

Raised to Grace

Ladies and Gentlemen, 1850 to 1990



BIOGRAPHIES

Falling From Grace: The Dukes of Mallard
Empires of Grace: Ladies and Gentlemen
The Blandy Papers: Maid for Murder
Manly Grace: The Myth of the Mallards
Faith in Grace: The Bishops of Mallard

MUSINGS

Manners of Grace: Axioms
States of Grace: The Mallard origin
Proof of Grace: Mallard Evidence

STORIES

The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Collected Mallard Papers, Series I: States of Grace

Copyright remains with the editors, who may at any time elect to reproduce, revise or abandon it. Readers are at liberty to imagine value. For those who require certainty, the notional price is three guineas.

© 1990 Viscountess Viola Violet Vorpel (attributed)

© 1990 Arthur Frederick Blandy, PhD. (editor, attributed)

© 1990 Ima Duckson & Sons, Printers & Ornamental Bookwrights (design, typesetting)

© 2025 Apond Editions, an imprint of Ducksina House (first critical edition; inconsistencies preserved by intention)

Produced in Sydney, Australia by grace@mayflet.com [web: mayflet.com]

No part of this publication may be corrected without the express permission of the Mallard family. All typographical peculiarities are the responsibility of the original designers, whose aesthetic cannot at this late date, be altered without disturbing the historical record.

All rights reserved, or none at all, depending on whom you believe. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without prior permission—though history suggests that parts will be copied, misquoted and misattributed regardless. Copies may be requested, passed hand-to-hand, gifted or left to languish on a shelf where they might be mistaken for a family history.

Preface to This Edition

Editor's Note

Among the lesser papers salvaged from the Vorpel-Mallard trunks at Sussex was a slim bundle tied with a faded ribbon, marked in a neat but hurried hand: "*Not for publication—unless circumstances demand.*" The hand is Viola's.

Whether she intended these fragments as a second volume of her *Trumpet in the Dust* lectures, or as an altogether separate book, is unclear. The sisters disagreed even on that. Octavia, in Sydney, maintained they were notes never finished. Gloriana, predictably, declared them "complete" and pressed them upon her son as a *necessary education*. Elspeth wrote to Jeanne (a letter survives, the ink washed thin) saying: "*Viola cannot leave men alone—she must have the last word, even in their own language.*"

What is certain is that the pages were bundled with a series of annotations in another hand—that of Arthur Frederick Blandy, valet to Gloriana's son Fabrice. That the same Blandy who styled himself a scholar of "U and Non-U speech" should meddle in Viola's manuscript is both unsurprising and deeply suspicious. He admits, in one margin, to "tidying where necessary," though his definition of necessity may have been broad. In one place, he has inserted a footnote longer than the original page.

In another, he confesses: "*If the Lady herself had seen fit to include this, I cannot see why it should be omitted by me.*"

The trunk contained other contradictions: Elspeth's comments clipped to Octavia's essays; Gloriana's underlinings in thick pencil; even a pencilled remark, likely Fabrice's, in which he scrawls: "*Mother's obsession with titles has made me an anachronism.*"

Readers should therefore approach these pages with the scepticism appropriate to all Mallard archives. They are neither complete nor reliable. The word *gentleman*, which Viola here skewers with her usual élan, shifts meaning with every voice: parasite, patron, parvenu, liar, dilettante. Perhaps the only continuity is fraudulence.

And yet—taken together, the fragments do form a parallel story to the decline of the dukes. If *Falling from Grace* charts the collapse of titled nobility, then *Raised to Grace* traces the hollow rise of the gentleman: from the parasite of 1750 to the empty signifier of 2000. That it concludes with Fabrice—tutored by Blandy, yet rejecting all pretensions to gentility by becoming a purveyor of pleasure—is either the perfect irony or the final indictment.

The reader may decide.

Preface to This Collection

Viscountess Viola Vorpel

You will find in these pages fragments, trifles, diaries, myths, ditties, sermons, and other scraps besides. This untidy collection is not a history—it is a ledger of deceits, a satire of pedigree, a love-letter to folly.

Though its pages may glitter with the manners of dukes and the aspirations of gentlemen, it is no volume devoted to their supposed ascendancy. The nobility, as you will see, have long since proved a spent force—decorative, perhaps, but useless as gilt on a coffin.

Of necessity, to prove my point, I have included that ludicrous guide left by my sister Gloriana (in Sydney of all places) to her son Fabrice on the manners and behaviour of a gentleman. If nothing else, it shows that the vestiges of power never disperse; they are merely colonised, altered to suit, and pressed into the service of personal advancement in a society of equally rabble-born folk.

My aim in this archive is to trace the *rise to grace* of women. The benefits to us—myself in particular—of an education that permitted us to read the Classics in their original tongues are not, as men so often suppose, immeasurable. On the contrary, they may be measured precisely by the discomfort they cause in drawing rooms and cathedrals alike. The true purpose of learning, after all, is not to soothe the existing order but to expose it.

Here you will encounter the arguments that have raged for generations within my family—about how society ought to be conducted, how much ground ought to be ceded to the “fair sex,” and how we have arrived at systems and institutions that diminish gentleness itself.

My sisters, aunts, mother, and grandmother speak from different eras but on the same questions: of education, class, faith, and that delicate warfare between the sexes which men call civilisation.

We are, all of us, women of letters, with the wit and, more importantly, the leisure to pursue our thoughts and record them—though we know how swiftly they may be erased by men, as women so often are.

That is why I have gathered them here: not as a monument but as a weapon, polished and barbed, to be read by any who would know the hidden history of grace.

If I speak of grace, it is not of the divine sort. I mean that human grace born of composure under scrutiny—the art of standing still while

the world rearranges itself around you. It is this grace that women have perfected, and that men, in their endless noise, have mistaken for silence.

I dedicate this book, therefore, not to the gentlemen who believe themselves its subject, but to the women who wrote it—often without knowing they were doing so—and to those who will, in time, read it as proof that erasure is never complete.



The Edifice

1840: Motherhood and Education

A Question of Woman's Dignity

It is with a measure of both sorrow and frustration that I address a subject so close to the heart of every gentlewoman: the burden of motherhood and the limitation of our education. Too long have women been permitted only a scant education, not because of any natural deficiency of intellect or capacity, but because the men who govern society prefer us so—not merely to be ignorant, but to be ever preoccupied with childbearing. Thus I ask, with a voice awkward yet earnest, “Are we mere brood-mares? Or are we people with dignity too?”

One need only glance at the lives of the women around me—wives, daughters, mothers—to see the truth laid bare. From the moment a girl reaches womanhood, her fate is often sealed not by her talents or her mind, but by the demand to conceive and carry heir after heir. Our bodies are woven into the fabric of family fortunes and social standing, measured by the number of children we bear, and yet so little is done to value the woman herself as more than a vessel for reproduction.

