INTERIOR SPACES: PRIVACY AND VIRTUE FROM THE
TIME OF SARAH SCOTT TO JANE AUSTEN

by

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This thesis traces the rise of autonomous moral behavior (self-governance) in the context of increasingly private domestic settings in British novels from the middle to the end of the Georgian period. I argue that the representation of private domestic space that occurred by Austen’s time was linked to the autonomous moral behavior represented in her novels, and to the developing standards of morality expressed in philosophical writings of the age. Sarah Scott and Jane Austen serve as the principal points of comparison; but David Hume’s and Adam Smith’s philosophical works, Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, Henry Mackenzie’s sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling*, Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novel *The Italian*, and Elizabeth Hamilton’s regional novel *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* also feature prominently.
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Introduction

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), David Hume refers to ordinary houses and furnishings to illustrate the idea of sympathy, whereby “we enter into the sentiments of the rich and poor, and partake of their pleasure and uneasiness” (*THM* II. 2. 5. 14):

A man, who shows us any house or building, takes particular care among other things to point out the convenience of the apartments, the advantages of their situation, and the little room lost in the stairs, anti-chambers and passages; and indeed ‘tis evident, the chief part of the beauty consists in these particulars. . . . We enter into his interest by the force of imagination, and feel the same satisfaction, that the objects naturally occasion in him.

This observation extends to tables, chairs, scritoires, chimneys, . . . and indeed to every work of art. (*THM* II. 2. 5. 16-17)

Although the moral stakes are generally not high in touring a home, in Hume’s system the approval (or disapproval) one might feel in such a situation is nevertheless connected to one’s “moral sense.” For example, Hume notes that in seeing a theatrical play, whether a given “view causes a pleasure or uneasiness” determines whether the spectator considers the “action, or sentiment, or character” to be “virtuous or vicious” (*THM* III. 1. 2. 3). Similarly, the approval or disapproval that is felt in looking at objects in a home is a modest expression of moral judgment.

Given Hume’s common sense observation in 1740, that the sentiment evoked by domestic places and furnishings possesses the potential to help people understand and evaluate one another, the relative scarcity of novelistic descriptions of houses and furnishings in novels throughout most of
For many literary critics, the “watershed in the depiction of fictional living space” would not occur until Charles Dickens and the Victorian era (Tristram, *Living Space* 16). However, significant developments in the representation of domestic space also occurred during the Georgian period to help delineate the evolving moral world of their characters, during an era in which “established conceptions of morality as obedience,” as promulgated by religious organizations, for example, “came increasingly to be contested by emerging conceptions of morality as self-governance” (Schneewind 4). For instance, in *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), Sarah Scott imagines an estate that proclaims the promise of a philanthropy that is firmly grounded in Christian belief. Fifty years later Austen offers a different kind of domestic space more expressive of individual judgment. In *Persuasion* (1817) she describes Captain Harville’s modest winter home in Lyme. The “fitting-up” of the abode includes “some few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up,” which the narrator sees as influencing the character’s “habits” and as embellishing “the picture of repose and domestic happiness” that the home presents (98). Austen creates a setting that contributes significantly to the depiction of Harville, who extends hospitality “from the heart” (98). In this thesis I argue that the representation of private domestic space that occurs by Austen’s time is linked to the autonomous moral behavior

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1 To cite just one example of spare detail of domestic settings, the dialogue in Samuel Richardson’s *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* is presented in extraordinary detail, but when the conversation turns to physical surroundings, specific features of place seldom emerge. For example, when heroine Harriet Byron entertains a visitor during her stay at the home of her London cousins, the text reports that the visitor was “pleased to admire” her “apartment,” which “then became the subject of a few moments’ conversation,” before the subject is abruptly dropped. (1: 284). No clues are offered to a curious reader who wonders what, exactly, in the room was being admired during the “few moments’ conversation” about the apartment, or how the furnishings of the apartment may reflect the characters of either Harriet or her visitor.
also represented in her novels, and to the developing standards of morality expressed in philosophical writings of the age.

The development of this “moral autonomy” occurs in the cultural context of an increase in the appearance of an attribute having both moral and spatial dimensions—personal privacy. In his seminal The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt associates privacy with the popularity of the novel itself, and many other critics echo this theme. Nevertheless, the simultaneous impact of increased privacy upon novelistic representations of domestic settings and moral behavior during the Georgian era is not generally recognized. Moreover, the contribution that representations of space make to Austen’s engaging vignettes of ethical reflection is acknowledged only infrequently. Understanding the connection between the novelistic representations of domestic space and moral behavior is critical in our effort to comprehend eighteenth-century modes of living and thinking. Domestic architecture and ethical choice are superficially disparate, and the present-day proclivity for separating studies of material culture and moral epistemology, for example, can contribute to a disjointed perception of the period. However, an American contemporary of Jane Austen, Timothy Dwight, saw “the mode of building” as “awakening” the better aspects of an individual’s “character” (Cleaveland 47). This thesis recaptures the idea that

2 See Watts’s chapter in The Rise of the Novel entitled “Private Experience in the Novel” (174-207). Additionally, J. Paul Hunter remarks in Before Novels that the activity of reading novels in the eighteenth century offered “an escape of a particularly spatial kind” from “the cramped space in which much private reading took place” (127). For more recent examples of the study of privacy and the novel, see Alison Conway’s “Private Interests: The Portrait and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England” and Patricia Meyer Spacks’s “The Privacy of the Novel.”

3 One notable exception is Francis R. Hart’s “The Spaces of Privacy: Jane Austen.” Hart argues, “The history of organization of domestic space is inseparable from the history of privacy and intimacy in human interaction” (306).

4 Clifford E. Clark, Jr. notes that Dwight’s theory regarding to the relationship between architecture and morals also inspired American architectural reformers to argue decades later that
a relationship exists between representations of domestic settings and moral life in the Georgian period.

To make the relationships between literary representations of domestic space and moral autonomy clear, I adopt a historical methodology that shows how novels from the mid-eighteenth century—particularly Sarah Scott’s *The History of Cornelia* (1750), *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), and *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766)—portray domestic life and ethical values, in contrast with Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (originally drafted c. 1795, published 1811), and *Persuasion* (published posthumously 1817). For purposes of this analysis I have selected Scott’s novels to represent the middle of the century for several reasons. Perhaps as a reflection of her association with the Bluestocking Circle via her sister Elizabeth Montagu, Scott was in touch with the main intellectual currents of her time. Moreover, her works evince a particular interest in both moral conduct and domestic arrangements, as exemplified by her best-known novel, *Millenium Hall*, which is fashioned as a “description” of an estate in which philanthropic activity is performed. In general, Scott’s reliance upon religious doctrine in addressing moral themes is consistent with a conception of morality as obedience, whereas Austen generally portrays more autonomous moral behavior. While recognizing that moral

“the environment that surrounded the individual was a crucial force in shaping his personality,” and that the “morals . . . of the nation . . . depended upon the construction of a proper domestic national architecture” (42).

In addition to both being accomplished female novelists, numerous other lines of connection can be drawn between Austen and Scott. Both were members of the economically “distressed gentility,” both were without husbands (despite Scott’s short-lived marriage), both enjoyed close domestic relationships with another woman (Scott with Lady Barbara Montagu and Austen with her sister Cassandra), and both lived in Bath for a period of time.

Bluestocking Circle co-founder Elizabeth Montagu has been described as a wealthy woman “who invented a new kind of informal sociability and nurtured a sense of intellectual community” (Eger 21). Montagu’s salon counted among its participants the actor David Garrick, the painter Joshua Reynolds, and Samuel Johnson (Eger 27-28).
behavior can include a wide range of issues, this paper primarily focuses on benevolent actions as a surrogate for moral conduct. After addressing Sarah Scott, I will explore the philosophic writings of David Hume and Adam Smith to help reveal some of the reasons for the increasing sense of moral autonomy in the culture of the time. I will also include in this survey Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), and Elizabeth Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), in an effort to study depictions of domesticity and morality in such important genres of the period as the epistolary novel, the sentimental novel, the Gothic novel, and the regional novel. This analysis will demonstrate that depictions of domestic settings and moral conduct were clearly more reliant upon values of privacy and autonomy in Austen’s time than in Scott’s time. To provide a background for this analysis, I will first discuss the interrelationship of public and private aspects of domestic living and morality.

*Public and Private Space in the Domestic and Moral Spheres*

The perception of the home as a place for nurturing private moments is a historically recent phenomenon. Prior to the eighteenth century, relatively few houses contained separate, purpose-built rooms for food preparation, dining, conversation, and sleeping. Architectural innovations

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7 The *OED* defines benevolence as, “Disposition to do good, desire to promote the happiness of others, kindness, generosity, charitable feeling (as a general state or disposition towards mankind at large)” (“Benevolence,” def. 1).

8 While the overall organization of this paper is chronological, I will depart from a strict chronology on occasion so as not to interrupt the discussion of a given author’s works with a discussion of another author whose work may have appeared between publications of the first author.

realized by the end of the eighteenth century combined with the greater availability of furnishings and ornamentation to create more opportunities for seizing private moments within the home. For example, architectural historians frequently note the introduction of corridors to provide direct access to individual rooms, rather than the traditional design whereby rooms were accessible only by crossing through other rooms.

Gaston Bachelard relates privacy directly to domestic space: “[T]he house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). The word “privacy” can connote both “a condition of limited access” and “one of personal control” (Spacks 20). In either case, the concept of the private is linked to the concept of the public, as when we look to the state to assure private protection. In considering the respective roles of the public and the private, Hannah Arendt suggests, “The most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all” (73). In fact, privacy is required to enable the natural process of trial and error experimentation that is necessary to form one’s individual personality, or to create intimate relationships (Fairfield 18). In other words, moral decision-making is likely to be more autonomous, and less subject to strict adherence to established codes of behavior, when privacy accompanies moral contemplation. The existence of private places, both in everyday life

from 1100 to 1800. For a description of the evolution of houses inhabited by the less wealthy, see N.J.G. Pounds’s The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution and Witold Rybczynski Home: A Short History of an Idea. Additionally, Bill Bryson’s At Home: A Short History of Private Life presents an intriguing portrait of the many connections between today’s home and furnishings, and the historical events that spawned them.

10 Patricia Meyer Spacks also draws the act of reading into the dynamic of privacy and self-actualization: “The opportunity to explore and solidify the self belongs to privacy. Reading novels provides opportunity for such exploration, such solidification, and for the processes of discovery that necessarily precede these activities” (Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self 29).
and in literature, are important for the potential that they provide for the projection of parts of an individual personality or character that would not be possible in a public space.

In considering the effect of privacy upon moral thought in the eighteenth century, and its intersection with public considerations, Adam Smith serves as a notable point of reference. While he does not address privacy as a concept per se, the private element of moral decisions is apparent in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, 1790). For example, Smith’s moral agent reflects inward to an imagined “impartial spectator” rather than outward toward an established code for moral guidance. In elaborating upon this concept, he points to the importance of “sympathy,” “propriety,” and “self command.” According to Smith, sympathy essentially enables one person to put himself or herself in the place of another. This ability, in turn, enables a spectator to develop informed judgments on the actions of another; and, perhaps more importantly, enables that other to view his or her own situation from the perspective of an “impartial spectator.” From this perspective the moral agent can perceive the “propriety” of a given behavior, while the “cardinal virtue” of “self-command” may be additionally necessary to follow the guidance indicated by this process. Smith describes the process of ethical choice in the context of a mutual sympathy between the moral agent and the imagined observers:

As [the spectators] are continually placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it. (*TMS* I. 1. 4. 8)

The impartial spectator helps to illustrate the conjunction between public interests and private decisions. It is internal to the individual, but informed by a social perspective.
Beyond the arena of morality, public considerations can also impact private decisions regarding domestic architecture and decoration. This relationship is seen in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, when extravagant plans are described for the improvement of Sotherton Court, a place having “many more rooms than could be supposed to be of any other use than to contribute to the window tax, and find employment for housemaids” (85). When one of Sotherton’s visitors, Henry Crawford, denies the need for improvements, his companion declares, “You are too much a man of the world not to see with the eyes of the world. If other people think Sotherton improved, I have no doubt that you will” (98). This quotation suggests a paradigm not unlike Smith’s impartial spectator and reveals an inherent difficulty in separating personal tastes from the tastes of society at large. The effort to differentiate one’s self as an individual does not occur in isolation. Personality is not constructed from a private storehouse of furnishings, but from elements imported from a public that will surely have opinions as to how these elements are used. An individual may attempt to project an aspect of personality by furnishing a room with indigenous pottery rather than colonial furniture, for example, but in both cases the objects are effectively borrowed from the public sphere. As a result, the use of household furnishings to project an individualized personality encompasses both private and public perspectives.

