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ELIZABETH SHERIDAN'S POST CELEBRITY

Elizabeth Sheridan (*née* Linley) occupies a unique place in the pantheon of renowned women of the late eighteenth century. She is included in Richard Samuel's painting *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*, taking centre stage, but when the painting was completed she had not performed in public for several years.[1] As Elizabeth Linley she ranked with the greatest performers of the age, singing sublimely in concerts in Bath, Oxford, Worcester and London. During Lent in 1773 Frances Burney recorded that the 'whole Town' was 'distracted about her. Every other diversion is forsaken – Miss Linley engrosses all Eyes, Ears, Hearts', including Burney's own: 'for my Sins, Born of the male Race, I should certainly have added one more to Miss Linley's Train'.[2] Burney's enthusiastic commentary has appeared to confirm that Linley, then aged nineteen, was the embodiment of the celebrity culture that came to characterise Georgian society. Joseph Roach has argued that 'Miss Linley' attained the status of a secular saint, such was her power of her astonishing voice. Her great gift, however, the quality that made her voice truly transcendent, he explains, was her ability to *perform* intimacy, making each member of the audience feel that they had a unique connection with an undoubted star.[3] Her glittering career ended with her marriage to Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who forbade further public appearances, fearing they would injure his new-found status as a gentleman. But Mrs Sheridan, as she had become, did not vanish. She moved into the ebullient world of Whig high society there to attend parties and banquets amongst grandees like the Duchess of Devonshire, but also to work tirelessly for her husband, whose political career required all their efforts. Portrayed by the leading artists of her day, including Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sheridan remained a landmark against which other performers could be measured.[4] She was never invisible even if, at least as a professional performer, she seemed silent. Her paradoxical position, hugely visible yet stifled, made her, according to Roach, a 'supremely gifted but connubially circumscribed performer'.[5]

Roach's sympathetic conclusion draws on the great body of exciting work on celebrity culture in the Georgian England, including his own pioneering study.[6] Scholars of celebrity have paid close attention to modes of public performance and their contested relationship to the market, forms of gendered exploitation, and the performance of privacy. Felicity Nussbaum has revealed how leading actresses created their stage

personalities in ways that enabled their 'inner lives' to be transacted as a public spectacle. Building on this insight, Julia H. Fawcett has argued that the stars of the Georgian stage performed their 'interiority' lavishly, using the devices of disclosure as a means of achieving greater publicity, while cannily retaining their privacy.[7] Consequently privacy can no longer be understood as the antithesis of publicity. These arguments coincide with recent accounts of the commercialisation of British culture in the second half of the century. Gillian Russell has explained that an inherent theatricality of 'the Town' multiplied the forms of sociability available to women as well as men. What might occur in public, or in private, shifted and expanded with many activities suddenly domiciled, even as they were commercialised. Elite leisure increasingly took place in homes or other exclusive sites, allowing feted professionals to attend aristocratic soirées.[8] In such a society celebrities appear to stand colossus-like upon the shifting sands of an evolving culture. It is hard now to mistake the terrific power of theatrical celebrities such as Clive, Garrick, Siddons, and Jordan, who traded their privacies in order to trade up. But there is a need for caution about what this shift might have entailed, especially for women who lacked either the security of great estate (such as the Duchess of Devonshire) or the terrific popular appeal and professional security enjoyed by Siddons and Jordan. In an important intervention, Harriet Guest has stressed the 'convoluted burden of significances' which attach to any designation of publicity or privacy, and has indicated the subtle ways in which the divide between them might be permeable, a permeability which might be experienced as an opportunity as well as a restriction.[9] While Guest and Russell are careful in their articulation of public and private oppositions, some of the claims made for celebrities challenge but never fully escape the punitive public-private divide once thought axiomatic in eighteenth-century studies. The public can appear the only worthwhile areas, and privacy only brought there to be remade, as if it was never wanted, or could never prove useful.[10]

Elizabeth Sheridan does not fit these paradigms. The opposition between public and private cannot explain her later life, the roles she was expected to undertake, or those she choose for herself. Nor does the category of celebrity describe her life. We need something that can respond to her particular, yet instructive existence. As a member of the middle-classes, connected to social and political elites, her positon was never entirely secure. The world in which she moved was too mobile, and, for reasons of both class and gender, too precarious. Her status shifted, and did so repeatedly. Although the end of her professional career meant that she avoided public performance, Sheridan remained

visible, still a celebrity, in the intersected worlds of fashion, theatre, and elite Whiggism, itself a distinctly politicised version of the *beau monde*.[11] These circumstances are almost wholly different even from those charted by Nussbaum, Fawcett and others. Sheridan did not publish in her own defence, nor seek to explain or justify her life, save to those who knew her best. With this in mind, it is useful to compare Sheridan to a rather different figure, Elizabeth Gunning. Despite an impoverished Irish background, Gunning shot to fame in the early 1750s when she created a great bustle in the fashionable world. She was painted by Reynolds and married well: first to the Duke of Hamilton, then to the Duke of Argyll.[12] After her marriages, Gunning's celebrity was translated into power and authority: she was a double Duchess, after all. Her correspondence, studied by Elaine Chalus, reveals her to have been a hardworking and successful exponent of aristocratic privilege, as adept at the game of power and place, as if she had been born to it.[13] Sheridan is different: not least because her marriage was less wondrously endowed. Though Richard Brinsley Sheridan was not, in Lewis Namier's phrase, an 'inevitable party man'.[14] Nor was Elizabeth Sheridan an inevitable party wife. Gunning could draw upon ideas of the family, much like the Duchess of Devonshire, that were patriarchal and dynastic to justify her public interventions and private requests, Sheridan could not.[15] The scale of her family and the comparative weakness of her status inhibited these claims. When we think of celebrities we often compare them to aristocrats with whom they seem freely to associate, but stage performers were not secure in their status, and the effort required for its maintenance was often burdensome and open to criticism. While privacy might be packaged and commodified on stage and in print, it was quite another thing to expose it in less rhetorically assured or controlled environments. Private selfhood might often be something it was desirable to protect. This was a particular cause for Sheridan. In pursuit of her family interest, bound to the career of her husband, Sheridan's home became as porous and multifunctional as the grander houses at which she stayed. There she could be found making cockades and other electioneering clobber. There she participated in meetings, saw elections launched, and heard plans and policies decided upon. Events happened around her, but also because of her presence. It was not always a life of terrific prestige and its precarity was obvious, even alongside its opportunities.[16]

