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Leisure in ‘Feminine’ Fiction, 1751-1834

Anne Bandry-Scubbi

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Muße im 18. Jahrhundert

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Leisure in ‘Feminine’ Fiction, 1751–1834

Anne Bandry-Scubbi

In this article I examine the ways in which gendered leisure was perceived and used to narrative ends in what Marilyn Butler calls ‘feminine’ fiction¹, namely novels written by women between 1751 (Eliza Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless*) and 1834 (Maria Edgeworth’s *Helen*) in a corpus-based stylistics approach, mainly from a lexical point of view. I focus on the distribution and use of vocabulary related to leisure in two corpora comprising some 70 novels, some famous (by Austen, Burney, Edgeworth, Haywood), some not. The mixture of canonical and non-canonical texts gives a view of the context in which the authors who became famous were writing. One of the groupings, the Reference Corpus, contains as many texts by women as by men (17 by each) to provide the possibility of teasing out gendered differences. In contrast, the Women Corpus contains 42 texts by women authors, six of which are also present in the Reference Corpus and 34 others from the Chawton Novels Online collection.² The narratives in both corpora take place mainly in the British Isles, feature a small set of characters and are neither overtly gothic nor historical. They are ordered chronologically. The large amount of text (over 5 million words in each corpus) makes up at least partly for the inevitable arbitrariness of choice. Each corpus as a whole furnishes a norm to which novels from and outside it can be compared as regards word frequency and use, in a methodology deriving from a combination of distant and close reading.³ This implies a process of zooming in on parts of the corpora shown as typical or untypical by the data and zooming out to achieve a wider view. Texts particularly

¹ “Domestic comedy centring on a heroine, in which the critical action is an inward progress towards judgment” (Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Oxford 1975, 145).

² Chawton Novels Online <https://chawtonhouse.org/the-library/library-collections/womens-writing-in-english/novels-online/> (Accessed 01/08/2017).

³ For detail of the corpora and general findings see my “Chawton Novels Online, Women’s Writing 1751–1834 and Computer-Aided Textual Analysis”, in: *ABO* 5, 2 (2015), 1–54. A more spectacular analysis of the Chawton Novels is Jan Rybicki’s “Vive la difference: Tracing the (Authorial) Gender Signal by Multivariate Analysis of Word Frequencies”, in: *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 31, 4 (2016), 746–761. Franco Moretti and the Stanford Literary Lab work on much larger corpora (<https://litlab.stanford.edu/pamphlets/>). My main software is *Hyperbase: Logiciel hypertexte pour le traitement documentaire et statistique des corpus textuels*, Version 9.2011, University of Nice.

focused on are Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, Frances Brooke's *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* and Austen's mature fiction.

The term *leisure* appears with a similar frequency in the mixed-gendered corpus and in the female one, with respectively 222 and 248 occurrences. It is present in all but three texts in each of the two corpora (not the same ones) and its distribution appears without striking variation in the Women Corpus.⁴ Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* stand out for a higher frequency of the word *leisure* than the norm made up by the Reference Corpus, with a strong presence also in *Emma* (one of the six texts belonging to both corpora) and in *Pride and Prejudice* from the Women Corpus. In fact, Austen uses the term throughout her mature fiction in very similar proportions, as a corpus made up of her six published novels show.

The way in which *leisure* is employed over the 70 novels can be examined by the analysis of concordances. To do this, definitions of *leisure* and the terms used to delineate the notion are needed. The first definition given by the *OED* is very close to the Latin etymology, *licēre* ("to be permitted"): "freedom or opportunity to do something specified or implied" (1a). *Leisure* therefore first implies a voluntary action, a possibility which can be taken advantage of or ignored. Although obsolete by the eighteenth-century (the last example dates from 1640), the agency of the individual expressed by *leisure* foregrounded here suggests the main question raised by the notion of *leisure* in the novels: will the character(s) make use of this opportunity in a positive or negative way? Rather than a polarisation, this creates a continuum which the quantity of novels in the corpora illustrates, some of the salient points of which will be analysed here.

Examples from the period under study illustrating a second, narrower, *OED* definition all include a negation or bear a strong negative connotation: "Opportunity afforded by freedom from occupations" (2a) comes with "It does *not* give us time or leisure to reflect on ourselves" (1712, *Spectator* 418) and "They had leisure to *laugh* at their late terrors" (1791, Radcliffe, *Romance of the Forest*); the definition "Duration of opportunity; time allowed before it is too late" (2b) is illustrated by statements like "The unfortunate youth had *scarcely* leisure to *deplore* the elevation of his family" (1781, Gibbon, *Decline & Fall*) and "He found himself unexpectedly in Eachin's close neighbourhood with *scarce any* leisure to *avoid* him" (1828, Scott, *Fair Maid of Perth*).⁵ A quarter of the occurrences of *leisure* in the 70 novels come with a negation, showing an interest for the conse-

⁴ This amounts to four uses for every 10 000 words on average. The slightly stronger frequency in the Women Corpus probably comes from the choice of texts and is therefore not significant (the maximum rate is nine for every 10 000 words). In the mix-gendered corpus, texts by female authors use this term more (68% of the occurrences for 56% of the corpus) but this comes mainly from the three texts with the highest relative frequency.