This ceaseless cycle of pregnancies carries a heavy toll upon a woman's health. Many suffer from exhaustion, frailty, and ailments borne of repeated childbearing without respite. Miscarriages—frequent, devastating—leave wounds not only of the body but of the spirit, sorrows often endured in silence. The emotional weight of loss is compounded by the relentless expectation to conceive again, as though

a woman's feelings were secondary or even irrelevant when matched against the imperative of continuation of the family line.

In all this, what of our education? Is it by chance that women remain deprived of scholarly opportunity, or is it rather a deliberate design to keep us tethered to the cradle and the nursery? Could it be that men fear a woman's capacity for knowledge—not because they doubt her intellect, but because an educated woman might refuse to sacrifice her mind and body to such unceasing demands? To limit our learning is to limit our horizons, to ensure our energies and affections are consumed by duties to others before we have chance to define ourselves.

Certainly, there are achievements and talents among women that go unnoticed and undeveloped. How many promising minds are dulled by the sleep-deprivation and weakness wrought by hurried pregnancies? How many aspirations are dissolved into the wet diapers and sleepless nights that mark our days? If education were afforded equally, might women not discover pursuits and contributions beyond the domestic realm—in literature, in science, in governance?

And so I return to the question that haunts many of us: Is this really all there is to a woman's life? A cycle of bearing and nursing children, of silent endurance and quiet suffering, barely permitted thought or rest? Must womanhood be confined to such narrow parameters of service, her dignity measured only in motherhood?

I believe we must demand more—more care for the health of mothers, more respect for their intellects, and more freedom to cultivate lives rich in thought as well as love. Without such change, we deny half of humanity its full potential and leave many women trapped in a life that offers neither fulfilment nor honour.

The time must come when women are seen not merely as vessels of heirs but as full persons, deserving of education, autonomy, and compassion commensurate with their strength and spirit. Until then, the question remains, heavy and unresolved: are we, in truth, only brood-mares, or are we people with dignity too?

1850: Jeanne d'Anatis

On gentlemen

Sisters, you will observe that the word 'gentleman,' once a modest description of birth, has multiplied itself into a whole colony of pretenders. Our forebears required but two distinctions: noble or not. Now we are to endure a ladder of sub-distinctions—baronet, esquire, gentleman, man of property, merchant prince. Each rung is furnished

with new manners, new euphemisms, new anxieties. The word itself has been so stretched as to lose all sinew.

I trace it thus: from *gentilis*, meaning of one's clan; to *gentil*, a man of breeding; to *gentleman*, a creature who need only appear respectable. Once it denoted an estate, now it denotes only an income. A ducal line may wither, but the 'gentlemen' breed like rabbits, each convinced his table-napkin makes him kin to a prince.

Is it any wonder, then, that our cousins have faltered? Nobility diluted itself by permitting the term to flourish. A Duke who needs to insist upon being a gentleman has already diminished his estate. The very word that was meant to defend our order has undone it.

1860: Advanced Women's Education at Home by Progressive Gentlewomen in England

In mid-19th century England, women's education was predominantly shaped by societal expectations that emphasised domestic roles and "accomplishments" such as music, needlework, and polite conversation. However, within this restrictive environment, a minority of progressive gentlewomen pioneered advanced home education for their daughters. Around 1860, some upper- and upper-middle-class families fostered intellectual development beyond traditional norms, laying important groundwork for future educational reforms.

The content and curriculum of advanced home education differed markedly from the more common focus on feminine accomplishments. Progressive families valued academic subjects traditionally reserved for men, and thus arranged home instruction in Greek, Latin, modern languages, history, mathematics, geography, natural sciences, and philosophy. Unlike the typical limited instruction from governesses, these girls often benefited from private tutors or well-educated mothers who orchestrated a rigorous and broad curriculum. Notable examples include intellectual women such as Florence Nightingale, Elspeth Mallard and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who received extensive home schooling that cultivated their pioneering careers and social reforms later in life.

The motivation behind these educational endeavours was grounded in Enlightenment ideals and early feminist thought. Progressive gentlewomen believed in the intellectual potential and moral capability of women, viewing education as essential for developing independent and responsible minds. They saw themselves as educators who could provide a disciplined and thoughtful learning environment within the home, parallel to the type of education afforded to boys. These

educational efforts challenged the prevailing view of women's intellectual inferiority and contributed to a growing awareness of the need for academic parity.

Despite its promise, advanced home education remained limited in scope and accessibility. It primarily existed within wealthy families able to afford tutors and intellectual resources. Most girls, even among the privileged classes, did not experience this level of academic instruction. However, the model set by these progressive gentlewomen was influential; it demonstrated the feasibility and benefits of comprehensive education for girls. This tradition helped pave the way for the later establishment of rigorous girls' schools and broader women's educational reforms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

1980: Alice Mallard's Note

It would be misleading to imagine these "progressive gentlewomen" as early revolutionaries in petticoats. Their enterprise was not to overturn the order but to perfect its manners. They sought not to unmake the hierarchy that contained them but to rise within it—by intellect, taste, and the poise that education confers. The curriculum they devised for their daughters—Greek declensions, Euclidean proofs, the poetry of Horace copied in a fine hand—was as much an emblem of refinement as a weapon of resistance.

In practice, their advancement of women's education served to consolidate the very class system it appeared to challenge. To instruct a girl in Latin was to distinguish her from the servant who ironed her linens; to teach her logic was to prepare her for a conversation at dinner, not a profession. Even Elspeth Mallard's salon of earnest inquiry depended on the unpaid labour of women less enlightened.

What they achieved, and it is no small thing, was to create a new species of feminine authority—one that could wield knowledge gracefully, as a social ornament. Their rebellion, if it deserves that name, was in the register: soft, grammatical, genteel.

1865: On a Lady's "proper" education

Jeanne d'Anatis

We are to become still more feminine by suppressing certain natural dispositions and by cultivating peculiar modes of conduct. A set of manners and attitudes distinctive to women surround us with an aura of

protection and mystery. To move out of this orbit, the educators warn us would be a serious breach of propriety.

My mind must be enlarged, yet the delicacy of my manners must be preserved; my knowledge must be various, and my powers of reasoning unawed by authority; yet I must habitually feel that nice sense of propriety, which is at once the guard and charm of feminine virtue.

1865: On the Self-Made Man

Jeanne d'Anatis

The self-made man is much admired, though I have yet to meet one who did not boast of his making. He is constructed, not born—all surface, no sediment. His fortune, earned through toil, becomes his proof of virtue; he polishes his manners as he polishes his boots. His conversation smells faintly of coin, like a purse warmed too long in the hand.

Such men prefer to speak of “character,” as if honesty were a substitute for breeding. Yet I find honesty is most loudly praised by those who have only lately acquired it.

1866: On Instruction in Deportment

Miss Hester Braye to Jeanne d'Anatis

My mother says a young lady must learn to curtsy before she learns to think, for bowing comes before reflection. The dancing master says the same, though in another key: “Your step, my dear, must precede your sentiment.”

If one learns to move without stumbling, it is called grace; if one learns to think without stumbling, it is called presumption.