Sheridan's part-willing and much-obligated place within in what Leslie Mitchell terms the 'Whig World' is crucial to her instructively particular existence. Though it loomed large in the public imagination, the Whig world was insular and intimate. It rested upon shared values of liberty, property, parliamentary opposition to the Crown and,

perhaps most readily, a shared appetite for pleasure. Parties and gatherings at grand houses filled their time, alongside race meetings and private theatricals. London was the centre of their operations - the location for all forms political and pleasurable intrigue.[17] Marriage vows were lightly cast aside, lovers taken, and preposterous bets placed. It was all very assured, very suave, and rather cruel. Where the divide between public and private was drawn was by no means clear, nor was there much desire to do so. The Whigs were happiest when their political, familial, and sexual connections coincided with what amounted to a massive and marmoreal version of the private: the aristocratic mansion. Within the generous confines of the Whig home the private could be as inclusive or exclusive as they wished, which suited them fine. Politics, like pleasure, was casually domiciled, woven into a world of high fashion and intrigue.[18] The operations of the Whigs (by no means different, save in aim, from the Tories) constituted what Chalus terms the 'social politics' of the elite, a realm in which women had particular roles to play.[19] Sheridan provides a challenging perspective on the Whigs opulent and cossetted society. Her husband was a 'man of talent' recruited by the Whigs for his political acuity and deemed socially acceptable for his wit and his beautiful wife. But they were never really of their set, their place rested on the precarity of their merit: dubious grounds indeed. Nor was her involvement always terribly animating: weeks, months spent at Deepdene, Crewe Hall, and Delapré Abbey. Sheridan came to despise the 'Tiddlings and Fiddlings' of the Whigs and their affairs (of which there were many): Fox and Harriet Bouverie; Frances Crewe and her husband; and Lady Duncannon - also with her husband.[20] Yet she remained within Whig society, sharing its splendours though conscious of its fatigues, even confessing that she preferred an 'interesting Book close to the Fire…[to] all the Gaiety and Magnificence of Chatsworth'.[21] Seemingly denied these resources, Sheridan's self-possession, even her selfhood was threatened: often in poor health, she was subjected to many demands as political wife, mother, and once great star: 'indeed', her sister-in-law reflected, 'the life she leads would kill a horse'.[22]

Sister Christian: Re-creating Mehitabel Canning

Sheridan recorded these pressures in letters to her friend Mehitabel Canning (*née* Patrick).[23] Canning, whose given name means 'favoured of God', corresponded with Sheridan during a period from late 1784 until Sheridan's death in 1792. Sheridan would have had many correspondents, but Canning was the friend she loved 'best in the world', referring to her as 'Sister Christian' in part-teasing acknowledgement of her faith, but

also to positon her as a monitor.[24] These confiding letters reveal Sheridan's desire to shape her life and to present it to a friend whose judgement she revered, yet wished to manipulate. Clare Brant has written that the familiar letter 'gave writers the opportunity to imagine themselves in different personae and personae of difference'.[25] Sheridan's letters are particularly marked by this tendency, rehearsing several identities alongside an equally forceful re-creation of her addressee. Sheridan wrote to Canning as if her correspondent's concerns, and by implication her own were principally domestic. An early letter in the Bath collection, dated 'London – July 11th' is typical. It relates her son Tom's truancy and the efforts made to return the 'young Squire' to school, before asking after Canning's family and reporting on their mutual friends.[26] Although Canning was equally well-connected within Whig society, Sheridan emphasizes what she assumes to be Canning's greater religious and domestic orientation, a tendency to 'privatise' Canning, in the restrictive sense that grows after the death of her husband, Stratford Canning, in 1787.[27] The extent of Canning's devotion, as mother of five children, wife then widow, or as a Quaker, is less important than Sheridan's assumption of this difference between them. The tactic enabled Sheridan to mark a distance across which judgment might occur, while making clear their separation. Canning is even reminded not to press too close. When she inquires whether her friend – 'Mr H' - might have his tragedy performed, Sheridan is dismissive: 'you know S- never does or will interfere about Plays or Theatrical Matters you must know what endless scrapes he wd get into if he did with all his fine Friends'. The reiteration of 'you know' tells Canning that her enquiry is misplaced. Yet the letter is crammed with enticing and privileged information about Drury Lane, its personnel (Siddons and Jordan), their wages and expectations, as well as forthcoming plays by John Burgoyne and Joseph Richardson. Sheridan's revelation of the theatre's operations serves a further purpose symptomatic of her self-representation. She places the theatre's domestic life – its cycle of bookings, payments, and benefits - in open view, showing how they determine what occurs on the stage, and how they communicate beyond it: the private world determines the public. Her account of herself follows a similar course.[28]

Moments at which some version of the private gains contact with a form of the public recur throughout the archive. Though she often complains of her much-impinged upon existence, Sheridan is keen to display it. Merely to be domestic is never enough; her private life must be packed. She writes proudly, for instance, during the summer of 1785 about her husband's speech on what she terms the 'Irish Business'; adding that, 'I hear

nothing but his praises, wh. (between you and I) I have great Pleasure [in] "tho' he is my husband"'. She is referring to her husband's parliamentary speech on 25 July, but does not rest here, allowing events and ideas run together, creating forms of social and temporal enjambment. Alongside public news she relates a visit from her sister's children, news of the chicken pox that has afflicted her household, and how she is to 'go Saturday in a party…to fetch Tom from School'. The party will comprise leading Whig writers and politicians including her husband, Charles James Fox, Burgoyne, George Ellis, and Richard Fitzpatrick. Whether the trip is an instance of eccentric parenting, a political meeting, or simply a jolly is hard to determine. What is perhaps most important is Sheridan is the only woman. These men were most likely indifferent to a schoolboy starting his holidays, but his mother's presence gave their jaunt the excitement of heterosexual flirtation, a hint of glamour and intrigue. The letter consequently represents Sheridan as having appropriate domestic concerns yet still serving as the knowing mediator and active participant in her husband's career. Her life acquires purposes and significances that are, if not public as such, then not easily defined as private, if by private we mean removed from the public gaze, or left to one's own devices. With even the school run commandeered, her family life coincides with what might otherwise be the grandest form of public life: politics, though it hard to avoid the implication that, for those involved, public life is an extension of the private.[29] There is an element of showing off here, a mode of self-performance – an aspect of her post celebrity - without which her claims to privacy would mean little. Consequently the adventure bears witness to Sheridan's special existence. Amongst leading Whigs she is central, her solitary role the afterglow of her stardom and her evidently continuing beauty: she is private, but gazed upon. This disclosure recurs when she relates how Fox has suffered 'a *relapse* as he calls it of his Passion for me' but reassures her friend, that this merely means that he 'wd go some lengths to oblige me', and this means that she can recommend Canning's friend to the place that he seeks.[30]

