The English club, as an arena of exclusive male sociability, contributed to the re-fashioning of a new model of politeness, which did not posit refinement and masculinity as opposites. Some of the main aims of clubs were to preserve their members’ masculine identity and to reinforce their cohesion by developing a strong male affiliation network. The success of clubs in England enabled to establish a unique model of male sociability, proving that being an Englishman did not imply being unsociable and rough. The club was an exclusive social space, where a man can perform his masculinity through his activities, his conversations and his behaviour. The visibility of gender and social performance induced the respect and support of his fellow clubmen and could determine a man’s future social and political success. The eighteenth-century club thus played a crucial role in the process of gender identification and of social recognition. This article shows that masculinity was a social construction as well as a social performance. Being a man obeyed gendered norms, which corresponded to gendered social manners and practices. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the ideal of the gentleman served as a means to shape the Englishman’s masculine identity, but it revealed the limits and the paradoxes of politeness, thus questioning the French model.

* Keywords: eighteenth-century London clubs, masculinity, male sociability

Sociologist Scott Coltrane defined gender as “the socially constructed ideal of what it means to be a woman or man,” stating that our everyday activities provided “opportunities for expressing, and perhaps transforming, the meaning of gender.” Therefore, masculinity is considered as a social construction, but also as a social performance that is expressed through the manners and behaviour of men themselves.
Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, masculinity has been confronted to challenging cultural influences. Indeed, the concept of masculinity has matured through its conflictual relationship with politeness. The dynamics of attraction-repulsion for the French model helped redefine English masculinity. Moreover, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the influence of a new ‘urban culture’ with the flourishing of sociability in England influenced its very definition. The ideal of the gentleman through politeness and refined conversation, which prevailed among the exclusive circles of London society, corresponded to a desire to shape a new model of masculinity. Yet, a paradox existed between a normative refined and “feminine” sociable model, as performed in French salon culture, and that of the gentleman’s club. This tension highlighted the danger of excessive refinement and effeminacy, epitomised by the fop figure. This may be a reason for the exclusion of women from those private institutions, added to the fact that club sociability and conversation were simply thought inappropriate for the female sex. In a society highly preoccupied with social visibility, gender representation and performance through gender-specific pastimes and manners were crucial. What then, in a gentleman’s reactions or attributes, should be displayed and what should remain invisible?

Homosociality seemed to be the best way for men to preserve their virility and identity. Thus, club sociability provided the perfect medium for redefining male sociability and offering a new model of English masculinity. To what extent did London clubs question and replace a model inspired from French ‘feminine’ sociability with a model of English sociability, reconciling politeness and refinement with masculinity?

**Gender at Stake: Masculinities and the Ideal of the Gentleman**

A definition of ‘masculinities’ which perfectly applies to club sociability in eighteenth-century London is to be found in *The Masculinities Reader*, edited by Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett in 2001: “Masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine.” Indeed, men’s social manners and practices are a decisive tool in the identification and fashioning of their masculinity. As Judith Butler affirmed, “gender is a construction,” and “without those acts; there would be no gender at all.”

The club is an institution that appeared at the end of the seventeenth century and mainly grew out from the coffee-house. It flourished in the eighteenth century as an increasingly private and exclusive space. Indeed, the definition of the word club changed progressively, following the evolution of the form of sociability to which it referred. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the noun club was first defined as a social gathering held in a tavern or in a coffee-house, during which the expenses were split among the members present. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the term became more precise: a club meant any association or society in which people gathered with a common aim and met on a regular basis in a precise location according to certain rules, in order to maintain social relationships and a spirit of cooperation. The 1730s saw the creation of the *Royal Society Club* (originally called *Club of Royal Philosophers*), *White’s Club*, the *Dilettanti Society* or the *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks*, to name but the main ones. It is not before the 1760s that the word club reached its full maturity, by then defined as an association of persons, meeting
under specific rules, whose admission was guaranteed by a selective vote. A club then had its own premises (the club-house) reserved for the exclusive use of its members as a space for social intercourse and entertainment (for example Boodle’s, or Brooks’s located in St. James’s Street).

If most London clubs were socially exclusive, they were all gender exclusive. As a male universe, the club can be considered as a pure expression of masculinity. Men’s clubs represent the perfect model of exclusive male sociability: by strictly selecting their members, by expecting that they conform to club rules and by providing them with a male-only assembly, they contribute to shape and assert their members’ masculinity. Through the process of masculine affiliation and through specifically male behaviours, the construction of masculinity is at stake. The importance of peer recognition within the club and within society at large shows that masculinity is not only a social construction but also a social performance. Gender structures social relationships; it advocates and reproduces rules and patterns of expectation. As Frank Barrett suggests, “individuals act out gender norms; they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power.”10 The visibility of gender is then confirmed through the way clubmen try to reach a normative ideal of male behaviour in conformity with gendered social expectations.