1868: On Conversational Accomplishments

From the diary of Beatrice Mallard

Conversation, it appears, is an art in which we must be heard but not noticed. The secret lies in murmuring with animation. Opinions are like ankles: one must have them, but only the vulgar display them.

1870: On the Uses of Reading

Jeanne d'Anatis

A lady's library must never exceed her dressing table in size. Books are ornaments, to be admired for their bindings and dusted by the housemaid. The Bible, Shakespeare, and the Book of Household Management: sufficient scripture, poetry, and science for any woman.

I sometimes think we are not discouraged from reading so much as from finishing. A woman who reads to the end of a book is liable to expect the same of her life.

1870: On a New Species

Jeanne d'Anatis

A tradesman is a new species of gentleman. Wealth that dresses itself up in liberal behaviour and gives itself airs commonly passes muster for gentility. The title of gentleman is now given to all who distinguish themselves from the common sort by a good garb, a genteel air, or a passable education—by wealth or by learning, it matters little which.

In former times, breeding was a matter of blood and habit; now it may be purchased by the yard. One buys one's manners as one buys one's cloth: the tailor confers respectability where the tutor once did. The merchant's wife learns to curtsy from the dancing-master, and their sons, sent abroad for polish, return with a taste for imported vices and a conviction of their own refinement.

I do not object to the enlargement of our species, only to its pretensions. When all men may be called gentlemen, none shall deserve the title; it will have dissolved into the thin air of commerce, like perfume upon a tradesman's handkerchief.

1872: On the Politician

Jeanne d'Anatis

Once the Church was our conscience and the Crown our command. Now we have elected men who pretend to both. The politician is the gentleman of the mob: born to please, bred to deceive. He bows to all and belongs to none.

His speeches are designed for quotation, not conviction; his honour, for the press, not for posterity. Yet he is always called "the Honourable." The irony, I think, is deliberate.

1872: On Godly Idleness

Elspeth Mallard

In my grandmother's day the church was considered a poor relation to the professions. A younger son might be dispatched into holy orders not for his piety but because he was unfit for the army or too idle for trade. The parish offered him a rectory, some acres of glebe, a roof over his head, and a mild occupation that left him ample time for hunting, fishing, or dalliance. Few considered the church a calling: it was, rather, a cupboard in which to store inconvenient sons.

Yet how curious that in the next century the selfsame cassock was dusted off and treated as though it bore moral authority. With the rise of the industrious middle classes, the church was rebranded as a vocation—its rectories polished into shrines, its rectors elevated into guardians of the nation's morals. God Himself, who had long idled in His heaven, was suddenly pressed into service as overseer of every hearth and parlour.

The nobility, always willing to bow when fashion requires, pretended reverence though it cost them nothing. The labouring poor, always told what to believe, bowed because refusal brought punishment. But the middle classes—those swarming gentlemen and their lady-wives—made of God a projection of themselves: tidy, watchful, exacting, endlessly corrective. God, like their own ambitions, was both idol and alibi.

It amuses me to note that the same idleness once mocked in a parson's son became sanctified as the mark of divinity. If God "rested on the seventh day," then surely the gentleman might rest on every day. What is heaven itself but a promise of eternal leisure, gilded with hymns and silver plate?

1872: On the Finishing School

*Letter from Miss Clara Denning,
pupil at Mrs Horbury's Academy*

We are instructed daily in the twin virtues of endurance and embroidery. One may stitch anything into silence: a grievance, an idea, a future. When the bell rings for comportment, we practise smiling as though at an invisible admirer.

Mrs Horbury says we are to become angels of influence—invisible, yet always at work.

1874: On fiction and romances

Jeanne d'Anatis

Fiction is a particularly vulgar obsession of the educators. Novels, like strong wine, apparently make young ladies giddy. “Had so many fascinating descriptions never been given of the pleasures, enjoyments, and advantages of rank and fortune, the elegantes of humble life would have been far less numerous, and we should have retained some valuable stuff, capable of being converted into the wives of traders and yeoman,” writes one lady.

They tell us it would be wise for parents to establish an “immutable law” forbidding their charges to borrow books from the circulating libraries. “It is much to be questioned whether any sort of fictitious representation of life and manners ought to be put into the hands of youth. Many novels contain objectionable passages but to expurgate such works would only excite curiosity,” that lady says.

Adding that “better” policy to allow the passages to remain, and to have a governess or older person mark them with disapproval—and a fluttering perturbation—when reading with young ladies.

What I ask is amiss with a girl who has an imagination? When she is permitted much less else.

1874: continuation—On the Containment of Fancy

Jeanne d'Anatis, marginal note in her commonplace book

They say a girl’s mind must be protected from invention, lest she imagine herself elsewhere. Yet I observe that men of science are permitted their hypotheses, poets their allegories, and politicians their manifestos—all fictions in grander attire.

Imagination in a woman is rebellion disguised as reverie. The governess who blushes at a romantic passage does not fear corruption; she fears comparison.

1874: Marginalia in a pamphlet on “Female Instruction”

Jeanne d’Anatis

The pamphlet states: “A lady’s mind must be cultivated like a garden.” Quite so. Every garden begins by excluding the forest.

1874: Jeanne d’Anatis

On educating men

What is there left for one to say?

“*I shall always be ready to joyn in the common opinion,*” judged Mr Gibbon, who attended Westminster: *that our public schools, which have produced so many eminent characters, are the best adapted to the Genius and constitution of the English people. A boy of spirit may acquire, he continues, a praevious and practical experience of the World; and his playfellows may be the future friends of his heart or his interest. In a free intercourse with his equals the habits of truth, fortitude and prudence will insensibly be matured.*

How charmingly he mistakes accident for design. Truth, fortitude, and prudence are rarely the fruits of such institutions; arrogance, secrecy, and cruelty are far more common harvests. These schools teach boys the invaluable art of keeping one’s own counsel and betraying one’s friend at the proper season. They acquire what their masters call “manly discipline,” which is to say: the power to endure insult, inflict it upon others, and never weep.

Birth and riches, he assures us, *are measured by the standard of personal merits.* Yet I have seen no boy of humble birth allowed to measure anything at all, save perhaps the weight of his master’s hand.

It is a curious education that teaches boys to be men by treating them as soldiers, and to be gentlemen by teaching them contempt.

Memoirs of Harriette Mallard

(From the editorial papers, c. 1980)

Harriette Mallard remains one of England’s most infamous courtesans, her *Memoirs* (1875) having both scandalised and enthralled polite society. Born into a minor yet well-connected branch of the Mallard family, she was the daughter of a diplomat’s sister and a speculative banker whose fortunes wavered between colonial trade and social disgrace. Educated in languages and music, and briefly presented

at court, she soon recognised that her wit and intelligence carried greater currency than her dowry.

