky Dainty and Bess Taste" will drain what others leave in the cups. This is the period during which the locked tea-caddy came into its own, the keys held by the housekeeper who also had first "rights" on used tea leaves, which she would dry and reuse or sell. The ladies in this narrative don't give their servants real tea because it is too expensive, and makes them too close in class status. However, they thoroughly approve of their servants drinking the left-overs for

They never quarrel when at tea they sit;
Tea is the school at which they learn their wit.
A sober girl's a credit to her sex;
But tippling minx defames 'em when she speaks
[...]
It is better than drinking Gin by far,
Which makes them stink, and cause domestick war.

The social commentary continues to refine the double-standard at some length, until the narrator interrupts with a general commentary on its value that relates it directly to tea:

The ladies, thus talk chearfully and free,
Neat minted words, occasioned by tea,
And when they form a sentence, verse, or songs,
Poems, or speeches on their artless tongues,
They strike the hearers with a sweet amaze!
Their admiration to its zenith raise.
They follow no musty worm-eaten rules,
They scorn to use such old grammatick tools:
Yet, elocution hangs upon each tongue,
And rhetoric thus flowing, smooth and strong;

All unaffected, natural and free
So polite are the fair admirers o'tea.
Such is the beauty of their easie stile,
They impress their words, and speeches with a smile.

The combination of the natural, free, easy and artless with rhetoric and elocution (intensively structured and formally taught to boys as the basis of the ten years of their public school education), is contradictory to say the least, and is further mapped in the conclusion of the narrative onto a combination of artless, sober and rational.

Campbell is obviously trying to yoke together the contradictions between the pure and natural woman, and her representative image of sobriety and rationality, the one being gender-specific and the other not, as if perhaps sobriety and tea-drinking could offer a positive approach for men to femininity. Yet the commentary is also precisely class-specific: the approach is made possible because these "ladies" are witty and intelligent. When Campbell moves on to his Dick Rosy-face and Amy Sweet-lips dialogue, which is concerned with labouring-class people, the discussion is wholly in terms of the alliance of women, tea-drinking and domestic bliss, against men, alcohol-drinking, and rough behaviour like cursing and fighting. From the 1730s onwards, until well into the nineteenth century, the domestic woman tea-drinker *versus* the irresponsible male alcohol-drinker, is a culturally recognised split defining gender differences for the working-classes, but also one that is given an interesting spin into the lazy tea-drinking wife *versus* the hard-working, deserving husband (Fig. 5).

What is difficult perhaps for us to appreciate in the late twentieth century is the equivalence of pros and cons for tea and alcohol consumption in the eighteenth. The tracts on health are quite troubled not only with the introduction of spirits into England, but with the potentially deleterious effects of tea. What is more, writings on health in the early eighteenth century, particularly with respect to foods and health, are far more likely than we are today to connect the social and psychological effects of a drug directly with its "natural" properties. Tea-drinking becomes associated not only with excessive nervousness and anxiety in many texts from *Wholesome Advice Against the Abuse of Hot Liquors* (1706) and *The Domestic Coffee Man* (1722) to Bradshaw's *Valuable Family Companion* (1750), but also with "loosening" of the tongue which moves quickly from eloquence to gossip to slanderous scandal scatologically connected with its laxative effects in *A Satyr on Tea* (1733). It is also associated with expense which may impart status but which is also thriftless and leaves the rest of the family impoverished, as well as with the practice of forming all-women

³² DUNCAN CAMPBELL, *A Poem upon Tea. Wherein its antiquity, its several virtues and influences are set forth [...]* Also the objections against tea, answered (London: Mrs Dodd, 1735).

communities which takes women away from their domestic family duties as well as providing support and encouragement for arguing against those family structures and strictures. The incarceration of women within the home as socially leisured objects, despite the fact that for many of them labour-intensive household work was an immediate reality, appears not only to have been challenged but also to have been used to as much advantage as possible by women choosing to take the social representation literally and argue that if they were objects of leisure then they didn't have to work or at the least they had the right to actual leisure.

The gender specificities of the images of women and tea and men and alcohol are not clearly positive or negative. A broadsheet ballad of 1746 "The Tea Drinking Wife and Drunken Husband" begins with the husband complaining first about tea-drinking and female company: "Until ten or eleven o'clock you seldom rise; / And then when you're up you must have your desire, / And straight get the tea-kettle clapt on the fire. // Then in comes her gossips to prate and to chat [...] By this time my dinner it ought to be done"; it continues with the expense: "You are daily wanting fine things to buy, / Let me go as fine as my neighbours you cry"; and concludes that this lifestyle turns the wife into "a most damnable scold". However the wife then replies that men

blame us for drinking of innocent tea,
Which is but early refreshment our spirits to cheer,
While you go to the ale-house & get drunk with strong beer.
You leave me till one in the morning alone,
And then from the ale-house come staggering home,
[...]
Then reeling to bed where until morning you lie,
You grunt and you groan like a hog in a stie,
You are both crawsick and quarelsome all the next day,
Is that to be bore with master Whisker I pray?"

She then goes on to point out that her husband frequently picks up "a gamesome young girl" and cheats the "poor wife of her due".

Much more explicitly anti-tea-drinking, but in fact against the way that women are using their privatisation to their own advantage, is a one-among-many ballad: "A new song on tea-drinking" (1746), addressed explicitly to the "jolly blades". The ballad starts with a complaint about expense which is immediately cast alongside a comment on the enforced leisure of unemployment: "Of late the times are hard and dear / And want of occupation, / Is the general cry everywhere, / Tho' all the English nation

/ Yet they must have their tea, tea / When ever they incline to drink / But husbands they must pay". It moves on to compare women in "days of yore" before tea-drinking (about 50 years earlier), when "Each, lovely, spouse would mind a house / Her children and her labour", while now "We must have tea to drink / If our back-sides go bare". The writer then specifically breaks down the cost for "sugar tea and cream" as one shilling for four persons. Given that wages were around ten shillings per week for a labourer, 1 shilling on tea for four people is clearly a middle-class pursuit. But the monied middle-class just as clearly took the expense of this entirely leisured, non-nutritional item as a legitimate part of the household budget. *Madame Johnson's Present: or the best instructions for young women of 1754*, lists among essentials that the young housewife should buy bread for seven persons per week at three shillings three farthings and Tea and Sugar for seven persons per week at four shillings and one penny.

The concern with effects on health and the expense of tea-drinking diminish as the century progresses, as the culture gets used to the physiological responses to the drink, as England begins to produce its own porcelain, and most importantly after the Tea tax was changed in 1785 reducing the cost of tea from eight shillings to three shillings and fourpence per pound.³³ In parallel, the concern with scandal, perceived as a result of women getting together on their own, but in fact a concern with the negative and frightening effects of women's responses to the isolation and privacy of the bourgeois family, grow enormously until the end of the eighteenth century. A detailed and observant, if weighted study of tea written in 1758, *The good and bad effect of tea consider'd*, spells out the connections. The writer spends some time praising moderate use of tea, especially as a morning meal taken with "good toast and butter". In these times, he says, we eat so heavily for supper that a light breakfast is important for all but the working classes. Those who labour for a living cannot be sustained by tea, even should the mistress of the house supplement the tea with alcohol: "Whatever these poor creatures say for themselves, a breakfast of tea about eight o'clock in the morning, after washing from twelve, will not enable them to work till dinner". In contrast, afternoon tea taken without food, is to be avoided by all but those of "high degree", because it encourages loose talk.