As a matter of fact, the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is particularly relevant to our subject. Introduced in 1983 by Raewyn Connell, it mainly refers to the dominant position of men in society and to the subsequent subordination of women.11 At the end of the seventeenth century, the status of woman in English society still followed a patriarchal model. What is even more interesting is that this concept can apply not only to “the structural relationship between men’s power over women,” as Michèle Cohen puts it, but also to the unequal power relations between different categories of men.12 For Cohen, it is the polite and refined gentleman that represents hegemonic masculinity. However, Connell has recently added some refinement to her theory and defined a more complex model of gender hierarchy, emphasizing the agency of women.13

To better understand the construction of English masculinity, the club will reveal itself a very useful tool. Indeed, it is a privileged space where male bonding takes place and where male social practices are performed. In the eighteenth century, polite and refined masculinity was supported by conduct manuals, moral literature, and popular periodical essays. Born in the coffee-houses of Queen Anne’s reign, periodicals such as the Spectator and the Tatler endeavoured to promote the ideal of the gentleman. Through this successful medium, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele aimed at diffusing “gentlemanly values” to their readers and encouraged what the historian David Solkin called a “well mannered masculinity.”14

The first step of the gentleman’s formation was education of course, “learning” to be more precise. Then, politeness and conversation were necessary to the fashioning of the gentleman.15 Philip Carter considers conversation “as the crucial means for uniting and engaging friends, professional associates or strangers” and “a key requirement of the modern gentleman.”16 Politeness was an inclusive notion comprising the behaviour to adopt in public, the instruction, as well as the moral virtues of an individual. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the French were still the best models of polite conversation. So as to fashion himself as a “man of conversation,” the gentleman had to imitate the French. The Grand Tour provided an opportunity for young aristocrats to form their tastes and to put a finishing touch to their education. On their way to Italy, they spent some time in
France in order to acquire French polish, manners and language. However, “though by going abroad young men were expected to be polished out of their ‘rusticity’ and return accomplished gentlemen, they could equally well develop, ‘an effeminate and unmanly foppery’.”17 This tension raised by several contemporaries will be analysed in the following section of this study.

Also part of acquired polite experience was sociability: “being sociable to man,” as James Miller defined politeness in 1738.18 In that respect, the club was a decisive step for the young gentleman eager to gain a cultural varnish and social recognition. Belonging to a club often proved a helpful passport for the young aristocrat to enter the polite political and literary circles of the capital. Meeting distinguished, accomplished and influential men enabled him to acquire this so much desired social credit. The average age of the founding members of the Society of Dilettanti19 or of Almack’s20 (future Brooks’s), was twenty-five. The initiative of those young men could also be seen as a means to organise their own social integration into a selective network of male affiliation, thus making recognition by their older peers much easier.

Making a figure in the world is a social performance.21 John Brewer affirmed that “politeness and refinement had to be shared; put on display.”22 Gentlemanliness, then, is highly visible through manners, practices, dress code, etc. But is being a gentleman equivalent to being masculine? Masculinity, as established earlier, expresses itself through expected gendered behaviours and practices. The ideal of the gentleman, in trying to shape and to embody English masculinity, has highlighted some paradoxes inherent to the English nation.23

CLUB SOCIABILITY: A GENDERED TRADITION

Before the extraordinary development of London clubs in the first part of the eighteenth century, coffee-houses were already strongly identified with male sociability. The only feminine presence was limited to the coffee-house owner or to the waitress. When small assemblies of men started to meet in a separate room, the exclusion of women became even more obvious. Most of the various activities of London clubs were definitely male pastimes, not considered suitable for women. Clubmen gathered around food and wine, cards and conversation, sharing their political, scientific or artistic interests. They loved to spend time with friends to exchange their opinions, compare their experiences and define the limits of a gender-exclusive social space. Gambling, for example, was a behaviour which, like sport or hunting, enabled men to create bonds and to become an integral part of the male affiliation network.24 In some clubs, the election of a new member by the famous process of blackballing was followed by an initiation ritual, which reinforced male bonding. It was a means to introduce the new clubman to the fellow members of the club and also to create a feeling of belonging to a selective community.

Furthermore, we can easily draw a parallel between the rites and codes that a club member had to follow and the rites performed by freemasons’ lodges. Both forms of sociability were for men only, and as far as rites were concerned, the obligation of secrecy too was a characteristic that some clubs and freemasonry had in common.25 The Sublime Society of Beefsteaks,26 for instance, required its members to keep the words pronounced during their initiation ritual secret. As for the Hell-Fire Clubs, secrecy was coextensive with identity. The nature of those societies implied that names of members remained undisclosed. Rituals with masks and specific cos-
tumes were used during pagan ceremonies held in secret locations, hidden from the public.27

For a long period, men have shown that they were not ready to accept women into the public sphere, and especially into their clubs. The segregation of the sexes remained a dominant feature of English society and sociability. At the end of the seventeenth century, some social practices of separation had already developed. For example, English women had taken the habit of leaving the table after dessert, allowing men to be free to dwell on some more “masculine” topics and to indulge into pastimes reputed as not suitable for ladies, among which drinking and gambling.28 Several foreign travellers were surprised at this unusual practice. César de Saussure mentioned it as an established custom in 1727;29 as well as Abbé Le Blanc, who made a long description of such a ritual in his *Lettres d’un Français* in 1745.30

