

*Identity and influence from coterie to print  
Carter, Chapone, and the Shenstone–Dodsley collaboration*

I cannot help looking on my self as a fellow of no mark nor likelihood, as Shakespear calls it, so that whether thro' my fault or misfortune, perhaps from a mixture of both, it is of no manner of consequence to the world whether I am in it or out of it. My Country cannot thank me for increasing her wealth, her knowledge, or her numbers; and when I die, except two or three friends whose goodness overlooks my insignificancy, few will know that I even have been, none will regret that I am no more . . . How shall a man free himself from this state of annihilation and emerge into being? (Thomas Edwards, 1734)<sup>1</sup>

A Mind too of so slight a Make, in a Body so liable to weariness, & that makes such large demands of time for refreshment & amusement. But perhaps it is all my allotted Business Now to Enjoy a Happy Easy situation & be Thankfull for it. How Gracious the Allotment! Yet I am formed with a Principle of higher Ambition; Life is a School & must my Part be all Play & No Work? Can this Come out well? I do not doubt its coming out well if this be really appointed me, but do I not Play away more time than I should & Overlook my Task? That is my only fear. (Catherine Talbot, 1751)<sup>2</sup>

“Indolence is a kind of centripetal force.” (William Shenstone, 1764)<sup>3</sup>

In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, some young members of the gentry faced a crisis that is recorded in anguished outbursts to trusted friends: a crisis of uselessness. Thomas Edwards, probably aged about thirty in the first epigraph to this chapter, complains to his friend Lewis Crusius that he suffers from the “misfortune” that “it is of no manner of consequence to the world whether I am in it or out of it.” This misfortune is, in Edwards’ view, directly linked to his social position in the world. Vainly attempting to raise himself, should he perhaps rather allow himself to sink downward “to a lower degree of usefulness”? Heir to a modest estate, apparently without the temperament to actively pursue the family profession of the law, and without the means to attract a satisfactory

marriage partner, Edwards retired to the country, first to his paternal estate of Pitshanger in Middlesex, and then to a small farm at Turrick, in Buckinghamshire. It was from this retreat that his coterie friends Daniel Wray, Philip Yorke, and Samuel Richardson coaxed out, encouraged, and circulated Edwards' literary productions. Yorke, for example, appears at one point in 1751 to have set Edwards to work on a plan of a winter garden for Wrest Park, some sort of response to Voltaire, a sonnet, and an unspecified "work of invention."<sup>4</sup> Without these encouragements, it is unlikely that the sonnets and critical treatises that were ultimately published in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* and in his own *Canons of Criticism* and *Account of the Trial of the Letter Y [Upsilon]*, both printed by Richardson, would have come into being and been preserved as important contributions to the eighteenth-century sonnet revival and to the development of modern principles of scholarly editing. Edwards' letters, at once witty and affectionate, make clear how fundamental his membership in these literary coteries was to his sense of self-worth and of the value of his writings. Telling his friend John Lawry about a sonnet he has recently sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, he observes, "I am proud to think that the friendship of worthy Men will be an honor to my memory, if what I write should survive to posterity."<sup>5</sup> And when he perceives the coterie to repudiate his work, as in the case of Susanna Highmore and John Duncombe discussed in Chapter 1, he suggests that this "frost" may have "checked" his impulse to write poetry. Ultimately, Edwards imagines his circle of friends as extending into the virtual networks created by print; after the publication of the third edition of his *Canons* in 1750, he comments frequently on the "new friends" the work has made for him in places like Gloucester and Cirencester.

Certainly the words of Edwards – "How shall a man free himself from this state of annihilation and emerge into being?" – and of Catherine Talbot – "Yet I am formed with a Principle of higher Ambition" – suggest that even individuals with a firm belief that this life was but a brief preparation for an eternal state felt an imperative to make a mark, and thereby establish an identity in this world, one that could not consist solely of fulfilling their relative duties to kin, friends, and dependents. Talbot's sense of a conflict between inutility and "ambition" is telling. The disjunction between her relatively high social status and elite connections yet lack of wealth to marry suitably or live independently from her mother and Secker affected not only her social but also her literary life. Even in the early 1760s, when living in Lambeth Palace and serving as almoner and secretary for Secker, now

Archbishop of Canterbury, she was still writing, probably to George Berkeley, in a fit of winter dispiritedness,

I feel myself the most useless & consequently the most contemptible Creature upon the face of the Earth – & yet after all wherein is a Tip Top fine Lady less useless than myself? Why no, I beg her pardon I must Yield the Palm of Contemptibleness to her if she is a very fine Lady indeed: But among sober people that have leisure to think & to employ themselves to purpose if they would I am certainly one of the very very lowest & most insignificant. . . I am very good for nothing to be sure, & I have had a Cold near this fortnight into the bargain.

Turning toward self-mockery, she adds, “No, nothing will serve me I find but to have the whole direction of Church & State, the Regulation of the Press, the Improvement of Laws, the Dispensing of more Riches than six such Nations as this Possess, & to be Censoress general over all persons in all matters great & small.”<sup>6</sup>

Talbot’s articulation of her existential dilemma is merely an extreme version of a struggle visible in other mid-century lives squeezed between, on the one hand, a belief in human potential cultivated by education and called to action by contemporary theologies of practical Christianity, and, on the other, a lack of meaningful occupational opportunities due to the social and financial constraints placed upon the genteel of limited means. Studies of intellectual movements and social demographics in eighteenth-century Britain provide grounds for this notion of an identity crisis among the well-educated and intelligent of the lower gentry and upper middle classes who found themselves so constrained between limited opportunity and high expectation. Clifford Siskin and William Warner have recently postulated that the primary outcome of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was an entire reconceptualization of the self as its own primary end product. Practically speaking, such phenomena as the growth of the professions in visibility and prestige in contrast to the restraints on active engagement for many young men of birth, the inability of many young men and women to marry due to the inadequacy of their inheritances in a time of changing status and economic structures, and the relative unavailability of opportunities for intelligent single women loom behind the laments of an Edwards and a Talbot.<sup>7</sup>

It is arguable that the press, through its development and wide dissemination of devotional, biographical, and fictional models of self-cultivation and achievement, let alone its fostering of an awareness of the fame and influence that might be possible through its means, contributed

significantly to creating the link between obscurity and wasted potential. Talbot, for example, found the perfect expression for the twin dilemmas of obscurity and uselessness in her contemporary Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, first printed in 1751. Reflecting on the life of the playwright and polemicist Catharine Trotter Cockburn, whose subscription edition of works (edited by Thomas Birch) she was currently promoting, Talbot applies the *Elegy's* striking definition of unfulfilled potential to Cockburn's lack of an audience:

What a pity that her last years were in  
 a manner lost in obscurity so little suited  
 to her genius. But  
 "Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
 The deep unfathomed caves of ocean bear;  
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Talbot is writing to Elizabeth Carter here; in her journal of the same period, Talbot is more explicit about a link between Cockburn, who had died impoverished in 1749, and her friend:

[Mrs Cockburne] was a remarkable Genius, & Yet how Obscure her Lot in Life! It seems grievous at first, & such Straitness of Circumstances as perplexes & Cramps the Mind, is surely a Grievance, but on consideration what Signifies Distinction & Splendour in this very Transitory State? Hereafter Every Good Heart shall be distinguished in Honour & Happiness. But methinks those who knew such Merit did not do Their Duty in letting it remain so Obscure. E.C. [Elizabeth Carter] is her superior – Alas will not she live & die perhaps as Obscurely, & What alas can I do to prevent it?<sup>8</sup>

As Chapter 2 has already shown, doing her duty to bring merit out of obscurity – the merit of Cockburn and Carter here, at other times that of Johnson or some other obscure poet – in fact became for Talbot at least a partial cure for her own sense of being “formed with a Principle of higher Ambition” that could not find a satisfactory expression. In this way, participation in a literary community of conversation and scribal exchange could offer an outlet for ambition. The coterie context provided meaning through the active work of building and maintaining community by means of letter-writing, the production of works celebrating the group, the encouragement of writing projects, and the patronage of writers and other causes that the group found deserving. As I have shown for the Montagu–Lyttelton circle, the coterie might over time also join forces to

initiate and promote print projects of its own. The goals of such projects were generally articulated as the securing of fame or the preservation of work for posterity; simultaneously, they often functioned, in the model I am suggesting here, to meet the material needs of the work's author while satisfying the desire for meaningful action on the part of the coterie members promoting the work. Thus, the mid-eighteenth-century literary coterie continued to fulfill an important function typical of such groups – that of furthering the stature of its members in the world of letters – by managing the interface of manuscript and print production. And as it did so, it provided individual as well as collective purpose.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on several cases in which the literary sociability of the coterie and its extension into print offered a resolution to the personal dilemma of uselessness. I will briefly revisit the Montagu–Lyttelton coterie's publications of Elizabeth Carter's *Poems* and Hester Mulso Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* from this perspective, before turning to a detailed examination of the Poet of the Leasowes, William Shenstone, as an example of how coterie values could be used to forge an identity that, paradoxically, redefined a life of apparent idleness and retirement as an embodiment of genuine taste. Finally, I will show how this coterie-based esthetic, manifested through the practice of multiple media arts, was represented and thereby solidified, in a further paradox, through the printing projects of Robert Dodsley. With such forays into print, the coterie values of Chapone and Shenstone, in particular, became influential in the directions taken by modern literary culture.