Before her twentieth year, she had formed advantageous “attachments” with men of power—members of Parliament, military officers, and titled gentlemen—whose discretion proved less enduring than their desire. Refusing the genteel poverty of spinsterhood or the legal bondage of marriage, she transformed herself into what society most feared: a woman ungoverned by men, yet fluent in their manners.

Her *Memoirs*, published first in France and later expurgated in London, named names, described habits, and peeled away the varnish of “gentlemanly” virtue. The effect was electrifying. She was condemned for vulgarity, yet secretly admired for daring to write as men spoke. Her frank treatment of money, sex, and hypocrisy turned her into a paradox—part moralist, part libertine.

Modern readers may overlook the radical force of her gesture: she claimed narrative authority where women were permitted only silence or repentance. Harriette’s writing does not simply reveal a scandalous life; it demonstrates that female intellect could command the same audacity, irony, and precision that men called genius.

She wrote herself out of the ledger of respectability—and, in doing so, into the family line of thinking women.

(Marginal note in another hand: “She taught us that knowledge and seduction are the same art. Fabrice learned that lesson well.”)

1875: On the Colonial Cousin

Jeanne d’Anatis

Our relatives in the colonies send home photographs. They are invariably seated before palms, wearing linen and discomfort. The gentlemen appear bleached by heat, the ladies hardened by it. They write to us of “opportunities,” meaning land and labour—neither of which a true gentlewoman ought to mention.

They have invented their own hierarchy, measured by acreage and import duties, as though nobility might germinate in foreign soil. They are no less proud for having none to compare themselves against.

1875: From *The Memoirs of Harriette Mallard*

(suppressed chapter)

It has often been remarked to me, with an air of moral superiority, that I have *lived by my wits*. I take no offence at the observation. Most men I have met have lived by mine also.

When a lady has neither fortune nor protection, she must either marry, pray, or think. Marriage is the dullest, prayer the least certain, and thinking the most dangerous of the three. I chose the latter.

A gentleman once advised me that a woman should never speak first in company. I answered that a gentleman should never contradict a lady, and thereby had the first and last word both. He forgave me instantly, for men of my acquaintance adore a lesson so long as it is administered from the lips they desire to kiss.

Society reproves me for bartering affection. Yet I see wives every day who have done the same thing for a ring, a name, and a drawing-room in Mayfair, while I was content with ready cash and no pretence. They have the ceremony; I have the honesty.

I have been told that my candour is unladylike. So is poverty. If truth is a vulgarity, then I must plead guilty; for it is the only dowry my parents left me and the only virtue I have found profitable.

Of all the titles bestowed upon me—adventuress, siren, jezebel, philosopher—the last amuses me most, for it comes nearest the truth. A philosopher, if I understand the word, is one who observes without illusion. And what are men, when observed, but a collection of small illusions, each hoping to be taken for grandeur?

1982: Alice Mallard

Editorial note

Harriette Mallard's so-called "confession" belongs to that peculiar literary species in which the female pen, denied legitimacy in intellect or imagination, was permitted only in sin. Her frankness ensured her infamy; her infamy ensured her publication.

It is striking how many of her arguments, once dismissed as the ravings of a courtesan, were later advanced—more decorously—by suffragists and moral reformers. She had already understood what her respectable contemporaries could not: that economic dependence is the first corruption, not the last.

In tone and in method she anticipates our cousin Fabrice, whose own *Memoirs* (unpublished during his lifetime) echo her mixture of wit, precision, and polite contempt for hypocrisy. Both wrote from a

position society called disgrace, yet both reveal a clarity the “honourable” could not afford.

If virtue was their family’s chosen ornament, candour was its recurring heresy.

1876: On Conduct Literature

From Jeanne d’Anatis, draft essay never published

Every year a new book appears to tell us what we are. “Hints for the Young Housewife.” “The Moral Lady.” “The Woman at Home.” We are catalogued like furniture, each volume describing the correct polish and placement.

When men tire of conquest, they write manuals for it.

1878: On the Educated Lady

Jeanne d’Anatis

The educated lady is a curiosity of our time: a creature too clever to remain silent, too polite to speak plainly. She reads everything but the room. Her learning is both her ornament and her punishment.

Society invites her to talk, then reproves her for doing so. Men admire her intellect the way they admire fireworks—bright, brief, and best enjoyed from a safe distance.

1880: Jeanne d’Anatis, a letter fragment

on the reading public

Meanwhile a hungry reading public is supplied with a diet consisting largely of Evangelical porridge. Although literacy has opened the door upon a new world for the masses, it is, for most of them, the narrow world of the religious zealots and moral reformers. Few of them are to know the realms of gold explored by the youthful Keats. The goodly estates of classical literature, the western islands of fairyland, even the kingdoms embracing many realities of their day are not for them. If they form new opinions, they receive them from the demesne carefully restricted by self-appointed warders.

Octavia Mallard—marginal note, 1932

My grandmother underestimated the appetite of the English for pious gruel. When once they acquired a taste for Evangelical porridge they refused ever after to take their literature al dente. The national character seems to require moral ballast with every mouthful.

Where my grandmother saw censorship, I see digestion: ideas strained, sweetened, and thickened until suitable for clerical infants. In that sense, the reading public has always been the Church's most dutiful congregation—believing whatever the last sermon happened to print.

1881: Correspondence between Jeanne d'Anatis and Harriette Mallard

Jeanne d'Anatis

Your *Memoirs* have found their way even into our quiet drawing rooms, borne on whispers and hidden behind sermons. I am told your frankness has offended nearly everyone worth knowing, which I suppose means you have struck near the truth.

Yet I wish you had left certain passages unwritten. There is much to be said for discretion, particularly when one's readers have only lately been permitted to form opinions of their own. You may find yourself the author of unintended revolutions among the shopgirls.

Harriette Mallard

Your concern for the shopgirls is touching, though I assure you they have known more of life than any of my reviewers. If I have committed an indiscretion, it is only in writing what gentlemen do when they believe themselves unseen.

Discretion is a privilege of the rich, my dear. The rest of us must tell the truth or be told it by others. I have merely put to paper what your moralists keep locked in their confessionals.

As for revolutions, they are never unintended.

1885: On Refinement

Jeanne d'Anatis

Refinement was once an art; now it is a trade. One attends finishing schools to acquire a finish, as if the soul were a piece of mahogany. The polish is visible, the substance doubtful.

True refinement, I suspect, lies in concealment—in knowing precisely what to show and what to leave imagined. That, alas, cannot be taught.

1885: On libraries

Elsbeth Mallard

It is with great pleasure I observe, that ladies of letters in this age have lost in a great measure that shyness and bashfulness of temper, which kept them at a distance from mankind; and, at the same time, that women of the world are proud of borrowing from books their most agreeable topics of conversation.

Many a gentleman's large, well-stocked library showcases taste for showy luxury rather than education. They choose leather bound volumes, some with raised straps on their spines to hide the narrowness of a work. Colour predominates, volumes are endlessly aligned on broad and sturdy shelves along walls, floor to ceiling. Some walls of books their spines alone showing are faux: a hidden door perhaps behind. It is the look of the thing. A room for cigars and silent contemplation.

