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Introducing Romantic sociability

Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite

On the night of 28 December 1817, the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon held a dinner in the painting room of his studio at 22 Lisson Grove, London. The centerpiece of the room, illuminated by the flickering light of a winter’s day fire, was Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem: the occasion was partly marking a completion of a phase in the painting which had involved Haydon’s portrait of William Wordsworth witnessing Christ between the figures of Voltaire and Milton. Present at the party were Wordsworth himself, John Keats, who was meeting Wordsworth for the first time, Charles Lamb and Thomas Muckhouse. The evening soon became exceedingly convivial. There was a vigorous debate on the merits of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Virgil, and toasts were made to Voltaire and Newton. Others joined the party in the course of the evening—the surgeon Joseph Ritchie, who was about to embark on a trip of exploration in Africa, and John Kingston, comptroller of the Stamp Office and a man with some pretensions in belles lettres. According to Haydon, Kingston had been curious to meet Wordsworth partly because of the latter’s literary celebrity but also because, as distributor of stamps for Westminster, Wordsworth was Kingston’s inferior in the civil service. ‘The moment he was introduced he let Wordsworth know who he officially was’, writes Haydon in his diary. This produced an awkward moment of self-consciousness for Wordsworth, who was exposed before the company as a placeman, subject to the authority of men like Kingston. The latter’s attempt to enter into the world of these artists and writers by talking to Wordsworth about poetry was ridiculed by a drunk Charles Lamb, who countered Kingston’s sage remarks with the nursery rhyme: ‘Diddle diddle do’, an assertion of the infallible and the noble against the bureaucratic intruder. ‘There is no describing this scene adequately’, Haydon commented.
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There was not the restraint of refined company, nor the vulgar freedom of low, but a freak, natural force, such as one sees in an act of Shakespeare, every
man expressing his natural emotions without feign. Into this company, a little
heated with wine, a Comproviso of the Stag's Office walked, billed, dressed, &
official, with a droll air of the powers above him and a droll contempt for those
beneath him.

He goes on:

There was something interesting in seeing Wordsworth visiting & Keats at Lamb's,
& me Picture of Christ's entry into Jerusalem: then, occasionally brightened in
the gleam of rays that sheltered from the fire, & bearing the voice of
Wordsworth repeating Milton with an intonation like the funeral bell of St Paul's &
the music of Handel mingled, & then Lamb's wit came sparkling in, between
& Keats's rich fancy of Savoy & Rome & doves & white clouds, wound up the
stream of conversation. I never passed a more delightful day & I am convinced
that nothing in Boswell is equal to what came out from these Poets. Indeed there
were no such Poets in his time. It was an evening worthy of the Elizabethan age,
and still long flash upon that inward eye which is the bliss of Solitude."

The 'immortal dinner', as it was described in Hazlitt's Autobiography, was a sociable event staged by the painter in what was both a private
and a professional space: his studio, and before a work in progress, which was not merely a kind of historical backdrop to another kind
of guest in dialogic relationship with the drama before it. Christ's Entry
was a heroic vindication and, indeed, sanctification, of the capacity
of men of genius to transcend the age. The dinner has been staged on
a number of occasions in biographical accounts of the protagonists and a survey
of metropolitan culture in 1812, but it has not received any sustained
critical attention within Romantic studies, like 'Romantic sociability' as
a whole. The turn to history in Romantic studies has given us
some glimpses into the sociability of men and women of the Romantic
period for example, the dinner network comprised by the reform societie,
publishers' dinners, theatre-going and supper parties of the Godwin
circle in the 1790s; the suburban sociability of some evening contests, tea
drinking and music-making of the Hunt circle in the 1810s and 1820s; the
'Italianist salon' of William Roscoe in Liverpool; John Clare's scrutiny of
Cathedral, Lamb's and Hazlitt at the Leader Magazine dinners of the 1810s;
the friendship of Thomas Moore's conversational consummate; Helen
Maria Williams' anglicization of French salon sociability, but in only
a few of these cases has sociability actually been the focus of the analysis
and there has certainly been no work which has attempted to define
'Romantic sociability' or map a possible field of study in such terms.