### Carter and Chapone: identity and influence

As Chapter 2 has shown, the Montagu–Lyttelton coterie, during the first few years of its existence, featured virtuoso letter-writing, avid discussions of reading, travel description, and various literary projects such as collections of dialogues, poems, and criticism. Montagu's letters circulated among admirers beyond the coterie, as did Lyttelton's travel descriptions (see Chapter 6), and their dialogs of the dead were well received by their contemporaries both in print and in manuscript.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 2 has already discussed the similar interpenetration of coterie and print considerations in the project to publish Carter's poems; here I wish only to consider the conceptualization of the project as a means of broadening Carter's reputation and influence. As Montagu puts it in a letter to her friend:

I am sorry for your tremors & trepidations, but they are mere nervous disorders, & the manuscript must be printed so my Dear Urania away with your lamentations, sit down revise, correct, augment, print, & publish. I am sure you will have a pleasure in communicating the pious virtuous sentiments that breathe in all your verses. My inferior soul will feel a joy in your producing such proofs of genius to the World, let it see that all your advantages are not derived from study. The envious may say you brought your wisdom from Athens [a reference to the *Epictetus* translation], your wit is your own . . . The very best of your poetical productions have never been publish'd, they may indeed have been seen by a few in manuscript, but the finest things in sheets are soon lost; foliis tantum ne carmina monda; ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis, print them & bind them fast I beg you.<sup>10</sup>

While Montagu certainly holds out to Carter the possibility of widening her contemporary reputation from that of scholar to that of wit (i.e. an original genius), she also entices her with the moral “pleasure [of] communicating the pious, virtuous sentiments that breathe in all your verses” to the “world.”

In this, Montagu takes a position similar to *The Rambler's* appeal to posterity through print, discussed in Chapter 2. At the conclusion of that episode, Carter, complaining to Susanna Highmore about the demise of the periodical, revealed that she grasped the Rambler's vision of the ability of print to reach beyond the limitations of an immediate audience: “we may both comfort our selves that an Author who has employed the noblest Powers of Genius & learning, the strongest Force of understanding the most beautiful Ornaments of Eloquence in the Service of Virtu[e] and Religion, can never sink into Oblivion however he may be at present too little regarded.” Carter too felt the pull of an authorial agency that extended beyond the immediate present – as Bigold has summarized it, “Carter lived for posterity” – as much in the “distinctly modern” sense of managing her image as in the sense of an immortal afterlife. This aim accords well with Montagu's emphasis in the quotation above on an authorial subjectivity fixed in print for the sake of reputation and influence with a contemporary readership. But this notion of extended reach need not be incompatible with a coterie notion of writing as an extension of the social self, as the Chapone and Shenstone cases in this chapter will show. Margaret Ezell has written, for period just before this, of how the leaving of “remains” to be printed after one's death could be seen as a continuation of the circulation of one's writing among a socially restricted circle: in both cases, writings were a continuation of living presence. Thus, Carter's *Poems* as a coterie project is of a piece with her regular reminders to Talbot of the

value of the everyday, the sociable, and the mundane – what Karen O’Brien has identified as “Bluestocking theology”; in particular, Carter’s “vision of religion [is] as something residing in the everyday, pleasurable practice of virtue and benevolence.”<sup>11</sup>

Just as Carter’s poems demonstrated the originality of her wit, publications in the form of letters could exploit the association of intellectual women with epistolary skill. This was the case with Hester Mulso Chapone’s 1773 *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, the culmination of a thirty-year process of reputation-building. As elaborated in Chapter 1, the young Mulso began to accrue fame as a skilled letter-writer in the late 1740s and early 1750s, especially through her membership in Samuel Richardson’s coterie. With the *Letters*, Chapone successfully carried into print the private origin of advice written to her teenaged niece. In the view of Chapone’s brother John Mulso, it was precisely this transmediation that constituted the appeal of the work: “How was it with Mrs Chapone? it was the genuine Affetuoso, the con amore of her Book that gave it it’s Run: Had She wrote to an imaginary Niece the most animated Traits would have escap’d her Pen.” Chapone cultivated this aura of intimacy, presenting her work as originating in a purely private communication with one beloved individual: “I never entertained a thought of appearing in public, when the desire of being useful to one dear child, in whom I take the tenderest interest, induced me to write the following Letters.” The letters themselves begin by asserting the efficacy of the handwritten letter, combining as it does the forces of affect and truth:

My dearest niece, Though you are so happy as to have parents, who are both capable and desirous of giving you all proper instruction, yet I, who love you so tenderly, cannot help fondly wishing to contribute something, if possible, to your improvement and welfare: – And, as I am so far separated from you, that it is only by pen and ink I can offer you my sentiments, I will hope that your attention may be engaged, by seeing on paper, from the hand of one of your warmest friends, Truths of the highest importance, which, though you may not find new, can never be too deeply engraven on your mind.<sup>12</sup>

The book’s readers, of course, will not see handwriting on the paper before them: Chapone creates a palimpsest of powerful media associations, layering the ancient image of sacred words carved on a tablet and on the heart over contemporary beliefs about the manuscript letter’s capacity to communicate directly to the emotions even when remediated by print.

Chapone underscores the coterie origin and context of her authorship by dedicating the publication to Montagu as the friend-patron (“perhaps it was the partiality of friendship, which so far biassed your judgment as to make you think them [the letters] capable of being more extensively useful, and warmly to recommend the publication of them”) and advisor (“some strokes of your elegant pen have corrected these letters”) who has enabled its publication. To Carter, Chapone articulates in blunter terms the value of combining a coterie’s authority with a shrewd reading of the print marketplace: “I attribute [*Letters*] success principally to Mrs. Montagu’s name and patronage, and secondly to the world’s being so fond of being educated, that every book on that subject is well received.”<sup>13</sup> But such statements invite the question: if the natural home of Chapone’s very popular *Letters* was in the private contexts of her family and the Bluestocking coterie centered on Elizabeth Montagu, why print at all, rather than circulate the work through scribal channels?

Correspondence quoted in Chapter 2 has made clear Chapone’s very reduced financial circumstances after the death of her husband and the attempts of friends such as Carter, Montagu, and Montagu’s sister Sarah Scott to find sources of income for her. We have also seen, however, that an educated and intellectual woman with good family connections like Chapone might reject the possibility of an income that might compromise not only her social status, but also her ability to maintain a life that met her intellectual and ethical standards. Like Carter, then, who would refuse to stay at the London home of Montagu when she was in the city, but would accept the use of her friends’ carriages, Chapone’s decision to publish cannot be attributed simply to external financial pressures, although that must not be dismissed entirely. Ten years earlier, shortly after the death of her husband, and with that event the loss of purpose in managing a household and potentially educating children of her own, Chapone had acknowledged to Carter her struggle against “a certain weariness of life, and a sense of insignificance and insipidity, [that] deject my spirits.” Retrospectively, she confides to Carter in 1777 that the success of her three publications of the decade has “appeas[e]d in some measure, that uneasy sense of helplessness and insignificance in society, which has often depressed and afflicted me; and gives me some comfort with respect to the poor account I can give of “That one talent which is death to hide.”<sup>14</sup> In short, there is an element of selective media deployment at work, as well as the understanding that a coterie can provide the tangible and intangible support from which a publishing venture can be undertaken with dignity and success. In an insightful discussion of print publication



on the part of “women who might be neither aristocratic nor enormously wealthy,” Harriet Guest observes a pattern that applies to both Carter and Chapone: actuated at once by “quite extreme personal self-effacement and the obligation to publish exemplary work,” they are able to view print publication as “a source of largely pleasurable reputation and money.”<sup>15</sup>