Although the concepts “private” and “public” are often understood as being a mutually exclusive pair, their joint appearance in behavior as apparently diverse as ethical choice and domestic design demonstrates that the private and the public can be seen as two poles in a continuum. One aspect of this continuum is a historical movement toward a greater emphasis on privacy. This trend becomes apparent as we pursue the historical development of novelistic representations of domestic space and benevolence from the middle to the late Georgian period,
We will begin with Samuel Richardson as an introduction to my more extensive discussion of his younger contemporary, Sarah Scott.

*Sir Charles Grandison: A Man for Public Places*

*Sir Charles Grandison* represents an extreme example of the failure of privacy in domestic settings.\(^\text{11}\) While the novel is generally not very forthcoming in providing details of the physical surroundings in which action takes place, a peculiar conflation of private and public spaces is clearly observable. This is attributable in part to its epistolary character. The inscription of words on the pages of a letter transfers ostensibly private, sealed thoughts to a medium that is potentially public, as it is sent into a space very much out of the control of the letter writer.\(^\text{12}\) For example, though Harriet Byron’s correspondence is addressed to her cousin Lucy Selby, a colloquy also takes place in these letters between Harriet and her uncle Thomas Selby. Harriet frequently comments upon her uncle’s supposed reactions to her missives, and she often addresses him directly in her letters to Lucy. Moreover, an audience for Harriet’s letters to Lucy even exists in the house in which Harriet is staying: “As Mr. and Mrs. Reeves require me to shew them what I write, they are fond of indulging me in the employment . . .” (1:90). It is therefore a very public document that Harriet composes in the privacy of her “closet.”\(^\text{13}\) The text does not tolerate privacy even during the course of courtship. Harriet reports, “I never was uncivil, as I

\(^{11}\) Ian Watts notes that Richardson’s “direction . . . is towards the delineation of the domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it: the two go together—we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses” (175). In this paper I argue that Richardson’s “direction” is more fully realized by others later in the Georgian period.

\(^{12}\) For a discussion of private versus public aspects of letters in another of Richardson’s novels, see Christina Marsden Gillis’s *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolary Form in Clarissa*.

\(^{13}\) Rebecca Anne Barr comments, “*Grandison’s* letters are group missives: duplicated, transcribed and redistributed as impersonal documents or newspapers” (402).
call it, but to one young gentleman; a man of quality (you know who I mean;) and that was, because he wanted me to keep secret his addresses to me, for family considerations” (1: 126). Harriet is willing to entertain a number of hopeless suitors, provided they do not object to having their ardent appeals to her made public. The failure of privacy in the novel is perhaps most vividly illustrated during the course of a scene in which Grandison proclaims his rationale for declining the offer of a duel, within the hearing of a “short-hand writer” concealed “in a large closet adjoining to the said withdrawing-room” (2:48). As might be expected, the shorthand writer’s transcript of Grandison’s moral reasoning finds its way to Harriet, and thence into her correspondence. In a later episode, Grandison allows a bishop to eavesdrop on a “private” discussion between Grandison and the bishop’s sister. The novel’s eighteenth-century illustrator, Thomas Stothard, captures this violation of privacy in the illustration reproduced at Appendix I, which a later edition entitled “The bishop had placed himself within hearing” (Stothard Plate IX). As symbolized in scenes such as this, *Sir Charles Grandison* is a novel virtually without private places or private sentiments. Its domestic settings serve as a public stage for the display of Grandison’s moral prowess.

In a “Concluding Note” to *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson admits that his eponymous hero is “proposed for an example” of “principles and conduct” (7: 330-331). However, the effectiveness of this example has been open to critical debate. Carol Houlihan Flynn characterizes Grandison’s “saintliness as “predictably commonplace, ultimately banal,” and Rebecca Anne Barr refers to Grandison as representing “a magazine of polite and considered opinions assembled from Richardson’s assiduous reading of the *Spectator* and the Bible” (Flynn 47, Barr 394). While Grandison occasionally refers to a private morality, his behavior is
primarily based upon traditional values. For example, Grandison attributes his rescue of the novel’s heroine from her abductor Sir Hargrave Pollexfen to a common sense of duty. He tells Sir Hargrave and his associates, “I should have a very mean opinion of any man here, called upon as I was, if he had not done just as I did; and a still meaner than I have of you, Sir Hargrave, had you, in the like case, refused assistance to a woman in distress” (2:31).

Grandison’s brand of morality is more elaborately displayed in the protracted defense that he makes of his refusal to accept Hargrave’s challenge to meet him in a duel—a refusal that Grandison portrays in part as an act of benevolence toward his adversary. He asks Hargrave, “If you think I have injured you, is it prudent to give me a chance, were it but a chance, to do you a still greater injury?” (1:308) Though not a Catholic himself, Grandison also argues for a religious proscription to dueling, as “[n]o religion teaches a man evil” and the Catholic Church condemns dueling (2: 57). While Hargrave is utterly frustrated at his ability to bait Grandison into a duel, Hargrave’s associates who witness Grandison’s forbearance and the exposition of his position are so moved that they acclaim his goodness: “He has won me to his side. By the great God of heaven! I had rather have Sir Charles Grandison for my friend than the greatest prince on earth” (2:35). There is no need for Smith internalized impartial spectator here. Grandison brandishes his claimed benevolence toward Hargrave with a theatrical flourish, and to the public cheers of onlookers. A public venue is required to properly display Grandison’s apotheosis, particularly considering Richardson’s avowed intention that the novel broadcast the moral virtuosity of its eponymous hero.

14 According to Flynn, Grandison exhibis only “public virtues,” and no “private” virtues.
Sarah Scott and the Mansions of Good Works

The community described in Sarah Scott’s Millenium Hall is remarkably similar to a community envisioned in Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison. Richardson’s text describes the economic plight of many English gentlewomen during the era: “[G]irls of slender fortunes, if they have been genteelly brought up, how can they, when family connexions are dissolved, support themselves?” (4:193) To which question Grandison proposes “the establishment of a scheme . . . . We want to see established in every county, Protestant Nunneries, in which single women, of small or no fortunes, might live with all manner of freedom, under such regulations as it would be a disgrace for a modest or good woman not to comply with . . .” (4:192-193). Like Sir Charles Grandison, Millenium Hall presents environments designed not so much to accommodate privacy, as to display virtuous living and Christian charity in a public way. Millenium Hall reveals an unequivocal connection between the home it provides for the gentlewomen for whom it was established and the charitable acts that are performed there.

The mansion was originally purchased as a place of country retirement for three wealthy gentlewomen—Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Mancel and Lady Mary Jones—but its description in this original capacity of private use is limited to the report that it was “sufficiently furnished, and in such good order, that they settled into it without trouble” (157). This was twenty years before the time in which the novel is set, and before the various charitable projects had been put into motion, including “the establishment of schools and alms-houses” and the furnishing of “a house for every young couple that married in their neighbourhood” (159). It is only in conjunction with the public acts of philanthropy that the text provides a detailed description of Millenium Hall and its grounds. Millenium Hall’s large main room is “forty-five feet long” and filled with women—each presumably redeemed from difficult pasts, as the novel’s framed vignettes suggest—who
pursue a variety of refined occupations (59). Moreover, the furnishings of the room are (unusually, for its time) very specifically described, as they are representative of Millenium Hall’s style of living. There are “three large bookcases”; “an orrery”; “a globe”; “two ladies reading, with pen, ink and paper on a table before them at which was a young girl translating out of French”; “a lady painting, with exquisite art indeed, a beautiful Madonna; near her another, drawing a landscape out of her own imagination; a third, carving a picture-frame in wood, in the finest manner, a fourth, engraving; and a young girl reading aloud to them” (59). This is not a snug, private space, but a large, well-furnished hall filled with women pursuing the arts. Another room is “well furnished with musical instruments,” and “a beautiful saint Cecilia, painted in crayons by Mrs. Mancel, and a fine piece of carved work over the chimney, done by Mrs. Trentham” (62). The exhibition continues into the areas surrounding the house. Behind a little door in a “high pale” is “a row of the neatest cottages I ever saw,” in which elderly women spin. According to one of these women, “[I]t is a most comfortable place, God bless the good ladies! I and my neighbours are as happy as princesses . . .” (65). The grounds also contain a school at which poor children from the neighborhood are educated in practical skills: “The school-room was very large, and perfectly clean, the forms and chairs they sat on were of wood, as white as possible; on shelves were wooden bowls and trenchers equally white . . .” (196).15 The surroundings in which both Millenium Hall proprietors and their dependents live publicly proclaim their devotion to Christian values and their innovative social agenda.

As in *Sir Charles Grandison*, reliance upon established codes of conduct persists in

15 D.W. Elliott notes that the cleanliness of the poor is emphasized throughout the novel: “If the poor are clean, they are understood to be deserving, and the charity bestowed on them can be expected to achieve its desired goal” (543). The cleanliness motif is seen again, for example, when the narrative describes “about fifty girls, in a very neat uniform, and perfectly clean . . .” (196).
Millenium Hall. While guiding a tour of the mansion’s grounds, Miss Mancel declares to its visitors,

[F]or as whoever lives in England must submit to the laws of the country, though he may be ignorant of many of the particulars of them, so whoever lives in a Christian land is obliged to obey the laws of the Gospel, or to suffer for infringing them; in both cases, therefore, it is prudent for every man to acquaint himself thoroughly with these ordinances, which he cannot break with impunity. (166-167)

As in Sir Charles Grandison, there is no need for Smith’s internalized impartial spectator to guide one’s behavior. One need only familiarize oneself with the laws of the country and the New Testament. Moreover, as Nanette Morton has observed, via such devices as enclosures for the poor cottagers living on the estate, the proprietors of the community establish a system of surveillance that “evokes obedience.” The surveillance extends to the ladies of Millenium Hall themselves, who are “subjected to God’s gaze, a subjection which, in turn, increases their utility by prompting them to perform their supervisory duty” (201-202). Similarly, Judith Broome sees the novel’s social system reflected in its landscapes: “Like the social structure of the community, the geography and landscape of Millenium Hall are contained and orderly: pastures, gardens and vegetable beds are all neatly tended. Such tidiness reflects the clearly defined segments of the Millenium Hall community” (152). Despite its air of progressivism, the social and moral framework of Millenium Hall is firmly rooted in tradition.

The various settings depicted—from great hall to music room to schoolroom—flamboyantly communicate the moral values and altruistic gestures so central to the theme of the novel. The home here symbolizes a Christian system of caring for the less fortunate, whether
they are impecunious gentlewomen or the common poor. Regarding the latter, I have already mentioned the community’s care for the elderly in the neighborhood by providing shelter and work, as well as a school for the local youth. The ladies also establish a “carpets and ruggs” factory, where “several hundreds of people of all ages, from six years old to four-score” are employed (243). While the primary mission of Millenium Hall is to provide a refuge for gentlewomen in financial distress, the Christian benevolence displayed by the ladies of Millenium Hall extends to hundreds of the poor in its environs. The community of women so successfully pursues the dictates of their Christian consciences that Lamont, the foppish companion to the novel’s narrator, is moved to see Christianity in a new light. Although he has previously observed that Christian doctrine seemed to have little influence on its adherents’ actions, he now realizes “what religion in reality was, and by the purity of its precepts, was convinced its original must be divine” (248). The domestic environment portrayed here supports a Christian system of caring for the less fortunate, whether they are impecunious gentlewomen or the common poor.