Within the social history of the long eighteenth century it would be true
to say that sociability has received more substantial attention in work by
scholars such as Peter Burke, John Money, Kathleen Wilson and Peter
Clark. Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen's English Masculinities uses
sociability as a sub-category in which to group two of the chapters of
that collection while both John Brewer's Pleasures of the Imagination and
Amanda Vickery's The Gentleman Dancer deals extensively with the topic
without explicitly foregrounding it. Paul Langford's essay 'Manners and
the Eighteenth-Century State: The Case of the Uncomparable Englishman'
over the subject more directly, culminating in a sub-section entitled
'English sociability'. Langford's essay exemplifies a general tendency in
eighteenth-century history, literary studies and social and political
theory to regard sociability ahistorically as a given of social interaction
which does not require explanation. For example, the two essays in
English Masculinities grouped under the rubric 'Sociability' which address
plebeian male sociability and gendered constructions of conversation for
uppers-middle class and elite males, suggest that sociability varied accord-
ing to class and social rank, but the editors do not directly address how
they are using the category or how their essays might impact its mean-
ing. Leslie Mitchell's TLS review of Peter Clark's monumental British
Chats and Societies speculated that the willingness of Britons to associate
in clubs and societies could be explained by urbanization and a non-
interventionist state post 1868 but 'must also owe something to what was
innate in the British character', a universalizing perspective also appar-
ent in Langford's essay which develops what is in effect a polemic about
English national character. Rejecting the Habermasian model of the
public sphere, Langford defines 'English sociability' as distinct
from sociability as extended kinship and sociability as the divided or
alienated self, as public and concludes with a quote from a Victorian,
George Gissing, to the effect that English sociability has never been
'ceremonial' or 'mirthful' but as regards every prime instinct of the
community ... the English social instinct is supreme'. Glossing this
quotation, Langford concludes 'If, at last, English sociability is an illu-
sion, it is one that has entranced the English themselves. Its most lasting
legacy is surely the potent image of the gentleman as the authentic rep-
presentative of Englishness, in the character which the eighteenth century
bestowed on him.' Langford's essay illustrates the continuing discursive
potency of sociability, how it can articulate particular constructions
of gender, class and national identity. As this volume will outline, this elusive potency is not just a feature of current academic discourse on sociability, but was apparent in the eighteenth century.

The competitive neglect of events such as Haydn's account of the 'immortal dinner' is a reflection of the marginal status of such texts as the essays, diaries and letters in Romantic literary studies, which have had considerable ideological investment in canonical genres and forms such as the lyric, as well as in a narrow text-based definition of the Romantic public sphere. As Paul Magnusson states: 'The public space of romantičanism is the book and the periodical, which suggests that it is not to be found in the theatre, the debating clubs, the bookshop or the dining room.' An argument of this volume is that we need to recover the significance of sociability, not simply for biographical studies of Romantic writers or in order to contextualize their work, but as a kind of text in its own right, a form of cultural work sometimes playfully examined as at 22 Lason Grove, which was a fundamental part of the self-definition of Romantic writers and artists. Another reason why events such as Haydn's 'immortal dinner' have been neglected is the apparent incompatibility of such convivial and theatrical social occasions with Romanticism's traditional identification with the lone poet, withdrawn into productive introspection, with individualism rather than collective activity, and with the cultivation of the authentic rather than the performative self.2 These emphases have been given a historical inflection in Mark Philp's claim that in the 1790s 'the ideals nurtured by sociability collapsed ... leaving the stage free for the isolationism of the Romantics', a statement which appropriately highlights the crucial significance of the 1790s for which also proposes the 'Romantics' as anti-social and Romantičism as a whole as representing the rejection of Enlightenment sociability.3 The chapters in this volume will attempt to challenge these assumptions. It is our contention that the solitary self has stood for Romantičism for too long: this volume will investigate re-sociable other.

If the solitary occupies the position of the other of the sociable or interiorized Romantičism, this is partly because there has been no critical tradition of representing a Romantičism in which sociability is a value. As Lawrence Klein has pointed out, '[t]he idea of sociability took shape in the form of a rehabilitation of solitude'.4 Before we move on to survey the heterogeneous forms that could be said to constitute Romantičism's sociable others, it might be worth mapping the move from what Klein refers to as the', the relutant', sociability of the earlier eighteenth century to the Romantič movement of solitude, which is engaged in Haydn's dialogue between solitude and sociability. In 'British Clubs and Societies', Peter Clark refers to 'an intimate recollection' of social activity in the Georgián period of which he distinguishes three broad categories: the 'private' sociability of the home, where 'the greatest volume of social contact took place'; the 'old-style' sociability based around the church, parliament, court and the street; and a 'new-style' sociability engendered by the commercialization of culture in venues such as the coffee-house, the inn, tavern, alehouse, the proliferation of forms of voluntary association, theatres, pleasure-gardens, dancing assemblies and so on. Within this last category Clark notes but does not substantively analyze the gender differences between what he calls 'fashionable sociability', 'influenced by sensibility and the public presence of women', and the sociability of the club, coffee-house and tavern, which was strongly identified with male homosociability.5 The preoccupation of the coffee-house and the club as models of sociability, both within eighteenth-century representations and contemporary readings of the period, has functioned to produce a paradigmatic model of sociability that is implicitly male and homo-social. It is one of the aims of this volume to re-examine this model in order to account for a more diverse range of sites of sociability, in particular, sites which are more inclusive of female modes of sociability, and to account for forms of female participation in the public sphere more generally, as part of a larger investigation of gender and Romantič-period sociability.6