What is compelling about this text is the way it recounts in explicit detail how "loose talk" comes about (forgive the extensive quotation). There may be no more innocent meeting than over "sober tea", yet:

³³ EMMERSON, *British Teapots*, cit., p. 11.

We often hear, when a person desires to be [...] acquainted with another, they first consider who is known to the person they want to be known to, as they may accidentally meet to drink tea together, and after tea too often a cup of stronger regale, which gives warmth to imagination, and volubility to speech, and lays a foundation for a future friendship, I call it; and most certainly a great deal of business is transacted, or at least agreed upon, at the tea-table; but what is worse, some, after another cup of the good creature, are unguarded, and frequently boast of bargains perhaps they never purchased; and indeed, had they, it discovers an imprudence, to run down the value of any commodity: and as this same tea helps the memory, quickens the understanding, clears the head, opens the eyes and ears, as before it is said to do, but more especially with the addition of a cup or two of a comfortable cordial, that makes some call to mind transactions of long standing, and relate an old story without any loss, but with some additions, to make it more suitable to the design it is advanced for, and that is commonly for the good of some neighbour they wish well to: Others whose eyes are opened by the virtues of tea (and a little of the other sort) are so strong-sighted to see and foresee, not only what their neighbours have done, are doing, but what they will do; one of this penetration sees greatly into other persons follies, nay, often sees double, and discovers more than they really have; but, while she is thus looking after, and discovering the faults of others, she overlooks her own; but what great discoveries are made, or are to be made, they are all set forth to the best advantage by this quick-sighted person (one of the ceremony) at the next afternoon regale.³⁴

However, as with other texts, it is when the writer moves on to criticise the "tradesmen's wives and those lower still" that his real worries surface. The custom is too expensive and "These poor creatures, to be fashionable and imitate their superiors, are neglecting their spinning, knitting etc [...] their children are in rags, gnawing a brown crust". Furthermore on the "new" custom of putting gin in tea he laments: "Oh! I here with confusion stop and know not how to bewail my grief for you, delightful fair! [...] be careful [...] you charming, guiltless, young ones! your morals will be corrupted" as the "mistress of the ceremony" will put gin in the tea, the young woman will begin to speak too much and "well then, at one of these meetings all the fault is laid upon the man, and ways and means consulted, how to subdue him". Later on the writer reiterates his concern that "tea-drinking

³⁴ *The good and bad effect of tea consider'd. Wherein are exhibited, the physical virtues of tea... To which are subjoined, some considerations of afternoon tea-drinking* (London, 1758), p. 38.

[...] causeth disobedience and domestic strife, and at last the artful husseys lay all the blame on their husbands", concluding that tea is "a great check to matrimony".³⁵

Tentative Analysis. Looking at the textual evidence for the cultural significance of tea and tea-drinking in the period 1660-1785, three strands can be unbraided for the purpose of analysis. The associations of tea with the foreign and the exotic, and with the conflation of natural and civilised, cluster around the public tea-drinking in leisure gardens. The concurrent image of tea as sober, medicinal and rational, focuses on the domestic use of tea with food at a morning meal. And the connotations tea acquires with fashion and status accrete around the private entertainment of drinking tea at home with visitors, usually in the afternoon. Drinking tea in the leisure-gardens is of course completely non-nutritional but is condoned for decades as a social practice, a leisure habit. As the eighteenth century moves on and the constituency for leisure-gardens becomes more and more working class, the literature increasingly associates tea with explicit sexuality. Tea becomes the cultural sign for sex: "just my cup of tea", "coffee tea or me" "chatting someone up" (combining *cha*: tea with *chat*: conversation) and so on. In contrast, morning tea is always taken with food and this constrains its cultural free-play, tying it closely to the gradually coalescing image of the "mistress of the household" who offers good sense and nutrition.³⁶ Both public and familial tea-drinking take place with men present: the one with men as part of the sexual image, the other with men as husbands and sons (Fig. 6). It may be significant that in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* sober tea-drinking by men is presented as occurring within the house.³⁷ Even the private tea drinking of ladies in their own homes, without visitors, is usually attended by the "tay-boy".

However the significance of tea-drinking as a leisure activity, that is constructed by the bourgeois housewife in response to the isolation of the private domestic world, is that no men are present. It is interesting that during this period afternoon tea on a visit is not associated with food,³⁸ so there is an empty gap in the cultural meaning. Initially this is filled with the notion of wit and eloquence for the educated middle-class woman,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 41 sq.

³⁶ See BETH KOWALESKI-WALLACE, "Tea, Gender and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century England", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994), pp. 131-45.

³⁷ HENRY MACKENZIE, *The Man of Feeling* (London, 1771). I thank Tim Burke for this reference.

³⁸ This is an area largely re-defined in the nineteenth century.

although the notion increasingly becomes subject to ridicule as the Hogarth cartoon of "Blue-stocking ladies at tea" (Fig. 7) indicates in its portrayal of the drunken disorder often linked to women's tea-drinking as the century moves on. But as the practice becomes more widespread through the middle classes, the tradespeople, artisans and then the wives of labourers, the cultural gap becomes wider. Why are these women getting together without men? Why are they inventing a women-only leisure activity? Why do the participants come home with arguments for their husbands? Tittle-tattle, prattle and chat: all opprobrious words linked to women-only conversation. That these women were dealing with their gradual exclusion from the economic world, their swift redefinition as privately-owned commodities within the emerging capitalist structure, probably also with restrictions on their sexuality – any of which might have begun to fill the cultural gap – were inadmissible possibilities.

What is particularly acute about the way the texts of this period respond to the cultural significance of tea is the clear class-distinctions they make. It is taken for granted that the aristocratic and leisured classes have a right to luxury and sexuality. Moreover there are no constraints on them to be sober, rational or sensible. It is as though their "work" in life is to function as artificially constructed signs for desires. This would accord with the Mandevillian notion that the aristocracy had a responsibility to consume. Furthermore, because they can afford to consume, their consumption is by definition not excessive, they always have enough. The sign of luxury is filled and complete, hence not desirable. In contrast, the working classes are presented as uncontrolled signs for precisely the same consumption, but made problematic because they are not supposed to have the time or money to participate in luxury; they are supposed to be working; and their activity is dangerous because by definition their consumption is excessive. But in terms of tea-drinking, the way that this excess is represented shifts its tenor as the eighteenth century progresses. Campbell's poem of 1735 stresses the need for the labouring classes and servants to remain hard-working and sober, and contemporary presentations of excess are carnivalesque in their stress on momentary aberration and the resumption of the status quo. However later representations such as Garrick's *Bon-Ton* underline the effect that the stable markets necessary to capitalism have, in turning carnival into desirable commodity wherein excess can be managed (for example in the leisure gardens), and used to govern.³⁹

³⁹ This is an element that STEPHEN COPLEY, *Literature and the Social Order in eighteenth-century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), argues as an implicit factor in Hume's political economy (p. 16).