Chapone’s friends, she reports soon after the publication of *Letters*, “fret and scold at me for having sold my copy, and grudge poor Walter [J. Walter, her bookseller] his profits. But for my part I do not repent what I have done, as I am persuaded the book would not have prospered so well in my hands as in his.” Just as she recognized what Montagu’s and her own contributions had been to the production, she also recognized the need for a certain kind of writing to be marketed through the resources of the print trade. With her next publication, titled *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse, By Mrs. Chapone, Author of Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* and published in 1775, Chapone showed that coterie authorship was in her no mark of an incapacity for business: the bargain she drove based on the success of *Letters* earned her five times as much for the sale of this slim volume’s copyright to the Dilly brothers and Walter as she had procured for her first foray into book publication, and the admiration of her brother.<sup>16</sup> This miscellany successfully exploits an interest on the part of Chapone’s booksellers in commercializing the coterie – indeed, it flaunts rather than hides its origins, with poem titles indicating the occasion and date of writing, added footnotes clarifying these origins, and the incorporation of answer poems by Edwards and Highmore. What initially appears as a bifurcated, even self-contradictory career, then, in fact suggests that in the second half of the eighteenth century coterie literary credentials continued to authorize and lend cachet to a writer who chose to remediate her work in the very different context of print.

### “Industry of a better Kind”: William Shenstone theorizes retirement

Like Edwards, Talbot, Carter, and Chapone, the country-gentleman poet, miscellaneous writer, and landscape artist William Shenstone (1714–63) began his adult life acutely conscious of a tension between his ambition to make a mark in the world through a profession, literary fame, and/or some form of preferment, on the one hand, and the retired rural life to which his limited means and lack of taste for public engagement consigned him, on the other. Shenstone inherited a modest estate of about £300 per year and studied at Pembroke College, but left Oxford in 1739 without taking a degree. In 1737 he published a small collection of poems, and his letters

of this time suggest attempts to leverage his writings, especially a Spenserian parody *The School-Mistress* and a 1741 poem *The Judgment of Hercules*, dedicated to George Lyttelton, into some form of favor and place in the world. Moving restlessly between London and the residences of friends, and disappointed in his hopes of preferment, Shenstone's letters of the early 1740s acknowledge his goal of winning "praise" as "the desired, the noted, and the adequate reward of poetry," while lamenting that he is only "suffer[ing] [him] self to be deluded with the hopes of it [fame]" in order to "avoid impatience, spleen, and one sort of *despair*: I mean that of having no *hopes* here [in this world], because one sees nothing here that deserves them." A recurrent theme of indolence struggling against ambition runs prominently through his entire correspondence – even in these early years, he describes himself as "sick of exhibiting so much sameness" while "impatient to be doing something that may tend to better my situation in some respect or other," and points out the "hypocrisy" of the *Hercules* poem's advocacy of active virtue in contrast to his own "laziness."<sup>17</sup>

Yet in these years, Shenstone was actively developing the practices of poetry exchange and revision that would characterize the group that has been called the "Warwickshire" or "South Midlands" coterie. Like that of the Yorke brothers, Shenstone's scribal habit seems to have begun as a means of maintaining ties with his school and college friends, but with a more explicitly articulated goal of seeking to further the group members' place in the world.<sup>18</sup> Principal participants initially were Richard Jago, Richard Graves, Anthony Whistler, and William Somerville, all of whom were, or became, recognized writers in their own right; through Jago and Somerville, Henrietta Knight (Lady Luxborough) entered into correspondence with Shenstone; over time, John Scott Hylton, John Pixell, and a Miss White (later Pixell's wife) were at least occasional participants in the group's exchanges; and in the latter years of Shenstone's life, Thomas Percy and Robert Dodsley were integrated into the circle. Shenstone's role at the center of this coterie, however, was not that of the ever-creative instigator of achievement and emulation, like Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray, or the bustling mentor, like Samuel Richardson, or the powerful, well-connected patron, like Elizabeth Montagu and George Lyttelton. Shenstone was, indeed, a consistent encourager and supporter of the career aspirations of coterie members like Richard Graves and Thomas Percy, whose individual achievements after his death were considerable. With his increasing fame, Shenstone also stimulated and furthered the careers of aspiring poets such as Mary Whateley (later Darwall) and James Woodhouse.<sup>19</sup> But his

position, initially by default and ultimately by choice, was rather that of the still center in the midst of those seeking to make their way in the world, the inspirational source, and even more, the embodiment of the esthetic principles of retirement, simplicity, and love of nature that emerged as a dominant strain of poetry in the decades following his death.

The terms used by Lady Luxborough in a letter of June 24, 1749 to Shenstone encapsulate this paradoxical dynamic:

Pardon me for differing with you in opinion. You are not the idle man of the creation. You may be busied to the benefit of society without stirring from your seat, as much as the mischievous man with seeming idleness may be busied in the destruction of it. You give innocent pleasure to yourself, and instruction as well as pleasure to others, by the amusements you follow. Your pen, your pencil, your taste and your sincere unartful conduct in life (which are the things that make you appear idle) give such an example, as it were to be wished might be more generally followed – few have the capacity, fewer have the honesty to spend their time so usefully, as well as unblameably.<sup>20</sup>

If this description appears overly idealized, Shenstone's own self-characterizations never lose their flavor of self-deprecation and their honesty with regard to economic realities. Thus, one of his most memorable counsels, to his friend Jago, to "cultivate your garden; have a bird or two in the hall (they will at *least* amuse your children); write now and then a song; buy now and then a book" is framed by the admission that "one may easily habituate one's self to cheap amusements; that is, *rural* ones (for all town amusements are horridly expensive)."<sup>21</sup> While this economic realism made some of the first readers of his correspondence uncomfortable, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, it was also intrinsic to Shenstone's influence. It was part of the mix that allowed him to take on a position of cultural leadership through what he lacked, to represent the coterie poet as retired, geographically localized, and removed from the tainted pursuits of those seeking a more ostentatious form of usefulness. As James Turner summarizes it, "we are meant to think of Shenstone as one who has found in garden design a *scheme of life* (of the kind that eluded *Rasselas*), a means of combining the better halves of otherwise incompatible worlds – retirement and sociability, probity and desire, sexual form and innocent vegetable content."<sup>22</sup>

Essential to this persona was the Leasowes. Even when seeking preferment in London, Shenstone begins to write of his "gratitude" for this family farm, near the village of Halesowen and the Lyttelton estate of Hagley. "Over-run with shrubs, thickets, and coppices, variegated with

barren rocks and precipices, or floated three parts in four with lakes and marshes," the Leasowes is perfectly suited, he finds, to his "particular humour" as a poet.<sup>23</sup> In about 1744 he turned his back on London to take up permanent residence on the farm and began to dabble in small landscaping projects there. Initially, the coterie exchange of poetry seems paramount in the correspondence record, with the gardening projects as mere "amusements." Gradually, however, the landscaping gains in importance as Shenstone develops the notion of a *ferme ornée*, or ornamented farm, whereby the grazing and arable lands are surrounded by a circuit walk (with decorations of urns, benches, alcoves, and small structures along the sides of the walk) that allows for a variety of perspectives on the farm and its surroundings.<sup>24</sup> He begins to report visits from the local gentry and landowners, starting with George Lyttelton and his family and guests at Hagley, and Henrietta Knight, Lady Luxborough, whose residence of Barrels was about a half-day's journey from the Leasowes. Thus, landscape gardening and poetry become inseparably intertwined arts in the artist's epistolary rhetoric: "I have an alcove, six elegies, a seat, two epitaphs (one upon myself) three ballads, four songs, and a serpentine river, to shew you when you come," Shenstone writes to Jago, in a letter tentatively dated 1744. And in a 1750 letter to Lady Luxborough, he surveys the shift in his perspective from deprivation to potential plenitude:

Give me Leave here, my good Lady! to mention what a Change there is in my Scheme since I first began to lay out my little Farm in Paths, etc. At First I meant them merely as Melancholy Amusements for a Person whose circumstances required a solitary Life. They *were* so; but I ever found ye solitude too deep to be agreeable. Of *late* encourag'd by your Ladyship and some others I begin to covet to have my Place *esteem'd* agreeable in its way; to have it *frequented*; to meet now and then an human Face unawares – to enjoy even ye Gape and Stare of ye Mob ... but above all possible Contingencies to have it honour'd wth ye Company of your Ladyship and your Acquaintance.<sup>25</sup>