The coffee-house and the club are the primary sites and practices of the conversational model of culture which starts to gain ground in the eighteenth century.7 A vital cultural formation in this respect is the early periodicals, in particular, Richard Steele's The Tatler (1709-11) and Joseph Addison's The Spectator (1711-14, 1715).8 While The Tatler and The Spectator exist for us as edited 'texts', they began their lives as 'papers', circulating within the heterogeneous webs of the actual sites of sociability with which they conducted their social traffic. There are a number of ways in which the early eighteenth-century public sphere might be said to announce sociability as a value:

(i) in the modelling of culture as a conversation, and the cultivation of the sociable virtues of laughter, chivalry, conviviality, taste and politeness;9

(ii) in the modelling of culture as object of sponsorship (a less participatory yet more theatrical model than (i) above);
politeness and sociability, politics and sociability, do not go hand in hand. Our volume seeks to examine what happens to this model which keeps politics and sociability separate in a period such as the 1790s which is marked, we argue, by highly charged combinations of politics and sociability. Jon Meo’s, chapter, in particular, examines the nature of precisely this kind of transformation of an early eighteenth-century mode of sociability, elaborated in the work of Shaftesbury, within the radical political cultures of the 1790s in the circles of Robert Merry.

Another significant model of sociability is the theatrical, performative or what John Dewey has referred to as the ‘spectatorial model’ of culture. This model intersects with the conversational model, but can diverge from it in that it can involve a less participatory mode of culture and sociability. As The Spectator No. 1 says: ‘I have acted in all the parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper.’ The Spectator No. 1, p. 5.) The figure of the spectator is a significant sociable presence in the writings of the Scottish Enlightenment, a crucial cultural form of the classical eighteenth-century public sphere. Adam Smith founds the Scottish Enlightenment tradition of what John Dewey has referred to as ‘spectatorial ethics’, exemplified by Smith’s innovation of the ‘cool and impartial spectator’ in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1719, revised 1790). As Dewey has also suggested, sociability is an ‘imperative’ of Enlightenment moral philosophy in general. According to Adam Smith, the best model of society is a conversational one in which pleasure arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another.

This moral philosophy is exemplary in its elaboration of sociability as a value. Moral philosophy and journalism are not separate realms, though. Indeed, the bringing together of journalism and philosophy – the open and critical discussion of modes of behaviour and everyday life – is a critical impulse of the bourgeois public sphere. As Addison’s speaker in *The Spectator* No. 10 says: ‘I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, so dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea Tables, and in Coffee-Houses’ (*The Spectator* No. 10, p. 14).

And just as Scottish Enlightenment philosophy is characterized by a focus on emphatically social and sociable relations, so too does this new coffee-house sociability involve both a democratization of philosophy and an enactment of the ideal of philosophy as a mode of sociable
interchange. The Teller and The Spectator papers popularize the philosophical ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment, self-consciously promulgating sociability as a virtue.

In The Spectator's reading of Thomas Hobbes's Discourse of Human Nature (1650), its satirical reproduction of Hobbes's misanthropic reading of laughter as pride—"[according to this Author therefore,] when we hear a Man Lange excessively, instead of saying he is very Merry, we ought to tell him he is very Proud" (The Spectator No. 37, p. 200)—produces the sociable virtue of laughter, thereby offering another example of the early eighteenth-century public sphere's production of sociability as a value. Running counter to the pessimistic and mechanistic model of civil society offered by Hobbes, produced out of a seventeenth-century background of religious and civil conflict, this reading offers a moment at which The Spectator foregrounds its own ideological implication within the Enlightened Hanoverian Whig regime in its valorizing of social order and harmony, free of the 'Spirit of Faction', and of an order of 'Merry' sociability. Even the categories of melancholy and pathos are pressed into service in the culture of the early eighteenth-century public sphere. The discourse of sentiment, for example, involved the category of catharsis, which relies on the sympathy of spectators. As Addison writes in The Spectator, it is by contemplating the 'greater miseries of others [that] a man forgets his own and obtains the needed mental catharsis' (The Spectator No. 387). A literature of pathos is a primary tool also in this training of feeling. Dyer has referred, for example, to the Ossian poem of James Macpherson as an attempt to 'increase humanity through the skillful manipulation of pathos' (21).