Within this analysis, the middle classes are increasingly expected to show the sign of luxury, but not to excess. They must desire consumption as an indication of status, but again by definition cannot do so to excess without literally losing their profit, which is precisely what retains a semblance of liberty within the systematic management of commodities by maintaining an illusion of freedom through the choice of buying consumer goods. Again and again the tea-drinking middle-classes are criticised for excess in case it brings ruin on their families. They are expected to repress the actuality of desire for leisure and sexuality, yet desire the representation of it. They are expected to subject themselves to the structures of representative power yet not engage in representation. For tea it will take another century before the middle classes take the cultural significance of the representation into their own hands.

What is even more interesting is the position of the middle-class woman within this economy of luxury and desire, of having and wanting. It is significant that in the aristocracy, both men and women drink tea together and neither is perceived as excessive, except in the 1747 *Three Cantos on Tea* which is otherwise remarkable for its difference from other contemporary texts. Just so, among the labouring classes, both men and women are perceived as excessive in their gender-specific consumption of either alcohol or tea. Middle-class women at the breakfast table are clear signs of a self-imposed management of potential excess, repressive desire conforming to the economic demands of their husband's worlds yet not recognised as doing so.

In contrast, those middle-class and artisan women who do not have to work and instead take tea together in the afternoons, they are the sign of "having enough" and can temporarily behave as if they were indeed aristocratic. Yet, since this is in effect a falsehood – not only because they are fully part of familial economy no matter how erased but also because their class position means that they do not have "enough" for limitless luxury – they are in actuality behaving excessively. Not only are they excessive but the semi-public/private space they occupy is outside the management of the political economy, and hence their excessiveness is frightening and beyond public control. Patterns of tea-drinking and responses to its cultural and social significance indicate the confluence of repressed desire and chaotic excessiveness that come to mark the representation of women in the years that follow, as well as some of the stresses that capitalism in the emerging English nation state, forces onto concepts of gender.

Tea on the Lawn: Between the Woods and the Drawing Room in the Nineteenth-Century

Until quite recently tea services have been a standard part of the English middle-class trousseau. The expression "who will be mother?" (i.e. who will pour the tea) is still common in many parts of England. Both material and linguistic customs are products of the gradual accretion of tea and tea-drinking around concepts/notions of womanhood, both domestic and sexual, through the years of the nineteenth century. Again the development and diversification of tea as a cultural signifier will depend largely upon whether or not it is taken with food: with food, tea is a stable guarantee of sobriety and sense; without food, it is without a nutritive role, free to acquire other associations.

It was during the second half of the eighteenth century, as we have seen, that tea became firmly associated by the middle-classes with womanhood and domesticity. The frequently quoted lines from William Cowper indicate a cluster of signifiers including sobriety, privacy, and a domestic barricading against the cruel outside elements:

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round;
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer, but do not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.

But the corollary of this "warmth" is household isolation, loneliness, and a stressful inward focus. By the opening decades of the nineteenth century the idea of the housewife with her own domestic world over which she is the "presiding genius of the table", crystallises around the image of the mistress serving tea (Fig. 8). This woman controls the chaos of the house, orders and regulates its private space. Indeed serving the tea becomes a rite of passage into the purity and morality necessary to a good wife: but a second look uncovers profound ambivalence and constraint particularly on her sexuality.

Social Background for tea-drinking to the 1840s. The image of the good wife needs to be set against the social background of a consistently enlarging middle-class, for which the leisured housewife is a sign of successful capitalist business. The man of household can be seen to be earning enough to release his wife from work, and since this work had to be

done by someone else, the nineteenth century sees a rapid expansion of the servant workforce. One difficulty with this pattern was that if you were aspiring to middle-class status you needed to find out how to behave, and it is striking that the number of books of instruction on etiquette, the treatment of servants and the management of substantial households, increases considerably during the period 1785 to 1840 and exponentially from then until 1914. Broadly speaking, the most important changes that occur in these books as the century progresses, are those resulting from a change in audience. Books published in the early decades address the housewife as if she were still doing some work within the house, particularly in the field of storing, provisioning, conserving and preserving; the central decades of the century shift the emphasis onto servants and being able as the mistress of a house to tell the servants what to do for you; yet books from the last two decades of the century, with a wider readership following the Education Acts and a more robust assault on middle-class status from the working class, once again address the housewife directly, this time assuming that she does most of the household work herself.

Eliza Rundell's *New System of Domestic Cookery*, which was to dominate the early years of cookery publishing in nineteenth-century England, declares that "the direction of a table is no inconsiderable branch of a lady's concern, as it involves judgment in expenditure; respectability of appearance; and the comfort of her husband and those who partake their hospitality".⁴⁰ Yet Sam and Sarah Adams writing *The complete servant* scarcely 20 years later claim the table as the domain of a good servant, which evinces their "judgment and taste". Thomas Cosnett in *The Footman's Directory* (1823) makes it quite clear that the servant has a large part to play in the making and serving of tea, and *The servant's guide* (1835) explicitly says that tea-making belongs to the housekeeper, the primary domestic servant.⁴¹ From the 1830s onwards more and more household books, in contrast to eighteenth-century household books, which scarcely mention the preparation of tea, include detailed advice on purchase, storing and serving, of this increasingly popular drink.

⁴⁰ ELIZA RUNDELL, *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (London, 1797), p. v.

⁴¹ SAM and SARAH ADAMS, *The complete servant; being a practical guide to the peculiar duties and business of all descriptions of servants, from the housekeeper to the servant of all-work to the foot-boy; with useful receipts and tables* (London: Knight and Lacey, 1825); THOMAS COSNETT, *The Footman's Directory and butler's remembrancer; or, the advice of Onesimus to his own friends* (London: for the Author, 1823); *The Servant's Guide and family manual: with new and improved receipts, arranged and adapted to the duties of all classes of servants: housekeeper, cook, lady's maid, nurse, housemaid, laundrymaid, dairymaid, butler, valet, coachman, groom, footman, and gardener* (London: John Limbird, 1835).

References to tea in early nineteenth-century household books focus upon the types of tea available and the care with which it must be purchased. Until the 1840s, most of the tea entering England, whether black or green, came from China. Indeed it was not until tea was discovered in Assam, India, in 1823 that it became generally known in the West that it grew anywhere else. Even after the discovery it took 16 years for imports from India to be approved, because the adulteration of tea had become so widespread. Coffee and chocolate, when sold as beans, were far less easy to fake than the often crushed or rolled leaves of tea. Furthermore, when dry goods shops proliferated in the early nineteenth century, patented blocks of coffee and chocolate were swiftly introduced, while tea was still sold in leaf form and frequently unsatisfactory. Louise Johnson's *Practical Family Cookery* (1839) states that tea is "rarely to be procured good" and is being largely superseded by cocoa and chocolate. Johnson also suggests that hawthorn leaves be substituted for tea, a tradition that Lydia Child tells us in *The Frugal Housewife* (1832) acquired patent status in 1831, and is referred to in many other books (e.g. *New Family Receipt Book* of 1811).

