

ERIC WEICHEL

'Fixed by so much better a fire': Wigs and Masculinity in early 18th-century British Miniatures

Saturday Night past 10 o'clock

June 18th, 1728

Walk often through Hervey groves and now and then visit the ___ by the pas-glissant! I want no memorandums, even your picture is useless in your character, my imagination is so much a better painter than Zink yet I find you drawn there not only more like than by his hand, but also in colours fixed by so much better a fire, yet tis impossible they should ever fade, till the thing on which they are so lovingly laid is itself destroyed, nor is it all, for this painter not only describes your figure but your face, 'tis an echo to your words, as well as a mirror to your form, and so extraordinary a performer in each capacity, that I hear you in deadliest silence and see you in deepest darkness.¹

With these words, Lord John Hervey (1696-1743), one of George II's most prominent courtiers, illustrated the potency of artistic language in emotive expression, pointing to the relation between visual artifacts and the articulation of desire among the early Georgian aristocracy. Written to another man, Stephen Fox (1704-1776), later 1st Earl of Ilchester, early in Fox and Hervey's extended and complex relationship, the courtier's letter highlights the role of the portrait miniature in making visible affective relations between elite members of society. As such, the sartorial choices represented in small-scale likenesses of these two aristocrats, such as the manner of wearing a wig, can convey subversive messages about sexuality, identity and masculinity. I read the physical preciousness of the miniaturized luxury good as a legitimizing or sanctifying device, and I argue that Hervey and Fox's patronage choices, influenced by the theories of Baron Philip von Stosch, are

¹ Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, June 18, 1728, *Hervey MSS 941/47/4*, pg. 77, 78.

representative of the 'Whig' elite's interest in classical learning, unorthodox spiritual practices, and homosocial affection, interaction, and intimacy. Miniature portraits of Stosch, Fox, Hervey and others associated with their circle display the representation of subversive, dissident forms of elite masculinity that, through the blurring of boundaries of aristocratic male decorum, challenged the dominant modes of performing gender that existed at the time. These images commemorate the diversity in gender that, I argue, existed at the early Georgian court, and this discussion can therefore contribute to processes of reclaiming and reinserting a queer presence into art-historical narratives of eighteenth-century British portraiture.²

Lord Hervey's allusion to the miniature that he cherished as a symbolic, if inadequate reflection of his beloved is not the only instance in the *Hervey MSS* in which the language of art is used to refer to the absent person. In 1730, as a sign of his growing popularity with the Queen, Caroline of Ansbach, Lord Hervey was promoted to the administrative position of Vice-Chamberlain of the Royal Household. While his new status publicly confirmed his political value to the Whig party, headed by Sir Robert Walpole, the responsibilities associated with his new position heavily curtailed his ability to spend time with Fox. Late that year, Lord Hervey wrote to Fox "I have not had as much pleasure in thinking of you now you are at Maddington as I had when you were at Redlinch [Fox's estate]. I used to figure you up in the very room you were as to what you were doing: my Fancy now can only represent you singly; all of accompaniment of the picture is a dark and undistinguished canvas."³ The pair, who spent a year and a half touring Italy together, both commissioned small portraits of each other from Christian Frederick Zincke (1683/5 – 1767), George II's enamellist, continuing a long tradition of

2 In stressing the importance of 'reclaiming' deliberately suppressed or ignored histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that "subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric," illustrating the necessity for the academic community to "be imaginative and creative both in their research and their narrative strategies. How do you write the histories of suppressed groups?" Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pg. 98.

3 Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, Sept 14, 1730, *Ibid.*, pg. 141.

aristocratic interest in miniature portraits. Miniatures had many diverse uses, but their popularity, and the centrality of their function to romantic-erotic discourses among the transnational hereditary elite, was a byproduct of the genre's versatility.⁴

Miniature portraits on enamel, while technically demanding for the artist, offered the eighteenth-century aristocracy an alternative to the ungainly medium of canvas, which by nature catered to public display and was expected to be located in a comparatively permanent location. Small-scale portraits on enamel, however, could be worn around the person, secreted away with other treasured personal effects, or proudly displayed and collected as key indicators of the networks of familial and political affiliations that bound the aristocracy together. The reduced scale of miniature portraits also meant they adapted well to disparate forms of framing, such as the locket, which could be opened for display or closed for dissimulation. They were also adorned and embellished by a range of precious and semi-precious materials, linking the genre to the products of the decorative artisans who created snuffboxes, jewelry cases, and other luxury items.

By Lord Hervey's time, the familiarity of the portrait miniature had been long-established in England, with the Tudor and Jacobean courts establishing paradigms of patronage that were continued by the Hanoverian monarchs. The political and social changes inaugurated by the Glorious Revolution of 1689 deeply affected the demand for the decorative arts. The annual sessions of Parliament, for example, required most MPs and peers to reside in London for at least half of the year, resulting in a soaring demand for high-end architecture, swelling the audience for theatre and concomitantly affecting the consumption of luxury items such as portraits. The early decades of the eighteenth century saw miniature portraits much concerned with promoting the stylistic regularity of the sitters' likenesses, reflecting the hoped-for civic virtues of the landed class. The reasons for such stylistic

4 See, for example, Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette, *The Princess of Cleves* (New York and London: Meridian Classics, 1989 [1678]), pgs 44, 46, 47; and the memoirs of Françoise-Athénaïs de Rochechouart-Mortemart, marquise de Montespan, concerning the many loves of Henriette d'Angleterre.