In this context, the political overdetermination of sentiment and sensibility in the 1780s as signifiers, on the one hand, of Jacobin revolutionary excess, and on the other, of counter-revolutionary chivalry and loyalty (most notably in Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)), offers a measure of what is distinctive about Romantic-period sociability in contrast with the earlier period. In the 1780s, one of the primarily rationalized set of associations with sentiment is sociability and anti-sociability. In Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, written in the late 1790s though not published until 1811, the sensibility embodied in the character of Marianne Dashwood is represented as emphatically anti-sociable. This is reflected in the novel through the counter-revolutionary perception of sensibility as a form of excess which threatens social and familial stability. John Mullan's important Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century (1988) frames a discussion of the relations between selfishness and sociality in the novel philosophy of Shaftesbury, Adam Smith and David Hume with a plea on the side of Austen's novel and passing references to Mullan. For Mullan, Austen's identification of sensibility with anti-sociability is invoked as though Austen transcends the struggles over the definition of sociability and sentiment that Mullan is describing in his book, rather than participating in the contestation of the meaning of both sociability and sentiment that characterized the 1790s. Furthermore, Mullan both endorses the conventional literary-historical narrative which reads the Austen novel as a sociable cure for sentimental excesses, and relies on an idea of sociability as a given which does not require explanation. Our project, on the other hand, understands sensibility and sociability to be heavily contested terms and practices critically implicated in the cultural politics of the 1790s, often highly unstable meanings.

The culture of sentiment is a vital part of what Jürgen Habermas in his Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere refers to as the 'audience-oriented privacy' which develops in the early eighteenth century. Genres such as the letter and the diary, as well as the epistolary novel's sentiment's primary literary genre—all participate in the particular ethos of this new culture of 'audience-oriented privacy', in which forms of intimacy are staged in public. A similar recognition of the public and socially oriented production of the individual underlies Niklas Luhmann's investigation of the 'codification of intimacy', and the culture of 'affect-management', which is predicated upon the understanding of the individual not as an isolate, but as a socially recognized entity who is required to perform his or her individuality within a repertoire of codes and modes of affect. Such conventions break down any absolute distinction between the solitary and the sociable. Similarly, such a culture of 'audience-oriented privacy' suggests a complicated version of the so-called public and private distinction, which has been such a significant category of cultural, social and historical analysis since the English translation in 1893 of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Here the public sphere is used to account for the ways in which modern European democracies are distinguished from their centralizing absolutist predecessors, and refers to a democratic space of discursive interaction in which citizens participate in a public culture of critique. Implanted in the economic, social and cultural developments of laissez-faire capitalism, the public sphere is nonetheless distinct in principle from both apparatuses of state and from economic markets. The distinction between the so-called private and public spheres has been a critical distinction
for cultural history, for the study of gender and for politically oriented studies of culture, and for our refutation of sociability. Within this field of debate on the public and the private, as in the social and literary history of this period, the category of sociability is engaged regularly but fleetingly, never elaborated in its own right. When sociability does make an appearance, it is often used as a term of differentiation from the political, as a site of mere play or of a purposeless form of performance or theatricality. Influential in this respect is the work of the German sociologist Georg Simmel, whose 1903 essay ‘On Sociability’ identifies sociology as any social interaction which exists primarily for its own sake and for the fascination which in its own liberation from [social] ties itdiffuses’. It is a ‘play-form’ of interaction which need have ‘no extrinsic results’. Societies feel that the formation of a society as such is a value; they are driven towards this form of existence.’ For Simmel, sociability’s ‘aim is nothing but the success of the social moment and, at most, a memory of it’.25 A similar ahistoricizing construction of sociability is apparent in more recent accounts of the public sphere, for example in Jeff Weintraub’s reference to ‘the approach, exemplified...by the work of Aris (and other figures in social history and anthropology), which sees the “public” realm as a sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability, and seeks to analyze the cultural and dramatic conventions that make it possible.’26

Weintraub’s term of ‘fluid and polymorphous’ underscores the complexity of the historical and social specificities that might be said to be played out in sociable practices. And Bruce Robbins’s summary of Weintraub’s model, in his introduction to The Bizarre Public Sphere, emphasizes the theatricality of sociability, its ‘symbolic display and theatrical self-representation [which] has little if anything to do with collective decision making or state power’.27 Here, sociability is opposed both to political power and to rational communality; it is fully comprehended by a model of theatricality which is associated with individualistic impulses of ‘display’ and ‘self-representation’.

