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# Introduction

In 1823 William Hazlitt wrote:

Who with the Gentleman's Magazine held carelessly in his hand, has not passed minutes, hours, days, in *lackadaisical* triumph over *ennui*? Who has not taken it up in parlour window seats? Who has not ran [*sic*] it slightly through in reading rooms?<sup>1</sup>

He understood that pretty much the entire reading public was aware of the monthly miscellany periodical, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and probably read it, at home or in a more public club or library, even if only dipping into it to kill time.

In 1823 the magazine was 92 years old. Throughout most of the previous century it had held a leading market position. In the 1750s some 15,000 copies were printed every month and sold to an even larger number of readers throughout Britain and beyond. Thousands of those readers also supported it by submitting compositions in prose and poetry.<sup>2</sup> This was astonishing in a bruisingly competitive publishing environment where periodicals usually survived only a few years and rarely outlived their founders. Indeed, as early as 1738 a *Gentleman's Magazine* editorial had gloated over the demise of 'almost twenty Imitations'.<sup>3</sup> Surviving copies of many are rare, some known only through incidental contemporary references.

The *Gentleman's Magazine*, by contrast, lasted until 1907. The hundreds of complete or long runs that were bound for preservation and kept in academic, public and private libraries in Britain and abroad are a tribute to its contemporary significance throughout the English-speaking world. Yet, despite this legacy, the *Gentleman's Magazine* has

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not received its due attention from historians of the eighteenth century as a cultural product in its own right.

It has suffered from a reputation established in the early nineteenth century for outdated stuffiness. To a rising generation of radicals, reformers or romantics, it represented the old-fashioned values of their fathers' and grandfathers' generations. They saw it as a rather dull, staid publication for a backward-looking readership. As of an aged relative, Hazlitt was fond of it ('we profess an affection') to the extent that he 'would almost wish some ill to those who can say any harm of it', but ultimately slightly damning of a title he regarded as past its sell-by date ('the last lingering remains of a former age').<sup>4</sup> Robert Southey agreed. He took the magazine in Keswick in 1804, excusing this as 'to enlighten a Portuguese student'.<sup>5</sup> He was actually both published in it and planned to use it for biographical notes for *Specimens of the English Poets*, yet called it 'a disgrace to the age and the country'.<sup>6</sup> In the privacy of his journal Sir Walter Scott noted that he had, as Hazlitt described, turned to an 'odd volume' of the *Gentleman's Magazine* because he had finished other books. It was like a pawnbroker's shop with interesting articles confused amid a jumble of nonsense. He was rather more complimentary when addressing the editor of the magazine directly.<sup>7</sup> It was the venerable old age of the *Gentleman's Magazine* that impressed printer Charles Timperley. His 1839 trade history dubbed it 'the Old Parr of periodicals'.<sup>8</sup> A decade later, in William Thackeray's historical satire *Vanity Fair*, set in the Napoleonic Wars, the *Gentleman's Magazine* symbolized an unattractive past as one of the unread 'standard works in stout gilt bindings' (alongside the *Annual Register*, Blair's *Sermons*, Hume and Smollett) in two glazed book-cases in the study of wealthy businessman and domestic tyrant, John Osborne.<sup>9</sup>

This book looks behind the nineteenth-century critical judgment to examine the huge and underexploited resource that the *Gentleman's Magazine* represents for its construction of British gentlemanly masculinity, from its launch in 1731 to 1815. It considers, as others have done its founder, Edward Cave, and his editorial successors, and its role within publishing and book history. But more importantly, it integrates the text with its readers, their understanding of their reading and their contributions, responses and reactions to the text. As a study of its readers' horizon of expectations, it also does for masculinity what Kathryn Shevelow's *Women and Print Culture* does for femininity.<sup>10</sup>

It therefore provides a bridge between a purely literary cultural approach to masculinity and the related social practices in which the readership engaged.<sup>11</sup> The active participation of correspondents both

shaped the magazine, and helped to frame their understanding of the intertwined nature of eighteenth-century gender and class promised in the title: *Gentleman's Magazine*. Paradoxically perhaps, the group that emerges from this study is not the traditional gentlemen of the nobility or gentry, Samuel Johnson's 'men of Ancestry'.<sup>12</sup> It is, rather, 'gentlemen' of the middle class or 'middling sort'.