In Scott’s next novel, *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), the gentry continues to perform frequent and substantial good works. Although the text declares, “benevolence appears with peculiar lustre in a female form,” a male character plays the virtuous lead in this work (42). In fact, the narrator of *Sir George Ellison* reveals that its eponymous hero had previously served as the admiring narrator of *Millenium Hall*, and, as in the earlier novel, it is difficult to turn a page of this later novel without encountering a new illustration of benevolent activity.  

16 Ellison avers, “Those who have a true taste for the pleasures of benevolence, cannot be averse to

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16 The text of *Sir George Ellison* discretely discloses Ellison’s role in narrating Millenium Hall as follows: “As he has long ago . . . spoken for himself, I shall omit saying any thing of his visit there [to Millenium Hall], as it would only be a tedious repetition . . .” (40).
extending the circle” (46). During a sojourn in Jamaica, where Ellison marries into a sugar plantation, he assiduously raises the living standards of the laborers there, because “slavery was abhorrent to his nature”(10). He also declines a portion of his right of primogeniture, in favor of the benefits that the inheritance might confer on his brother and sister.

Perhaps the most notably selfless act of benevolence that Ellison performs is on behalf of a neighbor, Miss Allin, although this selflessness later redounds to his benefit (53). Miss Allin is a woman who fits the pattern of any number of the women who are described in *Millenium Hall*: Her “charms were not all confined to her person. She had great sweetness of temper, and exceeding good sense” (54). While Miss Allin “captivates” Ellison’s heart, and her father is much enamored by the notion of her daughter marrying the wealthy widower Ellison, Miss Allin’s troth is plighted to another man. In noble fashion, Ellison overcomes the objections of Miss Allin’s father and his own heart, and he bestows upon Miss Allin and her fiancée the financial means to marry. However, her marriage is not happy, and at length the dissipated husband dies. Sometime thereafter, the widow ministers to Ellison during a grave illness, and the two “confirm at church the union of their hearts, . . . an union which every succeeding day rendered more delightful, as a fuller knowledge of each others virtues . . . more than compensated for some abatement of passion which must unavoidably be the consequence of possession . . .” (184). It is difficult to know whether the ensuing marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ellison better expresses an abatement of passion or an increasing ecstasy in the contemplation one another’s virtues. The reader learns that “Mrs. Ellison returned his affections in the tenderest manner, and completed his happiness by entering into all his views, and assisting him in every

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17 In comparison with *Millenium Hall*, few critical articles have addressed *The History of George Ellison*. However, Eve W. Stoddard addresses the novel’s place in the context of anti-slavery writing of the period in “A Serious Proposal for Slavery Reform: Sarah Scott’s *Sir George Ellison*.”
work of humanity, wherein her heart was as deeply engaged as his” (186). Theirs is a marriage that does not revolve in a quiet domestic circle, but one that is fully devoted to tending to the needs of others. The epic nature of the couple’s benevolent lifestyle is illustrated in the following single (but also epic) sentence:

If Sir George and his lady parted with regret when benevolence called for their attendance, impatience to renew their conversation gave a double joy to their meeting, the cause of their separation made them behold each other with still additional esteem, and when they mutually related the manner wherein they had employed the hours of absence, the poverty or sickness they had relieved, the timorous doubting minds they had encouraged, the afflicted hearts they had comforted, or the ignorant understandings they had instructed, tenderness was heightened by veneration, and the affection, which in the happiest pair is merely human, seemed in them to be divine; and in reality was so in a good degree, being mingled with that spark of divinity imparted from above, that benevolence and love, which however now defaced, still shews how man might once be properly called the image of his Creator. (195-196)

What the ladies of Millenium Hall accomplish in the context of their utopian society, Mr. and Mrs. Ellison seem poised to surpass in their new Eden.

As in Millenium Hall, the home in Sir George Ellison is a space in which Christian charity can be performed. For example, Ellison’s worldly cousin, Sir William, comments to Ellison on his house:
I can see no faults in a habitation to which I owe so much of your society; but all prejudice aside, it is spacious and handsome; it is your disposition of it only that I shall criticise. . . . This advantage [of spaciousness] . . . you throw away; . . . having appropriated those which should have been included in your grand apartments to other people; as for example, Mr. Green has one for his school-room, your house-keeper another, in a third you have put up a bed where the curate is invited to lye whenever a rainy evening overtakes him at your house.

(79)

Thus, Ellison’s home becomes a seat for charity, although on a “smaller scale” than seen in Millenium Hall, as he had predicted as that novel’s narrator. When Ellison’s erstwhile traveling companion from Millenium Hall, Lamont, visits Ellison’s house, a “company of between twenty and thirty persons” meets him: “Instead of the serious, though respectable scene, his imagination had represented to him he found he had entered the seat of rational mirth, and decent festivity; a pleasing cheerfulness sat on every countenance, and openness of conversation reigned universally. . . .” (205). The home is depicted here not as a place for private domesticity, but as a venue for the display of virtuous behavior.

Consistent with the religious foundation of generosity shown by the proprietors of Millenium Hall, Ellison is explicit in describing the Christian motivations of his benevolence: “I consider every thing I possess, my fortune, my talents, and my time, as given me in trust, to be expended in the service of the Giver. I am but a steward, and must render an exact account of all that is delivered into my hands. The best role in which I can serve my master, is in benefiting his creatures . . . “ (84). Ellison’s belief in his identity as an instrument of God is also emphasized later, when the narrator explains Ellison’s conviction that “solicitude about any worldly affairs”
is “sinful,” and that, although we should “pursue what our reason tells us is most eligible,” we should submit our fate “to him who better knows what is really for our benefit . . .” (211). Accordingly, the text places the motivation for benevolence firmly within a religious context. As if to emphasize that these are not private but public concerns, the charitable acts described in both Millenium Hall and Sir George Ellison are, for the most part, projected from great houses in which the benevolence of the occupants becomes a matter of common of knowledge.

Before leaving Sarah Scott, I would like to draw The History of Cornelia into the discussion. Critics have generally overlooked this intriguing novel, but it possesses an energy and imaginative force that sets it apart from Scott’s later work. Additionally, the novel provides the opportunity for an apt reflection upon the texts studied thus far in this paper, as it is Scott’s first novel, and it predates the publication of Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison by three years. Like Scott’s later novels, it foregrounds moral concerns. The novel’s “Advertisement” states, “Works of imagination, that have a tendency to inculcate, illustrate or exemplify morality, have always met with the approbation of the good and judicious part of mankind . . . .” These moral concerns are folded within the story of a generous heroine who flees her home, and who must thereafter inhabit a variety of dwellings while “in search of a place of perfect retirement” (145). While descriptions of place are not prominent in The History of Cornelia, a close reading of the novel discloses many references to the background location of the scenes, including Gothic and cottage settings that foreshadow the work of novelists addressed later in this thesis. Cornelia’s habitations during most of the novel’s episodes are modest, which is in keeping with the character’s habit of conserving resources that might be given to the poor, and her only private

18 Accordingly, for purposes of this analysis I find The History of Cornelia to be more significant than does Gary Kelly, who dismisses the novel as “a conventional work” in the nouvelle galante tradition (20).
moments occur while she is reading. Given the relative obscurity of the work, I will describe several episodes from the novel in some detail over the course of the following paragraphs.

Cornelia is born into a distinguished French family. Her mother dies during her daughter’s birth, but her father lavishes his time upon her education. As a result, Cornelia achieves “a thorough knowledge of religion and morality, a great insight into history, natural philosophy, and several of the sciences, and a very great skill in music and other external accomplishments” (3-4). However, her secluded life leaves her unacquainted with the practical aspects of the world: “[S]he knew not her relation to anyone, but her uncle, who was almost the only person besides her father, with whom she had ever conversed, excepting the poor, whom the charitableness of her disposition had introduced to her observation” (4-5). Indeed, a more perfect creature than Cornelia may be difficult to imagine, given her multifold intellectual and emotional accomplishments, and her innate generosity toward the poor. In fact, after her father dies, she is put in possession of the family’s wealth, “which enabled her to increase those charities that had before, with the indulgence and approbation of her father, been her greatest pleasure” (5).

Cornelia is left to the care of an uncle who conceives “an early passion for her,” and her domestic living arrangements thereby become unsafe. Cornelia eventually flees in a public coach. The greatest concern that this removal engenders is the care for the poor that had marked her residence at her ancestral home. In a letter to her uncle she begs that he continue to support the charities that she established:

You will find I have maintained a little set of old men and women, of whom I required that they should teach all the children in the neighbourhood to read, write, work, and every thing of that sort that was then, or might one day become useful to them, that by their knitting and spinning, they should supply themselves
and most of the poor whom I clothed, with all things that could be so provided them, an that they should take care of such children as I committed them. (13)
In case her uncle does not comply with this request, she leaves all the money “she could possibly spare” for the support of the poor.

Thus we find in Scott’s first novel an instance of the fulsome charity around which her later novels Millenium Hall and The History of Sir George Ellison would revolve, and which she pursued personally. In fact, the above description of Cornelia’s generosity is eerily similar to a description of Scott’s own generosity, as recorded in a letter written by Scott’s sister, Elizabeth Montagu:

My sister rises early, and as soon as she has read prayers to their small family, she sits down to cut out and prepare work for twelve poor girls, whose schooling they pay for; to those whom she finds more than ordinarily capable, she teaches writing and arithmetic herself. The work these children are usually employed in, is making childbed-linen and clothes for poor people in the neighbourhood, which Lady Bab Maontagu and she, bestow, as they see fit. (“To Gilbert West, Esq.” 336)

These two descriptions demonstrate that Scott creates Cornelia with reference to the charitable impulses possessed by the author herself. Both Scott and Cornelia instruct poor children, and oversee a domestic industry that provides clothing to the poor in the neighborhood.

After fleeing the perils of her ancestral home in a coach, Cornelia discovers that an apparent refuge offered by an old lady is a bordello in which attempts are made to press her into service (38). Fortunately, when Cornelia refuses her intended first customer, Mr. DeRhone, he responds in a manner befitting “a man of great honour, and possessed of every virtue but
chastity,” and he thereafter rescues Cornelia from the bordello and becomes her protector in several subsequent episodes (42). Although Cornelia escapes the bordello, she is soon kidnapped by a wealthy and impetuous aristocrat, and spirited to a “castle.” In describing Cornelia’s new surroundings, Scott offers a taste of the Gothic atmospherics that would become so popular at the hand of such authors as Radcliffe and Walpole later in the century:

She was put into one of those rooms, not uncommonly found in old castles, where the owner may lie concealed, in case intestine feuds and commotions, or other occasions, made it necessary. . . . [T]he little light she had, came in by the top of the room, which had so much the air of a prison, as would have raised terrors in a mind much less occupied by its own anticipating imagination. (71)

This description is clearly in the Gothic mode, which Tristram generally describes as “generalized and atmospheric rather than particular and domestic” (Living Space 7). Scott’s early twentieth-century biographer, Walter Crittenden, suggests that Scott missed an opportunity in not more fully exploiting the possibilities presented by her early use of Gothic features in the scenes depicted in the castle: “[T]he gold was in her grasp, though in some way she allowed it to slip by unnoticed” (67). I would argue, however, that it is difficult to imagine how the utopian optimism of Millenium Hall would have been depicted if Scott had more fully indulged her Gothic genius.