Shenstone's literary and gardening activities have been discussed by some critics as a variation on the prominent Augustan trope of retirement.<sup>26</sup> This placement is instructive, in that it helps to explain his role as a mediator or democratizer of the eighteenth-century gentleman's values of disinterestedness, *concordia discors*, and the moralization of landscape as they were expressed in poetry and garden design by practitioners such as Alexander Pope at Twickenham and Viscount Cobham at Stowe; this role will be discussed further below and in Chapter 4. For my purposes here, these activities are significant in that they represent Shenstone's solution to the

dilemma of social uselessness experienced by a man of his education, connections, and upbringing hampered by restricted means and limited opportunities for engagement. Ultimately, Shenstone's repeated returns to the issue of industry and idleness bring him to the assertion that he is practicing "*Industry of a better Kind* than what employs the *Animæ viles* of a Drawing-room."<sup>27</sup>

In his correspondence, the reader can trace the shifting nature of Shenstone's "ambition," with his recognition that he can attract the attention and approbation of the great through his landscaping of the farm ("A Coach with a Coronet is a pretty Kind of Phænomenon at my Door"), not despite, but because of its contracted scale. If early on he tends to align taste with social standing, as when he writes in a letter tentatively dated 1744 of his regret that his house is not fit to "receive a sufficient Number of polite Friends" to allow him to "cultivate an Acquaintance with about Three or Four in my Neighbourhood, that are of a Degree of Elegance, & station superior to ye common Run," he eventually classifies his visitors, not by status and the assumed level of cultivation it represents, but by a hierarchy of "genuine *Taste*," which "differs as widely from [good-sense] as the Palate differs from the *Brain*." True taste is neither the birthright of the aristocrat, nor the acquisition of the nouveau riche, nor the accomplishment of the highly educated professional: it may belong to the wife whose husband has none, or to the more humble gardener or craftsman. His "ambition" is now to win the approbation of "the small number of tasters" rather than "the *large crowd* of the vulgar," "to please a few friends of taste before mob or gentry, the great vulgar or the small; because therein one gratifies both one's social passions and one's pride, that is, one's *self-love*."<sup>28</sup> As David Hill Radcliffe has shown, Shenstone, in his important 1750 ode "Rural Elegance," outlined a kind of manifesto of a "disinterested republic of taste," in which the private improver of the rural landscape plays a more productive social role than the hunting squire, a role equal in its own way to that of the swain:

And sure there seem, of human kind,  
Some born to shun the solemn strife;  
Some for amusive tasks design'd,  
To soothe the certain ills of life;  
Grace its lone vales with many a budding rose,  
New founts of bliss disclose,  
Call forth refreshing shades, and decorate repose.<sup>29</sup>

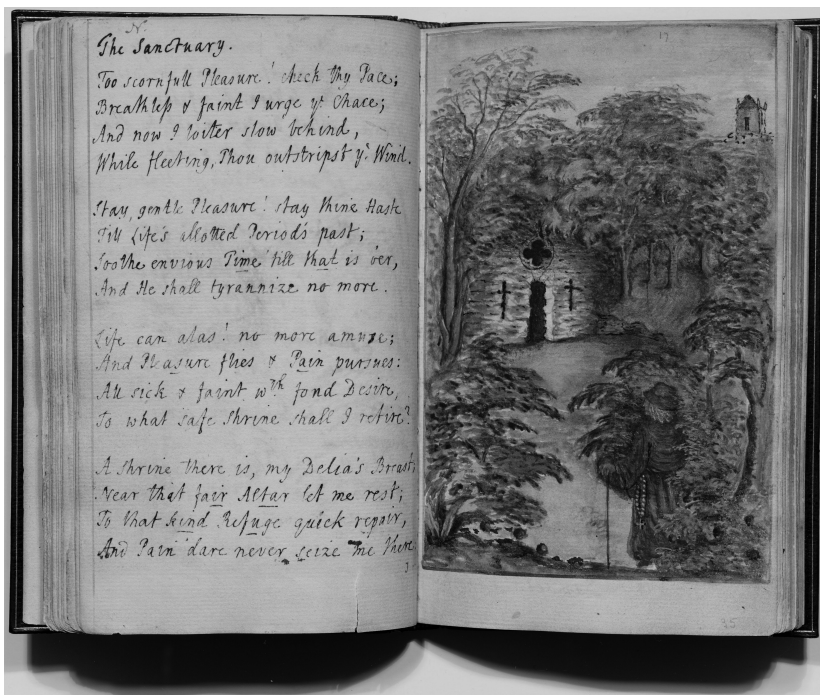


Figure 3.1 William Shenstone, “The Sanctuary” and illustration of a ruined priory gate, from Shenstone’s illustrated manuscript of poems. The “ruin” was one of the structures along Shenstone’s circuit walk around the Leasowes.

In a recent discussion of the illustrated manuscript album presented by Shenstone to his housekeeper Mary Cutler in 1754, Sandro Jung has noted that the artist’s vision was insistently intermedial, requiring that visitors to his garden read landscape, architecture, and poetry as intertextual, and expecting that through this reading they themselves would participate in a communal process of self- and social improvement. Shenstone’s letters reveal his own enthusiastic participation in multiple artistic technologies, including painting in watercolors, the design and production of decorative paper and seals for his letters, book binding, the architectural design of buildings for his garden and renovations in his house, and what Jung describes as the creation of “soundscapes” of falling water and birdsong (Figure 3.1). Such an embodied, materialized esthetic embraces the values of coterie culture. It is notable, however, that for all his vision of “publishing verses once a week upon [his]

Screens or Garden-Seats, for ye Amusement of my good Friends ye Vulgar,” Shenstone recognizes that in order to attract a more sophisticated audience of “tasters” to his and his neighbours’ displays – “those who were trained in intermedial reading practices and whose cultural literacy encompassed forms as varied and allusively evocative” (in Jung’s phrase) as the ones he was working in – “first we must take care to *advertise* them where their treasures lie.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, a second, counter-intuitive factor in Shenstone’s success lay in the fortuitous conjunction of his firm adherence to the local and the scribal with an innovative use of the print medium by his unlikely friend, the bookseller Robert Dodsley. It is noteworthy that Jung’s discussion of the esthetics governing Shenstone’s manuscript album refers repeatedly to Dodsley’s role as mediator of that esthetic, not merely in its print dissemination but also in gathering it together and rendering it coherent prior to printing the posthumous edition of Shenstone’s *Works*.<sup>31</sup> While the role played by that publication in creating “Shenstone” as a persona will be discussed in Chapter 4, I focus here on the poet’s artistic practice and its circulation during his lifetime, and on the significance of Shenstone’s friendship with the bookseller in this achievement. Dodsley enabled Shenstone to connect his physically and geographically retired artistic activity to the period’s most efficient distribution system for cultural values: the London book trade. It was this cross-media friendship, not unlike those of Philip Yorke and Thomas Birch or Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter, that “created” Shenstone the coterie writer as an influential leader of taste for his contemporaries by exposing his life and productions to a wide audience for admiration and imitation. Thus, in the final years of his life, Shenstone’s correspondence records increasing solicitation of his esthetic judgments in poetry, gardening, and other decorative arts, as he writes of his “*public life*” in the summer season, when strangers continually stop at his door; of “the noblesse, whom [he has] seen at The Leasowes, [who are] as complaisant to [him] as possible; whereas it was [his] *former* fate, in public places, to be as little regarded as a journeyman shoe-maker”; and of aspiring poets who dedicate and send copies of their works.<sup>32</sup> The final section of this chapter will elaborate on the role of the print medium in the coalescence and propagation of Shenstone’s esthetic values. But first, I wish to explore in greater detail the coterie principles upon which Shenstone’s retirement esthetic was built: relationality, embodiment and the resulting difficulty of access, modesty of scale, and simplicity.