homogeneity were diverse, but provide invaluable indicators of social tone.⁵

The heavily-stylized, formulaic nature of miniatures was remarked upon by critics during the period, who satirized 'Zink' in poetry for "making his sitters resemble each other or, more precisely, a stereotype based on a socially accepted pictorial form."⁶ Regardless of the stylistic homogeneity C.F. Zincke adopted in his English oeuvre, his popularity remained constant and his output prolific. Born in 1684 as the son of a Dresden goldsmith,⁷ whose profession offered the young artist plenty of scope to learn both studio management and the importance of precise attention to minute detail, Zincke "settled in England in his early twenties and studied enameling there with the Swedish master Charles Boit (1662-1727). Zincke employed the demanding technique of painting in vitreous glazes on copper for portraits seemingly from life."⁸ Although no direct records of payment to C. F. Zincke from the Hervey family, such as those that are extant for painters like John Fayram, appear to have survived,⁹ Lord Hervey's reference to the artist in the *Hervey MSS* corresponds to the documented appearance of miniatures of himself and both of the Fox brothers by Zincke. Zincke's portrait of both the Fox brothers shows each young man in the conservative style of dress advocated by many English rural gentlemen; an excellent example of the short 'bag-wig' worn by the brothers is also found in a similar image, comparable in colouring, composition and date, that is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As well as fixing a deadline for a minimum dating of these objects (i.e., certainly before June of 1728), Hervey's impassioned metaphors to Stephen Fox, implicitly criticizing Zincke's talent, correspond with a known ebb in the

5 Murdoch, John and Jim Murrell, Patrick J. Noon, and Roy Strong, *The English Miniature* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1981), pg. 164.

6 *Ibid.*, pg. 164.

7 Basil S. Long, *British Miniatures 1520-1860* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1929), pg. 471.

8 Katherine Baetjer, 'British Portraits in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,' *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Now Series, Vol. 57, No. 1 (1999), pg. 24 of 1-73.

9 Meaning either Hervey or, quite plausibly, Fox likely paid Zincke directly.

miniaturist's career, as by this time the painter, referred to as 'Zink,' 'Zinks' or 'Zincks' by his English patrons, was struggling to deal with the increased demands of his business and the accompanying decline in his personal health.¹⁰ Overwork and the precise attention to microscopic detail necessitated by the small-scale format of the enamel miniature had taken a heavy toll on the artist's vision, with several of his later works marred by uncertain glazing techniques, stippling, and similar sight-related defects.¹¹

Zincke's portraiture, even when suffering as a result of the increasing blindness of the artist, is still visually stunning: the faces of the Georgian nobility, and at times something of the intricacy of their costumes, characters, and modes of life, come through with great vivacity. The relative similarity of these early Georgian miniature portraits to each other, especially from the hand of one artist (or, one might say, the many hands of one studio) can act to heighten those subtle differences which might otherwise be lost in the plethoric flow of data radiating from a conventional full or half-length portrait. Among these differences are the Francophile elements in Hervey's portrait, which, compared to the conservative styles adopted by the Fox brothers, shows strong elements of French cultural influence in the manner of wearing the wig. Even the expression on Hervey's face, with its oval marred by the distinctive cleft in his chin, contains hints in his smile of the *toujours gai* that influential critic Joseph Addison and the readers of his mouthpiece, *Spectator*, found so revolting. Speaking of a contemporary French artist, Addison invokes strong language against foreign technique:

All the faces he drew were very remarkable for their smiles, and a certain smirking air, which he bestowed indifferently on every age and degree of either sex. The *toujours gai* appeared even in his judges, bishops, and privy councillors: in a word, all his men were *petits maitres*, [fops] and all his women coquettes. The drapery of his figures was extremely well suited to his

10 Basil S. Long, *British Miniatures 1520-1860* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1929), pg. 472.

11 John Murdoch and Jim Murrell, Patrick J. Noon, and Roy Strong, *The English Miniature* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1981), pg. 168.

faces, and was made up of all the glaring colours that could be mixed together.¹²

The nationalist language of this sophisticated connoisseur speaks of the prevailing attitude towards French portraiture in Post-Knellerian London. Lord Hervey, whose scholarly tastes were well developed, may well have encouraged Zincke to create a more informal, stylishly 'French' likeness of him as a reactionary strategy to the dictates of his father's generation. "Formal portraiture in all media," writes John Murdoch, "was becoming the art of a whole society and not the prerogative of the court, a development that encouraged a more genial intimacy and an unaffected interpretation of character."¹³

One of the most subtle signs of "character" in the eighteenth century was the wig. Wigs, as Marcia Pointon has persuasively argued, were, especially for men, the defining mark or sign of power in the societies of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Britain. Other noted scholars, such as Angela Rosenthal, have continued Pointon's critical legacy by expanding or revising her model. "The particular urgency of hair in the eighteenth century is, to my thinking, related to fundamental notions of sexual, national and racial difference within a rapidly expanding global economy."¹⁴ The appearance of the full-bottomed wig or *perruque* at the English court, originally imported to Britain from France in the wake of the Restoration, was a sign of continental cultural influence. Like the hand-in-waistcoat mode of masculinity that signified elegance and propriety, the mode of wearing the *perruque* first gained widespread usage at the French court, and was subsequently internalized and modified in England to suit the needs of the aristocracy. Styles could and did change with a dizzying rapidity, but the wig remained a necessary expression of status, class and wealth for all elite men throughout the eighteenth century.