During most of the remainder of the novel Cornelia, who says she is “in search of a place of perfect retirement,” takes abode in modest but happy domestic circumstances (145). She

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19 This startling characterization of Mr. DeRhone begs the question as to why Scott might have been content to characterize Cornelia’s protector as unchaste. Perhaps the answer is found in Hume. He argues that chastity is a useful virtue among both men and women due to the lengthy number of years that is required to rear a child, and that the father is unlikely to invest this time unless he is assured that he is the actual father. Because the identity of an infant’s father is demonstrably less susceptible to proof than the identity of the infant’s mother, social mores developed to provide stronger disincentives (e.g., shame and loss of reputation) to women than men to engage in “pernicious” behavior. See A Treatise of Human Nature III. 2.12.
escapes to a cottage in a remote village: “The cottage was a very poor one, and her chamber
would but just hold her bed, a chair, and a table. But as her mind was not contracted with her
habitation, she felt no uneasiness from the size and meanness of it. She looked on it as an asylum
from the worst of evils” (87). The cottage theme is reintroduced later in the novel, when the
ever-itinerant Cornelia finds lodging in similarly modest surroundings with new friend Julia.
Despite the modesty of the home, Cornelia “here enjoyed a tranquility and happiness beyond
what she had ever before experienced, while she lived among the great “(108). Scott’s
celebration of rural domesticity also appears elsewhere in her work. For example, in *Millenium
Hall* the narrator reports, “On our way home we called at a clergyman's house, which was placed
in the finest situation imaginable and where we beheld that profusion of comforts which sense
and economy will enable the possessors of narrow fortunes to enjoy” (222). Despite these
various hints regarding domestic life in the country, precious few details are rendered regarding
the interior of the houses. This circumstance recalls Thomas Gainsborough’s “cottage-door”
paintings of the period, in which the viewer remains, with the figures depicted in the paintings, at
the thresholds of the cottages. See Appendix II. Scott gestures toward the intimacy that must
exist within a cottage interior, but a fuller treatment of cottage life would not occur in literature
or visual art until the nineteenth century (Bermingham 32).

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20 In her own life Scott pursued the tranquility offered by simple circumstances in the
country. From 1754 to 1762 she lived with Lady Barbara Montagu. According to Scott’s sister,
Elizabeth Montagu, “They have a very pretty house at Bath for the winter, and one at Bath
Easton for the summer; their houses are adorned by the ingenuity of their owners, but as their
income is small, they deny themselves unnecessary expenses (“To Gilbert West, Esq.” 337).
Montagu also compliments Scott on the sylvan, yet accessible, aspect of the country: “I am glad
you are going to enjoy the sweet, the tranquil, the rational pleasures of the country; your situation
is very agreeable, as you can return to society whenever you please” (“To Mrs. Scott” 28 May
1756).
The History of Cornelia concludes with the marriage of Cornelia to her beloved Bernardo, and Cornelia resumes possession of her ancestral home: “The house was fine, and very elegantly furnished; the gardens and park were extremely beautiful and extensive, and diversified with lawns and woods to the greatest advantage. The park reached to the sea” (269). As in Millenium Hall and Sir George Ellison, Scott’s privileged heroines and heroes once again project Christian charity from great houses. While throughout most of the narrative The History of Cornelia does not fit the pattern this pattern of projecting charity from a great house, since its heroine is almost constantly on the move, Cornelia ultimately retakes rightful ownership of her ancestral estate, and with her husband is poised to “promote the happiness of all around them,” and thereby enjoy “a felicity, which nothing but the most exalted virtue can give” (270). While Scott flirts in this work with Gothic and cottage settings that later novelists would use to great effect, the concluding episode of the novel restores the great house and the traditional paternalism that so characterize Millenium Hall and Sir George Ellison. Moreover, as in these latter two novels, The History of Cornelia celebrates its heroine for her profuse benevolence, but the objects of her generosity are anonymous. According to Sandra Sherman, such anonymity is characteristic of the literature of the time. The poor are suppressed “as individuated, interesting subjects” and reduced to “ciphers,” with the result that poverty is portrayed as “a condition—a discourse—detached from individual referents” (Sherman 3). Like the philanthropic heroines and heroes in Millenium Hall and Sir George Ellison, Cornelia has a name and a history, but the recipients of her benevolent actions generally do not.

Before beginning to address later novels in the century, whose moral attitudes are more autonomous and less beholden to religious doctrine, I would like to briefly discuss several social,
economic, religious, and philosophical developments during the period, which will help to explain why the portrayals of domestic spaces and moral attitudes changed after Scott’s time.

Winds of Change

The social system Scott describes in her novels is reminiscent of the “cultural hegemony” that E.P. Thompson sees as the basis of the eighteenth-century ruling-class control (43). Thompson describes a system in which the gentry dictated terms to the lower classes as they provided support, dispensed favors of employment, and selectively exercised the “prerogative of mercy” in administering justice (47). Moreover, he characterizes the great public houses, which “have much of the studied self-consciousness of public theatre,” as important instruments of psychological domination (45). The paternalistic system had feudal origins and eventually evolved as a public policy in England after the abolition of monasteries during the Tudor period, which eliminated a primary source of charity. The Poor Law Act of 1601 prescribed responsibility to each parish for the care of its own paupers—“a duty which could be variously interpreted but at least meant that no one should be allowed to starve” (Collins 118). Scott references this responsibility in Sir George Ellison, whose hero volunteers to undertake the maintenance of the poor of three parishes, if only the other principal parishioners “consent to give him half the sum hitherto paid for the poors rate” (66). As the economic fabric of England began to change with the ascent of industrialism and consumerism—and with the emergence of new market theories that placed emphasis on individual effort and the threads that linked producer and consumer—sentiment in favor of the public support of the poor diminished. As a result, the paternalistic philanthropy portrayed during the middle decades of the eighteenth century in Millenium Hall and Sir George Ellison receded as the century progressed.
In addition to changes in public sentiment engendered by social and economic change, the religious motivations for charitable behavior were also compromised by the increasing secularization of the age. The growing belief in the usefulness of scientific and empirical methodology, as well as the skepticism that frequently accompanies such types of inquiry, combined to increase religious doubts. Additionally, the integration of Church and State in England created an additional source of complication, as actions that were politically expedient for the State would also affect the Church. According to Carol Stewart, “the skeptical, scientific, modernizing tendencies we associate with the Enlightenment” became a part of Anglicanism, in part due to the influence of the Latitudinarian movement, which “placed less emphasis on points of dogma and more on the moral life” (9, 134). Debates regarding morality displaced religious doctrinal debates to some degree, perhaps because such a shift tended to reduce religious discord among the various sects. Thus, economic, religious, and intellectual currents effectively combined to imbue the culture with a more secularized morality. A philosophic expression of this phenomenon may be found in the writings of David Hume and Adam Smith.

Hume first addresses ethics in Book III of his *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (1739-1740). He returns to the subject in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751), herein referred to as the “Second Enquiry.”\(^{21}\) In this latter volume, Hume explores human virtue, which he defines as “a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one, who considers or contemplates it” (Second Enquiry sec. 8n). Notably, this definition does not refer to such possible sources of authority as religious or classical texts, but merely to the approbation of people—and not merely “enlightened” people. As a result, much of the Second Enquiry

\(^{21}\) The First Enquiry under this nomenclature is *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), based upon Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 
addresses a variety of specific “virtues,” in the context of why they win approbation. Is the virtue useful to society at large, to the individual himself, or to others? For example, Hume identifies certain qualities as being particularly useful to oneself, including discretion, industry and frugality (Second Enquiry 6. 1. 8-11). We witnessed these qualities in Scott’s Cornelia, and will also see them again in Austen’s Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliott.

Hume does not attribute the approval of conduct seen as virtuous to human reasoning, but rather to human “sentiment.” He argues that to make moral determinations, a man “needs only enter his own breast for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him, and whether such an imputation would proceed from a friend or an enemy” (Second Enquiry 1. 10). In contrast to the pessimistic aspect of skepticism with which Hume is often associated, his view on ethical morality is at bottom optimistic, as it essentially posits that human nature itself is a sufficient guide to making moral determinations. 22 Among the virtues that Hume addresses in the Second Enquiry is benevolence. He avers that “no qualities are more entitled to the general good-will and approbation of mankind, than beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection and public spirit, or whatever proceeds from a tender sympathy for others, and a generous concern for our kind and species” (Second Enquiry 2. 1. 5). Hume also associates “the natural sentiment of benevolence” with “sympathy,” which he acknowledges operates most strongly with regard to those close to one than to “persons remote from us” (Second Enquiry 5. 2. 42). Despite this bias toward those with whom we have close relationships, he nevertheless believes that individuals also “retain a general standard of vice and virtue, founded chiefly on general usefulness,” which is applied to

22 For an example of Hume’s melancholy reflections connected with his skepticism, and his recognition of the “wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties,” see the conclusion of Book I of A Treatise of Human Nature (THM I. 7)
situations in which one does not have a personal stake (*Second Enquiry* 5. 2. 42n). This possibility of disinterested generosity can be contrasted to the opposing view—sometimes enunciated with regard to “gift theory”—that benefits are not conferred, except in expectation of a reciprocal benefit.\(^{23}\)

Eight years after the publication of the *Second Enquiry*, Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) appeared. Smith and Hume were personally acquainted with one another, and Hume doubtlessly influenced Smith.\(^{24}\) Like Hume, Smith places benevolence in an honored position: “[P]roper benevolence is the most graceful and agreeable of all the affections . . .” (*TMS* VII. 2. 3. 4). Additionally, he acknowledges the human inclination to bestow generosity upon those who are closest: “After himself, the members of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affections” (*TMS* VI. 2. 1. 2). Both Hume and Smith agree that the ability to accurately identify moral behavior is inherent in human nature, and neither philosopher relies upon the divine for the operation of their respective moral systems. Hume and Smith also recognize that benevolence exhibits different degrees. For example, Hume draws a distinction between the generality of mankind and “the more generous minds, that are

\(^{23}\) Pierre Bourdieu notes that the gift “creates obligations, it is a way to possess, by creating people obliged to reciprocate” (94). He characterizes a gift as “a misfortune because, in the final analysis it must be reciprocated” (94). This attitude can also be found in Richardson, as when Harriet Byron exclaims in *Sir Charles Grandison*: “[W]hat a consciousness of inferiority fills a mind not ungenerous, when it labours under the sense of obligations it cannot return!” (1:303)

\(^{24}\) After Hume’s death, Smith wrote, “Upon the whole, I have always considered him, both in his lifetime and since his death, as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit” (“To William Strahan” 221).
prompted to seek zealously the good of others, and to have a real passion for their welfare” (Second Enquiry 6. 1. 3n). Similarly, Smith is insistent upon the importance of putting one’s benevolent sentiments into action. He contends, “Man was made for action. . . . He must not be satisfied with indolent benevolence, nor fancy himself the friend of mankind, because in his heart he wishes well to the prosperity of the world” (TMS II. 3. 3. 3).

Despite these several similarities, Smith’s theory of the operation of moral behavior differed significantly in certain respects from Hume’s theory. Perhaps the most significant difference can be found in Smith’s criticism of Hume’s idea that utility is the ruling characteristic of that approbation that enables humans to recognize virtuous behavior. Smith describes Hume’s position on utility as asserting that “qualities of the mind” are not “approved of as virtuous, but such as are useful or agreeable either to the person himself or to others. . . .” (TMS IV. 2. 3). Smith ridicules this belief as being “of the same kind with that by which we approve of a convenient and well-contrived building,” and that it is impossible “that we should have no other reason for praising a man than that for which we commend a chest of drawers” (TMS IV. 2. 4).

Smith argues that “a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility” is “the first ground of our approbation” (TMS IV. 2. 5). For Smith, whether a given action achieves propriety depends upon the operation of human “sympathy,” which Smith essentially defines as a sense of “fellow-feeling” with any given emotion (as opposed to today’s more commonly understood meaning as “pity” or “compassion”) (TMS I. 1. 1. 5). In order to

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25 According to Hanley, “Smith does not deny the goodness of utility maximization, but rather suggests that to posit utility maximization as either the sole or the ultimate standard of ethical value overlooks the moral significance of beauty . . .” (69).