This is the story, then, of the rise and aspirations of this expanding and increasingly articulate eighteenth-century phenomenon identified by, among others, Penelope Corfield, Henry French, Margaret Hunt and Paul Langford.<sup>13</sup> It goes further, however. It is not so much the story of *who* these men (and women too) were, but of *how* they fashioned themselves as genteel and inserted themselves as a public in the nation's cultural and political life, by discussing and circulating through the magazine's pages the ideology of a new gentlemanly masculinity of merit achieved through industry and self-restraint. It extends considerably the time period of Shawn Lisa Maurer's *Proposing Men*. Maurer concentrates on the early-eighteenth-century *Spectator* and *Tatler* to argue that explicit periodical discourse about women also constructed a desirable masculine identity of the active, economically productive middling-sort man, exercising benevolent control over women in the setting of the household. Maurer indeed suggests that the *Gentleman's Magazine* deserved greater attention.<sup>14</sup>

The *Gentleman's Magazine* is unusually robust as a source. Unlike many texts used in cultural studies of eighteenth-century gender, it was available to readers throughout this whole time period of 84 years (and beyond), very widely disseminated and read throughout Britain and across the English-speaking world, and contained the multiple voices of thousands of real men and women outside elite and literary circles. It was a vast repository with a panoramic subject matter: an abridgement of the full range of Enlightenment fare, covering all the typical subject headings in a library catalogue of the time – divinity, philosophy, history, geography, scientific discovery, literature.<sup>15</sup>

It therefore provides an excellent opportunity to test through a longitudinal study the periodization and themes of the historiography of masculinity in the long eighteenth century. Here too it is a bridge: between the polite, metropolitan Whiggish world conjured in the earlier century by the *Spectator* and *Tatler* and the more class-conscious, gendered bourgeois values of the nineteenth century depicted in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes*.<sup>16</sup>

Given the vast scale of the total magazine archive (12 monthly numbers plus an annual supplement of 48 to 64 pages each year until 1783

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and doubling in size thereafter), it has been sampled. The Preface (written retrospectively each year and providing editorial comment), January and July numbers have been read in full from 1731 (the launch of the magazine) to 1815 (the formal cessation of the worldwide military conflicts in which Britain was engaged for around half of those 84 years). As the magazine had a strongly serial flavour, with much cross-referencing and reader debates often stretching over several months, topics and arguments have inevitably sometimes been followed backwards and forwards into other numbers. The sampling includes quantification and analysis of the 21,583 family announcements (births, marriages and deaths).<sup>17</sup> These accounted for between four and 12 per cent of the magazine's content, on a rising basis over the time period studied and with an increasing element of reader contribution, especially for deaths. This is the first time the notices have been analyzed over such an extended period.<sup>18</sup>

Masculinities in the *Gentleman's Magazine* are always set in the wider context of representations both in other contemporary sources (many of which it reviewed) and in recorded experiences in diaries, memoirs, autobiographies and letters (recovering the extent to which men were able or willing to meet the standards of ideal or normative masculinity in their everyday lives and relationships). Case studies illustrate some themes in greater detail.

Chapter 1 considers eighteenth-century masculinity and its historiography. Chapter 2 introduces the magazine, its owners, editors and writers and the small changes to its format over the period of the study. Chapter 3 brings together and reassesses sources for the magazine's circulation and uses new empirical research to position its readership and reception as cutting across divisions between social ranks and geographical boundaries to form a national 'imagined community' of new gentlemanliness.<sup>19</sup> Chapters 4 to 6 are arranged in three chronological periods: 1731 to 1756, 1757 to 1789, and 1790 to 1815. This enables an analysis of the gentlemanly masculinities portrayed by the magazine in relationship to the historiography of crises and turning points. The Conclusion assesses the competing pull of traditional lineage gentlemanliness and its re-shaping along more inclusive, meritocratic lines.