By means of these gossipy revelations and accompanying elisions and denials, of which there are many among her correspondence, Sheridan's more homely correspondent could witness the excitement of friend's life, while registering its multi-directional pressures. While Sheridan frequently represents her domestic roles (among which her children are conspicuous), it is the contrasting diversity of her experience that makes the private desirable. Privacy is the ideal for which she expresses desire. It is not difficult to see why. The Sheridans' commitments, in London and Stafford, were Richard Brinsley

Sheridan was a borough member, as well as obligations to attend Whig gatherings, meant that the Sheridans were often on the move. They were often lacking in funds, as their responsibilities to organise, and most of all to be seen, were rarely reimbursed. For Sheridan the articulation of her private selfhood, and desire for self-location, became the means by which she claimed to be independent of the demands of the Whig world. Here she is, for example, complaining about the pressures placed upon her as an impecunious political wife, for whom attendance at race meetings are an important responsibility:

> If I was an independent free agent, and mistress of my own time and actions you w'd have just reason to complain of my breach of promise on receiving this letter instead of seeing me- but much as I wish'd it, and fully resolved as I was to leave Tunbridge in time to spend a few Days with you before [Stafford] races, it has been utterly out of my power to do it – [RB Sheridan] (who has liv'd much more in London than with Me) went from here last Week meaning to return next Day with Money to discharge all our Matters here…but [I] saw nothing of him till four o'clock this Morning when I was frightened out of my Sleep by his return – we are now in the hurry of packing as we have not a moment to lost – this is the 25th and the First Days race is the 27th – so you will see my Dear Women how totally impossible it is for me to visit you till I return.[31]

There is a double movement here: a plea for forgiveness and gentle remonstrance. Sheridan represents herself as swept along: whisked from Kent to Staffordshire, not that her journeying will end there. Canning is enjoined to 'write a Line to Crewe Hall [in Cheshire] to assure me of your forgiveness'. Yet Sheridan is demanding observance and acceptance of sincerity despite her lack of control: if she was 'an independent free agent', she claims, matters would be different. It is in response to this unwanted sense of hurtling that prompt Sheridan, on several occasions, to express a desire to live quietly, alternately specifying a site near London or at some distance from it, notably in Wales.[32]

Her assertion of private integrity serves as a mode of self-legitimation. Most of all privacy became a means of asserting identity, recuperating a sense of worth after the exposures of her celebrity. Her letters display her inner self, not as a unique identity, whose merit and value relied on it being withheld.[33] Sheridan's sense of this investments occurs most at moments of potential exposure. This is the paradox of her relationship with Canning: a private, often intimate correspondence is shrewdly commandeered as a way of mediating a life, that is seen to coalesce around a figure who, despite, proving extensive

evidence to the contrary, claims to be private and to seek further seclusion. While her rural projections rehearse a familiar patrician ideal, her wish for retreat equally makes visible her conflicted attitude to her peripatetic life. Denied a comforting sense of place, Sheridan deploys an imagined privacy as antithesis and self-justification: it is something both to long for and yet hopefully avoid. It is crucial for successful the operation of this self-presentation that her addressee is assumed to already inhabit the private in a more closely defined form. More than that, Canning is expected to grasp the sincerity of Sheridan's doubled gesture of desire and disavowal while seeing through it sufficiently to marvel at the prospect her friend's wider world. In Fawcett's terms, Sheridan's letters are 'overexpressive' in that they recuperate privacy via a spectacular display of information that frustrates communication as much as it facilitates it. But Sheridan differs from Fawcett's authors. She is not managing her reputation in a confessional autobiographical text or apology, published in her twilight years, but writing letters that seek more insistently the authority of the private, even to a degree of privation.[34] Sheridan's letters to Canning grant a shrewd perspective on an astonishing existence, a life in which the claims of social and political life were greatly felt, not least during the Regency crisis of 1788-89, when she played an important, if secretive role.

Sheridan is consequently most unlike the northern gentlewomen analysed by Amanda Vickery, who had clearly defined and legitimate access to local forms of public life, but is equally unlike the fully entitled elite women studies by Chalus, Naomi Tadmor, and Ingrid H. Teague.[35] Writing to Canning, Sheridan discloses a coherent yet troubled subjectivity, which though socially visible, claimed privacy. This sometimes anxious yet affirmative identity that I have been calling her post celebrity, specifying by that term not only her separation from public performance and consequently a career, but more importantly her extreme consciousness of the opportunities and dangers posed by both public and private worlds. Post celebrity is a state of mind, and a really one at that. Though she lead a life that fulfilled many definitions of publicity (including politics, theatre, and other modes of highly socialised endeavour), her letters deploy multiple and even competing versions of the private and do so in order to enable not to restrict action. For Sheridan the articulation of her privacy enabled a selfhood and, often enough, self-location removed from the demands of the political world and the market. This projected privacy served as a means of claiming privileges and, consequently, self-legitimation. Most of all privacy became a means of asserting identity, recuperating a sense of worth after the exposures of her celebrity. Within the logic of her epistolarity, Sheridan' desire

for self-sufficient seclusion, modulates and permits public involvement even self-display. Her post celebrity is less proleptic of Garbo's desire to be alone, than a version of Cincinnatus's wish to return to his vineyards after his military service. Her much-avowed willingness to leave society and fame behind indicating an equal wiliness to be asked back. Sheridan's letters are, moreover, the work not of Sheridan's voice, which is the focus of Roach's work, but of her hand: a labour she understood figuratively and literarily.