Similarly problematic in this respect is Nancy Fraser’s reading of the public as a theater in modern societies in which political participation is achieved through the mechanism of all.28 The pure metaphoricality of this relation between the theater and the public sphere by which an abstracted model of the theater and of the public sphere become mutually signifying works to evacuate both of any real material meaning. The public sphere is not simply a theater, and sociability is not purely dramatic. The theater is one particular form of material site of the public and of the sociable, with specific and changing conventions of sociable behaviours. To elaborate this materiality (as against a kind of abstractionlessness) is one of the projects which will be conducted in this volume. Performativity and publicity are vital defining categories for the public sphere, and for understanding the social and the sociable. They are also particularly important categories in terms of the possibilities of making sexuality a central category for social theory, rather than the marginal one it often is. As Michael Warner has pointed out, ‘it remains depressingly easy to speak of “social theory” and have in mind whole debates and paraprofessional networks in which sexuality figures only peripherally or not at all’.29 Critical figures within social theory such as Jürgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Niklas Luhmann and Pierre Bourdieu, all elaborate important social-theory models in which sexuality is either a marginal category or an irreconcilably heteronomous one. As Warner further points out, ‘[p]erformativity as a quasi-institution for the past century has returned continually to the question of sexuality, but almost without recognizing why it has done so, and with an endless capacity to marginalize queer sexuality in its descriptions of the social world’.30 The work of Judith Butler has been enormously important in theorizing performativity as a critical category both of social and textual analysis, and in relation to gender and sexuality. As Butler suggests, ‘[p]erformativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it simply be equated with performance’. Performativity is both a self-conscious or literalized form of social performance, and a ‘repetition of norms [that is] not performed by a subject [but] what enables a subject’.31 The nuanced and theorized mode of performativity that Butler brings to the study of subjectivity, gender and sexuality in contemporary culture offers enormous scope also for the historical study of sexuality, and for the more specific theorization of social performance and sociability, enabling, for example, a theoretical inflection of that historical model of sociability associated with modernity that Peter Clark identifies as ‘fashionable sociability’. Just how the idea of the performative might be used to inform a sense of fashionable sociability that is both embodied and discursively produced is examined in Clara Tuite’s chapter on the relations between style, sociability and sexuality, and what we might call a ‘queer’ and ‘fairy’ cultural politics and sociable style in the diaries of the landed gentry heiress, Anne Lister.

The most influential account of the public sphere, Habermas’s Structural Transformation, also participates in social theory’s view of sociability and the performative as essentialized forms of human behaviour which are distinct from political or historical engagement. For Georg Simmel, the category of conversation was important in precisely those
ways in which it is 'merely' sociable, not critical. 'In purely sociable conversation, the topic is merely the indispensible medium through which the lively exchange of speech itself unfolds its attractions. ... folk is its own purpose.' Here, the 'purely sociable conversation' of a phatic sociability in which 'talk is its own purpose' is distinct from a 'talk' that is geared to critique. However, in Habermas's narrative of the transformation from a courtly to a public model of culture, his phatic sociability analogized to the phatic modes of performativity that characterize courtly modes of behavior - functions as the courtly other of what bourgeois culture of critique surpasses. What distinguishes the bourgeois public sphere from an aristocratic culture, where talk is its own medium, is the way in which an urban culture begins to shed its dependence on the authority of the aristocratic noble hosts and to acquire that autonomy that turns conversation into criticism and commentary into arguments. For Habermas, then, it is precisely the transformation of conversation away from the ideal form into critique that is important. But what of Simmel's 'purely sociable conversation'? Does it have another function besides being this courtly other? Here, sociability critical to these modes of critique? Do we have to sacrifice the ban naut for the rational arguments? Margaret C. Jacob's chapter, 'Sociability and the International Republican Conversation,' engages precisely these issues in its examination of the sociable production of the democratic subject which occurred in printed periodicals, letters and drawing rooms across Europe, as well as in the colonies. This question - what function has sociability as a culture of critique? - becomes even more pressing when we move, the facts, as this volume does, from the earlier half of the eighteenth century to the golden Habermasian age of the bourgeois public sphere: in the end, the eighteenth century, when the public sphere becomes politicized, and this is a primary question of the volume: what happens to this influential Habermasian model of the public sphere, and of sociability, in the Romantic period?

Habermas does not address 'Romanticism' as such, but nonetheless engages a development whereby the late eighteenth-century public, 'England after 1770,' grows out of 'early institutions' such as the coffeehouse: the 'medium of the press and its professional criticism ... formed the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters within which the subjectivity originating in the integrity of the cogito family, by communicating with itself, attains clarity with itself.' In this model the conversation within print and between writer and reader 'grows out' of, implicitly displacing or exceeding the actual conversation of the coffee-house and the kind of print culture which in Addisonian terms models itself on and evokes that 'talk.' The Habermasian public sphere as it applies to England therefore has two aspects, an early eighteenth-century phase in which cultural production is primarily connected to sociable terms and a post-1750 phase in which the 'imagined community' of print takes precedence. This phase structures what is a movement of decline for Habermas, staged in his chapter title as 'From Culture-Debating to a Culture-Consuming Public'. As Diederik Lynch puts it in her chapter in the volume, Habermas ... narrativizes the relationship between commerce and the public sphere: outlining a process in which commercialization represents the sad, feminized sequel to public sphere conversation' (p. 214). Lynch's chapter seeks to challenge Habermas's model which links consumption and femininity against political activism, and re-examines the relations between commerce and the public sphere and women's historical agency, by considering shopping as a model of sociability and as an occasion for the rational articulation of public issues.