Adulterated tea was clearly a very serious problem and resulted according to Mary Eaton's *The Cook and Housekeeper's Universal Dictionary* (1827) from the high taxes placed upon it. There are references to the nausea and indigestion caused by bad tea in, for example, *Domestic Management or Healthful Cookery* (1812), but many adulterations ended in death. The curtain-raiser play "Imitation Tea" (1818) centres its plot around a man who has sold poisonous tea, and is blackmailed into allowing his daughter to marry "William", when William and friend threaten to expose his practices to a vengeful mob which suspects him of murder. The audience is even given the recipe for the fraudulent tea: "sloe leaves, hedge leaves, Dutchpink, logwood, and verdigrise". Along the way, William and partner extort money and confessions from other characters by supposedly serving them this drink, then telling them it is poisonous, and only retracting the information after they have got what they wanted.

Directly pertinent to the social image of tea is the direction from Frederick Accum in *A Treatise on the Adulteration of Foods* (1820), which book incidentally provides precise instructions on how to adulterate tea in the name of identifying that adulteration, that the woman of the house is responsible for ensuring that the tea is free from adulteration. He states "Our ladies are our tea-makers; let them study the leaf as well as the liquor; let them become familiar with both vegetables, with their forms, colours, flavours, and scents; let us drink our tea upon the responsibility of our

wives, daughters, and sisters, and not upon that of our grocers".⁴² Accum gives explicit directions about allowing tea leaves to expand in water and then examining them against carefully sketched illustrations, but the difficulty of guaranteeing pure tea must have seriously detracted from its use during this period.

If the responsibility for ensuring the purity of tea fell upon the housewife, so did the choice of the kind of tea and its quality. An indication of the growing need to educate the aspiring middle-class woman in the practice of tea-drinking is found in the repeated descriptions in household books up until the 1840s of the kinds of green and black tea available, how they were cultivated and for what purposes they were appropriate. There was a general belief that Souchong tea was health-giving. A much published work, *The Invalid's Oracle* (1828) by William Kitchiner carefully prescribes Souchong tea made with a small amount of water and filled up with boiling milk and sugar, as a remedy for invalids at teatime. Other books which shared the concern with adulteration and with substitutes, also discuss the different kinds of tea with a view to making them "go further". Hyson tea was the cheapest during these early decades and receives much attention. Lydia Child suggests cutting it into the costly souchong on the basis that it is more "pleasant, and is more healthy than green tea alone".⁴³

Possibly for reasons allied to the imminent introduction of large quantities of tea from India, but also connected with the growing insistence on formal training for domestic servants, and pretensions to a "science" of housewifery, books for the middle-class housewife that detail the varieties of Chinese tea become numerous during the 1840s. Dr. Lankester's *Vegetable Substances* describes with some precision, albeit inaccurately, the methods for gathering tea: hyson, singlo and gunpowder and the varieties available: souchong, pekoe and kong-fu (in fact the former group are green teas, and the latter black).⁴⁴ G. Sigmond's *Tea; Its Effects, Medicinal and Moral* (1839) elaborates on the subtle differences between hyson, gunpowder, singlo and twankey. Instructions on the kinds of tea that there are, and what is appropriate to purchase, continue through the household books of the second half of the century. Yet the emphasis in these later works is twofold: first there is a stress on a quasi-scientific, informational knowledge that included comments on geography, agriculture, botanical

⁴² FREDERICK ACCUM, *A Treatise on the Adulteration of Foods* (London, 1820), p. 233.

⁴³ LYDIA CHILD, *The Frugal Housewife* (London, 1832).

⁴⁴ DR LANKESTER, *Vegetable Substances* (London, 1840), p. 379.

detail and so on. Examples of these later books include William Tegetmeier's *Information on Common Objects* (1858); , John Timbs *Hints for the Table* (1859); Isabella Beeton's *Household Management* (1859-60); J. Walsh's *The British Housekeeper's Book* (1860). But the educational comments on tea in these books also begin to make the drink exotic again – not merely imported but also strangely foreign, to some extent carrying the weight of mysterious practices. This growing instability in the significance of the drink is repeated in other discussions about its use during this period.

Sigmond's treatise is interesting for its direct alliance of tea-drinking with women's social lives and with the temperance movement. Tea and sobriety had been linked together in an ambivalent manner from the seventeenth century, ambivalent at least partly because adding alcohol to tea seems to have become a widespread practice evidenced in for example Dickens's Sairey Gamp, who was widely held to have gin, not tea, in her teapot. Dickens himself, in his defining article on tea for *Household Words* cited above, refers to the sobering effects that tea was thought to have in the seventeenth century on those who went on to drink alcohol: drinking tea before alcohol was supposed to keep you sober. However, tea was expensive, hence sobriety was costly. Yet the ambivalence indicated other substantial social unease because tea-drinking women as opposed to alcohol-drinking men had been increasingly represented in the eighteenth century as chatting, prattling husband-haters. When the temperance movement took on tea-drinking as a positive alternative to alcohol, the drink had to be divested of these negative connotations. This was partly done in terms of opposing the cheaper, "ordinary", Indian tea to the more expensive Chinese; but it was also done as we shall see by allying the drink with a meal including food.

Social Background to tea-drinking from the 1840s. The price of tea did not come down substantially until the 1850s-60s, yet from the 1830s apparently for the first time in household books, it is possible to find instructions for *making* tea. Prior to this time there are few if any recipes, presumably because the audience for the books would have been firmly middle-class housewives who employed housekeepers or servants to make the tea, and therefore did not have to know how to do it themselves. Yet as more families aspiring to middle-class status but not necessarily employing servants began to want to drink tea, recipes had to be included for its preparation. One of the earliest is Esther Copley's *The Housekeeper's Guide* (1834). Copley discusses the pros and cons of hard or soft water, of the necessity of removing limescale from the kettle – something commonly

done from the early years of the century by placing an oyster-shell in the kettle;⁴⁵ of having freshly boiled new water, not reboiled; of a clean dry teapot, recently heated with half a pot of boiling water. There was a healthy debate about the benefits of round as opposed to oval teapots, or china as opposed to metal; about the need to pour off most of the full pot for drinking within four to five minutes but to keep some water on the tea-leaves at all times; and about whether or not to put milk in the cup before or after the tea. Slightly later, and only in his book for lower middle-class women *The Cook's Guide* (1861), Charles Francatelli in common with increasing numbers of cookery writers carefully describes the way to make tea in quite similar terms.

Copley's instructions note that the mistress of the house must make the tea because servants cannot on the whole do it well. This could be an indication that servants in middle-class households in the 1830s were still not drinking tea. Certainly by the time of Isabella Beeton (1859) or Mary Jewry in *Warne's Model Cookery* (1871), this position has changed, and it is specifically the job of the maid-of-all-work to make the tea. In the meantime, from the 1830s to the 1860s, tea has become purer, cheaper, and through the development of retail shops, more accessible. But what the recipes also underline is the need for a kettle, some kind of tea-service, and a source of heat. The standard of living of the newly urban industrialised working class in the early years of the century would probably have made freshly boiled water a commodity that was not necessarily easy to obtain: no running water and no constant source of heat. Presumably it was only with the rise in the standard of living in the 1840s and 50s, and the massive introduction of coal and then gas-heated cooking ranges that this became possible. It does seem to be the case that by the 1860s the lower middle-class and artisan housewife became like the bourgeois wife: firmly in control of the teapot.