Bleeding Away: Affliction and Grief as Created Private Space

Throughout her correspondence, Sheridan aims to recreate, or at least present the private self that might guarantees the public actor. This ambition is best fulfilled by news of family, especially her cares as a mother, as well as vague desires to live in greater seclusion.[36] Information is superabundant, however, complicating the issue. Though this plenitude owes something to the disguised-in-public logic of Fawcett's canny autobiographers, and much to the narrative-baffling nature of anecdotes, her tactics as a letter writer confirm Guest's claim that domesticity 'gains in value as a result of its continuity with the social or the public, and not only as a result of its asocial exclusion'.[37] Sheridan makes her pitch for privacy most ardently in terms of her own physical legibility manifested in unflinching descriptions of her body. That body is frequently in a traumatic state, wracked by disease and assaulted by the medical profession. Elizabeth Cook has argued that familiar letters are best understood as an 'attempt to construct a phantasmagorical body that in some measure compensates of the writer's absence'.[38] Sheridan's letters share this aspiration, but offer little that is compensatory, but nor do they accept the idea advanced by Elaine Scarry that pain is uncommunicable. On the contrary she assumes that pain can be sufficiently witnessed even when not directly felt.[39] By the time she was writing to Canning, Sheridan was already suffering from the tubercular condition that would kill her. She makes explicit her plight several times, but requests that no mention is made of her condition, fearing that it will upset her husband, referring to him as 'the poor fellow'.[40] The appellation suggests his pre-emptive performance as a grief-stricken man of feeling, while serving to curtail all enquiry. To enforce this request for silence, Sheridan offers an image of her husband as tender, loyal, and considerate, despite his many derelictions (perhaps he was an expected reader of this correspondence).[41] By this method Canning can peer into a loving home, an image of domestic happiness, which she ought not to trouble. Yet within that scene there remains the hyper-privacy of her friend's disease, which will finally destroy that home. Sheridan's

attention to her illness, her willingness, to make her body a spectacle, intensifies its role in the articulation of her identity. Her afflicted body, made poignantly legible, becomes not merely the topic of her correspondence but the anchor of her private veracity.

Sheridan's presentation of her illness ensures that Canning is not simply her addressee but the repository for grief and grievance; sin and repentance. It is to Canning that Sheridan reveals her anxieties, and whom she wishes to show that she can endure any trial. This application to Canning is most apparent during the crisis year of 1787. Stratford Canning died that June; a month later Sheridan's sister, Mary Tickell, succumbed to tuberculosis. This grim summer became is the defining periods of their correspondence, drawing them closer together. Sheridan writes sympathetically: 'Dear Woman – I cannot comfort – I can only feel for you and love you'. Sensing her limits, Sheridan offers only to keep the 'sorrows of your Heart in the Bosom of friendship'.[42] As her sister's condition had worsened, Sheridan sought greater kindred with 'you, who are tutored in affliction'. Emotional proximity is tempered by apprehension of their difference:

> Poor Mary is forever talking of you and your dear Stratty – it is as much as ever I can do to hide the distress she gives me - indeed my dear Woman however I may have laugh'd in our giddy Hours as you call them, there is nobody has more true Religion at Heart than I have tho' I profess to think less seriously of forms and Ceremonies than some do – I know, and feel that it is the only Comfort in Affliction, and am Confident in my belief that we shall meet all those we love in a better World, this is a subject I cd talk of with Enthusiasm, but I dare not trust myself at this time.[43]

Canning is addressed simultaneously as confidant and monitor. The reference to 'our giddy Hours' stages of moment of self-rebuke predicated on her friend's anticipated disapproval. The phrasing is suggestive of a desire for reflection, condolence, and admonishment; a religion of beating hearts, but also confession. Christian suffering and due resignation are accepted, though with the prospect of post-mortem solace. Sheridan represents herself as withdrawn: subdued by calamity, yet improved by grief, almost to 'Enthusiasm'. This is a strikingly ambiguous word choice, indicative of self-awareness as she once again performs intimacy. Her wracked introspection is awkwardly externalised – offered up for witness and approval. It is impossible to tell how truly it was felt. Her avowals of pain and contrition are clear, almost daring, but also seem tactical, part of a conscious effort at self-presentation.

Sheridan's preference for disclosures at once comprehensive, evasive, and forbidding becomes more apparent in August 1787, when she again falls ill. Her letters initially deny that her cough is tubercular, though she promises Canning to reveal the truth about her condition; providing her husband is not informed.[44] These promises confirm a confederacy of grief and consolation that is wrapped in secrecy, a form of privacy which is both counter to her otherwise open correspondence. Sheridan was staying at Crewe Hall in Cheshire when she confided in Canning, and it was there that treatment resumed. She reports unflinchingly on its progress:

> Dr Hagarth…has promised me I shall soon be restor'd to Health if I will preserve in following his directions – in consequence of this I am at this Moment bleeding away from the bites of the five Leeches that have just dropp'd from my Breast. I am wrapt up in warm Poultices that I may employ myself as usual for I take it for granted the Bleeding will continue till Midnight as it did last time.[45]

There is a mixture in these phrases of pain, stoicism, and even a sort of boredom. Sheridan exhibits herself as a suffering and tormented figure, whose wounds, bathed by the leeches' anti-coagulant, will not close soon. She must stay wrapped up. Intimacy is created, as sympathy was for Adam Smith, through the spectator's ability to imagine and share the afflictions of others. There is no attempt to disguise her state; she is 'scarified by blisters'.[46] A canny authorising strategy comes into operation in which her explicitness guarantees the confessional nature of their correspondence, while ensuring that a valuable image of her plight is created. Sheridan details her scarred body and its treatment, offering it as the guarantee of her worthiness. Within her implicitly-offered moral economy Sheridan's physical afflictions balance her 'giddy hours'. More than that: suffering makes her an appropriate correspondent for a woman who has lost her husband and now lives in virtuous retirement. For much of 1787, Sheridan rested their correspondence on the shared experience of pain. Her writing simultaneously enabled and disabled by affliction. She writes in one letter sent that year: 'I dare not trust myself at this time to write more for my Hand and heart are both aching and I think it best for us both that I shd go to my bed'.[47] Alongside the evocation of 'bed' as an enclosing, private solace (much like the poultices) Sheridan's use of 'Hand' is striking. It is both mimetic and an instance of synecdoche. Canning is expected to appreciate her physical presence at only the slightest remove. She must imagine her friend's body; seeing it before her each time she reads her letters. Sheridan begins another letter complaining that: 'I have been prevented from

writing to you lately by losing the use of my right Hand. I was awkward enough to run a Needle under my Thumb Nail…which has given me a great deal of pain'. Needlework might be represented as the womanly antithesis to the presumptive act of writing during the eighteenth century, but here a domestic accident is deployed to focus attention on physicality of letter writing. Correspondence is made material and not just by the exchange of ink and paper: Canning must imagine her hand, feel her pain.[48]