12 Joseph Addison, 'Dream of a Picture Gallery,' *Spectator*, No. 83, June 5, 1711 in J.H. Fowler (ed.), *Essays on Addison: XIII*, <<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/fowlerjh/chap13.htm>>, par. 3.

13 John Murdoch and Jim Murrell, Patrick J. Noon, and Roy Strong, *The English Miniature* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1981), pg 169.

14 Angela Rosenthal, 'Raising Hair,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pg. 2.

The potency of the wig as a status-expressing device was such that it represented “austere masculine authority, articulating the claims of professional men in an emerging public sphere” and also created “gender solidarity, by muting differences of rank, political interest, region etc.”¹⁵ Wigs were important in male fashion in England from the late seventeenth century onward, but elite women’s fashion failed to adopt the wig until much later, after the wearing of hair powder became *de rigueur*. The political, economic and social autonomy suggested by such headgear may, I feel, have contributed to feminine reluctance to don the wig. Other authors have engaged with Pointon’s definition of the eighteenth-century male wig as a potent sign of power, such as Lynn Festa, who writes that “designed to cancel out individual vagaries, the wig does not derive meaning from the wearer; instead, it confers a corporate identity upon the individual, marking him as a member of a profession, a person of rank, a public man.”¹⁶

While this analysis is correct, provocative and historically well-grounded, Festa’s argument fails to take into consideration the subtle, almost imperceptible ways in which such “corporate” signs of identity could be subverted, tweaked or readjusted to display individuality and creativity. Zincke’s portrait of Stephen Fox, which was cherished by Hervey, shows a wig that conforms to an expected standard of aristocratic male identity, privileging the obvious, immediately recognizable marks of rank, wealth and participation in civic life without highlighting individual deviations from the norm. In contrast, Zincke, in his miniature portrait of Lord Hervey, is far more interested in cleverly subverting such concerns. Hervey’s wig is a type rarely seen in English portraiture, gathered to the side and falling onto one shoulder in a knot highly reminiscent of feminine hairstyles of the period, which encouraged one lock of hair to grow longer than the rest so as to be better displayed over one shoulder. A sitter with a similar, although less exaggerated, style of French-

15 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) qtd. in Lynn M. Festa, ‘Personal Effects: Wigs and Possessive Individualism in the Long Eighteenth Century,’ *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, No. 2, (Spring 2005), pg. 62.

16 Lynn Festa, *Ibid.*, pg. 62.

influenced wig is also seen in Zincke's 1724 portrait of Richard Abell.

Hervey's wig is therefore indicative of the existing conditions of social play, of a willingness to tamper (but only slightly!) with expected rules so as to draw attention to "individual vagarity" by utilizing the very same visual language that should have been used to "cancel out" his idiosyncrasies.¹⁷ Dror Wahrman sees such spaces for dissidence and gender subversion as a direct result of social conditions that were, given the dominant ideologies of the time, surprisingly flexible. He notes that "the consequent autonomy of gender from the dictates of sex, it can then be suggested, created a space for play, that is, a space for imaginable dissonances of gender over (supposedly) stable sexual bodies."¹⁸

Play, in this case, is careful to be as non-threatening as possible, even as Zincke represents his sitter with the Francophile accoutrements of a stylish androgyny that would surely have raised the hackles of Addison's kind of connoisseur. Hervey does not, however, eschew the visible signs of rank and power to express dissidence with Augustan formality, perhaps suggestive of his entrenchment within the world of privilege that was the Georgian court order and his high-profile position at court. Another of Hervey's friends who did tweak the usual rules of self-representation even further was Thomas Winnington (1696-1746), of Stanford Court. Winnington, an avid Whig, was an MP whose political connections with Sir Robert Walpole drew

17 Hervey's dress and demeanour in this work strongly contributes to the hypothesis that he was deliberately utilizing Francophile aesthetics as a reaction against the ultra-nationalist stance of many of the die-hard Whigs. Consistently plagued with accusations of effeminacy throughout his life, Hervey, at this stage in his career, must have been aware of how many of his father's contemporaries equated elite French masculinity with a loss of virility. "Effeminacy was perhaps the most widespread anxiety of the eighteenth century... For those wishing to celebrate the distinctiveness of their own national culture, France itself came to embody western civilization's putative concern with mere appearances and the 'insincere' concealment of impulses." See Christopher Forth and Bernard Taithe, *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics* (Houndsmills, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2007), pg. 6; see also Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey: Eighteenth Century Courtier* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pg. 14.

18 Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004) pg. 43.

him into Hervey's orbit, and who was later briefly appointed to a position as Lord Treasurer.

Winnington's miniature portrait on enamel from the atelier of Zincke, dated to c. 1730, is housed in the National Portrait Gallery in London. In contrast to the portraits of his closest friends, Lord Winnington's image is startlingly bereft of the powdered *perruques* that frame nearly every other male face in Zincke's oeuvre. Instead, a nightcap, sumptuously coloured and made of rich materials, conceals the shaven head most noblemen adopted in order to better wear the hot, heavy and cumbersome wigs, which by the early decades of the eighteenth century were powdered with barber's confections of flour and a variety of oils.