A woman's library, if she seeks knowledge, is in a small, less fancy, yet more comfortable room with plenty of sunlight, perhaps her piano, sofas and cushions and useful, important, perhaps scandalous for a lady of taste and refinement, books. Knowledge here is arranged more cleverly.

A gentleman, I am told, feels an inward pride in displaying a thousand volumes he will never read, each chosen to lend an air of cultivated repose to a mind rarely exercised. A lady, meanwhile, must keep her learning discreetly bound and quietly thumbed. Her volumes are fewer, yet she reads them twice; she notes the parts not to be repeated aloud, and marks the pages that confirm her suspicions about men.

Indeed, the library is a small theatre of manners. A man's shelves display conquest: he buys what he might have written, had he leisure. A woman's contain collusion: she borrows, copies, hides, annotates, exchanges. His is a fortress; hers, a salon.

There is also the matter of dust. Men's libraries are ceremoniously kept by servants who dust what their masters have never touched. A woman's room she dusts herself, disturbing nothing but the complacency of ignorance. In such rooms ideas circulate more freely than air.

When my husband inquires why I prefer my drawing-room to his study, I tell him it is because mine contains living books. By this I mean not merely those written by the hand, but the women who visit, who read with me, and who depart with a spark of that happy contagion which the reading of scandalous truths may confer.

1886: On servants

Elspeh Mallard

My great-grandmother, having lived in France before its convolutions, had acquired the attitude towards her servants that was less conventional than that of the English. Though a great and titled Lady, she permitted an unheard of familiarity with her servants, even to encouraging the informality of dinner when the *bonne* would come straight into the dining room from the kitchen carrying the steaming dish of succulent food that she had just cooked.

My own mother, being more studious than sociable, adopted that attitude and our servants fared better in our house than we have heard of their fates elsewhere.

We preferred women to men, not least because my mother did not see any sense in paying the exorbitant taxes of almost £7 per annum applied to that of male servants. She preferred to pass those savings on to her maids and thus pay them a wage commensurate with their abilities and loyalties. This, as much as any other consideration, led to our unusual circumstances of retaining our servants over many years.

But also she was of a mind to educate her servants and, given men are more likely to be properly educated, decided that women deserved opportunities not afforded to them otherwise. Thus, aside from their household duties, our servants were encouraged to read, to discuss and to make observations about the world. Mother held that politeness married to diligence gave birth to many greater appreciations. They were required to work but not only for our pleasure and amusements.

Whereas many a lady of our acquaintance complained about their own servants—one suspects only to show how many they had—we never experienced any trouble with our own. A significant number were from the Blandy family, those who had moved away from service from our ducal cousins. One of the Blandy governesses, I recall, spent her free hours instructing her cousins below stairs—a small revolution that began in our own nursery.

A lady of elevated social standing might count twenty servants in her household. We managed efficiently and equably with only six maids and a single footman inside the house and two outdoors men, who did

not attract the tax. My mother preferred the comforts of home, library and study and did not frequently make social calls, as was the sad habit of so many of her generation.

Our home was always clean and tidy but not so that the servants were worked to their bones. They were properly fed and clothed, given free days to do with as they chose and paid properly. Though mother did not object to her servants marrying—as she saw that we all deserve similar opportunities for marital conjugation—she preferred they remain in our service if practicable; and provided accommodation on our small estate for that eventuality.

And as unconventional as it is in our times, we have often worked with our servants at the household chores, not only because it freed their time for educational pursuits but because, as mother would say, we might one day need to know how to run a house without servants of any kind.

My grandmother called it grace; my mother, efficiency. The change was national.

1890: Notes on crookedness

Elsbeth Mallard

What is a *lord*? We are told it means “keeper of the loaf,” the man who watches over the bread. Yet no lord I have ever met has put his hand to flour or oven. The bread he keeps he has taken, not made. To keep the loaf is not to feed the hungry, but to remind them that their hunger is his to assuage or deny. It is a fine sleight of hand: to be seen as benefactor when in fact one is but parasite.

Others tell me the word runs deeper, to the Greek *lordos*, meaning bent, crooked of spine. How apt! For the crooked back soon becomes the crooked hand. Crooked in form, crooked in action. And to call upon the *Lord God* is then to call upon the crooked god, the deformed ruler, the thief sanctified.

We women live under such lords twice over. In the manor, the crooked husband who keeps us to his bread and demands gratitude for it. In the church, the crooked god who insists we kneel to him, whose priests steal not our loaves but our very time and spirit. They tell us he is “our Lord.” I reply: if this is lordship, give me none of it.

It is worth noting that the crooked man is always forgiven his crookedness. Richard III is excused because he was king. The lame, the bent, the idle, when noble, are called “graceful.” But the crooked woman? She is witch, hag, crone. The crooked lord is sanctified, the crooked lady is burned.

And so I say: the title “lord” is not honour but confession. To name a man “lord” is to admit he lives from theft. He holds the loaf he never baked, and calls it providence.

1890: On the Industrial Gentleman

Jeanne d’Anatis

Factories now replace fortresses, yet their masters call themselves gentlemen. They no longer command the sword but the steam-engine, and both make the same noise when mishandled. Their coats are cut from the same cloth as the old nobility, though the pockets are deeper and dirtier.

They dine in imitation of dukes, but eat as merchants do—fast and full. They possess the manners of their machines: precise, repetitive, and prone to overheating.

1890: The Silent Peril

Laudanum and the Modern Nanny

It is a matter of no small distress, and one I confess I wrestle with daily, that the care entrusted to nannies for my dear infant is at times marked by practices shrouded in troubling secrecy. Chief among these is the use of laudanum upon the teats of the baby’s bottle—a practice purportedly designed to soothe both child and nurse but which, I fear, conceals a far graver risk. The laudanum, an opiate tincture, lulls the infant into unnatural repose while granting the nanny a measure of respite from an otherwise relentless charge. Yet at what cost? There is whispered talk, scarcely acknowledged in polite society, that such dosing imperils the very life of the child.

I find myself caught in a cruel paradox of our era. As a woman of standing, I am compelled by convention and expectation to delegate much of the physical care of my children to appointed nurses. It is an arrangement steeped in tradition, where the mother’s role is more the silent overseer than the active nurturer, to the great frustration of my maternal heart. Yet I cannot leave my infant in these hired hands without vigilant suspicion, for these remedies—once folk medicine, now dangerously modern—are administered behind closed nursery doors, beyond my sight and influence.

The prevalence of laudanum in households beyond my own only deepens my unease. Reports abound of rising opium and opiate use

among adults, a creeping malady that darkens many a respectable family. Is it fanciful to suspect that the early introduction of such narcotics in infancy—however small the doses—may be the insidious root of so many future dependencies? Does the poison begin not in the gin palaces or physicians' cabinets, but in the very nursery?