A Great Hand: The Regency Crisis

Despite, accident, illness, and grief, Sheridan operated, as she was sometimes pleased to advertise, at a nodal point amongst the Foxites.[49] This was a positon of privilege, but equally of some risk, not least during the Regency crisis. Chalus has commented that the crisis marked the 'apogee' of social politics, for both Whigs and Tories. Women were particularly visible during the crisis, not only at public events, such as Celebratory evenings at White's and Brook's, but working behind the scenes. Their involvement was prominent, tolerated, and judged.[50] Sheridan's seemingly candid letters to Canning reveal the extent to which the Sheridans were clinging to the Prince of Wales's coat tails, hoping for significant rewards. Her closely-observed commentary reveals how much that crisis was one in which the personal was always political, creating opportunities for private advantage. This collision replicates the defining feature of the whole episode, which was after all, a moment of national emergency in which a private matter (the King's sanity) became the cause of much public concern. Once George III had appeared 'mad' in November 1788 the Whigs, led by Fox immediately sought to install the Prince in his father's place. Their public activities, not least in parliament were widely reported, becoming part of public discourse and debate. But to achieve their purpose, which was perhaps little short of regime change, the Foxites met in private homes, taking counsel in secret.[51] At this moment the conduct of politics inverted Jürgen Habermas's claim that the public discourse emerges from within private life. John Barrell has shown the political importance of several secretive spaces during the 1790s, often in the service of radical causes. During the Regency Crisis, however, the Whigs strove to privatise the concerns of the state, taking it into their homes and negotiating it in private, such that the political realm existed as subterfuge, scheme, and ruse enjoyed by a small elite group.[52]

Sheridan was intimately involved in these events, some of which took place in her home.[53] Her letters do not simply record her proximity to events and great persons, but reveal her implication in them, a commitment that merges the privatised political crisis to

other forms of privacy, principally the obligations of family life and the consolations of widowhood. The move occurs in a letter written in early January 1789 (when the crisis was at its height), when Sheridan was living in London while Canning was at Wanstead. The letter begins with complaints about the 'terrible Weather' and an onerous 'Musical Task' undertaken for her father, Thomas Linley. She then asks after her widowed friend's health in 'the evening of your Life'. Sheridan's assumption of her friend's seclusion reflects not a premonition of her death, but rather a sense that, with her husband dead, Mehitabel has little prospect of public engagement. This cruelly-made suggestion is constitutive of Sheridan's self-authorisation, ensuring a difference that enables revelation in ways that equality could not. Sheridan has much to tell her friend, including an account of how 'Pitts Arts' and his 'Creatures' have undermined Fox's advocacy of the Prince's right to the Regency. This is news from the front line: the King, she confides, 'is not the least better', while his physicians 'keep the Country in ignorance'. Against this conspiratorial background she presents her insider's account of negotiations on the Prince's behalf adding, not little proudly:

> The [Prince] has consented to take the Regency over tho' all Mr Pitt's Restrictions shd be carried and he has written an Answer to the Ministers explaining his Reasons for so doing – I shd think that Answer will appear soon in the Papers – it is vastly well done and I am sure must make all unprejudiced Persons love the [Prince] and hate Pitt. I have had a great hand in it for I copied it twice, and the Copy actually sent to the Cabinet was written by Me and sign'd by the Prince. – I intend when he is Regent to claim something for myself for Secret Service.[54]

The scene was played out at Bruton Street with Richard Brinsley Sheridan contributing the text, with assistance from others, including Burke, while Sheridan recorded their deliberations.[55] The way in which she presents her role in this intricate business compels attention. The reference to her 'great hand' comprehends both her role (as amanuensis) via the most familiar synecdoche and the precise form of that involvement, her handwriting. The adjective, however, undoes the reductive implications of the trope. Her 'hand' is not solely instrumental, or merely a figure of her presence, as it creates an image of proximity, and, potentially, touch.[56] The Prince's reply - not yet published (the delay is crucial, as it preserves the importance of her hand) - is raised as a spectacle, as a unique moment, at which hands might come into contact: 'the Copy…was written by Me and sign'd by the Prince'. Sheridan and the Prince do not actually brush against each other,

and yet they might have done. When Canning read these words she was, unlike you, looking at, indeed holding that self-same hand. The gesture reveals her skill as a correspondent, alive to the possibilities of the letter as form and the various means by which written texts can signify physical presences.[57]

What Sheridan describes is not the conduct of public men (or women) acting rationally for the public good, but rather the reanimation of courtly secrecy within a middle-class home: a clear inversion of what Habermas expected.[58] This regressive move is confirmed by Sheridan's assertion that she will soon 'claim something for myself for Secret Service'. Sheridan's covert involvement encourages her to promise her friend that 'I shall not rest my Dear Hitty till some way or other you are benefitted by the Change'. Elsewhere Sheridan assures Canning that the creation of a Regency will place it in her power to 'be of essential Service to you & your Family'.[59] This is a considerable and perhaps reckless promise to make. Not least because she is being unwisely explicit about the interested nature of her involvement, and that of her husband, in a national crisis. Her letter reveals the prospect of shared gain, just as her confession of Fox's '*relapse*' had done the previous year. Crucially gender prejudice is enabling rather than restricting this instance (as they were for Elizabeth Gunning and the Duchess of Devonshire). Women could enter politics, public life, or request patronage, if they were seen to do so for recognisably familial advantage. As Chalus has explained, in Georgian Britain elite women could seek advancement and demand reward, if they could demonstrate their familial interest. They frequently did so requesting promotion or emolument for husbands, brothers, sons, nephews.[60] These rather nefarious opportunities rely upon a deeper disjunction. It was considered presumptuous, and indeed was rarely believed, that a women might be disinterested. That always dubious claim remained the preserve of the male elite. Within such a context, and having revealed the depth of her implication in the Prince's business, Sheridan might reasonably fear that her friend would suspect some kind of transgression, a departure from the style and wonted operations of middle-class life. There suspicion is deflected by a curious confirmation of it: *trust me*, Sheridan's letter implies: I am corrupt, and rightly so; for I act always for my family, and my friends. It is characteristic of the relationship between Sheridan and Canning that she makes this gesture, and to offer Canning a place at her table.