The archetype of this domestic role is drawn by Alexis Soyer in the form of his recently-deceased wife, whom he idolised, in his book *The Modern Housewife* (1847). Significantly he places her skill in serving tea squarely at the breakfast table, along with breakfast food. This anchoring of the respectable face of domestic tea-drinking with breakfast and with food, becomes the pattern for the stable construction of the middle-class woman as good housewife.

⁴⁵ The tip is already to be found in *The New Family Receipt Book* (1810), and repeated through the century – for example in H. SOUTHGATE, *Things a Lady would like to know* (1881).

Tea With Food. Any analysis of the significant connections between tea-drinking and food needs to look at meals and mealtimes during the Victorian period. Both areas are intimately woven into the construction of the middle-class housewife. The early decades of the century, roughly 1810-1840, see a radical change in the work patterns of the middle classes, and with these a shift in patterns of eating. As men began to travel further to work, to the point when they ceased to come home for lunch, the working day lengthened considerably. A ten to twelve-hour a day job may mean 12 to 14 hours outside the house. The wife meanwhile is left on her own with a domestic life that is increasingly isolated. By the 1840s middle-class women had few occasions to go out: a servant did the shopping and advertising papers permitted the woman to choose items from home rather than in a shop; the theatre and the amusement parks were out of bounds as inappropriately risqué, brutal or working class; eating or drinking in clubs or pubs was not for women, and until the latter part of the century there were few if any "restaurants" or hotel eating-rooms for women, and few tea- or coffee-shops, the first being opened by the Aerated Bread Company in 1864, at London Bridge.⁴⁶

Within the home the mistress of the house was surrounded by people, few of whom she could speak to in conversational terms. Many books about servants from this period and up to the 1860s at the least, instruct the mistress on how to build authority: how to give orders, how to ensure standards, how to behave as a moral and social arbiter over the lives of her workers. Beeton's metaphor of the "sergeant" of the house comes with extended militaristic description that aptly illustrates the role that was to be emulated. In a household with many servants there must also have been delicately evaded recognition of the doubling enacted by the mistress and the housekeeper: the one supposedly knowing how and the other actually carrying out. Of course, there may well be children; but children were often looked after by someone else; children were seen for a specified time in every day and then removed – or indeed were sent away to board. The job description "companion" had to be invented so that these women could have someone to whom to speak. The new pattern of work left the housewife alone from breakfast until her husband's dinner, and tea was most prominently associated with both of those meals. Partly for nourishment, but mainly to cope with the isolation outside and within the home, the Victorian middle-class women turned to luncheon, teatime, supper and picnic: they invented a sociable snack culture.

⁴⁶ EMERSON, *British Teapots*, cit., p. 7.

"Tea" as an event, rather than a drink, could come with or without food. Tea at breakfast, which was the primary site of its association with the middle-class housewife, became the preeminent ceremony. Breakfast was the one time of day that a woman would be reasonably sure of seeing her husband and children. It was often the only meal they all ate together. In *Warne's Model Cookery* (1871), Mary Jewry summarises most of the elements that are mentioned in a plethora of other books. She begins with a late nineteenth-century version of Rundell, this time focused on breakfast: "A lady's taste and nicety are very perceptible at the breakfast-table"; there should be a clean table-cloth – Soyer's wife fined people half a penny for spilling on the cloth – fresh flowers, polished silver, and well-made tea, coffee and chocolate. Tea cups are to the left and coffee to the right. Jewry notes

A soiled table-cloth, tough cold toast, weak tea, bitter coffee, etc, are enough to derange both the temper and digestion of those who have to submit to such domestic inflictions. Let our homes ever be bright, sunny, and charming; and that such may be the case open the day with a cheery and well-arranged breakfast-table.⁴⁷

Following the description of the table itself, Jewry moves on to describe the making of tea, the kind of teapot, the order of milk, sugar and tea in the pot, in terms nearly identical to Copley's of 1834.

Yet outside breakfast, tea with food became a moving meal-time. As the Mad Hatter says in *Alice in Wonderland*, he's never quite sure when it will occur; and no-one at his tea-party knows whether there is anything to eat (Fig. 9). Early in the century the middle-class dinner was usually at 1.00 pm; with changing work it shifted to 5.00 pm [Kitchiner 1828] and then by the 1840s and 50s to 7.00 or 8.00 pm. Tea-drinking usually followed dinner and was often accompanied by toast. Both Beeton and Jewry allocate the preparation of tea and toast to the maid of all work, who should prepare them after doing the dinner dishes and changing into a clean uniform. Sarah Hale, in *The New Household Receipt-Book* (1854), describes the process in elaborate detail and tells us that it is the woman servant's main "duty".⁴⁸ This event first moved with dinner from 3.00pm to 7.00pm.

⁴⁷ MARY JEWRY, *Warne's Model Cookery and Housekeeping book* (London: Warne & Co., 1871), p. 65.

⁴⁸ SARAH HALE, *The New Household Receipt-Book: containing maxims, directions, and specifics, for promoting health, comfort, and improvement in the household* (London and Edinburgh, T. Nelson and Sons, 1854), pp. 414-15.

But when dinner came later and later in the evening, tea-drinking with bread and butter started to move to mid-afternoon. Fanny Kemble records taking tea in this way as a novelty in 1842.⁴⁹ Rather than being used as a purgative and restorative following a heavy meal, it became something taken on as part of snack culture. The impact on housebound women of a mid-evening dinner was the gradual deployment of a large number of small meals, or snacks, that could occur throughout the day and could provide a reason for a social event. The "luncheon" was perceived specifically as a lady's meal by the 1870s; visitor's tea-times were social events heralded by the dropping of cards in one's friends' houses in the morning time; and suppers became the woman's evening snack, during the time or shortly after the husband ate dinner.⁵⁰ The impact on children is most clearly seen in the invention of the "high" tea: teatime focused on the substantial consumption of food. But for the middle-class housewife, lunch and tea became the main remedies against isolation.

In common with tea at breakfast, tea with food was associated with the wholesome qualities exemplified in children's "high-tea". There were sporting teas: teas with tennis, with rowing, with cricket; or picnic teas in the outdoors, or on a walk. These tea-drinking occasions were mixed gender events where men and women could meet to engage in physical, healthy, but definitely not sexual activity. Women-only teas became common from the 1850s, and were frequently accompanied by cakes: the retail sale of baking powder which took off during this period radically cut down the cost of cakes and made them easier to bake successfully. Robert Philp, the author of the incredibly popular *Enquire Within*, describes his wife's "little tea-parties" with cakes in a tone of sentimental approval for their illustration of the quaint way that women gather together in groups to chatter.⁵¹ Upper middle-class teas were usually accompanied by bread and butter rather than cake, possibly because the mid-day dinner continued for the more wealthy until well into the twentieth century, and so tea retained its association with toast and bread, cake being inappropriate after a large meal. But also, upper class teas became snacks to keep you going until a large dinner, and again filling up on cakes would be just as inappropriate before a large meal.

⁴⁹ Cited in EMMERSON, *British Teapots*, cit., p. 26.

⁵⁰ See LYNETTE HUNTER, "Proliferating Publications: Meals and Books in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 51-70 of *The Nineteenth Century Mealtime*, ed. C. A. Wilson (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), p. 66.

⁵¹ ROBERT PHILP, *Enquire Within Upon Everything* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1862); there were a number of editions, beginning in 1856.