The practice of meeting and dining among men exclusively not only echoes this tradition, but also seems to prolong, at their club, those privileged moments when men could drink and discuss together without restraint. Women were nonetheless part of clubmen’s preoccupations as they were often the object of toasts and bets. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the most famous toasts were those performed by the *Kit-Cat Club*. Specific glasses had been engraved with a few poetic phrases written by Lord Halifax in 1703, in honour of some of the most beautiful ladies of the time.31 Bets were also often dedicated to women, to their life expectancy or their fertility, as revealed by numerous entries in the betting books of *White’s* or *Brooks’s*.32

Therefore, the role of women in English society appears crucial for understanding the specificity of club sociability in England and the apparent contrast with France, the paradise of “salonnières.” Traditional masculine and feminine role expectations are not enough to explain the exclusion of women from clubs. It is true that women had their own activities: they met at concerts, in neighbourhood circles, and around the famous ritual of tea-table conversation. Their exclusion from the sociability of clubs could, in part, be explained by their prescribed status in English society and their confinement to the domestic sphere. However, the first history of women, published by William Alexander in 1779, though providing a historical justification of female domestication in the private sphere, underlined, not without irony, the following paradox:

> We allow a woman to sway our sceptre, but by law and custom we debar her from every other government but that of her own family as if there were not a public employment between that of superintending the kingdom, and the affairs of her own kitchen, which could be managed by the genius and capacity of women.33

Between the highest affairs of the kingdom and those, not less essential, of the home, woman was not allowed intermediary responsibilities. Between State and family, the public sphere was not easily open to women.

Although *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* granted them an unprecedented and significant position in the “literary public sphere,” Addison and Steele constantly reminded their readers of woman’s specificity and of the importance for each sex to remain in their reserved domains and to conform to their respective social roles: “The utmost of a Woman’s Character is contained in Domestick Life […] All she has to do in this World, is contained within the Duties of a Daughter, a Sister, a Wife,
“Men and Women ought to busie themselves in their proper Spheres, and on such Matters only as are suitable to their respective Sex.” Besides, in a letter that an uncle wrote to his nieces, who had developed a passion for Latin and Physics, Steele clearly criticized women who desired to acquire any kind of knowledge considered useless to their domestic tasks: “What I have to beg of you now, is, [...] to tell us the difference between a Gentleman that should make Cheesecakes, and raise Paste, and a Lady that reads Lock, and understands Mathematics.”

The eighteenth century was marked by an increasingly polarizing separation between the two spheres: public, social and masculine versus private, intimate and feminine. The ideology that prevailed at the time understood masculine qualities as particularly adapted to the public world, and those attributed to women as better suited the domestic world. Even if those gender affinities were essentially theoretical, they represented a precept that eighteenth-century women were aware of and to which most women, as well as men, seemed to resign themselves. For Margaret Hunt, the main impact of all this symbolic baggage on the lives of actual women was certainly negative.

Nevertheless, even if they remained aware of the tensions existing between their behaviour and the domestic feminine ideal, some women could have a non-negligible political influence. Indeed, as Ingrid Tague affirmed, “[women of quality] participated in a huge network of influence that was a characteristic feature of British political life in the eighteenth century.” The Duchess of Devonshire provides the best example of the aristocratic power and political influence of a woman in a society that favoured men. Her talent for public relations, her strong power of persuasion and her unique personality allowed her to become a successful patroness and an effective politician who was able to disseminate Whig propaganda and to contribute to decisive political victories. Unsurprisingly, the visibility generated by such an influential social role was a source of anxiety among men. As a matter of fact, the intention to exclude women from the public sphere, and thus from clubs, was expressed through a strategy of distancing from political power. Men considered politics as their reserved domain—except for queens—even if one must distinguish government from political curiosity. Some discussion topics, termed as “masculine,” such as politics, law, and all that is related to public affairs, should not be touched on by women, not even in their presence.

However, the French traveller Pierre-Jean Grosley offered the following account in 1774: “[si] les femmes n’ont point d’entrée dans toutes ces coteries: elles s’en indemnisent par des coteries entr’elles, où, dit-on, elles traitent aussi les affaires d’Etat,” implying that women had their own sociability space, in which they could freely discuss politics as well as literature.

An example of feminine initiative was the creation of The Female Coterie, also called the Ladies’ Club. This “first public female club ever known,” as Horace Walpole’s words suggested, was established in 1769-70. It admitted men and first met at Almack’s Assembly Rooms (different from Almack’s, the club of St James’s Street and future Brooks’s) then in Albermarle Street, and from 1775 in the splendid residence of George Colebrook in Arlington Street. The Female Coterie stands as an exception, as it is the only mixed club to function like a gentleman’s club. It held regular meetings, had strict but specific election procedures: the vote for each new candidate was reserved to the members of the opposite sex. The social activities of the club were varied: dining, gambling, concerts, balls ... and the participation of
both sexes was rather balanced: 269 women for 295 men.\textsuperscript{45} However, sex equality remained a mere illusion. Not only did men dominate at the club dinners, but above all, the election procedures were unequally performed: when a married woman was elected, her husband automatically became a member, whereas the reverse was not the case. Moreover, the management of the club was a man’s business: in 1775, the names of 53 women appeared on the subscription list against 178 men.\textsuperscript{46} The adventure of \textit{The Female Coterie} ended in the winter 1777-78 because of financial difficulties. Yet, this short-lived experience remained a rare incursion of femininity into the male homosocial domain of the club.