⁵ Emphases in italics are mine, here and elsewhere.

quences of opportunities missed when attention is not paid to the demands from others or from oneself. An additional characteristic is that the first three *OED* examples quoted here all mention the reflection which “freedom from occupations” makes possible. Whether in a positive or negative way, this combination is present in about one out of six occurrences of *leisure to* and *leisure for* in the corpora and therefore plays an important part in the use novelists make of *leisure*.⁶

The third *OED* definition indicates two other important aspects (3a). First the strong relationship between leisure and temporality formulated as “time which one can spend as one pleases; free or unoccupied time”, which an 1830 D’Israeli quotation complicates by pointing to the fact that leisure time can be quantified and employed in several pursuits: “Charles commanded his Lordship to employ *some of his leisure* in a dramatic composition (*Comm. Life Charles I.*)” This links back to the voluntariness in the early meaning, the risks of which are exposed by the Johnson quotation illustrating the initial part of 3a, “the state of having time at one’s own disposal”: “I am not grown, I am afraid, less *idle*; and of *idleness* I am now paying the fine by having *no leisure*” (1780, Let. 25 Aug.). The agency implied by leisure can lead to its black double, idleness, against which Johnson fought and wrote repeatedly.⁷

The ambivalence arising from the polysemy of *leisure* is already foregrounded in his *Dictionary* (1755), where after “lazy; averse from labour” *idle* is defined as “not busy; *at leisure*”. Seeing that the subsequent elements of the definition go from bad to worse⁸, this does not reflect a very positive view of leisure, particularly when combined with *at*. For example, Mr. Bennet’s use of this phrase after the acceptance of the marriage proposals made to his two eldest daughters in *Pride and Prejudice* sardonically encapsulates his passivity: “If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite *at leisure*.”⁹ However, although the phrase is the most frequent collocation in which *leisure* enters in both corpora, it does not always bear the negative connotation Johnson and Austen endow it with. *At leisure* rather points to the relationship between leisure and

⁶ Variety prevails for the rest of what follows *leisure to* or *for*, in similar proportions in both corpora.

⁷ In “Spectators, Ramblers and Idlers: The Conflicted Nature of Indolence and the 18th-Century Tradition of Idling”, in: *Anglistik* 28, 1 (2017), 133–154, Monika Fludernik examines “Johnson’s diatribes against idleness” and how he consistently focused on “the psychological and physiological dangers of idleness” (150). Sarah Jordan makes the case that Johnson “portrays idleness as both voluptuously inviting and intensely horrifying” in *The Anxieties of Idleness. Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, Lewisburgh, PA 2003, 24.

⁸ “Inactive; not employed”; “useless; vain; ineffectual”; “worthless; barren; not productive of good”. Brandi Besalke (Ed.), *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic by Samuel Johnson* (Last modified 01/02/2014), <http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com> (Accessed 01/08/2017).

⁹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, London 1813, ch. 59.

time, which appears in half of the occurrences of *leisure*.¹⁰ This is what prevails in Johnson's definitions of the substantive: "Freedom from business or hurry; vacancy of mind; power to spend time according to choice" (1); "convenience of time" (2).¹¹

If the scarcity of leisure is often lamented, its overabundance and misuse are worse. Occurrences of *idle*-¹² are less frequent in the Women Corpus than in the Reference one, but no correlation with the gender of the writers appears in the latter. However, *men* and *fellows* are among the terms in the vicinity of *idle*-, along with the plural pronoun *they*: reprehensible lack of productive occupation is often linked to group activity, preferably male. *Dissipation*, *money*, *market* and *trade*, *folly* and *vanity*, *acting* and *cards* (more of which later) also feature prominently among the terms used in the vicinity of *idle*-, reinforcing its negative connotations. The positive terms which also recur in the vicinity of *idle*- illustrate the dynamics of industry and idleness¹³: the contrast with *industry*, *studies*, *labour*, *reading*, *work* and *employment* is qualified as *honest* and *sacred*; the presence of *persuade* shows that fighting idleness is a challenge, and therefore provides good narrative potential.

Leisure, Idleness and *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*

Hannah More clearly took advantage of this potential for her influential 1809 *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, the text which most frequently combines uses of the terms *leisure* and *idleness* in the two corpora. The Preface presents the dilemma faced by the social reformer and moralist when choosing the form of a courtship novel: "the novel reader will reject it as dull. The religious may throw it aside as frivolous".¹⁴ The story consists in the hero-narrator Coelebs contrasting sets of characters with the worthy Lucilla, the eldest daughter of his deceased father's best friend whom he duly marries at the end of the book. Examining occurrences

¹⁰ At *leisure*, wait for X's leisure make up one third of the occurrences in both corpora, to which must be added the many mentions of *hour/s*, *moment/s*, *day/s*, *morning*, *time* in the same sentence as *leisure*.

¹¹ The third is "Want of leisure. Not used" with a quotation from *Richard III*.

¹² *Idle* as adjective and verb, *idleness*, *idler*, *idly*.