Tea-drinking with food was allied with a concern for health, diet and sobriety. Hence an associated anxiety in middle-class commentators about tea-drinking by the working-classes, which emerges particularly clearly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Earlier books providing instruction to the mistress of the house are quite clear about the dangers of servants drinking tea, and usually prescribe the drinking of small-beer instead. Beeton suggests the addition of a beaten egg to every breakfast-cupful of tea or coffee to improve their nourishing effect. Once the education acts put in place a domestic training for all girls, the audience for household and cookery books expands and the tone of the comments on tea-drinking changes. E. Ruddock's *Essentials of Diet* (1879) insists on the use of bread and butter rather than meat with tea, saying that it often causes indigestion. The Rev. J. Faunthorpe's *Standard Reading Books for Girls* (1881) advises against drinking more than two cups a day in case tea induces nervousness.

More the point, the quasi-scientific approach of Catherine Buckton's *Health in the House* (1876) offers a breakdown of the active ingredients and an analysis of the effects of theine, caseine and tannic acid, as well as a practical discussion of the dangers of tea-drinking without food. A "poor woman", who is "faint from want of food" may receive temporary relief from a cup of tea. But in effect it offers her no nourishment, and encourages her body to perspire and lose heat. The fashionable lady who eats lunch and dinner may benefit from such effects but "the mothers and daughters of the working-classes in England injure themselves very much by taking too much tea":

No persons except doctors work harder than the industrious wives of working men, and they are your mothers. They not only work all day, but they are often obliged to work all night if they have a sick child. No women require more nourishing food. They ought to take very little tea, unless they can have the best food.⁵²

Yet three years later, Buckton's textbook for working-class girls in school, *Food and Home Cookery* (1879), is meticulous in its description of how to look after and clean the service and the equipment necessary for tea-drinking. Despite the worry over the lack of nutrition in tea, it is clear that working-class women did drink it, and did value it for a variety of different and not necessarily obvious reasons. It had social status, it located and defined a communal event, it signified in its very lack of nutrition a luxury

⁵² CATHERINE BUCKTON, *Health in the House* (London: Longman & Co., 1879), pp. 142-43.

and a leisured item. The main concern of tea-drinking for Phyllis Browne in *The Girl's Own Cookery Book* (1882) which came out alongside that popular periodical, was to redefine for the working and artisan class young woman her role as "the presiding genius of the tea-table" when she became a wife, and to enable it by offering hints on how to make the tea "go further".⁵³

Tea Without Food. If these comments begin to fill in a sketch of tea, domesticity and food, tea taken without food moves the significant images firmly out of the household and into the excessive. One of the more fascinating sites for the development of these images is in books for children. There are dozens of works with titles such as *Tea-time Tales*, *A Tale of Tea*, *Sabbath School tea-parties*, *The Frog's Tea-Party* or *The Animated Tea-Service* by P. André (1897). This last is a lavishly illustrated children's book which talks the listener through a story in which the characters are animated parts of a standard tea-service. Together they act out a tale of shepherdess milk jugs and tea-pot emperors, bringing together in "tea", in a manner lost since the eighteenth century, the pastoral and the exotic. A similar conjunction occurs in William Murby's children's play *Queen Hoveyou's Five o'clock Tea* (1888), in which the pastoral is transferred into the "fairy", and the exotic is realised this time in the tea-leaf itself. What is interesting in these works is the consistent portrayal of tea and tea-equipment as Chinese, at a time when most of the tea being imported is Indian – presumably because India was a "known" and China still largely a strange and unknown oriental image.

A concurrent fashion for using tea as a site for the far-Asian oriental unknown is found in the numerous adult plays written for the stage with titles such as *The Geisha* (1897). What these works make explicit is the association of tea-drinking not only with the exotic and foreign but also with sexuality. The racist discourse, arbitrarily interchanging Japanese and Chinese, is in terms of the sexual freedom of Asian women, but also of the incredulity shown by the writer toward these women who think they might form a domestic life with an English man. In *The Geisha* the Englishman is rescued by an English girl; in later plays such as *The Souchong Girl* (1916) the racism is more explicit and brutal, moving from incredulity to disgust.

Many other plays like *Take Tea in the Arbor* (1840), *A Mistress and her Servant* (1870), *A Storm in a Tea-Cup* (1854), *A Cup of Tea* (1867) or *Five o'clock Tea* (1889), foreground the social importance of taking tea at a

⁵³ PHYLLIS BROWN, *The Girl's Own Cookery Book* (London: "Girl's Own Paper" Office, 1882).

friend's house. Increasingly these plays underline the possibility for sexual play. *Five o'clock Tea* is a play about flirtation and courtship: a young woman has dropped visiting cards on a number of people informing them that she is giving tea that afternoon. The first to arrive is a young man who is interested in her, and surprised to be the first. Whether his surprise is ingenuous or she possibly invited him a little earlier on purpose, they have time for an opening scene in which they move from discussing the details of whether 6 people or 40 are to be expected, to more personal comments. The play offers a comedy of manners, in a sub-Wildean attempt at light social satire. What is particularly of note are the illustrations which portray the young woman giving the tea seated at a tea-table placed slightly behind a large curtain. All the visitors are seated and standing with their cups of tea, on the other side of the partially pulled-back curtain. One illustration clearly shows that part of the function of the curtained tea-bower is to provide a semi-private space in this domestic yet public social event, as the young man is able to carry on a conversation with this woman in semi-intimate surroundings and only notional chaperonage. (Fig. 10)

In *Manners of Modern Society* (1875) E. Cheadle explicitly defines the role of this tea-drinking without food, against tea-drinking with food. The latter, taken mid-afternoon, are "high teas" that are a suitable and cheap way to entertain a lot of people, particularly in the country. The former are "sociable teas" that involve a specific etiquette of conducting an At Home in town. Otherwise known as "Kettledrums", sociable teas are described by Cheadle as needing as little food as possible and preferably without servants: "People do not assemble at these five o'clock teas to eat and drink, but merely to see and talk to each other, and take a cup of tea the while as a refreshment [...] as 'little teas' are thoroughly social gatherings, servants should be excluded if possible".⁵⁴ The Kettledrum tea seems to be the pervading literal image of the Lion and the Unicorn in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, as they fight over how much cake to eat and after white bread and brown are drummed out of town: an image carrying with it all the connotations of social judgement by arbitrary gossip. Similar to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century "banquet" also serving only the extraneous leisure foods of sugar and wine in buildings far from the main houses,⁵⁵ or the eighteenth-century leisure gardens which offered tea in

⁵⁴ E. CHEADLE, *Manners of Modern Society* (London, Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1875), p. 158.

⁵⁵ See L. HUNTER, "Sweet Secrets", in *Banqueting Stuffe*, ed. C. A. Wilson (Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 36-59.

curtained cubicles, the nineteenth-century sociable tea was a licensed place for middle-class sexual play: a semi-private public place.