# 1

## Gentlemanly Masculinity

### **The *Gentleman's Magazine* and masculinity**

The *Gentleman's Magazine's* title was redolent of a traditional, superior masculine standing, evoking implied readers who were male rather than female, adult, and of high social status, Naomi Tadmor's 'lineage families' – the gentry, perhaps even loftier.<sup>1</sup> Their self-confidence was apparent in its contents, their ordered, hierarchical society represented in regular factual information of institutional promotions in the Church of England, army, navy, royal court and diplomatic service. The month's news chronicled the official engagements of the court, sessions of Parliament, meetings of directors of the Bank of England, of the South Sea Company and of the aldermen of the City of London and proceedings in the civil and criminal courts. Individual lives were inserted into this picture in lists of births, marriages and deaths, often featuring again the leading families from the news and promotions columns.

However, published statistics are 'neither totally neutral collections of facts nor simply ideological impositions', but rather 'ways of establishing the authority of certain visions of social order, of organizing perceptions of "experience"'. They become naturalized through repeated publication.<sup>2</sup> The magazine's 'facts' were not as value-free as they seemed at first glance. All the institutions featured in the magazine, including the family in the births, marriages and deaths, were organized by gender. It was, for example, only in certain elite male fields that it marked promotions and appointments. Births almost invariably acknowledged the father and sex of the child, rather than the mother's or child's name, unless they were of very high status indeed. Marriages almost always began with the groom. The deaths were highly selective, as comparison with the monthly Bill of Mortality for London, also a

regular magazine feature, indicates. Unsurprisingly, approximately half the dead in the Bill were female, and over 40 per cent were minors, whereas the magazine's obituaries were dominated by adult males.<sup>3</sup> These obituaries marked not only the death but also the 'continuing "social being"' of the deceased. By differentiating one deceased person from another and the commemorated from those unworthy of record, they were contributing to the 'continuous production of the social order [...] proclaiming the posthumous existence of certain persons and the social values they represent'.<sup>4</sup> It was certain types of men and masculine values they emphasized.

Gender and, within this, masculinity are socially created and signify power.<sup>5</sup> Although the description 'gentleman' only rarely appeared in the personal announcements, the magazine consistently, and over a very long time period, represented and reinforced the importance of normative, institutional masculinity. Where masculinity was not the overt subject of an article or letter, there was still a subtext: the abiding entitlement to speak and act of educated, gentlemanly men. The magazine embodied a characteristic repeatedly identified as a key element of superior masculinity: its omnipresent, apparently timeless, yet invisible and unspoken nature. This was often concealed behind the apparently neutral and universalizing use of 'man' to mean 'human' and the deployment of certain masculine values as the yardstick of any person's worth.<sup>6</sup>

The magazine could then be read as a guide to how men were ranked as gentlemanly or not, male readers presumably expecting or hoping for inclusion. This seems to place the magazine's gentlemanliness close to Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's model of 'hegemonic masculinity', that form of heterosexual masculinity which at any one time guarantees male dominance over women (patriarchy), and the dominance of some males over others.<sup>7</sup> Connell is criticized for failure to recognize on the one hand multiple and competing forms of masculinity both within and entirely outside the hegemonic ideal and, on the other, that the hegemonic ideal may be just that, rather than a lived reality. However, for the purposes of this study Connell's 'hegemony' is a useful reminder of the abiding power implicit in some masculinities, in this instance 'gentlemanliness'.<sup>8</sup>

A closer reading of the *Gentleman's Magazine* establishes that its masculinity was neither as stable nor confident as appears at first sight. Some reader contributions, especially the 'poetical essays' and the obituaries, betrayed a measure of private doubt amidst the public certainty, especially where the vagaries of men's personal lives (self-esteem, love,

courtship and marriage) were concerned. Success in the gentleman's world the magazine depicted required constant effort and skilful navigation between the Scylla of relationships with women and the family (How do I know whether she loves me? Is the bachelor or the married family man happier? How can I reconcile myself to the death of my beloved child?) and the Charybdis of comparison with other men over rank, wealth, effeminacy and courage. The *Gentleman's Magazine* therefore not only upheld a version of hegemonic masculinity – apparently natural and universal, insinuated into all aspects of human society – but also captured the variety of relational 'lived experience and fantasy' that constituted gender and masculinity in everyday life for real individuals.<sup>9</sup>