¹³ For example Sarah Jordan, "Idleness, Class and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century" in: Monika Fludernik/Miriam Nandi (Eds.), *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, London 2014, 107–128.

¹⁴ So as to ensure that readers who might skip the preface do not miss the point, friends of the enamoured hero and heroine are made to state well into the text that their story will be "a sad, dull novel [...] no difficulties, nor adventures to heighten the interest. No cruel step-dame, no tyrant father, no capricious mistress, no moated castle, no intriguing confidante, no treacherous spy, no formidable rival, not so much as a duel or even a challenge" (Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, 1809, ch. XX).

of the term *leisure* provides a view on how More uses its polysemy to invest the “frivolous” medium for didactic ends.

The first and last occurrences of the word show that *leisure* is necessary, as the “want of” it has negative consequences (the phrase only appears in these two instances). In the Preface, the narrator’s “want of leisure” evokes the risk that the text might not be published; “a confidential friend” sees to it, in a variation on the entrusted manuscript *topos*. The last reformed character Coelebs meets blames her dissipation on her “total want of leisure for reflection,” along with her “excessive vanity and complete inconsiderateness.”¹⁵ Within such a frame foregrounding the danger of the want of leisure, the meanings of the term vary among the possibilities delineated above to explore what young people should and should not do.

Both sexes need advice to “fill up” their leisure time without moral risk: More is one of the high users of this verb in the corpora, and what comes after “fill-” in *Coelebs* confirms her preoccupation with the adequate choice of activities as one third of her 33 occurrences concern leisure, time or mind.¹⁶ The hero condemns the “education” rather than the “dispositions” of one group of young women by opposing “useful” *leisure* to “waste of time” in a clichéd version of accomplishments (of which more later) or “trifling pursuits”:

Though Mrs. Ranby would have thought it a little heathenish to have had her daughters instructed in polite literature, and to have *filled a leisure hour* in reading to her a useful book, that was not professedly religious, she felt no compunction at their *waste of time*, or *the trifling pursuits* in which the day was suffered to spend itself. The piano-forte, when they were weary of the harp, copying some indifferent drawings, gilding a set of flower-pots, and netting white gloves and veils, seemed to *fill up* the whole business of these immortal beings, of these Christians, for whom it had been solemnly engaged that they should manfully [sic] fight under Christ’s banner.¹⁷

One solution is “learning”, “the best human preservative of virtue, that [...] safely *fills up leisure* and honourably adorns life, even when where it does not form the business of it,” which relies mainly on reading.¹⁸ For males, the recommendation consists in reading more than religious texts so as to be able to engage in conversation and fence against sinful activities, exemplified by gluttony (Chapter XXI). Reading, as noted by Fludernik and Nandi, is one of the “key activities” of leisure.¹⁹ For women however, the encouragement to read paradoxically condones and condemns the worthy occupation by intertwining the meanings of leisure and time, leaving “more leisure” for the opposite of leisure, “duties”:

¹⁵ More, *Coelebs*, Chapter XLVII.

¹⁶ The highest use in the Reference corpus occurs in *Frankenstein*, with a much more varied list of what is filled (34 occurrences for a text half as long as *Coelebs*).

¹⁷ More, *Coelebs*, Chapter VI.

¹⁸ More, *Coelebs*, Chapter XXI.

¹⁹ Fludernik/Nandi (Eds.), *Idleness, indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, 4.

The reading of a cultivated woman [...] commonly occupies *less time than* the music of a musical woman, or the idleness of an indolent woman, or the dress of a vain woman, or the dissipation of a fluttering woman; she is therefore likely to have *more leisure for her duties*, as well as more inclination, and a sounder judgment for performing them.²⁰

More combines female duties and leisure again when presenting privileged women: “Women of fortune have *abundant leisure*, which can in no way be so properly or so pleasantly filled up, as in making themselves intimately acquainted with the worth and the wants of all within their reach”; therefore, “charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession”.²¹ In the following chapter, quality vies with quantity when risk is at stake, with overfilling another hazard for “those who, having *more leisure*, will be in danger of exceeding the due bounds in the article of amusement.” The advocacy of reading this leads to, “by allowing *a little of their leisure*, and *of their leisure only*, to such amusements,” provokes a debate in which the main speaker adopts a Johnsonian posture, recommending “works of the imagination [...] with great discrimination, to the young and the unoccupied,” to which his antagonist retorts: “you would have our young men spend their time in reading idle verses, and our girls, I suppose, in reading loose romances?”²² The parallel between *idle* and *loose* enforces the point. Moreover, if taken meta-narratively, this passage validates More’s own “work of the imagination” by putting it in the same category as recommended “works of wit and genius.”²³ Her narrativised conduct book responds with some insistence to Johnson’s analysis that novels can serve as “lectures of conduct and introductions in to life” for “the young, the ignorant, and the idle.”²⁴

The paragon Lucilla Stanley then serves to oppose idleness and non-bookish leisure fruitfully, as she is in synch with the natural alternation of activity and non-activity, knowing when to act and when to step back:

‘When all appears dead and torpid to you *idle* spectators, all is secretly at work; nature is *busy* in preparing her treasures under ground, and art has a hand in the process. When the blossoms of summer are delighting you mere amateurs, then it is that we professional people,’ added she, laughing, ‘are really *idle*. The silent operations of the winter now produce themselves – the canvas of nature is covered – the great Artist has laid on his

²⁰ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XXIII.