Another though earlier instance was the famous \textit{Blue-Stocking Club} mentioned for the first time in Elizabeth Montagu’s correspondence in 1757, but it was more a \textit{salon} than a real club.\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Blue-Stockings “circle,”} to use Sylvia Myers’s phrase, was not a formal society: contrary to a \textit{club}, it had no regular meeting day, no admission procedures, no rules. It is even almost impossible to draw an exact list of its members as they varied depending on the occasions and on the affinities of the persons invited. From the start, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu’s aim was to promote literary conversation as the main pleasure of social life. As the founder and dominant figure of this mixed assembly, “la Belle Présidente” gathered in her own house in Hill Street—then, from 1779, in Portman Square—the most remarkable figures of London society.\textsuperscript{48}

The existence of this “literary salon” seemed to answer a social need of the time: the most learned women expressing the desire to have some intellectual exchange with men. Moreover, the success and longevity (almost fifty years) of this assembly testifies to the ambition of a group of educated ladies to put an end to the monopoly of men on intellectual and aristocratic sociability and more generally, to the separation of the sexes within the public sphere.

Women were not only thought to be unfit for positions of intellectual eminence, more especially public affairs or political matters, but they were also seen as an obstacle to masculine sociability and liberty. The Italian traveller Ferri de Saint-Constant asked an Englishman one day: “To the question, but why do you exclude women who would take part in the conversation in a pleasant manner?,“ the Englishman answered: “Oh, their presence would be a source of trouble and restraint for us: we wouldn’t be able to express ourselves freely, nor give our toasts;” the Italian added: “You mean that you wouldn’t be able to indulge in scandalous excess, destroy your constitution and your principles, abandon yourselves to intemperance and obscenity.”\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Politeness and English Masculinity: A Paradox?}

The English club prescribed a form of refined sociability which excluded women, whereas the latter were considered crucial to the perfection of taste and politeness in France. A double tension can be pointed out. There is a first paradox between women’s polishing influence and the threat of effeminacy and a second one between the taciturn and unsociable reputation of the Englishman and the success of male sociability in clubs. So, in other words, how could conversation, so closely associated with women in France, the true queens of Parisian salons, become one of the dominant features of the male universe of the London club? How could the Englishman, reputed as taciturn in the accounts of numerous contemporary travellers, transcend his nature and make of the club the temple of conversation and
masculine sociability *par excellence*?

As expressed through the title of Jeffrey Merrick’s article on Morellet and women, “Society needs Women ‘Like Coffee Needs Sugar’,” just like sugar sweetens a dish, women’s function is to refine society. While some considered women as necessary to public sociability, politeness, and the refinement of manners, others perceived them as a threat to man’s essential character, putting his masculinity in question. Addison encouraged contact with women as very essential to politeness:

> It is to the Fair Sex we owe the most shining qualities of which our’s is master.... Men of True Taste feel a natural complaisance for women when they converse with them, and fall, without knowing it, upon every art of pleasing.... An intimate acquaintance with the other Sex, fixes this complaisance into a Habit, and that Habit is the very Essence of Politeness.  

On the one hand, the presence of women was seen as beneficial and civilizing. It favoured social interaction between two distinct but complementary sexes: “Men and Women were made as Counterparts to one another.” Thus, conversation between men and women appeared to be the best means to perfect their politeness, their contact having a positive influence on each other:

> [it is] the Male that gives Charms to Womankind, that produces an Air in their Faces, a Grace in their Motions, a Softness in their Voices, and a Delicacy in their Complections. [...] [without women], Men would be quite different Creatures from what they are at present; their Endeavours to please the opposite Sex, polishes and refines them out of those Manners most natural to them [...] Man would not only be unhappy, but a rude unfinished Creature, were he conversant with none but those of his own Make.  

David Hume insisted on the benefits of mixed company: “both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace.” Conversation between the sexes would also help rub off, at least soften, the coarseness so much reproached to the English. James Fordyce also belonged to those who praised its virtuous effect: “nothing formed the manners of men so much as the turn of the women with whom they converse [...] Such society, beyond anything else, rubs off the corners that give many of our sex an ungracious roughness.” To counter this lack of refinement attributed to the Englishman, the presence of women in society would be salutary: Swift remains convinced that the presence of ladies would “lay a Restraint upon those odious Topicks of Immodesty and Indecencies into which the Rudeness of our Northern Genius is so apt to fall.”