## Shenstone's esthetics of embodiment

In his insightful and sympathetic analysis of Shenstone's approach to landscape gardening, David Fairer notes that Shenstone's esthetic is a "relational" one; challenging our tendency to invoke critical binaries of subjective "relativism" versus objective "principle," Shenstone is "fascinated by the relative, but this is not to be confused with a lack of judgment or with egotism. . . . Rather than returning and confirming the self, Shenstone's modes of looking encourage ideas of relationship, responsibility, and reassessment." In this respect he is an important figure in the history of eighteenth-century sensibility. Referring to Samuel Johnson's notorious implication in his "Life of Shenstone" that Shenstone's values were superficially based on mere "looks," Fairer counters with the contention that the poet's organic and sociable vision was not only interesting, but valuable, even ethical. This kind of relationality is encapsulated in the landscape gardening of Shenstone's *ferme ornée*, with its emphasis on circuitous walks offering multiple perspectives and its carefully sited inscriptions. But it is also reflected in his allegiance to scribal authorship, wherein the relationship between writer and readers can be as much a feature of a work's content and the way in which it is read as are concepts of formal integrity. Indeed, Fairer compares Shenstone's delight in the sociable pleasures afforded by the Leasowes with his coterie approach to his poetry; both attitudes reflect "his interest in, even what might be thought his need for, other viewpoints."<sup>33</sup>

An esthetic of relationship implies commitment to social connection as the ground and end of artistic production. While core members of Shenstone's coterie were lost through death or added as his sphere shifted from school and university friends to local gentry to the inclusion of more distant members such as Dodsley, its activities continued essentially unabated to Shenstone's death in 1763, as is demonstrated by a manuscript miscellany left among Shenstone's literary effects, produced after many of the coterie's members had achieved wider exposure through Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*.<sup>34</sup> The group engaged in the standard coterie activities of mutual encouragement to write, exchanges of manuscript poetry (in Shenstone's case, sometimes in volumes with his own illustrations), commentary on each other's work, and discussion of past and contemporary literary productions. Yet it displays, once again, a unique character, determined by Shenstone at its geographical, social, and ideological center.



From the start, it is clear that what Trolander and Tenger term amendment criticism is a serious responsibility of each member of the group, inseparable from the social ties upon which the links between members are founded. Writing to Jago, for example, Shenstone reveals how intimately friendship and literary production are entwined:

I know I have thrown a great number of careless things into your hands, I know to *whom* I intrusted my follies; but I know *not* what they *are*:— I believe, in general, that they consist of mis-begotten embryos and abortive births, which it had been merely decent to have buried in — some part of my garden; but I was morally assured, that you would expose nothing of mine to my disadvantage.

Shenstone writes with unusual honesty, though also with tact, in response to his friends' works; thus to Jago he says:

I saw several beauties in your former elegy; but, though it was “*formosa*,” it did not appear to me “*ipsa forma*.” I like this that you have now sent *very* much. It has a simplicity which your last a little wanted, and has thought *enough*. I begin to be seldom pleased with the compositions of others, or my own; but I could be really *fond* of this, with a few alterations, that I could propose.

In return, Shenstone solicits his friends' views and suggestions for specific lines that dissatisfy him; typical is his reminder to Jago that “you promised your observations, and I desire you would make them with the utmost freedom. I can bear any censure which you shall pass by way of letter, and I beg once more that you would not be sparing. It will be esteemed as great a favour as you can do me.”<sup>35</sup> He will not show a poem to its addressee or primary audience until he has heard from Jago or Graves or Lady Luxborough — sometimes from all three. Thus Shenstone kept the Countess of Hertford, soon to become the Duchess of Somerset and Catherine Talbot's friend, waiting for somewhat more than two years for his “Rural Elegance” — a poem dedicated to her as the vehicle by which he hoped to gain her acquaintance and patronage — while he consulted with these three friends.<sup>36</sup>

As these circulation patterns suggest, an inherent feature of Shenstone's artistic practice is his insistence on embodied forms that make access difficult, whether to his garden or his poetry. It may appear self-evident that the eighteenth-century landscape garden could be fully appreciated only by visiting the site itself and taking in the views from its serpentine walks, but in Shenstone's case, “he wants us to feel that human identity itself can be discovered in the landscape, the estate, the property, the

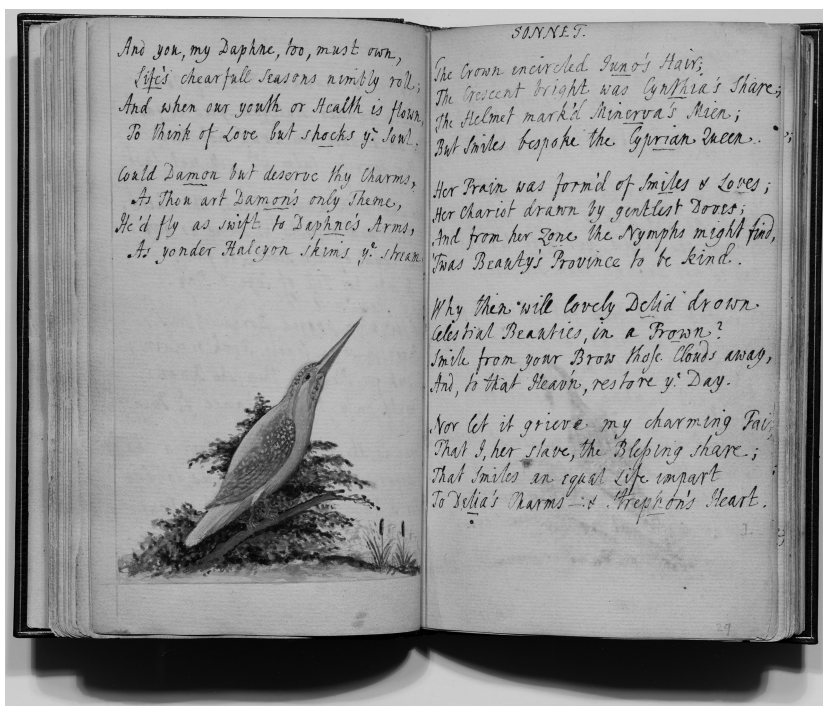


Figure 3.2 William Shenstone, “The King-fisher” stanzas 5 and 6 and illustration, from Shenstone’s illustrated manuscript of poems.

place.”<sup>37</sup> His poem “The Kingfisher,” for example, celebrates the rapid flight of the bird (also known as the halcyon) that “take[s] her fill of Love & Play” in the calm beauty of summer, knowing that “when rugged Boreas blows,” “To seek for Pleasure . . . / Would only, then, enhance ye Pain.” This careful observation of the bird that “skims ye stream” on his farm, accompanied by a watercolor image in his manuscript notebook, fuses in the poem’s concluding stanzas with the pastoral speaker’s own state of mind as he urges his Daphne to accept him before “our youth or Health is flown” (Figure 3.2) and ultimately becomes the basis of his coat of arms (see Chapter 4). While a reading of the poem’s final two stanzas in isolation might make it appear a collection of pastoral clichés, it takes on a richness through the internal descriptions of the bird’s changing flight patterns and the watercolor illustration, suggesting an experience and a self-recognition that the poet, and by extension the reader, can only encounter at the site of the Leasowes.

Perhaps as a reflection of this intimate identification of self with place, Shenstone's poetry was similarly hard to get at, even more so than that of the average coterie poet. Unlike the manuscript writings of Hester Mulso, for example, copies of which are still found in several collections (see Chapters 1 and 2), Shenstone tended to send his only copy of a work to a friend, a habit which led, in the case of "Rural Elegance" cited above, to the poem's being temporarily lost, despite its importance to him artistically and socially.<sup>38</sup> In an even more extreme form of limited access, the poet often tells a friend that his critical remarks on one of their poems cannot be conveyed by letter – only a visit to the Leasowes will do. Clearly a lure to draw guests to the farm, especially during the dreary months of winter, such an approach also identifies the work tightly with the place and hand of origin and underscores the privilege of catching a glimpse of it. Thus, the above-cited list of "an alcove, six elegies," and so on, intended to lure Jago into a Leasowes visit, continues with a further teaser: "Will the compositions come safe to you, if I send my book, which contains the *only* copies of several things (which I could not remember if they were lost)? – but I will not send them." Letters in his most intense writerly correspondences – with Graves, Jago, and Percy – frequently end with some variation on the formula "These Points & Many others cannot be so well adjusted as by a Conference betwixt us at The Leasowes; where I hope you will have Leisure to pass a day or two, when you have dispatched your other publications."<sup>39</sup>