²¹ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XXVII.

²² More, *Coelebs*, ch. XXVIII.

²³ Milton, Spenser, Cowley, Gray, Goldsmith, Beattie, Mason, Cowper rather than Sterne and “his corrupt, but too popular lesser work” (*Coelebs*, Chapter XXVIII), which most of More’s readers would probably have encountered through the safe filter of *The Beauties of Sterne* (first edition in 1782, twelfth by 1793). Sensitive young readers are allowed “the more delicate parts of *Gulliver’s Travels*” (*Coelebs*, Chapter XXXVIII).

²⁴ In *Rambler* 4 (1750), novels can serve as “lectures of conduct and introductions in to life” for “the young, the ignorant, and the idle”, <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/ETexts/johnson.rambler.html>.

colors - then we petty agents lay down our implements, and enjoy *our leisure* in contemplating his work.²⁵

Whether the artist be great or small, this provides a model which the practitioner advocates for any social class, particularly as a way to keep the lower one from going astray: “‘It looks, also,’ said Miss Stanley, ‘as if the woman, instead of spending *her few leisure moments* in gadding abroad, employed them in adorning her little habitation.’”²⁶ Far from being an end in itself or for the general benefit, the positive effect of this occupation oozes prescriptive morality; the sentence continues with “in order to make it more attractive to her husband” and leads to a precept: “And we know more than one instance in this village in which the man has been led to give up the public-house, by the innocent ambition of improving on her labors.” As a proficient upper-class gardener, Lucilla, the “pattern daughter [who] will make a pattern wife,”²⁷ can tend to her community as well as to herself, both practising and mouthing moral views which include the worthy use of free time. To become worthy of her and “renounce” the name of Coelebs in the last line of the narrative, the hero is made to enter a fallow period by her wise father, the tender of mental and emotional needs:

I know the rapid effect that *leisure*, retirement, rural scenes, daily opportunities of seeing a young woman not ugly, of conversing with a young woman not disagreeable, may produce on the heart, or rather on the imagination. [...] I could not consent that *mere* accident, *mere leisure*, the *mere* circumstance of being thrown together, should irrevocably entangle either of you.²⁸

More here reduces leisure to emptiness with a downgrading to “*mere leisure*” hammered in by the threefold repetition of the quantifier. As a consequence, the positive value shifts to *time*; Mr Stanley presents the period he has imposed before giving his consent as an offering rather than a penance (to be on the safe side, More again resorts to threefold repetition):

I was desirous of *affording you time* to see, to know, and to judge. I would not take advantage of your first emotions. I would not take advantage of your friendship for me. I would not take advantage of your feeling ardently, *till I had given you time* to judge temperately and fairly.²⁹

The bestower of time, like his daughter, has the wisdom to know about the virtues of productive inactivity or *otium*. He enforces a three-month separation of the future spouses putting *leisure* in what has been demonstrated to be its proper place, with a possibly unwitting sublimation of carnal union on the part of the

²⁵ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XXXII.

²⁶ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XL.

²⁷ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XLVI.

²⁸ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XLII.

²⁹ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XLII.

moral author: “business and duties will *fill up* your active hours, and an *intercourse* of letters with her you so reluctantly quit, will not only give an interest to your *leisure*, but put you both still more completely in *possession* of each other’s character!”³⁰

More therefore strongly establishes the necessary alternation of activity and inactivity, then explores the risks of the latter, which imply the necessity of guidance. In the process, she shifts *leisure* back and forth along the continuum inherent to its polyvalence. More’s view requires a “great Artist” who delegates powers to benevolent patriarchs: the union of the young people had been planned by their fathers when the female member of the couple was born and the worthiness of the then young boy assessed. Another story published some fifty years earlier tells of how this can go terribly wrong.

The History of Lady Julia Mandeville and Amusements

Published in 1763 by Frances Brooke³¹, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* takes place on an idyllic estate where amusements and good company prevail until the story warps into a *Romeo and Juliet*-like catastrophic ending. Young Mandeville duly falls in love with his cousin as planned by their respective fathers but “the gay structure of ideal happiness [falls] in one moment to the ground” when he dies in a duel caused by jealousy and she withers away in a consequent fever.³² Epistolarity endows the text with irony as Lady Anne Wilmot’s piquant and hedonistic letters debunk the youthful idealism of Harry Mandeville. The interest of this successful text for the present study consists in the list of “amusements” it provides:

Nothing can be more easy or agreeable than the manner of living here; it is perfectly domestic, yet so diversified with *amusements* as to exclude that satiety from which the best and purest of sublunary enjoyments are not secure, if continued in too uniform a course. We read, we dance, we ride, we converse; we play, we dance, we sing; join the *company*, or indulge in pensive *solitude* and *meditation*, just as fancy leads; liberty, restrained alone by virtue and politeness, is the law, and inclination the sovereign guide, at this mansion of true hospitality. Free from all the shackles of idle ceremony, the whole business of Lord Belmont’s guests, and the highest satisfaction they can give their noble host, is to be

³⁰ More, *Coelebs*, ch. XLVI.