For those who aspired to refinement and politeness, there was a necessity to find a happy middle ground, as Joseph Spence warned his readers: “some conversation with the ladies is necessary to smooth and sweeten the temper as well as the manners of men, but too much of it is apt to effeminate or debilitate both.” The suspicion of the English towards the fair sex was expressed by a lot of contemporary writers. Those who denounced conversation between men and women accused it of encouraging the confusion of sexual identities by effeminating the masculine character. Furthermore, behind the danger represented by women hid the shadow of the French model. The relation with the French was thus sexualized, constructed as a relation of seduction, positioning the English as male and the French as female.
Michèle Cohen explains that as “desire and seduction were held to be effeminizing, this relation threatened the manliness of the English tongue.” The English Language is a strong and masculine tongue, but it has some drawbacks: “Silence and difficulty of speaking and fewness of words are a kind of national Character,” noted Thomas Wilson in 1729. He added that conversation, though enjoyed, was “less pleasant to us; and in solitude, silence and spleen gain[ed] ground.” This accounted for the taciturn character of the English. This lack of sociability and politeness that is reproached to the Englishman, even if it has become a stereotype, will develop into an emblematic characteristic of the English nation and more particularly of English masculinity.

**BLURRING GENDER BOUNDARIES, OR, THE THREAT OF EFFEeminacy**

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, masculinity seemed to have suffered a crisis in England. Even women were concerned that men were abandoning masculinity itself, becoming soft, urbanized, and weak. The success of the coffee-houses at the end of the seventeenth century gave rise to a debate at the centre of which gender prevailed: the resistance to the coffee-houses as male preserves opposed women to coffee. A pamphlet entitled *The Women’s Petition against Coffee* (1674) revealed the opposition between the sexes through women’s hostility towards coffee—the drink as well as the institution—which, according to them, was harmful to man, as it would alienate his judgment and weaken his virility. Tim Hitchcock justly explains that “the concept of effeminacy highlights the crucial ways in which the ‘other’ to manliness in the eighteenth century was not simply the feminine, but also the effeminate.” In truth, men were not really threatened by femininity itself, even if they feared female power, but by effeminacy.

The figure of the fop was the object of numerous satires and embodied the shortcomings of femininity and politeness: by adopting too feminine attitudes, the fop sacrificed his virility. It is interesting to note that a masculine woman was as much criticized and mocked as an effeminate man. Addison and Steele were not the only ones to denounce such characters; in the second half of the century, James Fordyce achieved to warn young women against the confusion of genders: “A masculine woman must be naturally an unamiable creature. I confess myself shocked whenever I see the sexes confounded. An effeminate fellow […] is an object of contempt and aversion at once […] the transformation on either side must ever be monstrous.” All this contributed to blur genders, which John Brown condemned in 1757 in his *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*: “The Sexes have now little other apparent Distinction, beyond that of Person and Dress: Their peculiar and characteristic Manners are confounded and lost: The one Sex having advanced into Boldness, as the other has sunk into Effeminacy.”

An interesting example of this danger of gender blurring is the masquerade. This fashionable amusement was one of the few entertainments organised by London clubs where both sexes could meet. Significantly enough, it took place outside the clubs’ premises, unlike all other club activities. Following Terry Castle’s ideas, the cultural historian Dror Wahrman more recently insisted on the play of gender identities in the masquerades, stating that “masquerades famously undermined distinctions of gender, confounding again playful disguise with the potentialities of actual cross-gender passing.” Indeed, the mask performed a double role. As a clothing accessory, it served as a social artifice, which hid one’s identity, removing
social boundaries and liberating individuals from any form of pressure. Worn by men and women alike, as a fashion item, it also concealed one’s sexual identity, blurring and even questioning gender distinction. The ambivalence of the mask echoed the double function of the gaze—to see and to be seen, thus reinforcing the theatricality of such entertainments, which nonetheless remained associated with potential subversion and transgression.

Therefore, mixing with women was perceived as a danger, since man might alter his masculine identity and what is more, his national character. Contrary to his French contemporary, the Englishman preferred to stay apart and privileged the company of his male companions. Abbé Le Blanc did not fail to notice what he considered as a national specificity: “The French enjoy the company of women as much as the English are afraid of it, unless they are in love.” We find in Ned Ward’s Secret History of London Clubs, the Beau’s Club and the Mollies’ Club ridiculing two masculine figures typical of the time: the beau, a character at the top of London fashion, with affected manners and obsessed with his appearances, and the molly, a homosexual character, effeminate in demeanour as well as dress code.