The most influential applications of Habermas to the Romantic period in Britain have been those of Terry Eagleton and Joe Klenner, both of which engage the genre of the periodical as a parodigmatic formation of the public sphere constituted by and through print culture. Klenner's The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1750-1830 (1987) 'explains how eighteenth-century writers used the periodical to organize audiences, but also why their "widening circle" of readers perceptibly fragmented in the political crises of the 1790s.' Klenner argues that Habermas's "public sphere" was deeply compromised from the start, no sooner projected than transformed into an image to consume by readers who did not frequent it. Eagleton's critique of Habermas's model of the public sphere similarly notes its "severe problems of historical periodization" and its "nostalgic" 'idealizing' connotations. The consensual model of the public sphere was exploded from within, Eagleton argues, by the emergence in the 1790s of a counter public sphere of the "Corresponding Societies", the radical press, Owenism, Cobbett's Political Register and Paine's Rights of Man, feminism and the Dissenting churches, a whole oppositional network of journals, clubs, pamphlets, debates and institutions. Periodical criticism registered "fons patronum" rather than consent. Sir Roger de Coverley and Sir Andrew Freepoarte were no longer drinking companions at the same clab, but deadly rivals."
Eagleton argues that the "function of criticism" in the Romantic period moves from the press and its professional criticism to "poetry itself" because "the depth and span of critique which would be equal to a society wrecked by political turmoil is altogether beyond the powers of criticism in its traditional sense." The force for that criticism lay in the Romantics' elaboration of "dissent-support as a revolutionary force, the production of a powerful yet demoralized human subject which cannot be formalized within the protocols of rational exchange." The latter phrase "protocols of rational exchange" indicates but does not name Addisonian sociability as a set of rules or the particular cultural space of the coffee-house encoding an inhibition of the discursive and non-discursive, material and theoretical, which Romanticism by implication had "given up" or of course. England's more historically nuanced account of the public sphere as it applies to Britain in this period, therefore, basically recapitulates Habermas' two-phase model of the public sphere. However, while Habermas' "world of letters" that subsumed the world of the coffee-house includes periodical criticism and forms such as the novel (by implication allowing a place for a writer such as Austen), Eagleton limits the function of criticism to poetry. His emphasis on the counter-public sphere is also problematic insofar as it represents it as the source of a "turning," which fragments and "cancels" the ideal of the consensus public sphere but implicitly cannot function as the sphere of critique in itself that honour is given to poetry as a reaction to the crisis which the counter-public sphere had exposed.

Rather than interpreting 1790s radical culture as a counter-public sphere revealing the self-interest and materiality of the earlier model of consensus between gentlemen as a network of civil society, it might be more useful to see this divide as representing an interrelated politicization and expansion of the boundaries of the public sphere in which sociability as a value encoding principles of free debate, openness, harmony between equals is amplified by the French Revolution and its impact on Britain. The chapters in this volume by James Epwin, Margaret C. Jacobs, Jon Mevor and Gillian Russell address this phenomenon in a variety of ways. Eagleton's description of the counter public sphere refers to an aspect of culture in the form of Cobbett, Paine, journals and pamphlets, but interestingly he situates these as part of a range of activities and institutions, such as the surrounding societies, which had a significant sociable dimension.

To Eagleton's definition of the counter-public sphere we might add political lectures, radical tavern culture, radical dining and the circles of Horne Tooke, William Godwin and publishers such as Joseph Johnson. Such a sociable culture does not suggest a simple eclipse of the coffee-house model of the public sphere but what might be described as its apocatastatic critique. As James Epwin's chapter in this volume suggests, the political potency of the ideals of uninterred expression and moral equipoise was most expressed through companionship, the right of a man to discourse with his friends, made the coffee-house more significant the ever in the 1790s. The fulcrum for performative dimensions of sociability which scholars as diverse as Stimm, Sennett, Habermas and Fawcett have sought to distinguish from the political or rational also came into their own in the 1790s as part of the periodic or subversive strategies of radical culture. An example is John Thelwall's 'King Chaumieres' in 'Politics for the People,' for which its publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton, was prosecuted in 1795. The title registers its origins as a sociable performance, stating that 'King Chaumieres' was An Anecdot, related by Citizen Thelwall, at the 'Green Court Society', a debating club, and the text itself notes the audience response, how it produced 'applause', 'triumph', and ultimately Thelwall being 'conducted away with shouts of triumph by the greatest part of the company.' In this case the function of criticism emerges out of Thelwall's elaboration of the sociable art of telling stories in company, the ideal of uninterred exchange which also allows for the possibility of connection and even the unassociable underpins his political performance.