³¹ It was Brooke’s first novel but not her first published work: she featured on the title page as “the Translator of Lady Catesby’s Letters,” Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni’s 1759 *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette*. Published by Dodsley, it went through nine editions in Brooke’s lifetime (Enit Karafili Steiner, Introduction, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (Chawton House library series, Women’s novels) London 2013 [1763], xxi). This text does not belong to either corpus.

³² Brooke, *Lady Julia Mandeville*, 113.

happy, and to consult their own taste entirely in their manner of being so. (H.Mandeville to George Mordaunt, Esq.)³³

Applied to the corpora, this list, completed by activities from a few other similar passages, shows which amusements authors included in their fictions. No correlation with the gender of writers appears from the Reference Corpus.³⁴ Interestingly, *Coelebs* is the only nineteenth-century text which stands out for its quantitative use of the Mandeville list in this corpus, which confirms More's interest in leisure: reading and conversation predominate in her novel, yet no activity is below par. Frances Burney's 1778 *Evelina* is notable for its strong quantitative use of the list in both corpora. This indicates that the Mandeville activities are not typically rural as Burney's first novel takes place both in the country and the city, among several social classes. It contains many examples of "commercial leisure" which will not be examined here.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, dancing predominates in *Evelina* but all other amusements are mentioned; only *solitude* and *playing* (but not *play* as the heroine goes to the theatre) are used less frequently than average in both corpora.

The items of the Mandeville list may be categorised as follows. Over one third of the leisure activities mentioned in both corpora consist of *conversation* and *company*. In these mainly domestic novels, small-group interaction prevails, the plot develops from characters getting together and talking. The inclusion of this among *amusements* in *Mandeville* confirms the (French?) cliché of the eighteenth century as the century of conversation, practised *per se*; the use of dialogue, however, has been shown to characterize the "feminine" novels.³⁶ In contrast to conversation, reading, the next most frequently mentioned activity, isolates characters and therefore does not enhance the plot. *Evelina* provides a case in point:

'What do you do with yourself this evening?' said his Lordship, turning to me.

'I shall be at home, my Lord.' [...]

'Shall you be at the assembly?'

³³ Brooke, *Lady Julia Mandeville*, 6.

³⁴ A stronger relative frequency of the terms appears in texts from 1748 to 1778, *Roderick Random*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Humphrey Clinker* and *Evelina* (but neither *A Sentimental Journey* nor *The Man of Feeling*, nor the other Burney novel included in this corpus, published much later in 1814, *The Wanderer*): the congruence of amusements in these eighteenth-century texts with those enumerated in Brooke's text may come from the choice of the later novels, but this is an issue beyond the scope of the present essay. No such chronological grouping appears in the Women Corpus.

³⁵ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven/London 1999, 225.

³⁶ Bandy-Scubbi, "Chawton Novels", 9. 40% in the Women Corpus (conversation 22%, company 18%) and 45% in the Reference Corpus (conversation 18%, company 17%). The latter corpus shows no significant correlation with author gender.

'I believe not, my Lord.'

'No!— why how in the world can you contrive to pass your time?'

'In a manner that your Lordship will think very extraordinary,' cried Mrs Selwyn; 'for the young Lady reads.'³⁷

Reading provides noteworthy protection from undesirable company here. It is not surprising that it should not be very strong quantitatively in *Evelina* (slightly under average in both corpora), where Burney puts her heroine in a series of different groups and settings so that she becomes worldly wise and free from her initial timidity, rendered in terms of *conversation* when she first interacts with Lord Orville: "It now struck me that he was resolved to try whether or not I was capable of talking upon any subject [...] he *conversing* with all gaiety, I looking down with all foolishness."³⁸

Dancing is the next most frequent activity (12 % in the Women Corpus, 9 % in the Reference one), used more by Burney and Austen than by their contemporaries, in memorably choreographed scenes. It is followed by music, singing and concerts (10 %), during which peripheral conversations often move the plot forward. *Solitude* and *meditation* (2 % each) can be "indulged in" in *Mandeville* fashion (passage quoted above) or deeply suffered from as in Frances Jacson's 1823 *Isabella*. This is the highest user of *solitude* in the Women Corpus but low in amusements, from which the heroine is banished, cast away in rural Scotland while her husband and his mistress cavort in company, occasionally in her presence: that solitude should distinguish this novel from the rest of the corpus far more than the *Mandeville* list as a whole, whether positively or negatively, gives away the denouement: she regains and reforms her wayward spouse.

Cards, also at 2 %, appear in 54 of the 70 novels (90 % of the 310 occurrences of the term are playing cards, the rest being mainly visiting cards, which pertain to another leisure activity, *company*).³⁹ This tallies with Amanda Vickery marking cards out as "by far the commonest form of home entertainment."⁴⁰ They can even be seen as a last resort activity: "and when nothing else was to be found for recreation, cards *filled up the void*."⁴¹ Exactly what Hannah More denounces

³⁷ Frances Burney, *Evelina or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. London 1778, III.1.

³⁸ Burney, *Evelina*, I.11.