The fop was effeminate because he spent so much time in the company of women that he tended to behave like them. Thus, he had become “Frenchified” in manners and language. As such, he had forfeited his identity both as Englishman and as a man. Through the voice of Mr. Locke in Richard Hurd’s Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel, the Grand Tour and the accomplishments it promised were questioned and considered as alien to the manly English character. “No need to go out of our own country to learn politeness and manners. Many judicious foreigners prefer ours to the French, as more manly and becoming.” Travel to other countries, especially to France, was to be avoided; of course, this idea provided the occasion for an anti-French sentiment to surface. Feminization became linked to treason and masculinity to patriotism, as denounced in The Fifteen Comforts of a Wanton Life (1706-1707):

“This to that Fopish Nation that we owe
Those antick Dresses that equip a Beau.
[…]
So strangely does Parisian air Change
English Youth, that half a year
Makes em forget all Native Custome
To bring French modes, and Gallic Lust home;

The fop stood both as a caricature and a warning against the pursuit of an excessive model of politeness. To avoid becoming a fop, a young man had to exercise self-control and behave according to the expectations and norms of his social status and his sex. This was at the heart of Chesterfield’s advice to his son. As Michèle Cohen justly remarked, “politeness may have been about ease and sociability, but it required constant vigilance and discipline of body and tongue.” What mattered then was only his visible performance and the way a gentleman was able to control his attitude and perform in society. It was part of the gentleman’s training to learn what should be displayed, but also what should be concealed. By either hiding his lack of education or roughness of manners, or by masking his excessive delicacy or eccentricity, he aimed at finding the right balance to make all undesired traits of character or behaviour invisible.
THE ROLE OF CLUBS IN REDEFINING MALE SOCIABILITY AND OFFERING A NEW MODEL OF ENGLISH MASCULINITY

The paradoxes that have been identified should have made it very difficult for an Englishman to be polite and masculine at the same time. However, club sociability succeeded in reconciling politeness and refinement with manliness. To Lord Chesterfield, France was a model to be followed, to David Fordyce, on the contrary, this model was to be questioned. “Conversing with men ‘rub[bed] off that awkward Air and Pedantry of Manners’ inevitably acquired during an academic education.” This is how Cohen understands Fordyce’s idea that English politeness was serious and produced free men, men of civic virtue. Homosociality thus favoured social cohesion among the polite circles of English society. The exclusion of women from clubs provided the necessary condition for the redefinition of English male sociability.

Beyond the polarisation of gender mentioned above, one can question whether the club was a public or a truly private space. Where does it stand in the private/public sphere dialectics? The club, as a social institution, is the fruit of the parallel development of the press and the coffee-house. Born from the free association of private persons in a public place, it seems to belong to the public sphere, as defined by Habermas. Moreover, as a forum of discussion where a public opinion is formed, and as a place where social practices are performed, it fully follows this dynamics of publicity. However, we can consider that the club occupies an ambiguous position within the Habermasian model. Located at the heart of the public sphere, it progressively became, throughout the eighteenth century, a more and more private institution. The public character of the first clubs of the end of the seventeenth century, those informal gatherings, tended to disappear in the first half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, clubs not only deserted the coffee-houses and taverns to dwell in their own private buildings, but they also adopted stricter rules and more exclusive admission procedures and tended to recreate a quasi-domestic universe. Thus, the club can be seen as a “social space,” an intermediary space, following Michèle Cohen’s idea that “social spaces were neither fully public nor private but rather a space-between, created in part by the nature of the activities that took place there, and comprising all the spaces for ‘society’ both inside or outside the home.”

As long as politeness was located in social spaces where women were also present, it would endanger men’s masculinity. To retain their masculine character, men had to remove themselves from women’s company and conversation. They needed to create and preserve a private space in which they could protect their sexual and social identity. The “public” school has sometimes been referred to as one of those private spaces; so is the club. The exclusion of women from clubs, whose sociability and conversation were considered inappropriate for the feminine character, also reflected the will of men to remove women from this world of male affiliation. Homosociality was seen as an efficient means to preserve men’s threatened masculinity: “to retain the firmness and constancy of the male, [men must spend time] in the company of our own sex.”

In the second half of the eighteenth century an awareness grew that politeness, as it was defined—and in conformity with the French model—was incompatible with virility, so precious a notion to the English national character. As French conversation and sociability were associated with femininity, the only way to safeguard
the man’s masculine identity in England was to create new norms of politeness, which would perform a model of sociability à l’anglaise. Philip Carter considers that “the emerging attractions of refined sociability stimulated a need for conduct writers to develop existing notions of acceptable masculinity—to create, in effect, a model of refined masculine conduct—that would allow urban males to display a capacity for refinement while maintaining their masculine identity.” It is true that clubs had an influence on the art of conversation, on politeness and on society in general, replacing a French “feminine” model of sociability with an English model, in which men reigned. The lack of sociability and refinement often reproached to the Englishman was corrected by the success of such male institutions as London clubs, whose members represented the best examples of highly sociable masculinity. Samuel Johnson, a reputed clubman himself and the founder of the Literary Club, invented an alternative word to “sociable:” in 1783, he coined the word “clubable,” which perfectly corresponded to the English character. It remained a synonym of sociable but better suited English sociability. The first impressions that many might have on the English at the time could be deceitful, as the Swiss Muralt observed: “It is usual for them to be reserved at first, easing only once they are better acquainted with the persons they are dealing with.” Thus, association and life in society enabled them to surpass their initial inhibitions. Once the ice had been broken and the environment tamed, Englishmen could adhere to a real spirit of community. The private, exclusive, even intimate atmosphere of the club, as well as its male-only character, seemed to suit the English better and to enable them to forget their reserve or their clumsiness and to shine as sociable individuals in a chosen assembly of restrained size, composed by their peers. The frankness that the English showed in their discourse, as well as their taciturnity and the roughness of their manners, neither altered the refinement of their nation, nor their sociable character. Once seen as real deficiencies, those traits of the national character have become positive identifying values throughout the eighteenth century: they have taken part in the redefinition of English masculinity. Free from the French model, politeness and masculinity have been reconciled: Englishmen could be both polite and manly. According to Shaftesbury, politeness resulted in conversation between distinguished and learned men rather than an exchange between the sexes, which would represent a potential threat to their masculinity: “Language and style, as well as our voice and person, should have something of that male-feature and natural roughness by which our sex is distinguished. And whatever politeness we may pretend to, ‘tis more a disfigurement than any real refinement of discourse to render it thus delicate.”