Again, social connection is the ground of embodied art; art is made meaningful by social relations, particularly those of the coterie. Thus, Shenstone writes to Thomas Percy, "The *Renovation* of Spring has given me a pleasure in my Walks, which I always despair in *Winter* of their ever more affording me. But the *truest* Pleasure such things give, is of the social & *only-lasting* Sort; I mean the Pleasure *reflected* upon the Proprietor from ye Pleasure they *give a Friend*. Should *you* come over & be delighted here, the Pleasure would be increased an hundred-fold." Abstracting this expression of friendship more fully, he writes in 1755 that unlike the "Pleasures of Sense" and even the "Pleasures of Imagination," it is only the social pleasures, such as those evoked by the receipt of a letter from an old friend, that "encrease upon Repetition, and grow more lively from Indulgence." Shenstone elaborates:

Accordingly, though I first embellished my Farm, with an Eye to the Satisfaction I should receive from its Beauty, I am now grown dependent upon the Friends it brings me, for the principal Enjoyment it affords; I am

pleased to find them pleased, and enjoy its Beauties by Reflection. And thus the durable Part of my Pleasure appears to be, at the last, of the social Kind.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, the two activities of gardening and manuscript poetry exchange were culturally related, associated with a freedom of physical movement that allowed one to form and maintain select connections, which in turn came with a degree of education, leisure, and independent means. But these passages suggest that Shenstone developed a self-conscious, vocational approach to both pursuits, one that he articulated in his letters and other writings. Indeed, at times Shenstone's reports to his friends make it clear that he is staging the "coterie in the garden" as a kind of performance art. In September 1748, for example, he writes to Lady Luxborough of how her visit *would* have unfolded, had his stage management gone as planned:

For want of proper Contingencies, how many Noble Schemes have prov'd abortive! My Lord Dudley shou'd have met your Ladyship in ye Morning, & attended you thro' my Walks with extraordinary Complaisance & *Sprightliness*; Your Ladyship shou'd have been *unfatigu'd* ye *Moment* you got out of yr Chaise; notwithstanding ye *Length & Roughness* of your Journey; & as you came to the Seat which commands ye *Water* in virgil's Grove, I shou'd have come behind & dropt these Verses into your Lap, scribbled *extempore* no doubt with a blacklead-Pencil.

This account of a performance that never happened is matched by his description to the same correspondent, a year later, of an actual visit that transpired as if perfectly choreographed:

I had just fix'd up ye Lines I enclose in my Gothick Building, when who shou'd arrive but Mr Lyttelton, Mr. Pitt, & Mr. Miller. 'Twas impossible for me to conceal these, as I was oblig'd to accompany my Visitants all round my Walks. They happen'd to be much commended; all, except ye two first Lines of ye last Stanza; which I knew were flimzy, . . . The Building itself escap'd full as well as I cou'd reasonably expect; & indeed *better*. Many Parts of my Farm were extravagantly commended, but the Grove especially. . .<sup>41</sup>

In his discussion of the Shenstone poem "Upon a Visit to [a Lady of Quality] in Winter, 1748," Randall Calhoun has nicely captured the esthetic significance of performance for the poet, arguing that this occasional poem addressed to Lady Luxborough is "the culmination of William Shenstone's lyric art. Here the reader sees that graciousness, politeness, and lovely ritual are, for Shenstone anyway, truly beautiful."<sup>42</sup>

A third feature of Shenstone's esthetic, its modesty of scale, is articulated in a manuscript account by Shenstone of his first meeting with the

admired poet James Thomson. He writes, “Thomson assented to my notion of taste in gardening (that of contracting Nature’s beauties, altho’ he somewhat misquoted me, and did not understand the drift of my expression. Collecting, or collecting into a smaller compass, and then disposing without crowding the several varieties of Nature, were perhaps a better account of it, than either was expressed by his phrase or mine).”<sup>43</sup> In his elaborations of these ideas in his letters and his essay “Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening,” the emphasis on collecting into a small compass is accompanied by parallels between the gardener and a snail or an ant whose perspective can only be partial: “Man is not capable of comprehending the universe at one survey. . . we are placed in the corner of a sphere; endued neither with organs, nor allowed a station, proper to give us a universal view; or to exhibit to us the variety, the orderly proportions, and dispositions of the system.”<sup>44</sup> This perspective differs significantly from that of the disinterested lord of the estate surveying his wide landscape and disposing its beauties in an act parallel to the creation of the universe. Indeed, contemporary gossip about tensions between Shenstone and his near neighbor George Lyttelton, whose Hagley estate was later described by Johnson as an “empire, spacious and opulent,” dwarfing the “*petty State*” of the Leasowes, hints at a recognition of this divergence and the cultural shift it reflects. While initially a patron and friend, Lyttelton, it was alleged, became envious of the reputation Shenstone’s farm acquired, and deliberately toured visitors through the park the wrong way round so as to undermine its carefully planned effects.<sup>45</sup> For art historians, it is this ability to “collect into a small compass” that is the key to Shenstone’s importance as a landscape gardener; he “democratized” gardening for those who could not aspire to the opulence of a Hagley or a Stowe.<sup>46</sup>

In keeping with this spirit, the Leasowes acquired a reputation for simplicity and artlessness,<sup>47</sup> a principle that, again, is reflected in Shenstone’s literary practice. Not only did Shenstone turn increasingly to the pastoral, the ballad, the elegy, and the aphorism as his preferred forms for poetry and prose, but he increasingly identified simplicity as the value that distinguished his own taste from prevailing urban fashions. Thus, in advising the local playwright Thomas Hull on revisions to a play he writes:

I am with you aware, that the Story of the Spanish Lady is rather too simple, too destitute of Matter for the Generality of People who frequent the

Galleries of a *London Theatre*; but might not some Incidents of Humour be extracted from the Group of Sailors, [etc.] . . . Observe, I propose (or rather merely *allow*) this violation of the Simplicity of the Story, as a Means to make it answer the Purposes of Emolument to you, . . . for, as far as relates to my own Taste, I think, even in Representation, it could not be preserved too simple.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson finds the poet's predilection for the pastoral form regrettable and complains that his poetry in general lacks depth,<sup>49</sup> but Shenstone's influence in fact lies here. Shenstone's central role in encouraging and advising Thomas Percy in the preparation of his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* is the most documented example of that influence. Throughout his correspondence with Percy, Shenstone sounds the same refrain, whether in regard to Percy's projected translation of Ovid's epistles ("employ *me* as a *mere* Musick-master, whom you would wish to tune yr Harpsichord: At *most*, to retrench any little Incroachments upon Simplicity, ease of Style, and Harmony") or the collection of ballads ("I would wish you to consult for *Simplicity* as much as possible").<sup>50</sup> That this simplicity and artlessness came to represent elegance, which A. R. Humphreys describes as "his contemporaries' stock epithet for Shenstone,"<sup>51</sup> strongly suggests the success of the poet's articulation of these values – through the coterie forms of letters, poems, and landscape design.

### Dodsley's *Collection* and coterie fame

During the first decades of his adulthood, some of Shenstone's poetry was published to modest success. His Spenserian parody *The School-Mistress* first appeared in 1737 as part of a slim volume of poems "printed," as the title states, "for the amusement of a few friends, prejudic'd in his favour" when he was still at Pembroke; Robert Dodsley had published his *Judgment of Hercules* in 1741 and an expanded *School-Mistress* in 1742; his *Pastoral Ballad* in an imperfect version appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1751 without his knowledge; and other individual songs and poems were published in scattered magazines and song collections. At the same time, visits to his farm in the 1740s and 1750s generated sketches and manuscript descriptions, such as that by Joseph Spence (who visited the Leasowes with Dodsley) entitled "The Round of Mr Shenstone's Paradise" and illustrated by a drawing keyed to a list of features in Dodsley's hand (Figure 3.3).<sup>52</sup> The circulation of manuscript copies of such documents undoubtedly fuelled the growing demand among the elite, already noted, for consultation with Shenstone on gardening matters. But it was



Figure 3.3 Artist unknown (possibly traced from William Lowe and keyed in Robert Dodsley's hand), a plan of the Leasowes, accompanying Joseph Spence, "The Round of Mr Shenstone's Paradise." The Huntington Library, San Marino, California (HM 30312).