The direct predecessors of the Winnington portrait by Zincke are to be found in Sir Godfrey Kneller's images of the influential Whig elite, heads of the great land-owning families, who formed the social aspect of the Whig party known as the 'Kit-Cat' club. Most of the men were represented with attributes of their profession, status or hobby, which included considerably disparate activities. Jacob Tonson, a bookseller and commoner, was the *de facto* leader of a club that included Joseph Addison, the Duke of Somerset, and Sir Robert Walpole. Despite differences in background, nearly all of the over forty individuals represented were depicted with the status-alluding frame of the wig. Individuals who are exempted from this general rule of Kneller's were done so at the express wish of the sitter, who, by deviating from the norm, drew attention to themselves: Tonson, for example, as befitting an eccentric intellectual with no tangible political power, is painted wearing a soft cap. "When the wig was removed it was customarily replaced with the soft cap that is frequently represented in seemingly more informal portrait busts."¹⁹

The absence of the wig was therefore a device that was designed to draw attention away from familiar signs of status and power back towards the individual head, re-centering the viewer's gaze on the sitter's less immediately noticeable

19 Malcolm Baker, 'No Cap or Wig but a Thin Hair upon It': Hair and the male portrait bust in England around 1750,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pg 68.

idiosyncrasies. Kneller's portrait of Charles Fitzroy (1690-1757), 2nd Duke of Grafton, is striking in its deviation from the cautious professionalism of the other oligarchs. The swirls of an oval, extravagant silk cap worn by the young Duke, whose indolence and sensuality earned him the nickname 'Booby' among his contemporaries, is contrasted with the sharp, arrow-like dive of the neckline, as the young nobleman's hand traces open the folds of his cravat with seemingly careless, casual ease.²⁰

Fitzroy, whose father was the illegitimate son of Charles II and his mistress Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine (1641-1701), came from a family which was continually associated with the memory of illicit sexuality, while the personal mannerisms and behavior of the young Duke, at least at this represented stage in his life, spoke of the hothouse atmosphere of the court and of its eroticized nature. Winnington's portrait by Zincke speaks of a similar preoccupation with court morals and the sensuality of informal dress, where the absence of the wig could and did speak volumes about the sexual attitudes of the sitter. Removing the wig, or causing oneself to be depicted without it, was nothing less than dissidence, since "once it became customary for gentlemen to wear wigs, to appear without one was to expose oneself as eccentric, exceptional or deviant."²¹

Besides allowing the elite Georgian male considerable diversity in how he was represented, the miniature could serve an important role in the communal reification of the aristocracy. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Winnicott and Semble, who articulate something of the importance of infantile creativity in the subsequent recognition of the transitional object, the object that both denies and reifies the infant's sense of individuality, Pointon argues that hand-held miniatures can be read to function as transitional – positioned in a liminal sphere between private and public. As psychological defenses that both argue for the ego's

20 J. Douglas Stewart, *Sir Godfrey Kneller and the English Baroque Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Appendix Two: Portrait of Charles Fitzroy, 2nd Duke of Grafton (1683-1757).

21 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) pg. 117.

interconnectivity within larger, surrounding social networks, and yet still insist on the transcendence of the individual, 'portrait-objects' necessarily point to the ties of blood, affection, or, in the inevitable terminology of the period, 'interest'. Yet they also underline an individual's personality, whose representation attempts to find chrysalis in the carefully staged, formulaic visual rituals of the jeweled miniature.

"Like other defenses (such as the debates on luxury or the preoccupation with politeness)," Pointon writes, "the gem-encrusted portrait-object, ring-fenced from the real by miniaturization, materials, and technology, is given to be worn in a game that is more than competitive in the merely social or diplomatic sense. The portrait-object offers the prerequisite transitional object that can insist its bearer is at one and the same time socially attached and individually separate."²² For Pointon, bestowing semi-precious materials, such as diamond covers, minute carving, and the like creates a potent synthesis between "economic and sentimental value: the worth of the subject was irrevocably endorsed by the precious materials producing at the symbolic level a sign of unique distinction."²³ Pointon goes on to suggest that fusing family and money creates an "explicit" preciousness, in this medium reinforced by tactility.

The desire, or even the psychic need, to hold, to touch, or to cherish the miniaturized image of the absent person is vitally important for the conceptualization of the object as a stand-in for the absent person, and thus as a relic of their own relationship to the represented.²⁴ Hervey's language in describing the work of Zincke is highly suggestive in this regard, as Fox the subject is tied to Fox the object: "the thing on which they are so lovingly laid," in his narrative of internal envisionment, by "colours fixed by so much better a fire."²⁵ It is clear that miniature portraits were used, at the very least in this example, to celebrate, commemorate and

22 Marcia Pointon, "Surrounded by Brilliants": Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England' *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 83, No. 1 (March 2001), pg. 68.

23 *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

24 *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

25 Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, June 18th, 1728, *Hervey MSS 941/47/4*, pg. 77, 78.