As Paul Hamilton states in his introduction to Godwin's emphasis on the value of 'uncovered communication,' such a meeting of idealism and escapism is the political consequence of a utopian moment when Augustan literary culture had continued and postponed for so long. We might extend this 'meeting' to include 1790s radical culture as a whole. One of the aims of the counter-revolution was to close down the spaces in which texts such as 'King Chaumieres' could be enacted and subsequently disseminated in the form of print, spaces such as the debating clubs, lecture-rooms and taverns. But more effective in many respects was the use of the spy system to place in doubt the very principle of mutual confidence and trust on which social intercourse was based. The coffee-house was a site of surveillance, not by Mr Spectator, whose rules and modes and enabling a sympathetic social relationship, but by spies masquerading as a mere companion in order to betray and punish. The counter-revolution of the 1790s accentuates what might be described as the fear of the antisocial — the 'Spirit of Faction' underlying sociable relations, particularly between men, throughout the eighteenth century.
The threat posed by counter-revolution to the sociable ideals of the Enlightenment public sphere is the subject of Godwin’s Caleb Williams. Trying to escape from his persecutor Falkland, the eponymous hero ‘disappears’ in multi-cultural London by taking on the identity of a Jew. The metropolis is represented as a place of alienation, loneliness, isolation, and distance (Caleb regards himself as ‘a counterfeit’). In short, it is antisociable: ‘I dared not look for the consolations of friendship but, instead of seeking to identify myself with the joys and sorrows of others, and exchanging the delicious gifts of confidence and sympathy, was compelled to centre my thoughts and my vigilance in myself. My life was all a lie.’ Caleb tries to support himself financially by producing journalism in the style of ‘Addison’s Spectators’, an index of the difference between the early-eighteenth-century public sphere and its 1790s version.12 The sociable conception of literary production, based on the ideals of free interchange as well as actual social interchange between individuals is shown to be impossible. ‘Counterfeited’ as a Jew, Caleb uses his servant as an intermediary between himself and his publisher, whom he never sees: his writing, moreover, is not a disinterested expression of a socially meaningful identity but a mode of ‘substance’, with characteristics of peculiarity. Caleb’s imitation of The Spectator to earn a living anticipates Klancher’s claim that the public sphere was ‘no sooner projected than transformed into an image to consume by readers who did not frequent it’.13 The allusion to The Spectator also suggests how the ‘spectatorial ethics’ of the Enlightenment public sphere, implying community and sympathy, have mutated into a print culture as inherently ‘counterfeited’. Textuality itself—in its printed form—is problematic for Godwin. Print culture is counterfeiting because it is subject to the invisible workings and secret machinations by which the dominant classes can appropriate the energies and audience of a popular form such as the handbill and redirect them to its own ends. For Godwin, only face-to-face contact mediated by textuality can ensure free and open communication. However, at the same time he distrusted the licentiousness of the lute, performative sociability in which men like Dibdin and Mary Wollstonecraft ‘Truth’, he claimed, ‘could never be properly comminicated in theatres and halls of assembly’. Godwin saw the elaboration of radical culture as subversive laughter, the giving way of politeness to the carnivalesque inherent in the looseness of the Addisonian model of the public sphere, as having the potential to unleash the dangerous embodiment of the mode: ‘the conviviality of the feast may lead to the degradations of a riot’.14 Godwin’s emphasis on the importance of conversation in Political Justice was an attempt to reconfigure the terms of trust inherent in the Addisonian public sphere, constructing a space that might be more secure from the attentions of government but which would also serve to moderate the dangers of conviviality’s ‘loose talk’. His ideal of conversation was based on his own sociable circles, a company of friends, ‘private sociability’, in terms of Peter Clarke’s categorization. In the wake of the 1790s this version of sociability came to sustain literary culture in Romantic-period Britain in ways that have been only partially recognized. Sociable practices which were hitherto not part of the coffee-house model of the public sphere as critique, practices such as home visiting, private dinners (often under the auspices of publishers), and walking, played an increasingly important part in the validation of a distinctively literary public culture. This is apparent, for example, in Benjamin Haydn’s careful delineation of his dinner party in 1817 as occupying a space between the ‘restraint of refined company’ and ‘the vulgar freedom of low’ (reminiscent of Godwin’s conviviality). Moreover, the ‘frank, natural licence’ which the event exemplifies is qualitatively different from the model of literary culture as conversation represented by Boswell and Johnson: ‘I am convinced that nothing in Boswell is equal to what came out from these Poets. Indeed there was no such Poets in his time.’ The men at Haydn’s assume public representativeness not in terms of class or social status, or even as cultural arbiters on the Addisonian or Johnsonian model, but as a company of ‘Poets’. Similar occasions, lubricated by alcohol, enlivened by highly performative conversational strategies such as Charles Lamb’s punning or Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s monologues, formed the sociable contexts in which literary production was discussed, circulated, and sometimes created. The participants also worked to constitute this form of sociability textually, particularly through periodical publication apparent in titles such as The Companions, Table Talk, The Round Table or The Indulgent, in letters and also in poetry. As Nicholas Roe and Jeffrey Cox have shown, the cultural politics of the Hunt Society and that of the attack against them in magazines such as Blackwood’s was at base a struggle over what Hunt described as ‘sociability’, a particular idealization of friendship and group interaction as an exemplary model of social organization in general.15 In the context of post-Waterloo Britain such an emphasis on the transendent and redivisible capacities of the bonds of brotherhood and companionship had distinct political
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Within the literary public sphere is examined in Judith Barbour's chapter on the relations between sociality and literary sexuality in the correspondence of William Godwin. Barbour examines the fraught relations between the more recognizably 'public' and more prosaic homosocial model of literary sociality of the coffee-house and the more domestically oriented form of literary sociality, by examining a representative of sociality in Godwin's relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft. The letter mediated by social and quasi-sexual relations between such women writers as Mary Hays, Elizabeth Inchbald and Amelia Anderson.