Sheridan's sense of herself, and her relationship with Canning, as virtuously corrupt, underscores the privilege and vulnerability of women in the public frame of the Regency crisis. Her pledge brings the privatised world of party intrigue, and medical

collusion, into alignment with privacy conceived as a version of the domestic. National salvation will create private felicity: a Regency, she assumes, rather too confidently, offers the prospect of 'Happy Days' when she and Canning will rejoice 'in the Happiness and prosperity of our Children, as a recompense for past affliction'. When Sheridan closes the letter, however, she supplements image as participant in a secret political world:

> Send me a line to say how you are and how your Invalids do – I have been playing Cribbage of an Evening lately (for I never go out) and devote my Winnings to poor Creatures in want of every Comfort this Winter – I never read a paper but my Heart aches at the Accounts I see there – the Parishes have open'd subscriptions and I have been lucky enough to subscribe them all. God bless you E.A.S

Sheridan evokes a familiar image of the charitable middle-class woman, whose private actions create public good, collapsing in the process the binary between the two states (though the reliance on petty gambling seems odd).[61] Despite her aching heart Sheridan contributes only financially, she does not visit anyone. She did not, after all, lead a life of such middle-class pieties. Hers is a life of political involvement, deep in the private world of public events. However, her claim to sympathise with the poor, and to read about them while never going out, is typical of her self-presentation, not because it describes the life she leads (or wanted to lead), but because it claims a life that possesses the authority and coherence that she sought. The King's illness presented the Sheridans with what appeared to be a terrific opportunity, but coincided with a period of significant vulnerability. Shortly after writing her letter, their house was repossessed and they were forced to lodge with the Prince's clandestine wife, Maria Fitzherbert. Reliant on such dubious brokerage, Sheridan's household, already invaded, became genuinely exposed, made scandalous by a connection that could never be private.[62]

These tremendous pressures underwrite Sheridan's desire for seclusion. She wants, she writes, to be private, outside the whirl of London and its intrigues.[63] Although her letters claim a desire for privacy, it is her attention to the interconnection of public life and her private existence which animates her correspondence and signifies her post celebrity best. On 23 April 1789 Sheridan wrote to Canning about the Thanksgiving service that marked the conclusion of the Regency Crisis. Sheridan explains that her husband is: 'gone this morning to S^{t} Pauls in the Procession they say nothing ever equalled the Confusion of the City – I was offer'd all sorts of Accommodations to see the Sight but I was not tempted, as I have no doubt there will be Mischief enough done

without me'.[64] Her politically-inflected distaste provides a contrast to her account, located on the reverse of the sheet, of her attendance at the Whig Brook's Club ball a few days earlier. Sheridan had been ill again and had undergone 'all the Ceremonies of Blistering Bleeding, &c'. The juxtaposition of these painful 'Ceremonies' alongside public celebrations forces a characteristic mix of stoic forbearance and curious self-display:

> In spight of remonstrances – my Physician and Hair Dresser met together at my Toilette in the Morning and Prescriptions and Papillotes went on very amiably at last – for I C^{d} not bear to have all my money & my pretty Dress wasted – so I tell you [Dr] Turton patch'd me up, and I have my raking better than I expected – I have kept quiet ever since, & am following all Directions very patiently to make amends for my imprudence, w^{h} I assure you has done me no <u>harm</u> at least – the Ball was most Magnificent indeed and worth risquing a little Confinement for – as I had a Box I sat quietly in it the greatest part of the time & enjoy'd the Spectacle without mixing in the Crowd w^{h} was too great to be quite pleasant

A crowd of aspirations jostle for position in this account of a post celebrity arming for battle. Prudence and frugality appear alongside risk taking and rakery: the sick wife, home economist, and demi rep all claim attention. A splendid appearance and a pretty dress cover a body blistered and bled. Her compelling image enacts a complex strategy for being both public and private or rather private in public and public in private. The hyper-privacy of her body, unseen at the ball, is known by the reader, and acts to modulate her 'imprudence'. Sheridan would have been conscious of the controversies which increasingly surrounded participation of women, specifically Whig women, in gambling.[65] This may, in part, explain her attention to the suffering beneath her dress. Yet Sheridan's experience of fashionable diversion appears triumphant: she has gone to the ball, no one could stop her. Throughout Sheridan's letters, such ecstatic moments are followed, almost always, by private recuperation, the 'quiet' mode in which she recollects the event, except that the division between active and secluded life is never maintained. Sheridan represents herself as neither one kind of person or another; both looking and seen, private and displayed. This well-crafted image of self-willed quietness is her most sustained post-celebrity performance. It is not the achievement, still less the practice of the 'connubially-circumscribed', but the work of an experienced hand, wisely conscious of her power, yet loathe to disclose it fully.

A Sad Long Letter: Revolutions and Separations

Sheridan's letters create conjunctions and display the interruption of her private life by other concerns. While epistolary convention and the dimensions of her writing paper might account for these collisions, there is more to consider than just proximity. A series of letters written while she was staying at Crewe Hall and Bruton Street in the spring of 1790 make this clear. The letters relate the parlous state of the Sheridans' marriage but absorb other matters too. Sheridan told Canning of her intention to separate from her husband on 10 January, inveigling against his 'Gallantries' with Lady Duncannon. However on 27 January she revealed that she had overcome her resentment. She went further on 5 February outlining an 'act of oblivion' they had agreed to save the marriage. The letter spells out the negotiations undertaken by the Duke of Devonshire to prevent Lord Duncannon from pursuing a suit at law, and how Lady Duncannon will go abroad. Sheridan makes no secret of how her husband's infidelities (not least with a governess at Crewe Hall) almost drove her in the arms of the 26 year-old Duke of Clarence.[66] Although initially intrigued, or at least not so angry as to be flattered, she eventually needed Fox, Mrs Bouverie, and the Prince to persuade the Duke to leave her alone.[67] This would be a banquet of information, but Sheridan adds:

> I have written you a sad long Letter, but I thought you w^{d} like to know a little about us – in regard to the dispute between S- and M^{r} B- it still continues un-made-up – M^{r} B is very wrong-headed- S- has done everything possible to be friends with him – but he certainly has a right to think & judge for himself as Mr B- and will certainly continue equally steady to his Principles, & Politicks – as for the <u>Cause</u> I own I have not thought much about the Matter – I am naturally inclin'd to think S- must be right – and I believe the World in general think so too tho' B- has got the King and M^{r} Pitt on his Side.[68]

Sheridan reports the dispute between Burke and her husband about the French Revolution which had culminated in their very public separation in parliament.[69] She combines events, such that there is carefully-repeated narrative of unions and separations running through it. Accordingly, Canning gains a vantage point from which to see the nexus of Whig culture, politics, and sex as it afflicts her friend, and as it rips itself apart. Sharply differing opinions about the French Revolution have pushed Burke and her husband apart. The public and the private, historical and intimate are at once balanced and at variance: her husband is unfaithful yet justified as Burke's opponent.