The fashion that emerged for the hostess was the "tea-gown". These first appear in the 1860s, and are modelled on the Japanese kimono. During the 1860s Japan was moving out of its feudal period through a series of civil wars, and many of the periodicals of the time represent the exotic Orient in terms of the modes of life just becoming open to Western eyes. A classic study of the Japanese tea ceremony can be found in E.S. Morse's *Japanese Homes* (1886), and there is an increasing obsession with Japanese culture that culminates in the first decade of the twentieth century. The cultural instability of tea-drinking, especially without food, seems to have elided into the exotic 'Oriental' partly via this interest in Japan, and the tea-gown reproduces the sexual fullness of the image: Steel and Gardiner's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1888) advises that two tea-gowns, one warm and one cool, are necessary to travel. It goes on to note:

There is, perhaps, nothing more mysterious in nature than the harsh line of decency and indecency which most ladies draw between a tea-gown and a dressing-gown. Attired in one they will face a crowd with complacency; in the other, they will fly from a steward. Yet we suspect that, to the ordinary male comprehension, there is no tangible difference between the two.⁵⁶

Indeed the tea-gown was the only article of clothing a middle-class woman was allowed to wear in public, even in the semi-private public space of her house, that did not contain boned supports and restraints. Photographs of tea-gowns from the turn of the century illustrate the physical excitement and sexual invitation of such clothes (Fig. 11).

Innocence, Sexuality and Domestic Bliss: Between the Garden and the Drawing Room

While breakfast and to a lesser extent dinner were firmly tied to the concept of domestic purity and stability, the signifying activity of afternoon tea fluctuated between healthy and sober tea with food, through the children's high tea and stories of fairy, and finally to tea on its own in an exotic culture of sexual freeplay. To conclude this study, I would like to ask how the girl child moves from the high tea to the sociable, and whether the sociable compromises the domestic. *Alice in Wonderland* is a book about

coming to terms with food, as nourishment, poison, diet, drug, and as metaphor for becoming part of society. The tenth chapter, just before the central courtroom drama about who stole the tarts, contains the "Lobster Quadrille" which is a discussion of the ways each animal would cook itself, "set" itself for public consumption. The final chapter alone contains no dominant food metaphors as Alice rejects the dangerous indeterminacy surrounding food and drink.

But this is to take food and drink too privately. *Alice through the Looking-Glass* is also obsessed with food metaphors, yet the point of its narrative is to discover the rules by which other people consume and control it. Alice begins where she left off: saying that she would like a punishment that involved *not* eating her dinners. As she moves across the structured wilderness of the chess-board her education is focused on learning about the control of food, by learning about control over the words we use for it. From the snapdragonfly pudding, to the Humpty Dumpty wordplay, to the White Knight's song about butterflies and mutton pies, bread and trifle, and to "Alice's dinner" where she wonders whether bread is made with flowers or flours, Alice acquires understanding, achieves the status of Queen and womanhood, by learning social control over the words for food and drink. She ends by wanting to eat, yet is thoroughly frustrated by the social etiquette of dinner-table and so pulls apart the laid table.

To become the mistress of a table is, as we have seen, to become the heart of the home, the woman, wife and mother controlling the instability/ambivalence of the Victorian world through control over nutrition. But if the domestic wife and mother combined the elements of purity and adulthood in the tea service of breakfast and dinner, the 'pure' and 'natural' elements of tea-drinking in the afternoon tea were associated most strongly with children, the potential unsettling action of the image being repressed into fairy story. At the same time, the afternoon tea without food was definitely adult and definitely sexual. The girls in between childhood and womanhood make a curious transition via the country and sporting teas, over the lawn to the drawing room. Their tea-coats are more severe than those for women, their tea-frocks less suggestive (Fig. 12). Like Alice, they are interminably caught in a garden or a structured wilderness, until they, like Cecily and Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, find a sexual partner and move from tea on the lawn into drawing room, to domestic bliss. Yet this domestic bliss is profoundly severed and cut through by the need simultaneously to retain the purity and naturalness of a child and to make possible the sexuality of the exotic other. The cultural significance of tea-drinking encompasses

⁵⁶ F. A. STEEL and G. GARDINER, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (Edinburgh: Frank Murray, 1888), p. 226.

domestic order, childish innocence and mature sexuality. The rite of passage described/inscribed by serving the tea is one from an ambivalent state of sexual repression to an ambivalent state of sexual tension and confusion. But if tense confusion is what the domestic woman is left with, even more terrifying is the concept that to be truly pure and natural one must put away childish things and outgrow sexuality.

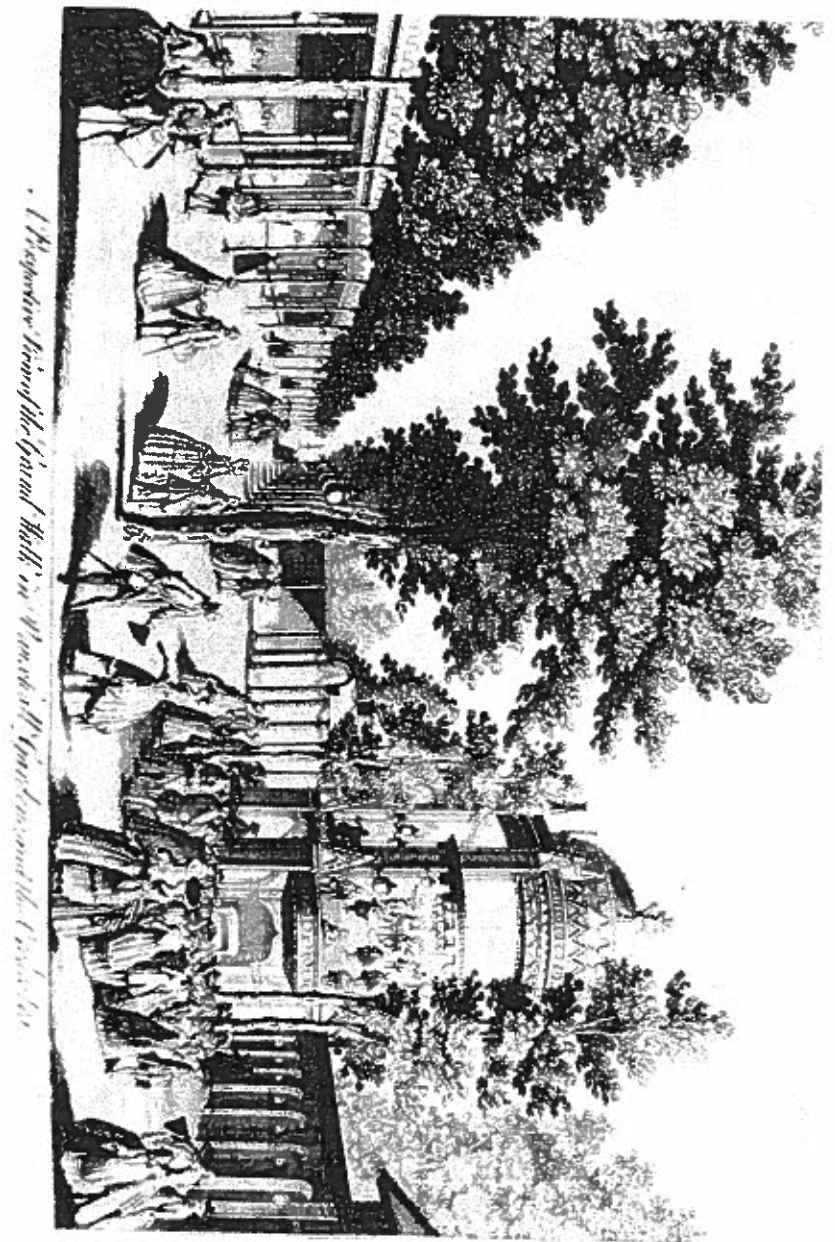


Fig. 1.
Vauxhall Gardens in the mid-18th century.