Dodsley's presentation of the Shenstone coterie's poetry as an ensemble that created and widely disseminated the popular image of the Poet of the Leasowes. While Shenstone had an established publishing relationship with the bookseller for single poems, as already noted – most recently, *The School-Mistress* had reappeared in his 1748 *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* – Shenstone's and the Leasowes' growing reputation as a center of

taste seems to have drawn Dodsley to solicit poems and establish a friendship in 1753–54 as the latter was planning further volumes to his popular *Collection*.<sup>53</sup> In the end, the Warwickshire coterie featured prominently in two of the final three volumes of the anthology, published in 1755 (Vol. 4) and 1758 (Vol. 5); that prominence, in turn, fuelled the appetite for anything by or connected to Shenstone. Dodsley's packaging of Shenstone's retired coterie life culminated in his publication of the *Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esq.* in 1764, a year after the author's death. I will explore the popular and commercial success of this publication and its spin-offs in Chapter 4, as an example of how a coterie writer's afterlife could flourish in print in the latter half of the century and thereby play a role in the literary culture of the time. My interest here lies in how Shenstone's interface with the London print trade, through Dodsley, reinforced the Poet of the Leasowes' image of usefulness in retirement. By holding up a mirror to his coterie life, the medium of print helped Shenstone make meaning out of what had once seemed nothing but the desultory circulation of poems, frustrated attempts at patronage, and the gilding of a rural cage.

Robert Dodsley himself was a risk-taker who entered the relatively ingrown London print trade as an outsider. A footman who made a name for himself as a poet among London's elite, Dodsley was established in the bookselling trade by Alexander Pope and by the late 1740s had positioned himself as the leading London publisher of *belles lettres*. Never a member of the "establishment" Stationers' Company, he seems always to have been relatively self-directed and independent as an entrepreneur, consistently publishing a majority of his titles on his own. The theorist of innovation Everett M. Rogers has suggested that risk-takers are most successful in their innovations if they can influence "opinion leaders," those individuals within a system who are open to the external and new and who are able to influence others through their social status and central position in their communication networks. This makes an innovator essentially parallel in network position and function to the bridge figure who traverses a structural hole in social network theory.<sup>54</sup> Initially the protégé of the daughter of Viscount Lonsdale and then of Pope, Dodsley continued to build strong connections among such patrons and influential writers of his day as George Lyttelton, Daniel Wray, Lord Chesterfield, Lord Bute, Horace Walpole, Joseph Spence, Joseph and Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, Edward Young, Thomas Edwards – and, late in both their lives, William Shenstone.



Dodsley's most enduring fame arose from the use of his author networks to create his often-reprinted *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*. Michael Suarez notes the "distinctively patrician pedigree" of the *Collection* as a factor in its popularity over twelve editions and thirty-four years: "some ninety-five of the 226 poems in these volumes, no less than 47 per cent, are either written by peers or are dedicated or addressed to peers."<sup>55</sup> Extant correspondence between Edwards and Wray and between Dodsley and Shenstone also makes it clear that a considerable portion of the poetry in the final six-volume collection had previously circulated only in script. Initially, a number of the living poets who found themselves in the volume expressed unease at being in Dodsley's hands; more accustomed to scribal modes of circulation, they clearly associated the print trade with vulgarity and fraud. Gray writes to Horace Walpole after the appearance of the first edition that Dodsley "might, methinks, have spared the Graces in his frontispiece, if he chose to be oeconomic, and dressed his authors in a little more decent raiment – not in whited-brown paper and distorted characters, like an old ballad. I am ashamed to see myself; but the company keeps me in countenance." And Edwards complains to Wray of having received a letter from Dodsley soliciting poems for an improved second edition while the first has just come on the market. Edwards worries that he is being drawn into a morally questionable plan: "You ought not . . . to have turned Dodsley loose upon me here alone, without sending me at the same time directions how to act . . . I cannot but think this scheme a kind of *Popish* trick and a hardship upon the purchasers of the first Edition, and that if it is so, I ought not to encourage it."<sup>56</sup>

Dodsley responded to such complaints, as Suarez has shown in some detail, by taking the collection up-market: between the first and second editions, especially, he transformed it from a low-cost, miscellaneous assortment of poems, many of which he already held the copyright for, into a value-added product by introducing new and better poems, adding copious ornamentation, and presenting the work in a more spacious arrangement on better-quality paper. Central to this process, as the above examples have suggested, was the involvement of figures such as Wray and Lyttelton, who could serve as mediators between the world of selective, scribal exchange, with its elite associations, and the more indiscriminate one of print. For Edwards and Shenstone, such mediation was an important reassurance: "I should have been glad if by some of my friends Mr Lyttelton could have seen all my pieces that I might have had his opinion which are worth publishing," writes Edwards to Wray, and Dodsley in turn offers to show Shenstone's later contributions to Lyttelton

or his brother, just as “most of those which compose the three first Volumes, were shewn to Sir George before they were inserted.” By the time Dodsley was actively soliciting poems from Shenstone’s circle for the later volumes, the poet felt he could assure Graves that “they will be read by the polite world.” Dodsley’s “Advertisement” to all editions of the *Collection* offers the reader, in turn, the guarantee that “nothing is set before him but what has been approved by those of the most acknowledged taste.” Marshalling the cultural authority associated with scribal culture, Dodsley’s project thereby put that culture on display. As Suarez summarizes it, “[Dodsley] was marketing poems by his coterie of authors and by the friends of his close associates for a particular readership”; for Barbara Benedict, from the perspective of the readers of such print publications, “literary collections [like Dodsley’s] . . . exhibit a clique yet aim at a general audience.”<sup>57</sup>

Dodsley took a creative view of book-making that can be compared to Shenstone’s approach to gardening; in fact, writing to Joseph Spence, another poet and enthusiastic gardener with whom he visited Shenstone, he compares landscape gardening with his own business activity in words that might have been addressed to Shenstone directly: “here am I, ty’d down to ye World, immerst in Business, with very little Prospect of ever being able to disengage my self. ‘Tis true, my Business is of such a Nature, and so agreeable to ye Turn of my Mind, that I have often very great Pleasure in ye Pursuit of it. I don’t know but I may sometimes be as much entertain’d in planning a Book, as you are in laying the Plan of a Garden.”<sup>58</sup> This makes it less surprising, perhaps, that as Shenstone revised his notion of the ideal audience for the *Leasowes* and for his poetry from the elite to the tasteful, he should find an affinity with Dodsley, whom he introduced to members of his coterie as one whose “genius is truly poetical, and . . . sentiments altogether liberal and ingenuous” – in other words, a man not primarily driven by the profit-motive of the tradesman.<sup>59</sup>

Shenstone and Dodsley ultimately formed what was to prove one of the most significant personal and professional relationships of each of their lives. From 1754 onward, Dodsley regularly visited Shenstone at the *Leasowes*, where they worked together on the former’s play *Cleone*, his poem *Melpomene*, and his collection of *Fables*, and on preparing Shenstone and the Warwickshire coterie’s poems for publication. In this sense Dodsley was a productive member of the scribal exchange from which he also profited as a bookseller; he clearly valued the advice of Shenstone and Graves, both on his own works and on the contents and ordering of his final volumes of the *Collection*.<sup>60</sup> Gordon in 1952 described Shenstone as

“virtually [the] editor” of the final two volumes of the *Collection*, based on his role in supplying and commenting on about one-fifth of the poetry they contain.<sup>61</sup> But a careful examination of the Shenstone and Dodsley correspondences suggests that it might be more illuminating, rather than assuming a print-publishing model, as the term “editor” does, to consider the extent to which Shenstone’s – and perhaps more surprisingly, Dodsley’s – working schema for literary production and circulation in this case was an extension of the scribal model of publication. For Shenstone and his coterie, just as for Carter and Chapone, printing could be understood as serving the ends of extending their contemporary influence and embodying an image of themselves in print for their contemporaries and for posterity.