Sheridan's post celebrity – as both self-disciplining tactic and as a performed identity - is consequently self-obscuring, even as she presents her narrative. Reflections on those around her recur but her own role is hidden behind a welter of circumstantial detail, which inhibits what it claims to reveal. The reader is required to infer Sheridan's presence and, by implication, to approve of it. She presents herself as within the world she describes, but not always of it. This is not always plausible: it is hard to believe that she does not know the 'Cause' of her husband's falling out with Burke. Her post celebrity is presentation is careful, shifting. She witnesses events but does not propel or shape them, though appears central for all that. When angry she is enticed by a Duke; but this is a lapse. When motivated by the prospect of security for her family and her friend she displays her 'great hand'. Otherwise she would rather play cribbage, or comfort the poor. Her true desires, she claims, are private and domestic, even as she stands on a public stage. Her hand works one way, her heart another. Or so she says. There are good grounds to be sceptical, and to admire instead Sheridan's smart management of her self-image. Her claims to still cherish a private existence amidst public events is never straightforward. This is the paradox of her post celebrity. Her continued public role is set forward, shaped, and justified either by the denial of its existence, or by offering a contrasting image of privacy: a wounded body, generously-meant 'secret service', or the crepuscular satisfactions of retirement. The letters to Canning reveal that the private is not somewhere to be inhabited, though it might be desired as such (like the Welsh fastness she sometimes wants), but is rather a mode of being, one that might be concerned with separation or even seclusion, but which is always a means of public intervention. Privacy is something she does, or more tendentiously something desired primarily for the licence it offers. The private self, which is manifested so starkly through the revelation of her afflicted body, is insisted upon throughout the archive. Her letters claim a constant condition of personality amidst the vicissitudes of an extraordinary life. That life is self-sustaining, yet require the kindness of a friend whose difference lays the foundation for all possible solace. It is her extenuation for her own 'giddy Hours': a request for approval and perhaps forgiveness.

The letters to 'dearest Hitty' require their intended reader, the much-anticipated 'Sister Christian', to understand to a complex and divergent set of social arrangements, that are rarely reducible to a stable distinction between public or private. Her connection to the Whigs does much to explain her equivocation: amongst this part serious, part frivolous group, public and private events were not sharply defined, their distinction

actively disregarded. The simultaneously high stakes and low thresholds of these manoeuvres make her case much more extreme than the operations undertaken by more clearly private women. An explanation, at least in part, lies with her involvement with the Whig elite and their version of social politics. In their world the serious and the national, too easily collapse into the private and the foolish. Sheridan comments on this tendency in May 1787, admitting her own disengagement: 'So much for Politicks – the gay world [goes] on as Usual'. Her self-conscious remark marks and masks her participation. It is important to register the canny intelligence which underlies the gesture, and which negotiates the public and the private without being confined to either. Written when celebrity and publicity appear denied to her, Sheridan's letters reveal not just her later career, but the ways in which the category of the private could be manipulated by the late century, and how prescriptions against the public participation of women in public, either for business or for pleasure, could be avoided. Sheridan's letters represent their author as foreclosed yet splendid nonetheless: the centre of her own attention. This is how she performed intimacy. She is always on secret service. Sheridan was both active and visible in her culture, but not in the very public way she had employed as a much-celebrated singer. Her post celebrity career worked more subtly, and perhaps more sustainably. Sheridan makes few forays into the 'public' as conceived by Habermas as politics or public discourse. She does not perform or appear much in print. But despite and, above all, because of her seeming absence, she intervenes in the Whig world, which is itself a mode of domiciliary politics. No conception of separate spheres will serve in this context. In a culture in which opportunities and desires are hierarchized and unequally distributed, value could not exist only in public or celebrity. Sheridan's letters exhibit what might be done in private, revealing its space for performance, activity and intrigue. Privacy, private life, even domesticity, cannot be understood merely as the antithesis of celebrity. Nor were celebrity or publicity the sole means to influence, power, or action in the eighteenth-century. Sheridan's letters, and the life they describe, reveal more complex and intricate routes through a fractured and divided culture. Georgian Britain was not consistently a society on the cusp of modernity, public rationality and transparent communication were dominant. Nor were all actions undertaken in the glare of the media; even celebrities could sometimes move unseen. It was an age still finding diverse uses for the hidden and the enclosed. It is important to recognise this unevenness and its opportunities when we study the texts left behind by clever, well-connected women. Nor should we assume that celebrity was the only model of success. It wasn't. Privacy served them just as well.[70]

Endnotes

[1] Richard Samuel, *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo (The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain)*, 1778 (oil on canvas, 132.1cm x 154.9 cm). National Portrait Gallery London. See Elizabeth Eger, 'Representing Culture: "The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain' (1779). in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton eds., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104 - 132.

[2] Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988-2003), 1, 249-50. See also Margot Bor and Lamond Clelland, *Still the Lark: A Biography of Elizabeth Sheridan* (London: Merlin Press, 1962); and Alan Chedzoy, *Sheridan's Nightingale: The Story of Elizabeth Linley* (London: Allison & Busby, 1997).

[3] Joseph Roach, 'Mistaking Earth for Heaven: Eliza Linley's Voice' in Elizabeth Eger ed., *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 123-40.

[4] See *London Evening Post* (14 February 1782) and *General Advertiser* (4 January 1786).

[5] Roach, 'Mistaking Earth for Heaven', 126-7, 131-2.

[6] See Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). See also Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody eds., *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain,1660-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2005); Heather McPherson, *Art and Celebrity in the Age of Reynolds and Siddons* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); Gill Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations: Viewing the Actress in British Art and Theatre*, *1768-1820* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2007); Leslie Ritchie, *David Garrick and the Mediation of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[7] Felicity Nussbaum, *The Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 11-13, 31-60; and Julia H. Fawcett, *Spectacular Disappearances: Celebrity and Privacy, 1696-1801* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2016), 1-22.

[8] Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[9] Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-15.