I have contemplated removing this particular nanny, yet I face a quandary. How might I find another, free from such practices, when it appears this has become a widespread, if clandestine, custom among caregivers entrusted with the day's most delicate charges? Is this the standard of modern childrearing, or merely a necessary evil to preserve the sanity of those tasked with relentless vigilance? The question torments me.

Furthermore, the social order denies me the liberty to personally tend my child as my instincts urge. Society's rigid expectations cast me as a figure of dignity and decorum rather than as a hands-on mother. My day is apportioned to charitable engagements and managing household affairs; the nursery is a domain where my presence is regarded as superfluous or even distracting. I am left to observe from a distance while a substance I scarcely understand is placed into my child's mouth, ostensibly for peace but potentially for peril.

I fervently hope for reform, for a time when mothers may be entrusted with both the knowledge and the freedom to care intimately for their children. Until then, I watch and worry, a reluctant witness to the silent perils of the modern nursery. May the days soon come when the well-being of our infants is assured without the shadow of addiction cast before their first breath.

1892: On the Club Man

Jeanne d'Anatis

The modern gentleman has discovered a new form of monasticism. He no longer kneels in chapel but lounges in clubs. The rules are identical: no women, no laughter, and no talk of trade, though all three are secretly observed.

The Club is a sanctuary where men may be relieved of their wives, their work, and their consciences. There, a man is judged by his tailor and redeemed by his silence.

1893: on the conversation of the lords

From the private papers of Elspeth Mallard

Among the loose sheets dated 1893 is one headed, in her small slanted hand, *The Conversation of the Lords*. It begins with a passage copied almost verbatim from William Hazlitt—proof that Elspeth, even when quoting, could not resist improving her sources. The sentence winds on for a page and a half, a magnificent list of male accomplishments so comprehensive it seems designed to exhaust both reader and subject.

The Lords have all the benefit of education, society, confidence, they read books, purchase pictures, breed horses, learn to ride, dance, and fence, look after their estates, travel abroad.

The man of rank and fortune, besides his chance for the common or (now and then) an uncommon share of wit and understanding, has it in his power to avail himself of everything that is to be taught of art and science; he has tutors and valets at his beck; he may master the dead languages, he must acquire the modern ones; he moves in the highest circles, and may descend to the lowest; the paths of pleasure, of ambition, of knowledge, are open to him; he may devote himself to a particular study, or skim the cream of all; he may read books or men or things, as he finds most convenient or agreeable; he is not forced to confine his attention to some one dry uninteresting pursuit; he has a single hobby, or half a dozen; he is not distracted by care, by poverty and want of leisure; he has every opportunity and facility afforded him for acquiring various accomplishments of body or mind, and every encouragement, from confidence and success, for making an imposing display of them; he may laugh with the gay, jest with the witty, argue with the wise he has been in courts, in colleges, and camps, is familiar with playhouses and taverns, with the riding-house and the dissecting-room, has been present at or taken part in the debates of both Houses of Parliament, understands the broadsword exercise, is a connoisseur in regimentals, plays the whole game at whist, is a tolerable proficient at backgammon, drives four-in-hand, skates, rows, swims, shoots; knows the different sorts of game and modes of agriculture in the different counties of England, the manufactures and commerce of the different towns, the politics of Europe, the campaigns in Spain, has the Gazette, the newspapers, and reviews at his fingers' ends, has visited the finest scenes of Nature and beheld the choicest works of Art, and is in society where he is continually hearing or talking of all these things; and yet we find that a person so circumstanced and qualified has no ideas to communicate or words to express himself, and is, as by patent and

prescription he was bound to be, a mere well-dressed fop of fashion or a booby lord.

Beneath it, in her own hand:

And yet they say nothing. Their accomplishments serve only to decorate silence. They have learned every art save that of being interesting. It is remarkable that the class with the greatest leisure for thought produces so little of it in speech. A lord will discuss the weather, a horse, or the condition of his drains, and believe he has exhausted philosophy. Knowledge, when it has no purpose, curdles into manners.

Below it, in pencil, she has added:

How strange that a class so perfectly instructed in the forms of everything should have nothing whatever to say. They converse as they govern—by inheritance. Their speech is a costume worn by habit, not necessity. A Lord in full conversation resembles a peacock: the display is exquisite, but there is no song.

And a few lines later, in ink:

Perhaps the true mark of rank is the freedom to remain stupid without consequence.

Later editors note that she often returned to this theme, seeing in it the danger of education as display rather than use. Her daughter Gloriana would one day echo it—unknowingly—when instructing young Fabrice that a duke's first duty is to appear informed. "A gentleman," she wrote, "ought to have a little of everything, but not enough to spoil conversation."

1894: On Charity and Display

Jeanne d'Anatis

The rich have learned to launder their souls in public. Charity is now the proper theatre of virtue. Balls for orphans, concerts for consumptives, teas for the destitute—every suffering is an occasion for a new gown.

They call it philanthropy, though it has all the hallmarks of fashion. The truly poor are absent, of course; one must never invite one's beneficiaries to the ball.

1895: On fitness

Elspeth Mallard

I took my beagle with me on my morning stroll yet was none the wiser nor more enlightened as to its fitness for survival than my old friend Mr Darwin was on his own voyage of discovery. Perhaps his beagle was more forthcoming on that long-distant journey.

He writes to me that they are the “fittest who survive” from one generation to the next. But what does he mean by the word “fittest”? For the word is open to many interpretations. Does he mean the strongest? My laundry-maid is strong: see how she carries the heaviest loads of wet cloth. Is she then the fittest to survive, though she has no children. My aged mother was never strong yet she has borne children.

Or does he perhaps mean “fitness” as a puzzle-piece: a thing that fits with another to comprise a whole?

As I sit here, idly thinking—my gentle maid turning a skein of yarn into a ball for knitting—does that render me more or less fit to survive? I am gentle-born, thus I must be weak, yet I have borne three daughters—all healthy—who may, in time, bear more children of their own. We will thus survive. So, is it weakness that is the more fit?

Or does Charles perhaps intend a fit of madness—or an epilepsy—so that such conjugations beget a greater chance at survival.

Yet what, after all, is survival itself but a life beyond life. And is not that eternality of life after death a promise made to us by our local vicar in looking to God and the heavens? Who among us is the fittest to survive death of body?

My husband, were he to know my thoughts, would doubtless advise against such idleness. Idolatry, he might name my habitual practice, as homage to this kind of thinking is beyond the fitness of a gentlewoman. I wonder what my beagle might say, had she the power of English. Or my maid who beckons me now with the wool ready to be knitted and fitted together into some suitable species of patterned fitness.

1896: On the Gentleman Abroad

Jeanne d’Anatis

In the colonies our men behave as if freed from civilisation, as though the tropics absolved them of manners. They go to the East to discover themselves and return with a tan and a mistress. They call this “broadening the mind.”

Politeness does not travel well: it spoils in the heat. The Englishman abroad is a curious creature—both missionary and marauder, worshipping at the altar of Empire and appetite.