NOTES

2 On the role of clubs in the development of urban sociability, see Peter Clark, Sociability and Urbanity: Clubs and Societies in the 18th Century City (Leicester: U of Leicester P, Victoria Studies Centre, 1986). By the same author, but covering more than two centuries, see British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World. (Ox-
3 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *gentleman* has evolved along the economic and social changes of the time. It is “a man of superior position in society, or having the habits of life indicative of this; often, one whose means enable him to live in easy circumstances, a man of money and leisure.” On the concept of the *gentleman* and its evolution in the eighteenth century, see an article by Jacques Carré, “Gentleman,” in *Dictionnaire Raisonné de la Politesse et du Savoir-Vivre du Moyen-Âge à Nos Jours*, dir. Alain Montandon (Paris: Seuil, 1995) 425-438.


5 According to the *OED*, the word *fop* was first recorded in 1440 and, for several centuries, just meant a fool of any kind. In 1672, for the first time, it was used to mean: “one who is foolishly attentive to and vain of his appearance, dress, or manners; a dandy, an exquisite.”


11 In their newly released book, Henry French and Mark Rothery explain Connell’s intention “to emphasize both the contingent, historical nature of gender relations, and their evolution through an on-going struggle between powerful and subordinate groups in society.” *Man’s Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: OUP, 2012) 5.


15 According to the *OED*, *politeness* is a synonym for “polish, refinement, elegance, good taste”.


19 The *Society of Dilettanti* was founded in 1734 by a group of young men just returned from their *Grand Tour* in Italy. They wished to promote, in their own country, the taste for the same objects that contributed to their intellectual enrichment there.

20 *Almack’s* was created by twenty-seven young men of rank in 1764, as a gambling institution, located in St James’s Street. It soon became extremely fashionable and marked the end of *White’s* monopoly in the universe of private gambling clubs. In 1778, William Brooks, the second owner of the club, gave his name to *Brooks’s*.

Among the illustrious members of the club, Charles James Fox stands as its main symbol. See an article by Richard Ollard “The Brooks’s of C.J. Fox,” in Philip Ziegler and

21 Carter referred to the “gentlemanly social performance,” in *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 209.


23 Those paradoxes are underlined and analysed in Capdeville, *L’Age d’Or des Clubs Londoniens* (1730-1784), 275-80.


25 This tradition of secrecy comes from the freemasons’ ancient rites performed in the Middle-Ages. At the time, they used to recognize themselves by specific words, signs and secret gestures.

26 The *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks* was founded in 1735 by Henry Rich, the machinist of *Covent Garden Theatre*. It gathered men of talent every Saturday around a piece of *steak* prepared by Rich himself. “[the society is] composed of the most ingenious artists in the Kingdom […] [who never suffered] any diet except Beef-steaks to appear.” *The Connoisseur*, n° 19 (6 June 1754). Its emblem was the *gridiron*, on which the first steak was grilled, and its motto: “Beef and Liberty!”

27 In the 1720s, several *Hell-Fire Clubs* appeared in London. They were dedicated to atheism and blasphemy, but also seemed to be a pretext for drunkenness and debauchery. The first one was founded in 1719 by Philip, Duke of Wharton and other high society rakes. A royal edict tried to suppress them in 1721. But in 1740, the most famous of all “Hell-Fire clubs” was created by Sir Francis Dashwood with twelve other members. This secret fraternity was called *The Order of the Knights of St. Francis of Wycombe*, or sometimes *The Friars of St. Francis* or *The Monks of Medmenham*. See Daniel P. Mannix, *The Hell-Fire Club* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959) or a more recent study by Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Clubs: Sex, Satanism, and Secret Societies* (Yale University Press, 2008).

28 “It is customary, after the cloth and dessert are removed and two or three glasses of wine are gone round, for the ladies to retire and leave the men to themselves,” John Trusler, *The Honours of the Table, or Rules for Behaviour during Meals* [1788], (Dublin: W. Sleater, 1791) 8.


30 Jean-Bernard Le Blanc (Abbé), *Lettres d’un Français* [1745], 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1751) 2: 110-116. It would be interesting to try and establish a link between the appearance of this segregation of the sexes at the end of the meal and the development of institutions of masculine sociability at the end of the seventeenth century.