26 Smith’s sarcasm on this point is somewhat unwarranted. In the Second Enquiry, Hume writes, “We ought not to imagine, because an inanimate object may be useful as well as a man, that therefore it ought also . . . to merit the appellation of virtuous. The sentiments . . . are in the two cases very different; and the one is mixed with affection, esteem, approbation, etc., and not the other” (5. 1. 1n).
determine the propriety of an intended action, an individual must imagine how an impartial spectator would view the action. For Smith, the ability of an individual to imagine how an impartial spectator would view an action enables the operation of a reliable moral compass: “If we place ourselves completely in his situation, . . . his voice will never deceive us (TMS VI. 2. 1. 22).

The moral thinking of Hume and Smith is pertinent to the present inquiry in several ways. Both Hume and Smith see moral virtue as necessarily interwoven with both private and public concerns, as seen most strikingly in Smith’s internal “impartial spectator.” Moreover, the moral systems of both are consistent with the growing secularization of the age in which they lived, as they based their systems upon the dynamics of human psychology and relationships, rather than upon religious doctrine. In contrast to the Christian ideal of directing charity toward “the least of these my brethren,” both philosophers respect the natural human inclination to direct generosity towards those who are closest (King James Bible, Matthew 25:40). Perhaps most importantly, the moral systems of both Hume and Smith are founded upon their confidence in the innate human capacity to vicariously experience a situation from the perspective of others, via the operation of sympathy.

Portrayals of sympathy can be found in Scott. For example, the resident gentlewomen of Millenium Hall, with their similar histories of financial dependence and lost romance, obviously empathize with one another’s circumstances. Nevertheless, the secular attitude exemplified by the thought of Hume and Smith becomes more evident in later novelists, such as Henry Mackenzie, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. The first of these also places a particular emphasis, or perhaps overemphasis, on the operation of sympathy.
Eighteenth-century literary representations of benevolent behavior can hardly be discussed without reference to the sentimental novel. Maureen Harkin associates Sarah Scott with the sentimental novel in the sense that, for example, “the direction of a reader’s future behavior . . . is understood as the ultimate and most honorable goal of the [sentimental] novelist” (29). However, if sentimentalism occurs “whenever a reader or an audience is asked to experience an emotional response in excess of that merited by the occasion or one that has not been adequately prepared for,” there is really no comparison between Scott and a novelist such as Henry Mackenzie (Harmon 478). Whereas Scott maintains a restrained emotional register, Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* is replete with tears and weeping. For example, when Harley, the novel’s hero, witnesses a beloved neighbor bring gifts of clothing to a couple of poor children that Harley is caring for, he experiences “a thousand sentiments;—but they gushed so impetuously on his heart, that he could not utter a syllable” (120). In contrast, while the ladies of *Millenium Hall* are occasionally ostentatious in performing their good works, they provoke in the testimony of the novel’s narrator a quiet admiration for their projects, rather than a reaction that is impassioned or heart-rending.

While Scott and Mackenzie share an interest in depicting models of benevolent behavior, Mackenzie’s manner of doing so is significantly different. Harley performs many good works throughout the *The Man of Feeling*, and while the narrator clearly anticipates that Harley will be rewarded eternally for his exemplary life, at no point does the narrator or Harley himself attribute his actions to religious motivations. For example, he encounters an “old acquaintance” named Edwards, who is concluding a long journey home from serving with the British military in India. After listening to Edwards’s impressive tale of woe, Harley exclaims, “Edwards, . . . let me hold
thee to my bosom; let me imprint the virtue of thy sufferings on my soul. Come, my honoured veteran! Let me endeavour to soften the last days of a life worn out in the service of humanity . . .” (112). Harley offers his support here as a gesture of gratitude on behalf of the “humanity” that has benefited from Edwards’s service. Similarly, after attending to the tearful story of Emily Atkins, a woman fallen into prostitution, Harley offers his assistance with the words, “there is virtue in these tears; let the fruit of them be virtue” (82). Once again, Harley is inspired by the worth that he perceives in humanity to perform his good offices.27

The skepticism that occasionally accompanies descriptions of generosity in the The Man of Feeling represents a second distinction that can be drawn between the benevolence described therein versus in Scott’s novels. For example, during one episode Harley gives money to a beggar on behalf of a “fresh-looking elderly gentleman,” on the basis of that character’s favorable physiognomy: “Harley looked again in his face, and blessed himself for his skill in physiognomy” (77-78). However, in the next chapter entitled “His skill in physiognomy is doubted,” Harley learns to his dismay that he had been taken in by confidence men. While this incident illustrates the possible difficulty of identifying appropriate objects of charity, the novel also calls benevolence itself into question as being a mere manifestation of vanity: “With vanity your best virtues are grossly tainted: your benevolence, which ye deduce immediately from the natural impulse of the heart, squints to it for its reward” (76-77). The text thus exposes a benevolent actor’s temptation to publicly record the “secret satisfaction of good actions” by

27 Spacks acknowledges Harley’s moral autonomy in observing, “No providential order governs Harley’s world. He must stand in for Providence” (126). However, she also laments Harley’s futility, particularly with regard to the tardy reciprocation of his secret love by Miss Walton. Spacks concludes that for Harley, “the confined space of privacy provides almost nothing in the way of opportunity” (128). I would argue, however, that Miss Walton’s confession of love at Harley’s deathbed tempers the agony of his last moments.
divulging this “secret satisfaction” to others, which is an example of the “reciprocation” sought by the giver of a gift in “gift theory” (77).

As we have seen, the public aspect of virtuous performance seen in Sarah Scott and Samuel Richardson is accompanied by the public stages upon which virtue is enacted. In contrast, the settings in *The Man of Feeling* are generally more intimate. For example, Emily Atkins’s father reports the following during the course of describing his realization that his daughter was no longer at home:

> My Emily’s spinet stood at the end of it [the room], open, with a book of music folded down at some of my favourite lessons. I touched the keys; there was vibration in the sound that froze my blood. I looked around, and methought the family-pictures on the wall gazed on me with compassion in their faces. I sat down again with an attempt at more composure; I started at every creaking of the door, and my ears rung with imaginary noises! (95-96)

Mr. Atkins’s description of the room is filled with images that are important for the private associations that they hold for him. A stranger to the scene would not experience the sense of emotion or loss felt by Mr. Atkins with regard to a music book folded down at a particular page, nor would a stranger likely perceive “compassion” in the portraits of Mr. Atkins’s family members. To the extent that family “compassion” and a father’s love for his daughter are aspects of benevolence, this description of a domestic setting directly associates place with private virtuous behavior. The sentimentality evoked here regarding a particular place occurs frequently in the novel, as when Edwards describes his efforts to retain his leased farm: “I feared the undertaking was too great for me; yet to leave, at my age, the house I had lived in from my cradle! I could not, Mr. Harley, I could not; there was not a tree about it that I did not look on as
my father, my brother or my child...” (107). Once again, associations with place are portrayed as being personal.28

Consistent with the intimate representations of domestic place in *The Man of Feeling*, Harley performs his good works in places hidden from public view. Harley encounters Edwards in “a hollow part of the road” that “seemed to be little frequented now” (105). Similarly, his aid to the prostitute is rendered after his being “shown up three pair of stairs into a small room lighted by one narrow lattice, and patched round with shreds of different-colored paper” (84). In fact, the near-anonymity of Harley’s virtuous behavior is symbolized by the novel’s organizational conceit, whereby the text represents itself as being written upon the surviving scraps of a manuscript that was being used as “wadding” for a curate’s hunting gun (48). That Harley’s benevolence becomes publicly known is therefore almost happenstance, in contrast to the public displays of virtue that characterizes the novels of Richardson and Scott. With its relatively private settings and its moral compass founded upon the main character’s conscience, rather than upon the dictates of cultural tradition, *The Man of Feeling* foreshadows the display of these characteristics in the much less sentimental works of Jane Austen.29 Before considering Austen, however, I would like to consider representations of benevolence and domestic setting in Gothic and regional novels produced by Ann Radcliffe and Elizabeth Hamilton, respectively—authors who were a decade or two Austen’s senior.

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28 Of course, a sentimental attachment to home is not unknown in our own time. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, “Few English words are filled with the emotional meaning of the word ‘home.’ It brings to mind one’s childhood, the roots of one’s being, the security of a private enclave where one can be free and in control of one’s life” (121). Louise De Salvo observes, “[T]he idea that somewhere there is a ‘domestic Eden’—D.H. Lawrence’s term for the place where you’ll finally feel at home, where your spirit will find peace and your life will blossom—seems to be deeply ingrained in our collective imagination” (6).

29 Harkin attributes Austen’s valorization of “rich social observation, elegance of style, and originality” as clearly marking “the end of the sentimental conception of novel as moral preceptor” (29).
Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Genius

Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novels serve as a link between Sarah Scott and Jane Austen. As we have seen, Gothic descriptions of place appear briefly in Scott’s *The History of Cornelia*. Crittenden reports, “It is hardly conceivable that Walpole or his followers could have taken the Gothic idea from Mrs. Scott, but it is none the less interesting that she should have made even this slight use of what later became a strong force in fiction” (67). Moreover, in *Northanger Abbey* Austen displays obvious familiarity with Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novels: “Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for” (200). Given the familiarity with Gothic tropes that both Scott and Austen indicate, one might ask whether these tropes bear any relationship to the evolution of domestic scenes and moral judgment that we are tracing. In Radcliffe’s *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), a number of such relationships, including the effect of privacy, are evident.

*The Italian* tells the tale of young nobleman Vincentio di Vivaldi, and his fervent love for Ellena Rosalba, a sensitive and beautiful woman whose unknown family background causes Vivaldi’s parents to view her as an unfit object of matrimony. In collusion with Vivaldi’s mother, the sinister monk Schedoni orchestrates Ellena’s abduction. Vivaldi defies the wishes of his family and pursues Ellena across the wild Italian landscape to a secluded monastery, where the Abbess attempts to force her to pronounce lifelong religious vows. Vivaldi succeeds in rescuing Ellena, but Schedoni secretly accuses him of religious crimes, and Vivaldi is incarcerated in the dungeons of the Inquisition, where he faces unknown interrogators. Meanwhile, Ellena is left as “a miserable wanderer on a distant shore,” who laments, “I have no longer a home, a circle to smile welcomes upon me!” (220) An undercurrent of loss and
uncertainty swirls through almost every scene of *The Italian*, as the dispossessed characters struggle to understand their surroundings and themselves. Even the “common rules of morality” are confounded, as when Vivaldi’s mother, the Marchesa, says of her husband, “If it is necessary to adopt a conduct, that departs in the smallest degree from those common rules of morality which he has cherished, . . . he is shocked, and shrinks from action. He cannot discriminate the circumstances, that render the same action virtuous or vicious” (172). Moral autonomy thus betrays its villainous side in machinations that recall Lady Macbeth. The shadows and specters that envelop the novel serve as an effective background to a world in which the characters are unable to rely upon such traditional bearings as family or religion.

As we saw in *The Man of Feeling*, *The Italian* frequently depicts domestic surroundings in a sentimental light and with an affectionate connection between place and the inhabitants of a place. For example, when Vivaldi first attempts to visit Ellena at her home, he discovers “[e]very object, on which his eyes rested, seemed to announce the presence of Ellena; and the very flowers that so gaily embellished the apartment, breathed forth a perfume, which fascinated his senses and affected his imagination” (24). Although Vivaldi’s love for Ellena is of a different kind than Mr. Atkins’s love for his daughter Emily in *A Man of Feeling*, the flowers that evoke Ellena for Vivaldi are very much like the spinet and music book that evoke Emily for Mr. Atkins. Additionally, like the scene in *The Man of Feeling* in which Edwards laments the possible loss of his childhood home, so Ellena mourns her own impending departure from home:

> In the prospect of quitting . . . the home where she had passed almost every day since the dawn of her earliest remembrance, there was something melancholy, if not solemn. In leaving these well-known scenes, . . . she was quitting all vestige
of her late happiness, all note of former years and of present consolation; and she felt as if going into a new and homeless world. (60)

Thus, *The Italian* not only conjures what we now perceive as the standard atmospherics of the Gothic novel—dark and cavernous monasteries, the shadowy wrecks of ancient ruins, and dusky passageways running away to unknown places—but it also delineates an attachment to familiar places and things, and thereby creates in many of its scenes an atmosphere of personal intimacy.