1899: On the End of an Era

Jeanne d'Anatis

We are told the century is closing. I suspect it has only mislaid its gloves. The same men who once called themselves noble now call themselves progressive. The vocabulary changes; the vanity does not.

Steam, steel, and speculation have replaced scripture, sword, and seal, yet the creed remains: possession is proof of grace.

I sometimes wonder if we have mistaken advancement for ascent. The staircase, after all, leads both upward and down.

1900: The myth of sacrifice

Elspeth Mallard

Women are expected to surrender themselves and their wills entirely to men and yet have enough will, self-respect, and pride to work hard, raise children, and maintain households; they are expected to remain chaste throughout their lives, and yet offer warm sexuality to their husbands.

Men are expected to be in total control of their immediate surroundings and especially their women, but to surrender control to “superior men” while maintaining self-respect; they are expected to find identity and a satisfying life in pursuit of power, and to scorn and deny the very elements that could bring them felicity and contentment.

The myth is that men sacrifice themselves in unsatisfying or dehumanising work for the sake of a demanding wife and family. In truth, the sacrifice is a performance—an agreed fiction between husband and wife, each pretending that the other is the object of devotion, while both serve the invisible idol of respectability. The wife sacrifices her person to propriety; the husband sacrifices his conscience to ambition. Each envies the other’s apparent freedom, and each is imprisoned by the same myth.

Were truth permitted its say, it would declare that men and women both serve a single master: the idea of *duty* dressed up as love. And duty, being without body or heart, requires continual worship in the

form of exhaustion. It is the altar upon which happiness is immolated every morning, with prayers for the preservation of appearances.

In my quieter moments, I sometimes wonder which is the greater virtue: to sacrifice oneself for an illusion—or to abandon the illusion and live honestly with desire. Few women of my acquaintance are permitted the choice. Fewer men dare to take it.



The Rise

1901: On Education

Elsbeth Mallard

In her surviving papers from the first decades of the century, Elspeth speaks less of manners than of *formation*. She had seen what centuries of education had done for men—it had taught them to converse without communicating—and she wished for her daughters something less ornamental. To her mind, education should neither reinforce social poise nor manufacture rebellion, but produce that rarer creature: a woman able to think without reference to approval.

1901: On dress

Elsbeth Mallard

“It is an offence for a man to dress up as a woman, but not for a woman to dress as a man. The explanation is that a man who imitates a woman must be mad, but a woman who models herself upon a man is only making an effort to improve herself.” [Wedderburn on Women (2nd edition, page 748)]

1902: On conversation

Elsbeth Mallard

The enormous increase of the means for acquiring knowledge, and the application of great inventions to save time in so doing, are by no means accompanied by corresponding strides in the art of conversation. All the knowledge of the day professes to be curtailed and collected into newspapers, periodicals, and handbooks, just as all the travelling of the day is done by rail and steam, with the aid of guide-books, which save the traveller all the trouble and all the education of thinking.

The tourist who formerly went through Italy with his *vetturino*, and saw every village and road deliberately, talking with the people and observing national life, is now whirled through tunnels and by night from one capital to another, where he sees what Cook or Murray choose him to see, just as the man who trusts the newspapers for his

knowledge gets scraps, perversions, even lies, served up for him by way of universal information.

It is easy to see that this kind of training, as it interferes with both liberty and leisure of thought, and induces men to spend far too much time in gathering facts, is in no way conducive to the improvement of conversation.

1910: On the Waste of Uneducated Women

Viola Vorpel

It is a truth universally unacknowledged—and how ironic that it remains so—that women are often intellectually and morally superior to men, and this distinction may be observed in every stratum of society. From the drawing room to the kitchen, from the manor to the mill, one finds women whose judgment is clearer, whose discernment is sharper, whose moral compass is less prey to vanity or impulse than that of their male counterparts. And yet, we persist in offering them an education either inferior to that of men or so trivial as to be an insult to their abilities.

One hears, endlessly, the argument that a woman's natural duties are of the hearth, that her intellect, however keen, must be tempered by usefulness in domestic service and child-rearing. This is sound enough in theory—children shall always require mothers—but the lamentable oversight is that an educated mother serves her children's future far more ably than an ignorant one. A woman equipped with knowledge of politics, literature, science, and the practical arts can guide a household not merely in the mechanics of feeding and discipline, but in the subtler work of shaping minds and spirits.

Consider the scale of waste involved when half the nation's intelligence is left untended. We spend a fortune cultivating the minds of men—men who often squander their intellect in idle club gossip, reckless speculation, or political vanity—while their wives, often the more sensible creatures, must confine their brains to planning the supper rota or making conversational bridges between quarrelling aunts. Our nation cannot afford such poor investment in its most reliable resource.

What, then, should the education of women be? It need not merely match that of men; it should surpass it in those areas where women are naturally better suited. For instance, while men learn the law as practitioners, women might be its moral critics and reformers, trained to detect the loopholes by which injustice thrives. In science, women might direct research toward the improvement of public health,

domestic economy, and the humane care of the vulnerable—all areas in which men, distracted by the thrill of discovery, often forget the application of results.

This is not to say that women should shirk the more traditional subjects in which men specialise. Indeed, the classics, mathematics, history, and philosophy must form the backbone of a woman's education, for without them she cannot converse at a level that commands universal respect. But these should be taught without the soporific condescension which male tutors often employ—the kind that presumes a woman's mind is a delicate glass incapable of withstanding rigorous thought.

And let her also study commerce. A woman trained in the principles of finance is far less likely to be beguiled by a husband's speculative ruin. She will know the difference between substance and show, between prosperity and pretence. In public life, educated women could bring balance to the excesses of Parliament, tempering policy with foresight instead of with self-interest.

I propose, therefore, that our girls' schools be restructured entirely: Latin and Greek at the same standard as the boys', practical sciences taught with the aim of actual invention, history stripped of its celebratory bias toward conquest, and ethics placed at the apex of study. Education for women should not merely prepare them to keep pace with men but to act as their civilising influence—to lead, if necessary—because history assures us that men, when left entirely to their own devices, are not always inclined toward civilisation.

We are told that our nation's strength lies in its "social capital," yet we allow half that capital to depreciate unused. It is not gallantry but sheer common sense to educate women fully, for an uneducated woman is the greater waste: her mind might have been the sharpest instrument in public service, her voice the clearest in debate, her pen the most persuasive in reform. Instead, she risks being reduced to the role of moral governess to her own husband, compensating for his lapses without the power to correct them in the wider sphere.

Women are no less English than men, no less entitled to serve the country with distinction, and no less capable of doing so with wisdom. If intellect and morality are indeed our national virtues, then let us educate those most likely to embody them—or admit, frankly, that we prefer underusing our best forces simply because they come in skirts.

To deny women knowledge is not to preserve civilisation—it is to postpone it.