There was too, as Connell's critics argue, variety in and dispute over exactly what qualities composed gentlemanly masculinity. These shifted over this study's 84 years as new sorts of gentlemen inserted themselves and their families into the magazine's announcements columns, measuring favourably their code of domestic respectability combined with hard-earned merit against aristocratic values. By 1815 there was a clear and increasingly self-identifying middling-sort tone to the magazine. It was a masculinity that some later used to justify claims to manhood suffrage.<sup>10</sup> Yet, for the upwardly mobile readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the shock years of the 1790s and French Wars typically produced a retreat to conservatism and a defence of the constitutional *status quo*.<sup>11</sup> As they retreated, the magazine's cultural pull waned. It became the creature Hazlitt gently mocked. What had seemed sturdy and manly 50 years or more previously was dismissed by Southey and Scott as 'Oldwomania' by 'reverend old gentlewomen' correspondents.<sup>12</sup>

## **Eighteenth-century masculinity**

Eighteenth-century British commentators recognized that Enlightenment thinking and the new social groups created by burgeoning commercialization had an impact on gentlemanly masculinity. The traditional gentlemanliness of the nobility (160 lords temporal who sat in the House of Lords) and gentry ('some 15,000 further landed families [...] lordlings, combining local clout and office with – for some at least – national stature as the backbone of the backbenchers') was based on inheritance and landed property.<sup>13</sup> Their position was justified as part of a divinely ordained patriarchal pyramid. God as the supreme father granted authority for analogous rule over their people by kings, and over their families and households by fathers. The system was upheld

through a code of male honour, in which the control of female sexuality was key and the duel the ultimate sanction.<sup>14</sup>

From the seventeenth century this model was undermined as Enlightenment empiricism demanded a reasoned, scientific explanation of mankind's place in the universe that in this context can be termed 'modern'. John Locke (1632–1704) took anatomists' nerve theory, which privileged individuals' feelings and experiences, and applied it to government and education. If each person was subject to unique sensations, then the mind of a child might be conceived as a blank slate upon which good or bad upbringing formed the man (and Locke was thinking of men rather than women).<sup>15</sup> Locke was widely read throughout the following century (a collected volume published in 1714 was in its 13th edition by 1824). It was familiar to and admired by some *Gentleman's Magazine* correspondents.<sup>16</sup>

Locke's theory did not shake to the ground the concept of patriarchy. Rather, it relocated its justification in the individual and his family.<sup>17</sup> It opened to all, even those born well below the nobility and gentry, the possibility of attaining gentlemanliness and the power it conferred through education and socialization. This was attractive to the new social groups found in London and other growing cities and towns. Their occupations included finance (stockjobbers, bankers, speculators), the professions (lawyers, doctors) and trading in goods, especially new luxuries. Traders included both the great merchants and the many middling-sort retailers and shopkeepers.<sup>18</sup> These were occupations in which mental prowess and what we would call a 'client-facing' manner had greater value than physical masculinity: the aristocrat's libertinism and duelling or the manual worker's raw strength.<sup>19</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Richard Steele (1672–1729) provided guidance in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* to the requisite new behaviour: politeness a conversational ease in the company of strangers as well as family and friends. Both remained in print during the century as collected volumes that were regularly cited. Politeness could, then, be acquired, was accessible, and introduced new worlds of possibility for aspirational members of the new professional, commercial and even artisan classes. By mid-century, the period covered by Chapter 4, it was more or less synonymous with gentlemanliness.

Among historians of politeness, Philip Carter draws on a rich variety of material, including conduct literature, periodicals (especially the *Tatler* and *Spectator*), drama and the lived experience of individuals taken from published diaries, memoirs and letters. He concludes that polite masculinity was largely defined through social performance

and against other men rather than women, and that restrained ‘gentlemanly’ conduct was the hegemonic norm with effeminate foppishness operating as a warning against exaggerated politeness rather than sexual orientation.<sup>20</sup> Some recent scholarship counsels against over-identification of politeness with the eighteenth century and masculinity. To be sure other forms of masculinity existed, but politeness remains a useful concept because it encompasses some of the key social and cultural changes of the period.<sup>21</sup> Analysis of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1731–56 goes beyond Carter because it reveals some of the ways in which polite ideals were transmitted to a broad national audience.