Fig. 2:
Bagnice Wells (1782).

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Fig. 3:
Eighteenth-century family tea.

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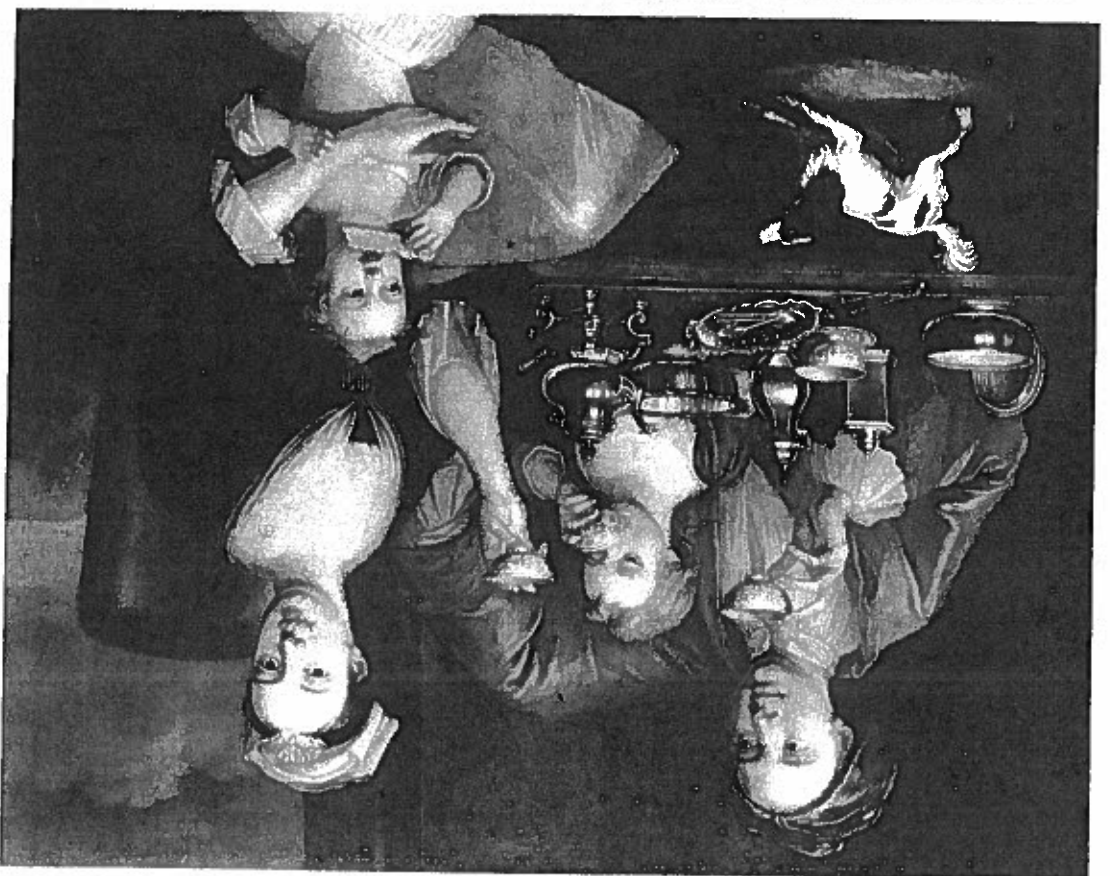




Fig. 4:
Mrs. Ardell: sensuality and etiquette

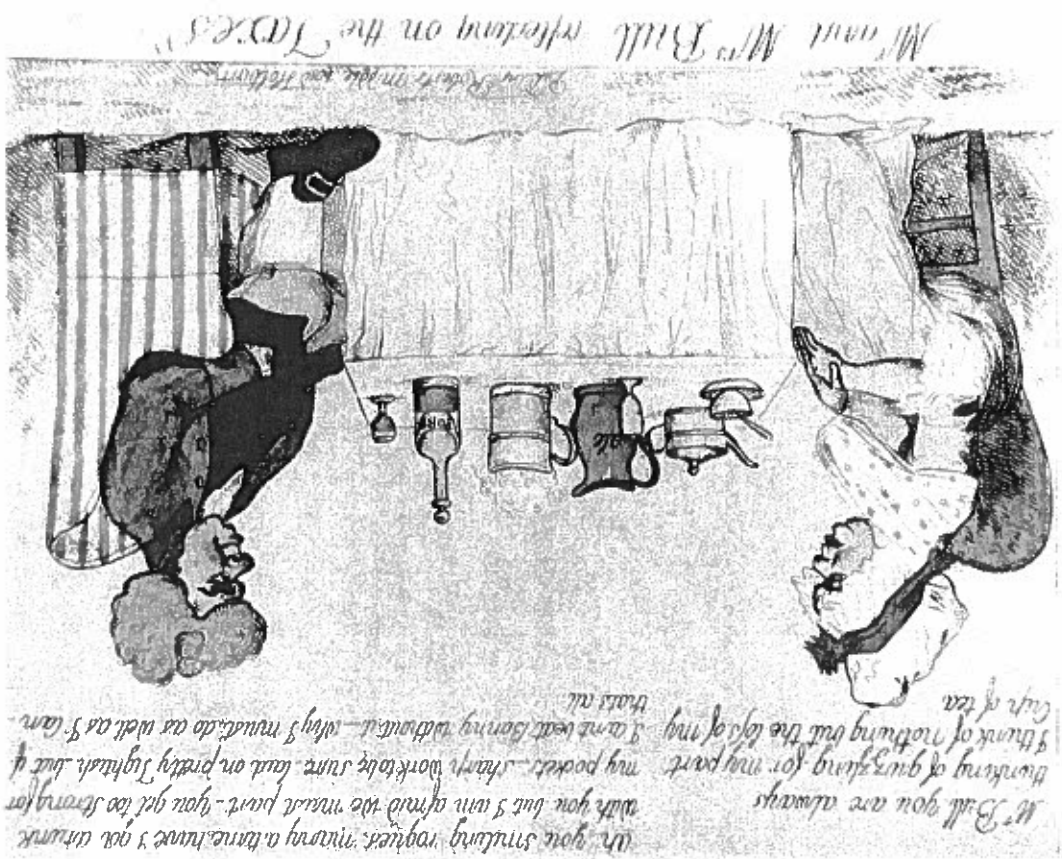


Fig. 5.
Mr and Mrs Bull: Tea and Alcohol.

Engraved for the Carlton House Magazine



A well known Tea-Table Altercation

Fig. 6.
A tea-time altercation.

p. 151



Fig. 7.
Disorderly tea-drinking.

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Fig. 8:
Tea and domesticity in the 19th-century.

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Fig. 9:
The Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

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Fig. 10:
"Will you answer my question, Amy" – Tea-time seduction.

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Fig. 11:
 Entertaining at home: a tea-gown, c. 1900.

p. 156



Fig. 12:
Edwardian tea on the lawn.