³⁹ Cribbage (6), loo (12), ombre (4), piquet (19), quadrille (seven of the 19 occurrences designate the dance) and whist (41) have been looked into. Of the latter, Horace Walpole wrote in 1742 that it "has spread an universal opium over the whole nation" (*OED*): it appears in Smollett and in three late 1780s texts, then more frequently from the 1810s onward. The list of card games comes from Denis Reynaud, "De la bassette au whist: les jeux d'argent comme modèle de transfert culturel entre la France et l'Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle", *XVII-XVIII HS3* (2013), 211–225.

⁴⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 208.

⁴¹ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Oxford 1997 [1751], 46.

with her repetitive, almost obsessive use of the same verb, in a novel she probably strongly disapproved of if she knew it, *Betsy Thoughtless*. More unsurprisingly combines *cards* and *idleness* in an episode which shows Coelebs the danger of marrying “a woman who had no one recommendation but beauty”: “he hardly ever sees his fine library, which is the object of her supreme aversion, but wastes his days in *listless idleness* and his evenings at *cards*, the only thing in which she takes a lively interest.”⁴² *Julia Mandeville's* Lady Anne Wilmot embodies to perfection the “lack of inner resources, [the] interior vacancy which must be filled” that Jordan associates with cards⁴³:

Nine at Night. Peace to the gentle spirit of him who invented cards! the very bond of peace, and cement of society.

After a philosophical enquiry into the *summum bonum*, I find it to consist in play: the more sublime pleasures require relaxation, are only for holiday wear, come but now and then, and keep the mind too much expanded: all other delights, all other amusements, pall; but play, dear, divine, seraphic play, is always new, the same to-day, to-morrow, and for ever.

It reconciles parties, removes distinctions, and restores what my Lord calls the natural equality of mankind.

I have only one fault to find with it; that for the time it extremely weakens, or rather totally suspends, the impressions of beauty: the finest woman in the world, whilst at the card-table, is regarded by the most susceptible man only as a being which is to lose its money.

You will imagine success produced these wise reflexions: yes, we have been playing a most engaging pool at quadrille in the wood, where I have with the utmost composure won an immensity. If I go on thus, all objections to our union will be- removed: I shall be literally a fortune in myself.

Without vanity, I have some little skill in the game; but, at present, there is no great degree of merit in winning of the friends who happened to be of my party, with an absurd conceited squire, who loves quality, and thinks it the greatest honor in the world that I will condescend to win his money. We had four tables under the shade of a spreading oak.⁴⁴

The female libertine Lady Anne serves as a foil to the ideal company assembled by Lord Belmont while gradually adapting to it. Although she is the only real gamester, able to twist the patriarch's maxims, the location “in the wood” and “under the shade of a spreading oak” combined with the choice of “quadrille” (also played by Austen's Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mrs Bates) tamper the dangerous potential of cards. In Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1802), they serve to dismiss the creole suitor Mr. Vincent, who turns out to be a gambler, cheated upon by another, female, victim of cards: Edgeworth's novel surpasses other

⁴² More, *Coelebs*, ch. X.

⁴³ Jordan, “Idleness, Class and Gender”, 116.

⁴⁴ Brooke, *Julia Mandeville*, 46–47.

Women novels in the narrative use of this passion, seen throughout Europe as quintessentially English.⁴⁵ “Cards come in for particular censure and satire”, Jordan notes.⁴⁶ This is probably why intelligent Elizabeth Bennet “despises cards”, to the amazement of vulgar Mr. Hurst.⁴⁷ Cards also often appear in the same sentence as other amusements such as dice, billiards, or just as ubiquitous tea⁴⁸, and music. Like other leisure activities taking place in the private sphere, music requires long learning but unlike cards comes with an a priori positive image of the practitioner. When bundled with other expected female pursuits however, this tends to vanish.

Austen famously contrasted the minimalist views on the matter of female accomplishments of nouveau riche Bingley to the maximalist ones of socially and intellectually, if not emotionally, secure Darcy. First the cliché: “They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.” Then the almost unattainable goal (but Darcy does know six accomplished women):

‘I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really *accomplished*.’ [...]

‘Then,’ observed Elizabeth, ‘you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an *accomplished* woman.’

‘Yes, I do comprehend a great deal in it.’

‘Oh! certainly,’ cried his faithful assistant, ‘no one can be really esteemed *accomplished* who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved.’

‘All this she must possess,’ added Darcy, ‘and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.’⁴⁹

Austen provides the additional twist of giving Darcy’s view through the anxious nouveau riche sister, the “faithful assistant” eager to oust the Bennet girls with a process of accretion: four skills (music, singing, drawing, dancing) rather than Bingley’s three limited ones, widening into *several* “modern languages” and additional ineffable behavioural qualities, which Darcy recapitulates (“all this”) and completes: not just “reading” but “extensive reading.” With these different

⁴⁵ See, among many other sources, Elisabeth Détais/Françoise Knopper (Eds.), *S’amuser en Europe au siècle des Lumières*, Toulouse 2007, 35–37.

⁴⁶ Jordan, “Idleness, Class and Gender”, 116.

⁴⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, I.8.