[10] See J.A. Downie, 'Public and Private: The Myth of the Bourgeois Public Sphere' in Cynthia Wall ed., *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 58-79; Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth-Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995), 97-109; and Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 383-414.

[11] Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[12] See (if you must) Robert W Jones, '"Such Strange Unwonted Softness to Excuse": Judgement and Indulgence in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Portrait of Elizabeth Gunning', *Oxford Art Journal*, 18 (1995), 29-43.

[13] Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 127, 135, 140, 168, 213-4, 222.

[14] Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1960), 2.

[15] See Chalus, *Elite Women*, 216-21; and Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (London HarperCollins, 1999).

[16] Elizabeth Sheridan, *Betsy Sheridan's Journal: Letters from Sheridan's Sister 1784-1786 & 1788-1790*, ed. William Le Fanu (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1960), 27, 50, 58, 105, 110, 117, 128.

[17] Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760-1837* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005).

[18] Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre*, 10-6.

[19] Chalus, *Elite Women*, 75-9.

[20] Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning, '23 November [before 1787]', Letters from Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning, Bath Central Library, Somerset, AL 1553.

[21] Sheridan to Canning, 'Delapre Abbey Novr 23d [1786]', AL 1553.

[22] Sheridan, *Betsy Sheridan's Journal*, 49.

[23] The Bath collection is arranged in two batches (ALB 2289-2308 and AL 1535-1571). The batches are somewhat muddled with letters from different periods confused between them. Dates are recorded sporadically, but present enough detail to indicate the date of their composition; remaining franks provide further confirmation.

[24] Richard Brinsley Sheridan to Lady Duncannon, 3 May, 1792 and Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning, January-April, 1792, *Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 1, 242, 236-7; and Sheridan to Canning, 'Putney Augst 6th [1785]', AL 1535.

[25] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 26-7.

[26] Sheridan to Canning, 'London - July 11th [1785]', ALB 2289.

[27] Peter Jupp, 'Introduction' to *The Letter-Journal of George Canning, 1793-95* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1991), 5-6.

[28] Sheridan to Canning, 'Southampton Feb. 3d [1791]', AL1567.

[29] Sheridan to Canning, 'Putney - 28 July [1785]', AL1536.

[30] Sheridan to Canning 'Thursday [c.1788]', AL 1550.

[31] Sheridan to Canning, 'Tunbridge Septr 25th', AL1541.

[32] Sheridan to Canning, 'Delapre Abbey – Novr 23d [before 1787]', AL 1553; Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall – Decbr 8th [1787]', ALB 2295; Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Jan 25th [1788]', AL 1552; and Sheridan to Canning, 'Mount Ephraim Augst 15th [1791]', AL 1568.

[33] See Guest, *Small Change*, 107-110; Fawcett, *Spectacular Disappearances*, 173-205.

[34] Fawcett, *Spectacular Disappearances*, 14-22.

[35] See Chalus, *Elite Women*, 53-74; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Ingrid H. Tague, *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England 1690-1760* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002); and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[36] For example: Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall – Octr 7th [1787]', AL 1542; Sheridan to Canning, 'Delapre Abbey Novr 23d [1786]]', AL 1553; Sheridan to Canning, 'May 28 [1788], AL

1551; Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Jan 25th [1788]', AL 1552; Sheridan to Canning, 'Dibden Augst 11th [1788]', AL 1555; and Sheridan to Canning, 'Rich[mond] Sepr [1789]', ALB 2301.

[37] Guest, *Small Change*, 15. See also Lionel Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', *History and Theory*, 42 (2003), 143-68.

[38] Elizabeth Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 26.

[39] Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

[40] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Octr 7th [1787]', Al 1542; and Sheridan to Canning, 'London – Feb. 9th [1788]', AL 1548.

[41] Sheridan to Canning, 'Dibden [Deepdene] Augst 11th [1788]', AL 1555.

[42] Sheridan to Canning, 'London – Tuesday night [14 June, 1787]', AL 1543.

[43] Sheridan to Canning, 'Reading – June 21st [1787]', AL 1544.

[44] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall – Tuesday 28th [August, 1787]', ALB 2293.

[45] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Octr 7th [1787]', AL 1542.

[46] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Decbr 8th [1787]', ALB 2295.

[47] Sheridan to Canning, 'Reading – June 21st [1787]', AL 1544.

[48] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall - Octr 7th [1787]', AL 1542. See Kathryn R. King, 'Of Needles and Pens and Women's Work', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 14 (1995), 77-93.

[49] See Chedzoy, *Sheridan's Nightingale*, 256-9.

[50] Chalus, *Elite Women*, 100-5.

[51] See John W. Derry, *The Regency Crisis and the Whigs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[52] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 14-26, 27-31; John Barrell, 'Coffee House Politicians', Journal of British Studies, 43 (2004), 206-32.

[53] Sheridan to Canning 'London - Tuesday' [cover dated: 'Nov: Eleventh 1788]', AL 1557; Sheridan to Canning 'Wednesday [late 1788]'; Sheridan to Canning 'Thursday [late 1788]', AL 1559; and Sheridan to Canning 'London - Wednesday [early 1789]', AL 1561; Sheridan to Canning 'Thursday [23 April, 1789]', ALB 2299.

[54] Sheridan to Canning 'Friday two o'clock [after 2 January, 1789]', AL 1562. The jointly-written letter is printed in *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 36 vols (London: Bagshaw, 1806-1820), 17, 909-11.

[55] Derry, *Regency Crisis and the Whigs*, 133.

[56] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, 124.

[57] Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 70-94.

[58] Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 30.

[59] Sheridan to Canning, 'London - Tuesday [late 1788]', AL 1557.

[60] Chalus, *Elite Women*, 108-11.

[61] Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres', 399.

[62] Derry, *Regency Crisis and the Whigs*, 137.

[63] Sheridan to Canning, 'Mount Ephraim Augst 15th [1791]', AL 1568.

[64] Sheridan to Canning, 'Thursday' [23 April, 1789], ALB 2299.

[65] See Gillian Russell, "'Faro's Daughters": Female Gamesters, Politics, and the Discourse of Finance in 1790s Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33 (2000), 481-504.

[66] Sheridan to Canning, 'Crewe Hall, Jan: 10th [1790]', ALB 2303.

[67] Sheridan to Canning, 'C[rewe] H[all]. Jan 27th [1790]', ALB 2305.

[68] Sheridan to Canning, 'Friday Morn: [after 5 February 1790]', ALB2304.

[69] *Parliamentary History of England*, 28, 366-72.

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