31 For precisions on the ritual of toasting, see Capdeville, *L’Âge d’Or des Clubs Londoniens*, 139-143.

32 Here is one example reported in *White’s* betting book:

*March 21st 1746/47.*

Mr John Jeffries bets Mr Dayrolle five guineas, that Lady Kildare has a child born alive before Lady Caroline Petersham.

N.B. Miscarriages go for nothing.


For *Brooks’s* betting book, see “Bettes Book–1778”, LMA, Mss. Acc/2371/BC.


34 *Spectator*, n° 342 (2 Apr. 1712).

35 *Spectator*, n° 57.

36 *Spectator*, n° 242 (7 Dec. 1711).

37 The concept of the separation of spheres was theorized and developed for the first time by Martha Vicinus, *Separate Spheres* (Bloomington, 1974).
43 Letter to Lady Ossory (14 Dec. 1771) Horace Walpole, Correspondence, 32: 67.
44 In his correspondence, Horace Walpole, himself a member of The Female Coterie, listed the names of the women who founded this ‘atypical’ club:

There is a new institution that begins to make and, if proceeds, will make considerable noise. It is a club of both sexes to be erected at Almack’s, on the model of that of the men at White’s. Mrs. Fitzroy, Lady Pembroke, Mrs. Meynell, Lady Molyneux, Miss Pelham et Miss Lloyd are the foundresses. I am ashamed to say I am of so young and fashionable a society; but as they are people I live with, I choose to be idle either than morose.

Letter to Montagu (6 May 1770), Horace Walpole, Correspondence, 10: 305.
45 Chiffres donnés par Peter Clark, Clubs and Societies, 198.
46 Peter Clark, Clubs and Societies, 199.
48 “La Belle Présidente” is an expression used by Lord Lyttleton in 1765 and reported in C.B. Tinker, The Salon and English Letters: Chapters on the Interrelation of Literature and Society in the Age of Johnson (NY: Macmillan, 1915) 124. Elizabeth Vesey, Mrs. Boscawen, Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot, Hester Chapone, Hannah More attended regularly, as well as eminent gentlemen from London high society such as Lord Lyttleton, Lord Pulteney, the Earl of Bath. Among the circle’s habitués were also Horace Walpole, David Garrick, Dr. Johnson or Edmund Burke
49 “À la question, mais pourquoi excluez-vous les femmes qui prendraient part à la conversation d’une manière agréable?’ L’Anglais de lui répondre: ‘Oh! c’est que leur présence serait pour nous un sujet de gêne et de contrainte: nous ne pourrions pas dire ce que nous voudrions, ni pousser nos toasts’, et l’Italien d’ajouter: ‘C’est-à-dire, que vous ne pourriez pas vous livrer à des excès scandaleux, détruire votre constitution et vos principes, vous abandonner à l’intemperance et à l’obscénité’,” Jean-Louis Ferri de Saint-Constant, Londres et les Anglais (Paris: Fain Jeune, 1804) 1: 198.
51 James Forrester, “The Polite Philosopher” [1734], A Present for a Son (London: J. Dixwell, 1775) 67-68. Forrester defined conversation with ladies as “the Shorter, Pleasanter and more Effectual Method of arriving at the summit of genteel behavior” (62).
52 Spectator, n° 128 (27 July 1711).
53 Spectator, n° 433 (17 July 1712).
61 Women’s Petition against Coffee representing to Publick Consideration the Grand Inconveniences accruing to their Sex from the Excessive Use of that Drying, Enfeebling Liquor, Presented to the Right Honourable the Keepers of the Liberty of Venus (London, 1674).
64 J. Fordyce, Sermons to Young Women, 1: 104.
67 In May 1774, Boodle’s, one of the main clubs of St James’ Street, organised a great masquerade at the Pantheon, a building designed by James Wyatt and inaugurated in 1772.
70 “Autant les Français se plaisent dans la compagnie des femmes, autant les Anglais la craignent, à moins qu’ils ne soient amoureux,” Jean-Bernard, Le Blanc (Abbé), lettre 7, Lettres d’un Français, 1: 45.
72 The term Macaroni was also used to refer to those young wealthy aristocrats and fa- mous founding members of Brooks’s club, who were characterized by their eccentric dress and hair style, inspired by Italian fashion. Their eccentric behaviour and delicate manners reminded of the figure of the beau or fop.
73 Tim Hitchcock & Michèle Cohen, English Masculinities, 51.
74 Richard Hurd, Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel, Considered as Part of an Englishman’s Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Locke (London: A. Millar, 1764) 156.
75 John Andrews, Letters to a Young Gentleman on his Setting out for France (London, 1784) 4.
80 This idea is developed in Michèle Cohen & Tim Hitchcock, English Masculinities, 1660-1800 (London & NY: Longman, 1999) 47.
83 James Boswell recorded on November 29th, 1783: “I was in Scotland when this Club was founded during all the winter. Johnson, however, declared I should be a member, and invented a word upon the occasion: ‘Boswell (said he) is a very clubable man’. When I came to town I was proposed to Mr Barrington, and chosen.” James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. R.W. Chapman, 1953 (Oxford: World’s Classics, OUP, 1998) 1260.

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