That image, as Dodsley conveyed it, certainly “exhibited the clique,” or coterie. In Volume Four of the *Collection* (1754), the group centered around Shenstone was featured as a block in the final sixth of the volume;<sup>62</sup> following poems by Somerville, Hylton, Lady Luxborough, Jago, Whistler, and Graves were thirteen by Shenstone, culminating in his *Pastoral Ballad* accompanied by Arne’s musical setting of its first part. Further, this collection within the *Collection* included several poems featuring the Leasowes and the theme of rural landscape gardening – Luxborough’s “Written at a Ferme Ornee near Birmingham,” several of Shenstone’s pastoral songs which speak of a poet-gardener seeking to impress his love on a visit to his garden, and a set of three “Rural Inscriptions” reproducing poems that adorned decorative features of Shenstone’s garden. The grouping must have been well received because Dodsley’s 1758 Volume Five opens with Shenstone’s “Rural Elegance: An Ode to the late Duchess of Somerset,” continues with 28 more Shenstone poems and songs, and then follows with another 15 poems from coterie members, including Joseph Giles, a Birmingham engraver whose work Shenstone had also sent along to Dodsley. As already noted, “Rural Elegance” can be read as a manifesto of Shenstone’s esthetic of taste, making its placement at the head of Volume 5 significant. Other Shenstone poems include another inscription, this one for a sheep-cote, and more pastoral songs; those of the coterie include Jago’s “Verses to William Shenstone, Esq; On receiving a Gilt Pocket-Book” and Graves’s “The Pepper-Box and Salt-Seller. A Fable,” which addresses its moral to “my Shenstone.”<sup>63</sup>

Dodsley, for his part, gained through his friendship with Shenstone access to materials that were actively circulating but had not yet appeared in print. These materials came to him with the hallmarks of coterie

practice – transcribed by Shenstone, often revised by him and others and unidentified by individual author. The method is illustrated in a letter from Shenstone to Jago as Volume 4 is in production:

I did send [Dodsley] several [Pieces] of my own, some of my Friend Whist [ler,] Graves, and some accidental Pieces of others which lay in my Drawer. I meant to send something of yours, of my own accord if I was hurry'd, otherwise not without applying for Consent. He wrote me word last week that his Public[ation] must be defer'd upon account of the Elections. So that we shall now have time enough to meet or write upon ye Subject – What I purpos'd was your Linnets – 'I owe etc.' Dick Graves send [*sic*] me the Inclos'd little comical Fable. I made some few alterations & put it into Dodsley's Hands. Be so good as to return it, as I have now no other Copy.

Coterie modes of exchange and revision fluidly cross the line into publication methods in this case. That Shenstone was not overly troubled about proprietary authorship in the process is further indicated by a letter from Dodsley in August 1764 listing, apparently at Shenstone's request, eighteen poems he has received from him in his various "pacquets," and asking that Shenstone "be so kind as to distinguish which are yours, & to favour me with any others that you may think proper for my purpose." Dodsley himself, as "a gentleman, whose judgment, I am convinc'd, is not inferior [to Shenstone's], & who is under the strictest Obligations to Sincerity," was invited by Graves to exercise the final judgment regarding the inclusion of, and alterations to, his own poems submitted by Shenstone for the volume. Thus, Dodsley was taking his cue from the coterie itself in treating the poems of Graves, Hylton, Jago, Luxborough, Somerville, and Whistler as already published in manuscript form and in consulting only with Shenstone about final editorial decisions.<sup>64</sup>

Significantly, of the authors of this coterie only Richard Jago seems to have objected outright to these methods, and that only several years later, in response to the production of Volume 5 of the *Collection*. Jago protests to Dodsley, "I am sensible, Sir how advantageous Mr. Shenstone's Recommendation is, and that it is no inconsiderable Compliment to be admitted to a Place in a Collection under so judicious a Compiler: At the same Time Sir, You must permit me to claim such an Interest in my own, as to give my Consent both to the Dress, and the Manner of its Insertion" – to which Dodsley replies that he thought Jago had been informed of the submissions, which have already been printed off. Overall, these anecdotes suggest that for most members of the coterie, while they cared deeply that their work appear to the best possible advantage, their poems had already been "published" in the act

of relinquishing control of the manuscripts to the coterie process of collaborative amendment. Like Chapone valuing the expertise of her bookseller in marketing the *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, Shenstone and his coterie acknowledge Dodsley's "Judgment & Character" in bringing the right material before the public in the best possible light (although this did not prevent Shenstone, an inveterate reviser, from hoping for the opportunity of a new, more correct edition). Soon after the appearance of the 1755 Volume 4, Shenstone "wish[es] . . . that the volume may recompence Dodsley for his trouble: I may also add, for his ingenuity, and for his politeness in giving each of us a compleat sett."<sup>65</sup> In short, for this coterie, printing was an extension of their circulation practices, to similar ends. The distinctly commercial realm of print was recognized, but primarily in the sense of shared concerns – about obtaining enough poetry to fill a volume and publishing it before the London season ended to gain maximum exposure – along with an acknowledgment of Dodsley's expertise in knowing how to bring material before the public successfully. The broader aim underlying these material concerns was of course the accrual of social capital to the coterie's members, both collectively and individually.<sup>66</sup> The influence of Shenstone's work as reflected in magazine reprints, tributes, and imitations is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, but the start of that dissemination was here, in the decision to have the coterie imaged so substantially in Dodsley's *Collection*.

Shenstone's colonization of print to serve his own esthetic principles is also demonstrated in the triangular working relations between himself, Dodsley, and the innovative type-designer John Baskerville, to whose specialized press in Birmingham, near the Leasowes, both men turned for small editions of works destined for exclusive audiences.<sup>67</sup> Writing to Jago regarding a possible printing of the late-life manuscript miscellany referred to earlier, Shenstone nicely articulates this extension of the localized scribal community through a selective use of print inflected by notions of controlled dissemination:

Be not apprehensive: there shall nothing appear in print of your composition any more, without your explicit consent. – And yet I have thoughts of amusing myself with the publication of a small Miscellany from neighbour Baskerville's press, if I can save myself harmless as to expense – I purpose it no larger than a "Landsdown's," a "Philips's" or a "Pomfret's Poems."<sup>68</sup>

Shenstone's placement of himself in a tradition defined by Lansdowne, Philips, and Pomfret is presented as self-deprecation, but it in fact reveals

his ambition to be recognized as belonging to a line of poets publishing modest, carefully curated collections principally for a select readership.<sup>69</sup> Harold Love suggests that one reason for the decline of scribal publication was the decline of the political or religious need to maintain separate ideological communities among the governing classes, but as this case shows, a mid-eighteenth-century country gentleman might turn political and economic marginalization into a voluntary separation based on taste.<sup>70</sup>

Shenstone achieved this end in large part, as we have seen, by restricting his own practice to two forms of circulation – of manuscripts and of travelers between landscape gardening projects. Thus, even in this age of efficient postal service, Dodsley was forced to travel regularly to the Leasowes in the latter years of his life, not merely to further his own manuscripts and to admire the *ferme ornée*'s improvements but also to extract from Shenstone the hoarded, much revised manuscripts that he could not be persuaded to relinquish to the post. Indeed, at one point in 1758, after months of delay in the return of corrected proofs for Volume 5 of the *Collection*, an exasperated Dodsley writes about the poem he had hoped to print three years earlier, in Volume 4, "Pray send the Rural Elegance, & let me finish, for I shall now be in great trouble & anxiety which accompany'd with pain [from gout] is too much. The Season is wasting, and I have between 6 and 7 hundred pound bury'd in the Paper & print of this Edition, which I want to pay and cannot till I publish." Paradoxically, Shenstone's stance of reluctance, of viewing as a hardwon privilege, and of a necessary link between the text and its physical source in the author was, as we have seen, a part of his construction as a leader in taste – heightened, perhaps, by its contrast to the technologies of communication and travel advancing around him. Deliberately working in allegedly "anachronistic" or "devalued" media, Shenstone established his place in literary history as "a forerunner of a later generation" (in the 1933 phrase of Marjorie Williams) through his coterie esthetic of relation and sociability, embodied art, modesty of scale rather than extravagant display, and formal simplicity. In this way, Shenstone came to represent the cutting edge of literary trends rather than the past.<sup>71</sup>

Like Elizabeth Carter and Hester Mulso Chapone, William Shenstone succeeded in transmediating his coterie values into print, resulting in an extension of his influence. Harold Love has suggested (drawing on Walter Ong) that Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura" of the work of art prior to the age of mechanical reproduction, its link to authorial presence, can be applied to manuscript publication's authority in the age of print.<sup>72</sup> From one perspective, this aura can be seen to be exploited by the print trade for

commercial purposes. But Shenstone's reputation, based on the social cachet of activities such as gardening and coterie exchange, was secured for literary history by the appearance of his work in print, particularly in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems*, reissued repeatedly, and in the same publisher's posthumous edition of his friend's works, discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>73</sup> Shenstone's approach to his writing, gardening, and other media arts might thus be viewed as an already restricted esthetic practice that takes on a heightened aura of authenticity in proportion to its representation in a commercial print medium that is anything but exclusive. Shenstone's artistic practice and posthumous reputation serve to demonstrate how allegedly "anachronistic" media phenomena can, with the collaboration of print institutions, be refigured as setting "modern" standards of taste for the consumption of that expanded print readership.