“fix” the depth and fire of affective desire, just as the enamellist fixed the colours of his product through the heat of the glazing and firing process. The miniature portrait clearly was used by Lord John Hervey and by Stephen Fox (later Fox-Strangways after his marriage in 1736 to a thirteen-year old heiress) as a device that legitimized and stabilized how the two men thought about their personal relationship, an understanding that was probably shared by the other elite, Whig-affiliated men who sought out their company.²⁶

Miniatures were originally not meant to function in isolation as the locket does, but to be passed from hand to hand, or sometimes even worn (usually only by women) as further indications of explicit links within the elaborate networks of the court, where marriages, birth lineages or court appointments were celebrated and publicized through a doubling of signs. In Hervey and Stephen Fox’s case, the same doubling of signs articulated an eroticized homosociality that subverted patriarchy from within, utilizing the very hegemonic discourses that buttressed patriarchy to convey dissident desires.

Homosocial bonding, of course, can never be completely stable, certain or fixed, as it depends on the shifting life-histories of the relevant individuals. John Potvin’s discussion of the term, first critically inaugurated by Sedgwick, highlights the oscillatory character of homosociality: “In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines male homosocial bonding and power along a continuum mitigated by ‘the gender system as a whole,’ which she designates as ‘male homosocial desire.’ Distinct from the homosexual, the homosocial institutionally

26 Some evidence does exist that a physical relationship existed between the two men. One letter in particular is most frequently cited as providing ‘proof,’ if such a thing were possible, of mutual eroticism. “I assure you (if ‘tis any satisfaction to you to know it) you are not in the least danger of being forgotten,” writes Hervey. “The favours I have received at Your Honour’s Hands are of such a Nature that tho’ the impression might wear out of my Mind, yet they are written in such lasting characters upon every Limb, that ‘tis impossible for me to look on a Leg or an Arm without having my Memory refresh’d. I have some thoughts of exposing the marks of your *pollisonerie* [lewdness] to move Compassion, as the Beggars that have been Slaves at Jerusalem doe the burnt Crucifix upon their Arms, they have remain’d so long that I begin to think they are equally indelible.” Lord Hervey to Stephen Fox, c. 1728, in Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Mollyhouse: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1830*. (London: GMP, 1992), pg. 149; see also Camille A. Paglia, ‘Lord Hervey and Pope,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1973), pg. 358.

reinforces the 'social bonds between persons of the same sex.'²⁷ Potvin goes on to comment that the "shifting and ever-contingent boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual placed along the homosocial continuum is problematized by the potential of same-sex eroticism, a desire which must remain inarticulate."²⁸

Certainly Hervey, Fox and their associates felt the need to remain publicly inarticulate: their surviving letters are sprinkled with agitated entreaties about the need to be cautious about what the recipient of the letter committed to paper. "For I would always have our pleasures the same," writes Lord Hervey, in one of the most explicit references to the need for self-censorship: "If this letter does not come too late to you to prevent you making any steps, this affair may weaken your interest with your friends. I would caution you for God's sake to be careful how far you embark, 'tis a very tender point for your reputation, I dare expectate [sic] no further by letter and wish you *meritome*. J."²⁹

Hervey's agitation is certainly fuelled by his relatively high-ranking position within the court, but also potentially in the growing visibility of the two men's relationship. Following their return to England, Hervey, especially, complains about his mail being opened, likely by spies loyal to the opposition government, but potentially also by his own ministry. "I have ten thousand things to say to you," he writes, in a letter from London to the absent Fox, dated November 25, 1729, "but every letter I receive from you or anybody else is opened, and I suppose the same useless curiosity extends to those I write, so I can say nothing I would not advertise."³⁰ Other, related issues in the *Hervey MSS* also include an attention to the paper trail of the physical correspondence itself: such an innate concern with detail was by no

27 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pg. 2, qtd. in John Potvin, 'Vapour and Steam: The Victorian Turkish Bath, Homosocial Health, and Male Bodies on Display,' *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2005), pg. 327; see also Jill Campbell, 'Politics and Sexuality in Portraits of John, Lord Hervey,' *Word and Image* 4 (1990), pg. 281.

28 John Potvin, *Ibid.*, pgs. 327, 328.

29 Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, January 11, 1727/8, *Hervey MSS 941/47/4*, pg. 78.

30 *Ibid.*, pg. 99.

means limited to the veiled references to homoeroticism that exist throughout the text, but also extending to other moral issues associated with liberal attitudes, notably suicide, a not uncommon event in the early Georgian court. Hervey, for example, writes Lady Mary Wortley Montagu inquiring if she ever received a letter in which he commented on the reasons for an unmarried friend's suicide (Lord Scarborough, a crony, took his own life in 1739), commenting that he begs "to know particularly whether you ever received a long letter from me after the death of poor Lord Scarborough in which there were various reflections which I should be sorry to have fall into hands that were not designed to receive them."³¹

One of the most intriguing facets in the overall importance of Zincke's miniature portraits of the Hervey set of Whig elites is the fact that the dissidence or subversion expressed by these male courtiers exists side-by-side alongside orthodox narratives of stability and continuity. Hervey and Fox's resistance is formulated in such terms that allows for the existence of the miniature to function as an indicator of familial links, but the two men also used miniatures as affective, transitional devices that, as Hervey's impassioned letters recount, used a semi-public, socially reified medium for the re-inscription of dangerously liminal modes of being, identity and desire.