*The Italian* also displays an attitude toward religious tradition and social convention that is more restrained than in *Millenium Hall*, for example. During an episode in which Ellena remains ignorant of Vivaldi’s location, she finds safety at a convent named Santa della Piéta, whose Superior “had known her from infancy” (299). Both the Superior and the convent’s nuns exhibit kindness towards Ellena: “They were not acquainted with the cause of her sorrow, but they perceived that she was unhappy, and wished her to be otherwise” (299). Santa della Piéta is markedly less prescriptive in its view of Christian doctrine than is Millenium Hall. In her exercise of “correct and vigilant judgment,” the convent’s Superior “conformed to the customs of the Roman church, without supposing a faith in all of them to be necessary to salvation” (300). Moreover, from a social perspective, the convent’s “society appeared like a large family, of which the lady abbess was the mother, rather than an assemblage of strangers” (300). The ponderous paternalistic atmosphere overhanging Millenium Hall is not found at Santa della Piéta, and the distinctions of class that are fundamental to Millenium Hall’s social organization are absent from the convent’s family-like society. At the conclusion of *The Italian*, Radcliffe again depicts conviviality among social classes during the nuptial celebration for Ellena and Vivaldi:
This entertainment was not given to persons of distinction only, for both Vivaldi and Ellena had wished that all the tenants of the domain should partake of it, and share the abundant happiness which themselves possessed; so that the grounds, which were extensive enough to accommodate each rank, were relinquished to the general gaiety. (413)

The overt indifference to class distinctions shown here is reminiscent of Vivaldi’s love for Ellena at the novel’s beginning, when his family insisted upon her social inferiority. Just as Vivaldi ignored Ellena’s family pedigree when he was first smitten, so does the couple ignore social rank in the celebration of their marriage.

Given the public display of generosity at the conclusion of *The Italian*, we must also consider whether the novel contains instances of domestic privacy of the kind that I associate with autonomous moral judgment. Many reminders of the stark contrast between private and public activity appear in the novel. Perhaps most telling is the novel’s underlying structural conceit, whereby a private narrative spoken in a confessional is made public, and subsequently “committed to paper” by a “student of Padua” (4). This publication of a confession recalls the extravagant violations of privacy inscribed by Harriet Byron in her missives in *Sir Charles Grandison*. Additionally, the Inquisition itself, which is so central to the novel’s plot, symbolizes the denial of privacy in matters as personal as religious faith. Nevertheless, *The Italian* also contains moments in which privacy is required in order for acts of kindness to be performed. For example, when Ellena is confined to the monastery after her abduction, a nun named Olivia attempts to assist her in her dealings with the overbearing Abbess, but this can occur only in a private setting: “Olivia accompanied Ellena to her cell, and there no longer scrupled to relieve her from uncertainty” (95). Similarly, when Olivia and Ellena are reunited at *Santa della Piéta*,
the two are “surrounded by too many auditors to allow of unreserved conversation,” and they retire to Ellena’s apartment (370). Here, Olivia feels ‘‘too much generous compassion for her sufferings not to endeavour to soothe the sense of them by an exertion of those delicate and nameless arts which, while they mock detection, fascinate the weary spirit as by a charm of magic” (372). In both of these episodes, private spaces enable Olivia to comfort Ellena, as would not be possible in a more public setting.

While The Italian’s elements of mystery, exotic atmosphere, and depravity are generally not exhibited in the novels of Scott or Austen, Radcliffe’s novel nevertheless occupies a telling place in the trajectories of setting and moral life that I am examining. As described above, the novel presents a clear distinction between the types of benevolent behavior that can be performed in a private versus a public context, and the moral decisions of the principal characters are founded upon their individual judgments, rather than upon a rote pursuit of established religious or social convention. In Northanger Abbey Austen might mock Radcliffe’s Gothic conventions, but the two novelists both recognize the importance of setting in depicting the modes of ethical behavior exhibited by their characters.

Elizabeth Hamilton: Cleanliness and Virtue in the Scots Cottage

Austen was familiar with the work of Richardson and Radcliffe, and she also expressed familiarity with the work of Elizabeth Hamilton.30 In fact, Deirdre Le Faye, editor of Austen’s letters, speculates that Austen “had probably” read Hamilton’s 1808 novel, The Cottagers of

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30 Regarding Richardson, Henry Austen reports that his sister Jane admired Sir Charles Grandison. He remarks that the novel “gratified the natural discrimination of her mind, whilst her taste secured her from the errors of his prolix style and tedious narrative” (7). As for Hamilton, upon learning that the second edition of Sense and Sensibility had been given to Hamilton, Austen remarks, “It is pleasant to have such a respectable Writer named” (“To Cassandra Austen.” 6 November 1813).
Glenburnie (428). For purposes of this thesis, Hamilton’s novel is remarkable for its extensive
treatment of cottage interiors, in contrast to the reader being left—like a viewer of
Gainsborough’s paintings—at the cottage door. Moreover, the novel poses a challenge to my
hypothesis that representations of increasing novelistic attention to detail in private domestic
settings is accompanied by more autonomous moral behavior. In fact, despite her generous
descriptions of private interiors, Hamilton’s moral outlook is much more akin to the religiously
devout Sarah Scott than to Hamilton’s more secular contemporary Jane Austen.

The Cottagers of Glenburnie features a woman of the servant class, Mrs. Mason, who
devotes herself to raising the personal and domestic standards of poor Scottish villagers. During
the course of the narrative, Hamilton renders vivid, and somewhat unsettling, descriptions of
cottage life. For example, during the course of several passages, cottage life is portrayed as being
uncomfortably close to animal life. When Mrs. Mason first approaches the village of Glenburnie,
she sees “twenty or thirty thatched cottages, which . . . might have passed for so many stables or
hog sties, so little had they to distinguish them as the abodes of man” (104). At the threshold of
the cottage in which she will stay she sees chickens flying about “in all directions, some over
their heads, and others making their way by the pallin (or inner door) into the house” (106).
When it is time to retire for night, she discovers that her bed holds a pillow stuffed with damp
feathers that are “full of the animal oil, which, when it becomes rancid, sends forth an intolerable
effluvia” (116). The cottage in Glenburnie is not the rustic retreat that one might imagine when
reading of Cornelia’s cottage life in The History of Cornelia, or in viewing Gainsborough’s The
Cottage Door. The profound degree of domestic disorder that Mrs. Mason confronts leads to her
difficult campaign to persuade the cottagers of the merits of making their homes “cheerful, clean,
and comfortable,” and to overcome their habitual response that they “cou’d no be fashed”
In the face of this stubbornness, Mrs. Mason persists, and she consoles herself by thinking “if I can once convince them of the advantage they will derive from listening to my advice, I may make a lasting impression on their minds” (123). Thus, not unlike the ladies of Millenium Hall with respect to the poor in their environs, Mrs. Mason is convinced of the correctness of her own value system and of the necessity of imposing it upon the benighted Glenburniens.

As we saw in Sarah Scott’s novels, Christian doctrine is also the moral anchor in The Cottagers of Glenburnie. For example, during a chapter in which Mrs. Mason narrates the story of her life, she recounts her reaction to first reading “a history of the Old World before the coming of our Saviour” (82). According to Mrs. Mason,

[T]he observations I made upon the consequences of the pride, vain glory, and ambition of those conspicuous characters of whom we read, would improve the powers of my understanding, and open my mind to perceive the value of those Christian principles, which led to peace here, and happiness hereafter: and to prove that it was not in the power of all the riches, or all the glory of the world, to give content; for that to fear God, and keep his commandments was the end of life. (82)

Given her Christian faith, Mrs. Mason does not encounter, or recognize, moral ambiguities that require independent ethical thought to resolve. Regarding life’s “trials of virtue,” she counsels a young woman, “Consider, . . . it is your Heavenly Father who has set the task,—perform it as unto Him, and when you have to encounter opposition, or injustice, you will no longer find them intolerable” (60). Unlike Harley in The Man of Feeling, who occasionally questions the value of benevolence itself, or Ellena and Vivaldi in The Italian, who experience frequent moral
uncertainty because they realize that their understanding of their circumstances is incomplete, Mrs. Mason is perfectly unequivocal in facing each day, and in dictating to her hosts at Glenburnie how to raise their children and clean their cottages.

So, how can *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* be reconciled to my thesis that representations of more autonomous moral behavior is accompanied by attention to detail in private domestic settings? It might be argued that Mrs. Mason’s tactical approach in bestowing her benevolence is to thoroughly invade the privacy of the individuals that she wishes to improve, and that the novel therefore portrays places that are more public than private. However, such an explanation does not account for the many private conversations in the novel in which Mrs. Mason steadfastly maintains her religion-based morality. Accordingly, the novel does not employ private settings for the purpose of enabling its characters to engage in autonomous ethical decision-making. Rather, Hamilton’s innovative domestic descriptive detail is utilized for didactic purposes, to assist the rural Scots in understanding their current conditions and what improvements they can make. In fact, readers of the period typically understood this purpose of the novel. According to Pam Perkins, novelist and travel writer Elizabeth Isabella Spence credited *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* with “the entire transformation of the Scottish peasant cultural practice between her first visit in 1811 and her” second in 1816, and Maria Edgeworth “expected that it would do ‘a vast deal of good’ for the Scottish peasantry” (124). Thus, while novelistic depiction of private domestic settings can support the portrayal of autonomous moral behavior among characters, as seen in *The Man of Feeling* and *The Italian*, such settings can also be deployed for other reasons, such as the didactic purposes adopted by Hamilton. In Austen, who is not overtly didactic, we encounter a return to the pattern of novelist who utilizes private domestic settings as appropriate for the moral autonomy manifested by many of the characters in her novels.
Although Austen may have been familiar with *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, as Le Faye speculates, she may not have appreciated the great amount of detail in its settings. In a letter to her niece, an aspiring novelist, Jane Austen writes: “You describe a sweet place, but your descriptions are often more minute than will be liked. You give too many particulars of right hand & left.” (“To Anna Austen” 275). Austen is economical in her descriptions of scene, but she conveys an unmistakable sense of domestic intimacy not found in Sarah Scott, Henry Mackenzie, or Ann Radcliffe. Although Austen’s descriptions may not be substantially more detailed than many of her predecessors, Tristram sees her “sparing detail” as serving “a different purpose; for her houses are always human spaces, defined by and in turn defining their fictional inhabitants” (“Jane Austen and the Changing Face of England” 140). In comparison to the highly visible gestures of Scott’s characters, Austen’s homes serve as settings for more private and personal interactions, and her more intimate environments betoken an increased emphasis on private aspects of morality and benevolence. Austen’s early novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (originally drafted c. 1795, published 1811), and her last novel, *Persuasion* (published posthumously 1817), both exemplify these traits.

As *Sense and Sensibility* opens, Mrs. Dashwood’s husband dies, and his son from a prior marriage inherits Norland, the opulent estate in which she and her daughters Elinor and Marianne had lived. Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters thereafter establish themselves in the modest surroundings of the distant Barton Cottage—“In comparison of Norland, it was poor and small indeed!” (28) Many details serve to compose a portrait of Barton Cottage. For example, with a nod to realism in preference to a more romantic conception of a cottage, the text reports, “Barton Cottage, though small, was comfortable and compact; but as a cottage it was defective,
for the building was regular, the roof was tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the wall covered with honeysuckles” (28). Additional specifics are provided as the narrative proceeds. For example, such particulars as the number of bedrooms and the dimensions of the “sitting room” are provided, and one visitor observes, “that it was very low pitched, and that the ceiling was crooked” (108). In contrast with Harriet Byron’s “admirable” London apartment in Sir Charles Grandison, for which no detailed description is provided, and the vague romantic atmospherics suffusing Ellena’s home in The Italian, the reader of Sense and Sensibility can visualize a fairly precise image of Barton Cottage.