⁴⁸ The Reference Corpus shows no author gender difference in the use of *tea*, which appears in all but eight of the 70 novels.

⁴⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, I.8.

expectations, the minimalist falls in (requited) love by chapter three while it takes two of the three volumes for the maximalist to captivate his future spouse. Before this episode, Austen has destroyed any positive value which may pertain to accomplishments by linking them to the character of Mary, with physical ordinariness (“who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and *accomplishments*”) and lack of “genius [or] taste” when playing the pianoforte. This leads to dancing and Darcy’s sarcastic “every savage can dance”: “Mr. Darcy stood [...] in silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all *conversation*, and was too much engrossed in his thoughts” to be sociable in the least.⁵⁰ At this point of the story, he only appreciates verbal choreography with “extensive read[ers]”.

The corpora confirm that *accomplishments* belong more to the female sphere. The mix-gendered corpus shows that women authors use the term more than their male counterparts (65 % of the occurrences for 56 % of the Reference Corpus) and a detailed analysis of the concordance in both corpora indicates that two thirds of the 360 occurrences concern female characters. Moreover, the Women Corpus uses this term 55 % more than the Reference one while it is only 6 % larger. *Accomplishments* attracts words designating females (*her, she, female, ladies, sex, woman, women, girls* and *daughter*, as well as the name of Edgeworth’s Belinda Portman). Austen, as always, uses the term scantily but efficiently, providing a cynical view of one of her period’s catchwords. The gendered tinge probably explains why Johnson does not include the substantive in the *Dictionary*. His definition of *accomplished* first focuses on proficiency, with a (possibly apocryphal) quotation from Locke pointing to the difficulty of reaching the desired state: “complete in some qualification. *For who expects, that, under a tutor, a young gentleman should be an accomplished public orator or logician. Locke on Ed.*” The second part of the definition seems open to both genders (“Elegant, finished in respect of embellishments; used commonly with respect to acquired qualifications”) but comes with a damning punchline (“without including moral excellence”) worsened by the quotation from *Samson Agonistes*: “Dalila [...] my *accomplish’d* snare.”

This announces More’s denunciation of accomplishments as “trifling pursuits” quoted earlier and Wollstonecraft’s oxymoronic “smattering of accomplishments” which do not enable women to be more than “butterflies”.⁵¹ “Dancing,

⁵⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, I.6.

⁵¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792. In the Dedication to Talleyrand from which the first extract is taken, she links this notion with “the box of mischief” from which stems disorder in the public and private spheres: “whilst they are only made to acquire personal *accomplishments*, men will seek for pleasure in variety, and faithless husbands will make faithless wives”. “Butterflies” comes from Chap.12. For a balanced view of the accomplishments debate, see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England*, New Haven 2009, 232–235.

music and drawing” More finds admissible as “relaxations” for “young people of fortune” only, in her wider scheme of education for both sexes (Chapter 12). All three activities require learning to reach proficiency. The last two can fill up young women’s individual leisure time to advantage.

Music in the fiction considered here has recently been studied by Pierre Dubois. “One of the major indoor activities to which young ladies devoted so much of their time”⁵², music features in the Georgian novel as an accomplishment which animates the life of the private circle but also as a sign of pernicious display. A list established from the instruments, players and genres Dubois mentions shows singing to be the prevalent musical activity (mentioned three times more often than instruments in the corpora) and displays a clear separation of texts according to gender and the items used. The harp is the most frequently named instrument in both corpora, present in half of the novels of each corpus. Yet not unexpectedly, once *The Wanderer’s* harp is discarded from the Reference Corpus where it takes up half of the 141 occurrences, this instrument comes second after the horn, male for all but one of its mentions, and is followed by violin and organ. This makes the harp the first female instrument, with 109 occurrences in the Women Corpus. Then comes the pianoforte, just before harpsichord and organ, with flute and trumpet further behind. The pianoforte features in all Austen novels, with *Emma* towering over all other texts thanks to the mysterious gift to Jane Fairfax, a strong plot-driving element, but otherwise the instrument is only present in 25 of the 70 texts.⁵³ Burney’s musical environment is probably what makes her the first to mention this instrument in *Cecilia* (1782) where to while away unwanted leisure the unhappy heroine “amused herself with walking and reading, she commissioned Mr Monckton to send her a Piano Forte of Merlin’s, she was fond of fine work, and she found in the conversation of Mrs Delvile a never-failing resource against languor and sadness” at Delville castle (VI.iii).⁵⁴ Music here is not social, which agrees with the low score for the Mandeville list of amusements in this dark counterpart to *Evelina*. In *The Wanderer* (1814), also a low user of this list, Burney uses music to other ends, making her heroine a gifted musician striving to earn a living by giving harp lessons rather

⁵² Pierre Dubois, *Music in the Georgian Novel*, Cambridge 2015, 296.

⁵³ 53 pianofortes or piano-fortes in the Reference Corpus and one *piano*, with the first use in the 1792 *Anna StIves*; 60 pianofortes, piano-fortes or forte pianos and 5 pianos in the Women Corpus with one use of *piano* to mention the low volume of sound as a complaint by an aging character (Mrs. E.M. Foster’s 1812 *Substance and Shadow; or, the Fisherman’s Daughter of Brighton*, a Chawton House novel). *Persuasion* (1817) has Admiral Croft claim that “James Benwick is rather too piano for me” (ch. 18). The prevalence of *piano* as noun in the corpora confirms the strong presence of the new instrument in households and novels.