Like the snuffboxes or porcelain tea-sets whose use was ritualized by the Georgian aristocracy in the modes of polite interaction that signified social position, miniature portraits and jewelry carried connotations of permanency that had long been the preserve of the traditional landed aristocracy, or at least the persons who had achieved landed status. "Jewelry, bequeathed as heirloom or gift, carries narratives of continuity and signifies the transvaluation of the material into abstract qualities such as history or spirituality."³² Besides the intangible, spiritual benefits of the highly decorative, miniaturized eighteenth-century object, luxury consumer

31 Lord John Hervey to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, letter from St. James dated November 2, 1739, *Hervey MSS 941/47/2*, pg. 18.

32 Marcia Pointon, "Surrounded by Brilliants": Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England, *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 83, No. 1 (March 2001), pg. 55.

goods such as snuffboxes, tea sets and miniature portraits had a high political value at court, where the value of such precious things was deliberately aggrandized by a monarchy that used them as visible manifestations of power. At times, “the fine dividing line between gift and payment of services” was often considerably blurred, as in the cases of the wife and sister of the Duke of Dorset, who, as representatives of the Sackville clan, received not only a parcel of sumptuous goods but a snuffbox containing a thousand-pound note from George II and Queen Caroline.³³

Hervey himself was no stranger to similar interactions, as from 1730 onward his rising favor with the Queen found concrete manifestation in the shower of gifts she publicly conferred on him. Queen Caroline’s influence over national affairs during this period is well recorded in the writings of other courtiers as well as Hervey’s, and in fact the beginnings of many of her political, cultural and social initiatives were implemented right from the moment of the Hanoverian accession in 1717. Since George II’s mother, Sophia of Celle, remained confined in Hanover under house imprisonment until her death, Caroline, as Princess of Wales, was the highest-ranking female royal in England.³⁴

Lord Hervey’s favour by the Queen, who actively sought out his company and consulted him as an advisor, is a sign of the degree to which his intelligence, wit and connoisseurship was valued by a woman whose lasting reputation has been one of scholarship and learning. “One of the few British sovereigns who can be described as an intellectual,” is how Judith Coulton, historian of eighteenth-century garden design, characterizes the personality of Caroline of Ansbach. “She played an important role in English affairs from the time of her husband’s accession in 1727 until her death ten years later... On four separate occasions, for months at a time, the Queen acted as regent while her husband absented himself [in Hanover with his

33 *Ibid.*, pg. 55.

34 Domenico Bertoloni Meli, “Caroline, Leibniz, and Clarke,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1999) pg 472.

mistresses]. Caroline was no mere *locus temens* on these occasions.”³⁵ The Queen herself recognized Hervey’s merit. “It is well I am so old, or I should be talked of for this creature,” jested Caroline in 1734 of Lord Hervey. In the same year Hervey wrote to Stephen Fox’s younger brother Henry, later Lord Holland, that “I can not help bragging to you of a Present the Queen made me.... Of the finest Gold Snuff-box I ever saw, with all the Arts and Sciences by her own bespeaking carv’d upon it.”³⁶ Besides illustrating the Queen’s own connoisseurship, the incident had further ramifications. “On 1 Feb. 1734 a jeweler’s apprentice was committed to Newgate for robbing his master of a gold snuffbox, the property of Lord Hervey (Daily Advertiser). Can it have been this one, kept in the vault of the jeweler? Six months later Hervey tells Henry Fox that the Queen has given him another fine snuffbox (9 June 1734).”³⁷ Clearly, miniaturized luxury goods like snuffboxes were used by the Queen as (highly public) expressions of personal and political affiliation.

Palm-sized, decorative and crafted from valuable materials, such objects could be passed from hand to hand during a set of social rituals like the drinking of tea or the morning visit, outliving the occasion as a memento; a particularly succinct description of the preeminence of such items in the life structures of the early Georgian nobility says they are “the visible bit of the iceberg that is the whole social process.”³⁸ As such, snuffboxes, miniature portraits and fine luxuries like imported china had aristocratic meanings of court service and structure; their appearance across most levels of upper and middle-class society by the close of the century points

35 Judith Coulton, ‘Merlin’s Cave and Queen Caroline: Garden Art as Political Propaganda,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pg 2. See also Gregory Brown, ‘Leibniz’s Endgame and the Ladies of the Court,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2004), pp. 75-100, specifically pgs. 81-90, 92-98, for a more specific discussion of the exhaustive intellectual interests and endeavours of this truly remarkable Queen.

36 Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey: Eighteenth Century Courtier* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), Pg. 171.

37 *Ibid.*, Pg. 171.

38 Mary Douglas, ‘Why Do People want Goods?’ in Shaun Hargreaves Heap and Angus Ross (eds.), *Understanding the Enterprise Culture: Themes in the work of Mary Douglas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pg. 25, qtd. in Marcia Pointon, ‘“Surrounded by Brilliants”: Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England’ *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 83, No. 1, (March 2001), pg. 58.

to this period as being a particularly influential epoch in the dissemination of such goods.

Art historical inquiries that deal with the spread of the miniaturized luxury item and other sumptuous goods therefore have great potential to engage with questions of the psychological effects of such affective materialism, including the ways in which homosocial relations, whether consciously eroticized or not, came to be conceptualized through the self-conscious use of ritual. Social rites such as the drinking of tea, the giving of snuffboxes or the group's perusal of miniaturized objects like the small-scale portrait were all repetitive actions that came to be reified through the preciousness of the objects involved in these activities. The mystical connotations of this process, which create a secular mimicry of the preciousness accorded to sacral vessels of church, temple or shrine, cannot and should not be divorced from customary histories of eighteenth-century consumption.