The process of self-education also produced fresh anxieties over both social origin and gender. Superficial politeness might conceal underlying vulgarity.<sup>22</sup> And politeness was not restricted to men. The civilizing influence of female conversation in mixed gatherings – at the tea table, in assembly rooms, public walks and gardens – was crucial. Yet too much frivolous interaction with women and the worlds of fashion and shopping associated with them could feminize a man. Such anxieties often lay at the heart of popular contemporary drama and fiction throughout the century, portrayed through stock characters, from the *nouveau riche* merchant Sterling and his sister Mrs Heidelberg in George Colman’s and David Garrick’s play *The Clandestine Marriage* to the malicious fop Mr Lovel in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*.<sup>23</sup> These potential pitfalls are also examined in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 begins in 1757 in order to capture an alleged ‘gender panic’ at the start of the Seven Years’ War, when some contemporaries blamed the adverse effects of politeness for Britain’s poor military performance. The key contemporary source for this interpretation is polemicist John Brown’s popular *Estimate* of 1757 which attributed defeats to an effeminacy that had sapped men’s military courage.<sup>24</sup> The *Gentleman’s Magazine* responded immediately to Brown with excerpts and positive comment.<sup>25</sup> It also gave a voice to those who supported a revived militia aimed at re-injecting martial courage into the male citizen-soldier defending the nation, its women and children.<sup>26</sup>

With hindsight, 1759 ended as an *annus mirabilis*, with setbacks reversed. By 1763, victory was secured and a new sense of British nationalism was built on an unrivalled position as ‘the most aggressive, the most affluent, and the most swiftly expanding power in the world’.<sup>27</sup> British manhood was vindicated and the superior, active male citizen was reconfigured as the ‘independent man’. His virtue was generated by gendered personal attributes rather than inherited rank, for manly independence meant not only freedom from direct or indirect financial

dependence on others but also 'the condition in which self-mastery, conscience and individual responsibility could be exercised'.<sup>28</sup> Taken together, the views of these men were 'public opinion', of which government was increasingly compelled to take note. The *Gentleman's Magazine* was one of the means by which this public opinion was disseminated.

Gender panic is said by some historians to have produced a sharper differentiation between men and women based on biology, one of the modern sciences.<sup>29</sup> They suggest that the new gentleman was compared not only to other British men but also to women, whose weaker nerve fibres rendered them incapable of the same degree of reason. Empire also opened up a new range of subordinate male 'others' against whom British masculinity was defined, through the development of 'scientific' racial and stadial theories.<sup>30</sup> This often manifested itself as the emasculation of non-European men or their definition as 'savages'. This study also challenges this interpretation of post-war masculinity.

Politeness was not abandoned, but the preferred version of gentlemanly masculinity metamorphosed into 'sensibility', in which brisk sincerity, candour and spontaneity reflected a man's true feelings.<sup>31</sup> The turn was evident in the negative public reaction to the posthumous 1774 publication of the noble Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*, which revealed the potential hypocrisy of outwardly good manners. The *Gentleman's Magazine* was in the vanguard of the critics. Its book reviewer praised the work's 'elegance and purity' of style but 'lamented' that 'sound principles of religion and morality are omitted in his system of education'.<sup>32</sup> Class conflict between aristocracy and middling-sort intruded on the gentlemanliness debate.

Sound principles of religion and morality were also what some Britons turned to after a second national crisis: the loss of the American colonies in 1783 following eight more years of war. The apparent withdrawal of divine approval for Britain's overseas ventures is seen as a key factor in the growth of evangelicalism, which sought to mend the Britain's broken relationship with God through a spiritual and moral revival of standards in public life.<sup>33</sup> Evangelicals relocated civic virtue in the Christian household, in the family life of rational, public men. Patriarchy was reconstructed as a mutually affectionate yet still unequal domestic conjugal bond between man and woman.<sup>34</sup>

Joanne Bailey notes that 'family sentiment and domesticity [...] can be traced throughout the long eighteenth century in major or minor forms', citing the widespread use of the ideal of the 'tender parent'.<sup>35</sup> At this particular conjunction, however, it took on a more political flavour. Together with sensibility's directness, it brought to further

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