Acimy's critics have acknowledged, Romantic-period Britain is notable for the rise of the nouveau literary, imaginative literature assumes a fully-dressed cultural and political authority. It is a period that saw the extension of sociality as both fact and value, reconfigured and redefined as a result of the suppression of utopian moments of the 1790s. was a crucial element in the shaping of such authorities. The process of reconfiguration and realignment considerably expanded and in some cases overwhelmed the literary public sphere. By incorporating literature, women, servants, the lower orders, the porcupine coffee-house model of the public sphere could more easily ignore. A lesson of this for our own definition of Romantic sociality is not limited to the sociality of literary circles but to recognize its fluid interplay with other modes of sociality within British society as a whole. We need to be attentive to the contexts in which sociality is taking place and adapt its potential to be constructed discursively as a value both new and now. As critics of a volume that represents from Australia we find it interesting to note that the part that the Antipodes had to play in the Romantic discourse of sociality was for Charles Lamb, at least, in defining the limits of sociality. In a letter to Barrow Field in New South Wales he contemplates the difficulty of conducting an报表ial relationship as socialite inter-hagge; at my point he says to Field, your "now" is not my "now" and, again, your "then", is not my "then", but my "now" may be your "then" and vice versa. Lamb later used this letter as the basis of an essay for the London Magazine, 'Distant Correspondence', thereby staging his loss of intimacy with his friend in a more public context: I lay trembling chanting to you at a distance, as when we used to exchange good mornings outside of our alcoholic hangouts, imagine this Hart-cout to the Temple. Why did you ever love that quiet corner? Why did you ever love that quiet corner?
Lamb's letter is typical of a certain Romantic discourse of sociability in which occasional companionship, cordiality and friendship are nostalgically commemorated by a speaker writing from a standpoint of isolation or self-willed solitude. His correspondence with Field in Australia suggests that in a period when the British sphere of influence was wider than ever before, due to global war, empire and exploration, sociable networks and communities had to be reconfigured and reimagined. A history of sociability in this period might therefore also function as an alternative history of war and empire, a topic towards which we can only gesture.

Conversation being a predominant trope of the volume, we seek to engage the notic of Romantic sociability in a spirit of open dialogue and discussion. The volume is an exhaustive and comprehensive work, and we are aware of no more ground to be covered in this vast field to set out to do this but rather seek to extend our exercise here of introducing sociability to the field of Romantic literary and cultural studies. The 1790s and the sociability of radical circles are foregrounded in the collection because of what we regard as the crucial significance of this decade and its sociable milieu in the shaping of a distinctively 'Romantic' sociability. William Hazlitt's title essay, "On the Conversation of Authors", which recognizes that conversation can no longer be universalized as a model for culture, contains a fascinating metaphor which invokes imaginative literature as the evanescent things of a sociability which always exceeds its textual representation. Writing, he claims, is "like the chalk-figures drawn on ball-room floors to be danced out before morning". The spirit of Hazlitt's sense of the hopelessness of the task, the aim of this book is to attempt to retrieve some of these figures, restoring to our sense of Romantic period culture the sociable contexts in which it was lived and inscribed.

NOTES

For full citations see Bibliography.
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53 For prison sociability see McCalman, 'Newgate'.
54 See Holofos, Social Politics.
57 Hazlitt, Complete Works, vol. X, p. 27.