Christian Frederick Zincke was not the only miniaturist to create a likeness of Lord Hervey, although it seems likely that despite being a "foreign" painter, Zincke and his close association with the court ironically represents the most 'English' of the small-scale Hervey portraits. The second artist favored by Lord Hervey was Johann Lorenz Natter (1705 – 1763), a gem-engraver who was working in Rome during Hervey and Fox's sojourn in Italy, and who created an *all'antica* engraved gem-portrait of Hervey in late 1729.

Natter's gemstone image is strikingly dissimilar to that of Zincke's, even allowing for the natural differences resulting from disparities between the work of an enamellist and a gemstone engraver. Despite their being dated to within a year or two of each other, the image by Natter is radically disassociated, iconographically speaking, from the obvious signs of secular gentility that Zincke, living in post-Knellerian London, was expected to excel in: it is not surprising that, following the climate of adulation for Kneller which endured for many decades, Zincke's attention to contemporary fashions and the modernity of his sitter's dress and grooming is constant throughout his oeuvre. By way of contrast, in Rome, Natter is very much caught up in tropes of classicism, antique revivalism, and the deliberately

archaicizing motifs used to express an impassioned nostalgia for the grandeur of Greco-Roman culture.

Instead of facing the sitter directly, as espoused by Zincke and the post-Knellerian generation, the *all'antica* carving shows Hervey in severe side-relief, head startlingly bare of the perewig that signaled his social power, garbed in the manner of a Roman patrician: the entire composition and execution of the small-scale portrait has been heavily influenced by observation of surviving Roman cameo-reliefs, and shows a prescient neo-classicism that is, as yet, rarely to be observed in Britain. Natter's choice of the brooch that fastens over Hervey's shoulder was a motif he would use again later in his career, specifically with another British sitter, Charles Sackville, Earl of Middlesex and later Duke of Dorset, who was in Rome four years later, and who commissioned a silver medallion from Natter in exactly the same severe, *all'antica* manner.

This connection may not be wholly incidental, as religious-occult links of social dissidence linked Sackville to Stephen Fox and thus to Hervey himself; I refer to the Masonic links between male members of the Sackville family and Hervey, hinted at by Baker, Laing and Harrison and made plausible through external references. Natter's medallion portrait of Sackville, for instance, included a figure of Horus on the reverse, identified by some Freemasons as a precursor deity to their own rites. Some of Hervey's closest friends and acquaintances are known to have been Masons, with both Stephen Fox and Charles Spencer (Churchill), future 3rd Duke of Marlborough, received into the Lodge in 1729.³⁹ Natter himself, by virtue of his periphatc, transnational career, played an important role in the spread of the Rosicrucians or 'Knights of the Rosy Cross,' whose ideologies closely paralleled those of the Freemasons.

Natter's allusions to Masonic spirituality are not discernable in his earlier

39 Malcolm Baker, Alistair Laing and Colin Harrison, 'Bouchardon's British Sitters: Sculptural Portraiture in Rome and the Classicizing Bust around 1730,' *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 142, No. 1173 (Dec., 2000), pg. 754. Both these men were later depicted with Hervey in a conversation piece by Hogarth, dated to c. 1740, which is displayed at the Hervey family seat (now administered by the National Trust) of Ickworth, in Suffolk.

portrait of Lord Hervey, but he was almost certainly recommended to Lord Hervey by Baron Philip von Stosch, a double agent in the pay of the British government. Stosch's inclination towards transvestism was largely ignored by Roman high society on account of his impeccably sophisticated tastes as a scholar, antiquarian and connoisseur, while his dissidence in gender was paralleled by his interest in esoteric spiritualism, as his "home at the Via del Malcontendi became a center for spiritual inquiry of a Rosicrucian, alchemical-pansophic nature."⁴⁰

The holy city, as an irresistible magnet for the nobly-bred "Grand" tourists educated on a regular diet of Juvenal, Horace and Virgil, had a remarkably diverse and (for the time) tolerant, cosmopolitan culture. It is significant to note that, at this time, sodomy was known as the "Italian" vice in England, with King William III lampooned in a nascent popular press of indulging in 'Italian' pursuits with his much younger, wilder protégé, while in France Saint-Simon and others lamented the spread of "ultramontane" (literally, beyond the mountains) pursuits among the decadent young princes of the blood at Versailles.⁴¹

Far from being fleeting references by isolated individuals, these conceptions of "modern" Italian culture in both France and England were reinforced by massively popular cultural institutions like the theatre, using nationalist assertions of the importation of foreign vices to highlight changing manners. "Eighteenth-Century social commentary," writes Dror Wahrman, "boasted a long line of extravagantly dressed gender-ambiguous male figures from the fops...to the Italians whose gender-blurred reputation was captured in Samuel Richardson's memorable three-way division of the character list in *Sir Charles Grandison* into "Men," "Women," and "Italians." (Imagine a theatre featuring three doors at the back marked "men,"

40 Ida Postma, 'The Birth of a New Order,' *Sunrise* (Theosophical University Press: October 1980), par. 4, 5 at <<http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/world/modeur/ph-ida1.htm>>, Accessed May 2007.