A substantial amount of domestic detail can also be found in Persuasion, particularly during Anne Elliott’s’s sojourn with her sister Mary Musgrove’s family at Uppercross village. Here we find “the faded sofa of the pretty little drawing-room, the once elegant furniture of which had been gradually growing shabby, under the influence of four summers and two children. . .” (37) The familiarity and intimacy of the place is enhanced when Anne follows her sister upstairs to “her husband’s dressing room door,” an unusually personal setting, and joins a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove (57). Another scene during the Uppercross visit takes place on a sofa. During this scene, in which Anne encounters her estranged lover Captain Wentworth for the first time in many years, the two are separated only by her sister’s mother-in-law: “They were actually on the same sofa, for Mrs. Musgrove had most readily made room for him;—they were divided only by Mrs. Musgrove” (68). This use of furnishings to express a sense of intimacy is a device not found in Sarah Scott’s novels.

Moreover, an air of domestic sentimentality enhances the intimacy of Austen’s settings. For example, aware of Barton Cottage’s defects, Mrs. Dashwood speaks of possible improvements such as converting its parlour into an entry hall. However, Marianne’s suitor,
Willoughby, objects to altering “the room which has hitherto contained within itself, more real accommodation and comfort than any other apartment of the handsomest dimensions in the world could possibly afford” (73-74). The vein of sentimentality continues when Elinor responds to compliments regarding Barton Cottage: “I think every one must admire it [Barton Cottage],’ replied Elinor, ‘who ever saw the place; though it is not to be supposed that any one can estimate its beauties as we do’” (123). Elinor’s appreciation of the home is portrayed as not only an emotional attachment, but also as a considered evaluation, in keeping with the “sense” of her character. A more extreme sentimentality is seen in the “sensibility” of Marianne, as when she personifies the place in the following apostrophe: “Dear, dear Norland! . . . when shall I cease to regret you!—when learn to feel a home elsewhere!—Oh! happy house, could you know what I suffer in now viewing you from this spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more!”( 27) While Austen satirizes the excess of Marianne’s sentiments for home, she also reinforces the feeling that home is a place that is experienced in emotional terms. The consistent viewing of place through an individual character’s emotional lens is in contrast to the relatively neutral tone of domestic description appearing in Scott and Richardson, when they appear at all.

A home’s potential for providing a canvas upon which traces of individual personality can be drawn is also apparent in Sense and Sensibility. Upon moving to Barton Cottage, the new residents endeavored, “by placing around them books and other possessions, to form themselves a home. Marianne’s pianoforté was unpacked and properly disposed of and Elinor’s drawings were affixed to the walls of their sitting room” (29-30). This quotation is notable for the association it makes between individual householders and home furnishings and decorations. While this projection of the daughters’ interests carries a public component, the reference also connotes the importance of individual personality in a way that is absent in scenes of Millenium
Hall, for example, when unnamed ladies perform at their harpsichords and other instruments. Later in Sense and Sensibility, a visitor notices Elinor’s drawings: “Oh! dear, how beautiful these are! Well! How delightful! Do but look, mama, how sweet! I declare they are quite charming; I could look at them for ever.’ And then sitting down again, she very soon forgot that there were any such things in the room” (108). Thus, although there is a public component to the sisters’ domestic display of objects that project their interests, the relative indifference of that “public”—as personified by this visitor—demonstrates the relatively greater semiotic importance of the objects to the residents themselves.

Austen, apparently recognizing that “household objects constitute an ecology of signs that reflects as well as shapes the pattern of the owner’s self,” exploits the potential for furnishings to convey messages about a home’s residents (Csikszentmihalyi 17).31 For example, in the depiction of Harville’s hospitality at Lyme, Persuasion describes the “few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up, and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries Captain Harville had visited.” The text tells us that these decorative articles influenced the Captain’s habits, presumably with regard to his “mind of usefulness and ingenuity” and his “constant employment” of drawing and creating “toys for the children” (98-99). In this way Austen acknowledges that the objects with which we surround ourselves at home contain messages that profoundly affect our psyches while providing information about the home’s occupants to its visitors. This purpose can be served by a simple object, such as a vase, or by a more complex artifact, such as a book. Sir Walter Elliot’s “Baronetage” volume in

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31 This discussion of domestic semiotics is much indebted to the ideas of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton in The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self.
Austen’s *Persuasion* furnishes an example of the dual potential of a household object to define and represent an individual:

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; . . . there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century—and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed. (3)

The Baronetage volume serves to define Sir Walter to both himself and his acquaintances. While a written text such as the Baronetage has an obvious semiotic function, virtually any household object can be utilized to define the individual to one’s self (a private function) and to represent the individual to others (a public function).  

While Sir Walter Elliot values his home for the social status it conveys, his daughter Anne sees the home as a repository of memories. As she prepares to move from the home, due to her father’s financial difficulties, she laments her “beloved home made over to others; all the

32 Another literary example of a household having both public and private semiotic potential is the French *secrétaire*, or private writing desk, such as the “Japan Writing Desk bestowed to me by my Lady Worseley,” which Jonathan Swift’s will bequeaths in 1745 (300). The personal writing desk is symbolic of the increasing individualization of the era, “the materialization of the owner’s self” and—with the locks on its drawers—“a declaration of the autonomy of the person” who hides away his or her personal papers (Goodman 194, 196). Although letter writing can be an intensely private exercise, its memorializing of personal thoughts paradoxically permits a public experience, once the documents are sent out into the world. Similarly, as exemplified by Swift’s presumably ornamented and lacquered “Japan writing desk,” the decoration and display of an object causes a public veneer to overlay the private purpose of an object, however many locks it may contain. It is as if an element of secrecy and privilege is being advertised.
precious rooms and furniture, groves, and prospects, beginning to own other eyes and other limbs!” (47-48) This exclamation reveals a sense of sentimental attachment that is reminiscent of Marianne Dashwood, as well as Mr. Atkins and Edwards in Mackenzie’s *A Man of Feeling*. Note also the unusual description of inverted possession, whereby residential objects possess the occupants rather than the reverse. Austen’s unexpected insight here is consistent with the more modern notion that, in addition to the manipulation of objects by human beings, objects also manipulate human beings. Not only does an individual serve as an active agent with regard to the furnishings in his or her living environment, but also the living environment actively influences the individual’s personality. This is perhaps most evident during the course of a household move, such as Anne undertakes. She reports, “I have had all my own little concerns to arrange, books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack . . .” (38). Anthropologists have recently noted the role played by such chores as sorting the possessions that are to be moved or discarded in the making—or remaking—of an individual’s personality: “It [sorting] responds to the desire to select for keeping what matters, those things that will define the identity of the new place and of the new social entity as well as the exclusion of those that would be incompatible with it” (Marcoux 79). The self-actualizing vignette in which Anne performs the tasks of moving is of a piece with a larger theme of the novel, in which Anne overcomes the “persuasion” of family members to assert herself as an individual and marry the man of her choice.

Given Anne’s estrangement from her father and her sister, she establishes a private relationship with her home, as when she is left on her own to prepare for the move. Austen presents privacy as a value in itself, in a way that is not seen in the Scott or Richardson. For example, in *Sense and Sensibility* Lucy Steele’s sister discloses to Elinor the contents of what Elinor belatedly learns should have been private conversations. In response Elinor expresses
moral dismay: “I am sorry I did not know it before; for I certainly would not have suffered you to give me particulars of a conversation which you ought not to have known yourself” (274). Elinor’s respect for privacy differs significantly from that of Harriet Byron, who—as we have seen—augments her own “private” correspondence with copies of letters between third parties, and transcripts of conversation secretly recorded by a shorthand writer.

Austen also frequently depicts privacy in a public setting. This circumstance causes me to differ with Philippa Tristram’s claim that “[w]here Richardson wrote his novels, and his heroines their letters, in little closets removed from the public eye, Jane Austen and her heroines spend their time in parlours which are anything but private” (12). On the contrary, I have noted previously that Richardson’s “little closets” actually serve to launch very public communications. Austen discovers intimacy in parlours despite (or, in some cases, because of) the variety of activities taking place. For example, during the course of a social gathering, Elinor is anxious to learn more from Lucy Steele about the latter’s relationship with Edward Ferrars, with whom Elinor has a close friendship. While most of the group plays a game of cards, Elinor excuses herself with the stated purpose of assisting Lucy Steele to “work filigree.” The text goes on to describe “two fair rivals . . . seated side by side at the same table” while Marianne plays upon the piano-forté so close to them “that Miss Dashwood now judged she might safely, under the shelter of its noise, introduce the interesting subject, without any risk of being heard at the card-table” (145). Although Elinor and Lucy are not alone in their domestic space, they nevertheless contrive to win themselves the intimacy necessary to discuss the mutually “interesting subject.” A similar dynamic is presented in Persuasion, when during a visit from

33 My view here is consistent with that of Ann Gaylin, who observes, “For Austen, public and private represent interconnected zones of activity, rather than spheres that must be kept separate.” (19).
Captain Harville and his bereaved colleague Captain Benwick to Anne Elliot and her party visiting Lyme, “it fell to Anne’s lot to be placed rather apart with Captain Benwick; and a very good impulse of her nature obliged her to begin an acquaintance with him” (100). This “good impulse” refers to Anne’s recommendations of literature that might benefit Benwick as he deals with his grief. Thus, Anne and Benwick find themselves in a private situation in a group of several characters, and this enables Anne to exercise kindness towards the grieving Captain. Yet another example of private moments taking place within a public setting occurs when the reunited Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth walk together in the streets of Bath:

And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children, they could indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgements, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment, which were so poignant and so ceaseless in interest.

(241)

Julia Prewitt Brown interprets this passage as “an image of private, intimate reunion of hero and heroine in what is so clearly a public, democratic milieu. . .” (132). Once again, privacy and intimacy are encountered in a public place.

As we have seen, private spaces help to enable the operation of autonomous moral judgment, and its portrayal in literature. Austen employs such settings in concert with the moral life she delineates in her characters. For example, Adam Smith’s privileged attributes of sympathy, propriety and self-command appear prominently in Sense and Sensibility, and self-
command may be Elinor’s defining character trait.³⁴ The expression “self-command” occurs eight times in the novel; each time with reference to Elinor’s possession of this quality, or Marianne’s lack of it. Marianne observes, “Elinor, in quitting Norland and Edward, cried not as I did. Even now her self-command is invariable. When is she dejected or melancholy? When does she try to avoid society, or appear restless and dissatisfied in it?” (39) Moreover, in a discussion with Marianne, Elinor expresses the implicit view that the achievement of propriety requires the self-command necessary to overcome the allures of pleasure: “‘I am afraid,’ replied Elinor, ‘that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety’” (68).³⁵ The bitter consequences of the failure of self-command are portrayed in Marianne’s abandonment of herself to melancholy after Willoughby’s betrayal, as well as in the loveless marriage to which Willoughby subjects himself.

Austen also utilizes an innovative narrative device, free indirect speech, to directly convey the experience of sympathy, the operation of which Smith holds as being so important.³⁶ Free indirect speech can be described as third-person narration which slips into the use of “language signals” that refer to the language situation of the character being described, rather

³⁴ Karen Stohr refers to Elinor Dashwood as “the exemplar of moderation, propriety, and moral rectitude” (382).

³⁵ Marianne cleverly complicates the issue in her response: “On the contrary, nothing can be a stronger proof of it, Elinor; for if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure” (68). If Marianne’s sophistry is correct, immoral action would be virtually impossible for anyone seeking immediate pleasure.