⁵⁴ The next use in the corpus judges the instrument harshly: “from an organ, every note is harmony. -As to a piano forte, it may speak to the ear, but never did it reach the soul” (*The Victim of Fancy* 1787).

than ill-famed sewing. *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796) denounce the non-payment of skilled workers who provide the means for leisure and pleasure. In Burney's last novel, the victim of this practice is the heroine herself. This departs from the clichés of effete singing, dancing and drawing masters by casting light on the socio-economic conditions necessary for young ladies to become accomplished.⁵⁵

Three years before *The Wanderer* Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* also explored the issue of paid female artistic labour with a heroine who hopes to compensate the loss of the annuity her father had invested for her by painting and drawing for money. The novel features male characters strongly disapproving of this ambition or deluding the skilled practitioner by paying for her productions anonymously.⁵⁶ Visual arts are absent from the Mandeville list, probably because painting and drawing tend to abstract the protagonist from the group to a greater degree than "indulg[ing] in pensive solitude and meditation". As shown elsewhere, pictures appear in the 70 novels more often as plot-advancing devices than as objects in the making.⁵⁷ The exceptional enumeration of Emma's "miniatures, half-lengths, whole-lengths, pencil, crayon, and water-colours," all unfinished, serves to set off the "imaginist" heroine's skill in sketching people's lives out for them rather than drawing their likenesses on paper, canvas and ivory, or striving for other accomplishments.⁵⁸

Accumulation, scattering and "smattering", rather than proficiency, make accomplishments the symptom of an empty mind, which can be filled dangerously, contrasting with Darcy's recommendations for "something more substantial". Austen puts this in Johnsonian terms with Sir Thomas Bertram's lament on his daughters' "mismanage[d]" education: "To be distinguished for elegance and *accomplishments* - the authorised object of their youth - could have had no [...] moral effect on the mind".⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *School, master and taught* also feature among the terms in the vicinity of *accomplishments*. For in-depth study of the "troubling status ambiguity of fictional characters born to leisure yet compelled to work" (p.6), see notably Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work. Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830*, Manchester 2010.

⁵⁶ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control* (Chawton House library series, Women's novels) London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014 [1811]. The historical fame of this novel largely comes from Austen's comment on its unexpected ending (Letter to Cassandra Austen, 11–12 October 1813 in *Jane Austen's Letters*, Deirdre Le Faye (Ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press 2011, 244).

⁵⁷ Anne Bandry-Scubbi/Brigitte Friant-Kessler, "Peindre en corpus: Miniatures et roman anglais féminin, 1751–1834" in *Palette pour Marie-Madeleine Martinet*, (2016), 1–35, http://www.csti.paris-sorbonne.fr/centre/palette/txt/peindre_en_corpus.pdf (Accessed 31/08/2017). Texts focused on are *Belinda* and *Betsy Thoughtless*.

⁵⁸ Austen, *Emma*, I.6.

⁵⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, III.17.

Austen makes Emma wed a mentor, a denouement not unlike Haywood's solution to make Betsy Thoughtless shed her patronym and be awarded that of Trueworth in one of the longest of the 70 novels: "The reader, if he has patience to go thro' the following pages, will see into the secret springs which set this fair machine in motion, and produced many actions, which were ascribed, by the ill-judging and malicious world, to causes very different from the real ones."⁶⁰ Initially "too volatile for reflection", the "many actions" in which her creator involves her wean Betsy away from her eagerness for the consumption of urban leisure activities; she acquires the capacity to put leisure to judicious use. This has required the passage from a perception of time as needing to be filled with a multiplicity of amusements to the enjoyment of delayed but certain happiness involving one year as a lone widow and the recommendation of reflection to her impatient lover.⁶¹ Betsy's scrapes as she gets repeatedly involved in London's shady leisure zones, her learning the hard way through risk taking (including near-rapes impossible to feature in fiction by the time Austen published her novels) make up a livelier story than Coelebs's search for the ideal partner. The capacity for reflection comes with maturity, which explains its strong connotation with *leisure* in the corpora, as stated earlier.

In his extension of the *Bildungsroman* to Austen, Moretti demonstrates that the genre's success rests in its exploration of the ways in which the modern "bourgeois" individual negotiates "the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization".⁶² In the 'feminine' fiction explored here, the adjustment of female characters to what is expected of them implies that authors give life to heroines by managing to go further than the clichéd denunciation of accomplishments, making them reflect on their resolution of this conflict. The agency to make use of leisure intelligently, often gradually acquired, provides good narrative material. Haywood and her successors who aimed for "work[s] in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, [...] conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language" - "Yes, novels"⁶³, rather than narrativised conduct books, produced didactic and dynamic fiction which celebrates leisure for the narrative possibility it affords.

⁶⁰ Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless*, 13.

⁶¹ Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless*, 561.

⁶² Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London: Verso 1987, 15.

⁶³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, I.5.

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