41 Louis-Francois de Bouchet, Marquis de Sourches and Gabriel-Jules, Comte de Cosnac, Arthur Bertrand (eds.), *Memoirs sur le Regne de Louis XIV*, vol. 1., pgs. 110-113, in Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Raga (eds.), *Homosexuality in early modern France : a documentary collection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pgs. 118, 240, footnote 65

“women,” and “Italians.”)⁴²

Such was the context of what “modern” Italy and Italians meant to the transnational hereditary elite, whose religious differences did not completely mask a common cultural affinity grounded, at least ideologically, in ancient Rome, and who were also fascinated with the tremendous cultural achievements of the Italian city-states during the Renaissance. These commonalities resulted in the magnetism of Rome and its enduring popularity as the end destination of the Grand Tour, but also allowed for the French and British aristocracy to “other” a wider Italian ethnicity as potentially sexually liminal - an ‘othering’ and exoticization that may indeed have increased the fascination and appeal of Italy to aristocrats like Hervey or Stosch.

Baron Stosch, as a noted intellectual, retained close links with Cardinal Albani and the exiled Stuart descendants of James II, who were living in Rome after changing Franco-British relations forced them to flee St. Germain; Stosch was thus an invaluable observer of all Jacobite intrigue emanating from the city, and as such he was paid heavily for his services by Sir Robert Walpole’s government, reporting to the administration the arrival and departure of all the nobly-bred English visitors to Rome. Hervey and Stosch were tied by similar interests, as Hervey’s antiquarian leanings were paralleled by Stosch’s centrality within the scholarly and artistic expatriate circles in Rome. Gem-carving was described by Stosch as “*ma passion, ma folie dominante*” and any list of his achievements should mention, besides his career as an undercover surveillance agent, “his study of antique gems, many of them in the remarkable collection he himself owned.”⁴³

One of Stosch’s greatest achievements is the unexpectedly pervasive triumph of neoclassical portraiture, in which, in his capacity as an intelligent patron with comprehensive historical knowledge, he was able to play a decisive role. Demonstrated by a sketch by Ghezzi of Stosch in 1717, the same year Stosch

42 Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004) pg. 60.

43 Malcolm Baker, Alistair Laing and Colin Harrison, ‘Bouchardon’s British Sitters: Sculptural Portraiture in Rome and the Classicizing Bust around 1730,’ *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 142, No. 1173 (Dec., 2000), Pg. 759.

commissioned a profile medallion in ivory by Giovanni Pozzi, these images provide important links in a genealogy of stylistic factors that contributed to the appearance of Natter's images of Hervey and Sackville. Both works predate by a decade the subsequent appearance of a highly seminal marble bust of Stosch by the French artist Edme Bouchardon. As Bouchardon was also subsequently responsible for a host of similar busts of British tourists of noble blood, including one of Lord Hervey, executed in the same year as Natter's likeness, these early *all'antica* portraits inaugurated by Stosch in Rome are indicators of the depth of the Baron's learning and the stylistic influence his kind of patronage could exert over subsequent developments in eighteenth-century sculptural portraiture. As Baker, Laing and Harrison remark, what is seminal about these patronage choices "is not simply that these images articulated the sitter's antiquarian concerns through their mode of dress and hair, but that - in line with the almost impartial and equal interest they showed in antique marble statuary, gems and coins - there was a continuum between sculptural portraits in different media and on different scales."⁴⁴

Through an analysis of archival material like the *Hervey MSS*, early eighteenth-century patterns of consumption, as represented by the miniaturized portrait, can be situated into a context that allows for multiple readings of the resulting luxury object. Archival documentation gives precious context to the motivations and desires that were driving the conceptualization of masculinities, while the work of artists like Zincke or Natter commemorates both aesthetic change and the personal relationships between discrete units of elite, transnational society. Sometimes, such as in Stosch's case, these relationships and affective attitudes found expression in learned articulations of classicist revivalism. I believe that, by juxtaposing relevant archival material culled from sitters' letters with art historical analyses of their likenesses, it is possible to construct a more sensitive, nuanced and inclusive discussion of the physical works of art themselves. By taking the portraits of Lord Hervey and his set as case studies with which to interrogate the conditions

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 760.

of possibility that channeled performances of dissident gender at the court of King George II, an enriched understanding of early Georgian portraiture is revealed, one that contributes to much-needed processes of re-including, reinserting and reclaiming a queer historical presence into official narratives of early eighteenth-century art history.

Other signs, such as the wig, or the absence of the wig, can speak volumes about how some of the nobility might resist naturalized structures of gender through personal performance. The physical preciousness of works by Zincke or Natter, in the instance of sitters like Lord Hervey and Thomas Winnington, should be thought of in terms of their socially legitimizing, celebratory character, and it is this that is truly vital about the study of small-scale portraits, since something of the vivacity, complexity and intricacy of individual identities can be specifically linked via the formal characteristics of a the genre's medium, "*in colours fixed by so much better a fire.*"⁴⁵ Few other kinds of portraiture radiate such a generous intimacy, speaking to the strength of affective relations among the Georgian elite in a way that is deeply resonant to a present obsessed with consumption, individuality, and diversity in gender.

ERIC WEICHEL is a 2nd-Year Ph.D Candidate in Art History at Queen's University. His work investigates the nature of elite masculinities at the Georgian court, drawing attention to the role of transnational cultural exchange in the aesthetics of early 18th-century British portraiture.

⁴⁵ Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, June 18, 1728, *Hervey MSS 941/47/4*, pg. 77, 78.

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