³⁶ Free indirect speech in Austen is most often displayed in Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion, and its occasional appearance in Northanger Abbey has been cited as evidence of Austen’s revisions to that novel late in her life (Shaw 592). Joe Bray credits Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison as serving as an inspiration to Austen with regard to the free indirect style. According to Bray, “Richardson’s attempt to allow intimate access to Harriet’s mind, to re-enact in her narrative the twists and turns of her past thought-processes grants a new perspective on the apparently spontaneous origins of the style that is so central to the achievement of Austen’s art” (28).
than the language situation of the narrator (Bal 47-48). For example, a third-person narrator’s description of a character’s situation may begin to adopt idiom, emotional expressions, and time and place references more suitable to the character than to the third-person narrator. The technique is used extensively in *Persuasion*. When Jane Elliott first encounters Captain Wentworth after a years-long estrangement, the narrator describes the scene as follows: “They had no conversation together, no intercourse but what the commonest civility required. Once so much to each other! Now nothing!” (63) This brief narration illustrates an effect of free indirect speech that has been termed “text interference,” in which it is unclear whether narrator or character is “speaking.” The simplest description of free indirect speech may be that the narrator, when reporting the words or thoughts of a character, places himself directly into the experiential field of the character, and adopts the character's perspective in regard to both time and place (Pascal 9). For example, when Anne hears the surprising news that Louisa Musgrove—her supposed rival for the affections of Captain Wentworth—is to marry another man, the narrator offers the following description of Anne’s ruminations:

In her own room, she tried to comprehend it. Well might Charles wonder how Captain Wentworth would feel! […]

Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! The high-spirited, joyous-talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading, Captain Benwick, seemed each of them everything that would not suit the other. Their minds most dissimilar! Where could have been the attraction? (166)

The narrative device of free indirect speech has the effect of blurring the discourses of narrator and character, and the reader is pulled into the character’s mind. Therefore, Austen’s narrative technique frequently simulates sympathy itself—which Smith places so centrally in his theory of
moral sentiments—and narrows the cognitive distance between character and reader, and renders
the character’s moral behavior particularly comprehensible. In Austen, the occasional use of
indirect free speech combines effectively with her intimate vignettes of domestic ethical
discourse. Austen depicts characters that are given the private space necessary for autonomous
moral deliberation, and at the same time she provides her readers with privileged access to the
characters’ internal lives.

To conclude my discussion of Austen, and to emphasize the contrast with Sarah Scott in
representations of privacy and benevolence, I would like to return to the subject of the poor. Like
Sarah Scott, Jane Austen was financially dependent upon wealthier relatives. In characterizing
Austen as a member of the “distressed gentility,” Alistair Duckworth observes, “[S]he was, along
with other women of her time and class, restricted as to opportunities. Her brothers’ routes to
power, position, money, and success were closed to her . . .” (167). Scott’s position was similar,
particularly after her brief, failed marriage with George Scott. According to Betty Rizzo, “After
the separation Scott was in no position . . . to fight for financial independence. She had to depend
. . . on the goodwill and the family pride of the men of the family” (305). While Austen
possessed this same type of dependence, it appears that she may have been more fortunate than
Scott in the degree of support received. For example, her brother Edward offered Austen, her
mother and her sister the house at Chawton, where Jane wrote her later novels. Not only did Jane
receive financial support from her brother, but she also came into contact with the poor in
assisting with Edward’s traditional landowner responsibilities on his estate. Jane and her sister
Cassandra acted as “agents” for their brother in ministering to the poor during his absences
(Collin 117). In a 29 November 1812 letter Austen writes, “We are just beginning to be engaged
in another Christmas Duty, & next to eating Turkies, a very pleasant one, laying out Edward’s
money for the Poor; & the Sum that passes through our hands this year is considerable, as Mrs. Knight left £ 20 to the Parish” (“To Martha Lloyd” 197). Austen notably refers to her role in helping to provide relief to the poor as “pleasant,” and she seems pleased that the amount available is larger in that year than other years. However, in comparison to Sarah Scott’s very active support of the poor, Austen’s role here is fairly passive, and perhaps reminiscent of Adam Smith’s notion of “indolent benevolence” (TMS II. 3. 3. 3). Similarly, in Austen’s early novels, poor characters make appearances from time to time, but they are generally anonymous. This is not inconsistent with other novels of the age, as we have already seen in connection with Millenium Hall and The History of Cornelia.

The poor become more prominent, however, in Austen’s last three novels. Mansfield Park’s heroine Fanny Price issues from a poor Portsmouth family, and Miss Bates plays a pivotal role in Emma, particularly as her character puts Emma’s pride in relief. Additionally, Persuasion’s Mrs. Smith represents another poor character, whom Anne attempts to assist on the basis of previous friendship. For this generosity she is roundly criticized by her father Sir Walter: “[W]ho is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate Buildings? A Mrs. Smith. . . . And what is her attraction? That she is old and sickly. Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste!” (157) The unwillingness of her father to entertain the thought

37 Regarding the reference to “Christmas Duty,” Sherman calls “duty” (poor relief) “a paternalist word” in the period (29).

38 I do not mean to disparage Austen’s generosity on the basis of one letter. Her brother Henry refers to benevolence as one of Austen’s “real characteristics”: “Her features were separately good. Their assemblage produced an unrivalled expression of that cheerfulness, sensibility, and benevolence, which were her real characteristics” (5).

39 The benevolence described in Austen is generally directed within an intimate circle. Sense and Sensibility’s Dashwoods, for example, are given the opportunity to live in Barton Cottage as a result of the generous offer of a cousin, Sir John Middleton. Moreover, Colonel Brandon’s care for his niece after her disgrace by Willoughby exemplifies the intra-familial generosity so characteristic of Austen.
of assisting someone who is “old and sickly” indicates the need for Anne to minister to her friend in the privacy of Mrs. Smith’s tenement. Sir Walter would clearly not tolerate this generosity in his own home. Anne Elliott’s care for Mrs. Smith serves as a pattern of sympathy, in a way that would not be possible if Mrs. Smith or her circumstances were anonymous.

A private meeting of the two characters takes place in a setting that Austen sketches with characteristic economy, but the description of Mrs. Smith’s rooms aptly supports the moment:

Her accommodations were limited to a noisy parlour, and a dark bed-room behind, with no possibility of moving from one to the other without assistance, which there was only one servant in the house to afford, and she never quitted the house but to be conveyed into the warm bath.—Yet, in spite of all this, Anne had reason to believe that she had moments only of languor and depression to hours of occupation and enjoyment. How could it be? (154)

The text here proceeds from a few words that describe the place, to a sensitive portrait of Mrs. Smith’s movement in the rooms, and finally to a moment of sympathy, in which Anne’s intuitive recognition of Mrs. Smith’s routine is punctuated with four words cast in free indirect speech—“How could it be?” Austen thus adroitly combines representations of a private and intimate place with Anne Elliott’s generous mind, and elevates a member of the poor to the ranks of the recognized. In comparison with Scott, Austen takes a much more secular approach in her characters’ interaction with the poor. This may be somewhat surprising—she was a clergyman’s daughter, after all—but it is nevertheless evident that her characters tend to be more motivated by personal considerations than Sarah Scott’s community of women, whose charities are religiously inspired. In comparison with the relatively ostentatious scenes of philanthropy in
Scott’s novels, Austen’s intimate environments enable more autonomous aspects of morality and benevolence to emerge.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Sarah Scott’s works capture the spirit of her times very effectively, particularly with regard to philanthropic activities in a quasi-paternalistic and religious context. Their reliance upon traditional tenets is accompanied by depictions of relatively public human interactions, not unlike those seen in Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison. Moreover, the characters in Millenium Hall, one of whom boasts that “my friends are above wishing to conceal any part of their lives,” are no more solicitous of the privacy of others than is Harriet Byron in Sir Charles Grandison (76). However, as the century advances, examples of greater attention to privacy, more autonomous moral judgments, and more intimate settings increasingly appear. The Man of Feeling’s Harley displays benevolent conduct that is more private and less dogmatic and institutionalized than that portrayed in Millenium Hall. With the appearance of the Gothic novel, characters such as Ellena and Vivaldi in The Italian demonstrate a high degree of independent judgment in their moral decisions, as a consequence of finding themselves in circumstances that are ambiguous and not completely known. Finally, while Austen eschews the mawkish tendencies of the sentimental novel and the grim atmospherics of the Gothic novel, she continues the novelistic trend of providing her characters with the private settings they require for purposes of addressing their quotidian moral dilemmas in an autonomous manner.

Developments such as the evolution in representations of domestic scenes and benevolent behavior traced herein typically occur in fits and starts over extended periods of time. Elizabeth Hamilton’s The Cottagers of Glenburnie points to an earlier period in its moral paradigm of
obedience to religious doctrine, as well as to a later period in its naturalistic description of impoverished domestic interiors. As Raymond Williams observes, so-called dominant, residual, emergent, and pre-emergent currents together characterize any given cultural moment. Therefore, it should not be surprising that Sarah Scott, whom I have primarily described as an author who presents scenes of moral rectitude on an elevated public stage, can also evoke intimacy. For example, *Sir George Ellison* concludes at a happy moment, shortly after its hero has recovered from a grave illness. Scott writes,

> I think I cannot take leave of this worthy family at a better time, than when it enjoys the utmost felicity the world can afford, lest by some of those unavoidable misfortunes, which in the course of time must befal every mortal being, the scene may be overcast, and those who are the happiest of mortals become objects of compassion; which would deprive us of a fair opportunity of quitting them, for I hope none of my readers would be able to bear the very thought of forsaking a friend in adversity. (221)

In the context of the paradigm of benevolent action and domestic space set forth in this essay, this passage evokes a scene of intimate kindness, which I associate more with Austen than with Scott. Nevertheless, the passage also conveys Scott’s characteristic spatial expansiveness, as it refers to “every mortal,” and is broadly addressed to the novel’s readers. Therefore, as this quotation reveals characteristics partially inside and partially outside the generally pattern traced in this essay, it serves as an example of the kind of “pre-emergent” signal of which Williams writes.

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40 See Chapter 8, “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent,” of Williams’s *Marxism and Literature*. 
The predominant relationship between presentations of benevolent acts and domestic space in these novels should be clear. The more intimate domestic settings presented in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, in comparison to Scott, are mirrored by the more personal quality of generosity displayed in the Austen novels. A general movement away from the authority of religion and classical value systems toward more secular and autonomous considerations, and from public to private gesture, is apparent in tracing these works chronologically. While the benevolent activity portrayed in such mid-century texts as *Millenium Hall*, *Sir George Ellison*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* are grounded in such traditional value systems as Christianity, the kindnesses evinced by Austen’s characters do not typically claim a religious provenance. Just as the moral philosophy of Adam Smith stresses the importance of an individual’s attributes of propriety, self-command and sympathy—rather than rote obedience to dogma or tradition—so do such Austen heroines as Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood exemplify these personal characteristics. Each of these authors supplies their novels with the appropriate stages upon which their characters’ attributes can be exercised. The transparent domestic places in *Sir Charles Grandison* and the philanthropic grounds of *Millenium Hall* display with great effectiveness the didactic, public morality that these novels feature. The exemplary conduct of Grandison and Ellison would lack force if enacted in hidden places. However, the more subtle moral life of Austen’s characters requires a different backdrop. It is unlikely that Willoughby’s confession or Elinor’s measured response to his words could have taken place before the multitude of onlookers that witness the action in *Sir Charles Grandison* or *Millenium Hall*. It therefore becomes obvious that the persistent association of obedience-based morality with public spaces and of moral self-governance with private spaces in these novels is not mere happenstance. As the period progresses, and novelists increasingly address private concerns of
the individual, social distances are attenuated. Moral behavior is more autonomous, and the circles of kindness become more intimate, as characters are placed in more private domestic spaces.
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Appendix I - Stothard’s Plate IX from *Sir Charles Grandison*
Appendix II - Gainsborough’s *The Cottage Door*