1910: A Modest Defence of Distinction

An anonymous reply to Viola Vorpel on women's education

Madam's eloquence on behalf of her sex is not only spirited but dangerously persuasive. Yet it is the peculiar talent of women to make even their misjudgments sound reasonable, which is precisely why the matter of education must remain carefully delineated between the sexes. Equality is a charming ideal in conversation; in practice, it is chaos.

The lady contends that women are often "intellectually and morally superior" to men. This, I readily concede on moral grounds—though only in the narrow fields of sympathy and patience, which Providence clearly designed them to embody. But intellectually? Surely not. A woman's quickness of wit is not evidence of intellectual stamina. Her mind is agile but not enduring, intuitive but not analytic, receptive but not original. We may admire the way she perceives patterns while laying a dinner table, but we cannot, in fairness, expect her to conceive the binomial theorem.

The difference, as I see it, is not one of worth but of purpose. Men are fashioned for strenuous thought, just as they are for strenuous labour. Their minds, like their muscles, are built for strain. Women's minds are built for grace—adaptable, delicate, exquisitely tuned to human feeling. When one expects them to bear the same load of logic, calculation, and mechanical reasoning as a man, one fatigues the very instrument that makes them so charming.

Our educational distinctions, then, are not a tyranny but a mercy. A woman burdened with masculine abstractions risks losing her finer sensibilities. History, philosophy, and the sciences are noble pursuits, yes—but too much of them turns the heart dry and the manner pedantic. Who would wish to dine with a lady who corrects one's Latin at table, or lectures on the chemical properties of wine?

The good lady argues that mothers must be educated to raise intelligent children. Indeed—but not as scholars. Their influence is emotional, not intellectual. A mother's wisdom lies in intuition, in that mysterious realm where affection instructs more deeply than logic ever could. What she cannot teach in books, she imparts through tone, gesture, and example. A child who feels loved learns morality instinctively; one who is merely lectured on Plato may grow clever but cold.

Nor should we underestimate the social dislocation that would follow from her proposal. If women were educated beyond the need of men, what, then, would men be for? Marriage must rest upon the balance of superiority and affection; remove the first, and the second will soon die of awkwardness. Homes would become debating

societies, drawing rooms would smell of textbooks, and husbands, poor souls, would flee to their clubs, only to find them invaded by female philosophers in pursuit of “moral reform.”

The truth is that civilisation depends upon differentiation. Every silver service requires both the gleaming teapot and the solid tray beneath it. Men and women complement one another because they are not the same. A gentleman leads not because he is wiser than women, but because he is permitted to bear responsibility for the results of folly—his own, and often theirs.

So let us by all means educate women—but in the beautiful, the humane, and the domestic. Let them study language, music, perhaps a touch of literature to lend their letters sparkle. But let mathematics, politics, and jurisprudence remain in male custody, where the armour of reason must be worn daily against the assaults of sentiment. It is not contempt that keeps women from these pursuits, but chivalry. If women insist upon logic, who will remain to embroider the curtains of the soul?

For when women cease to soothe, inspire, and refine, we shall discover, too late, that we have debased not only them but ourselves. The world may be governed by the mind, but it is made bearable only by the heart—and that, thank Heaven, remains a woman’s prerogative.

1910: In Response: The Case for Genuine Equality

Viola Vorpel

The Honourable Gentleman’s defence of the “natural” distinctions between men and women is, as ever, a masterclass in persuasion—if persuasion were aimed chiefly at preserving the status quo rather than truth. I thank him for conceding, rather graciously, women’s moral superiority in sympathy and patience—the very attributes we propose to build upon, not diminish. Yet, we must not mistake his concession for a modest triumph; it is an invitation to explore farther, beyond the gilded cage of tradition.

He suggests that women’s intellectual agility is “not endurance,” that our minds are “adaptable” but not “analytic,” “intuitive” but not “original.” This charming dichotomy is precisely the myth that has shackled half the population since time immemorial. Does history not recount women philosophers whose treatises endure? Does science not remember Mary Somerville or Madame Curie? Original thought requires, first and foremost, opportunity—which women have been denied until now. To declare mental stamina absent where education

has been absent is the very circular reasoning that keeps her exclusion intact.

The Gentleman warns of the “fatigue” of feminine sensibility under the “strains” of masculine subjects. Yet this presumes that intellect and sensibility oppose rather than complement one another. The empirical sciences, rigorous mathematics, and ethical philosophy need neither bluntness nor dryness—they require the finesse of imagination and the tempering of empathy, qualities which women possess in abundance when given fair scope. A lady correcting one’s Latin after dinner can be as charming as a host recalling a favourite verse; the key lies in opportunity and confidence, not in gender.

His insistence that mothers influence through “emotion” rather than “intellect” ignores the complexity of human development. Children need not only affection’s warmth but intellectual challenge’s cooling air. The mother who can reason, debate, and critique enriches her children’s minds more reliably than one who can only soothe. Moral learning is not mere imitation; it is critical reflection, and that requires intellect as surely as kindness.

On the social imbalance that “would follow” female education surpassing men’s: this is an argument from fear, not from fact. If intellect were truly a threat to affection, would love and marriage be so frequent among educated couples today? Would not the pride of intelligence draw mutual respect rather than division? Marriage based on artificial hierarchies is doomed to wither; genuine partnerships require equality in mind and spirit, which is precisely what a fuller education enables.

The image of the woman “debating at the dinner table” or “invading the clubs” is a caricature, a product of anxieties rather than realities. Women seek not to displace men but to share the conversation fully, to temper ideas with insight rather than sentiment alone. The world does not fall apart when different voices are heard; it becomes more vibrant, more just.

Nor is true civilisation built on mere “differentiation” or “permit[ting]” one sex the burden of responsibility. Progress comes from shared virtue—and responsibility must be equally shared. The “chivalry” the Gentleman lauds often translates to paternalism: the thin veil for exclusion. Politeness must not excuse injustice, nor courtesy replace competence.

In conclusion, I urge a re-examination of what we consider “appropriate” education for women. To limit women to the “beautiful” and “humane” is to underestimate their capacity and to waste a vast resource of potential intellect and morality. Yours is a world that clings to tradition like a faded portrait, but I propose we paint a new one—

where education is truly equal, where women's minds are not merely reflections of men's but flames to light the way.

Our mothers bore ignorance as a duty; we refuse it as a destiny. It is no longer sufficient to accept that half our nation's intellect remains uninvested. For the sake of society's future, and for justice itself, we must invest fully in all minds, regardless of gender. Anything less is not preservation of civilisation, but its stagnation.

1911: On the Symbolism of Correcting Latin

Octavia Mallard, a lecture to a women's college, Oxford

I find it both intellectually and socially fascinating that the simple act of correcting Latin within certain social contexts transmutes into a profound symbol of transgression. To the casual observer, this may appear a mere matter of pedantic precision, but for an etymologist and linguistic scholar such as myself, it represents a complex layering of power, exclusion, and coded hierarchies embedded within language itself.

Latin, far from being merely a “dead” language, functions as a living emblem of authority in three intertwined domains: the Church, the academy, and the law. Let us consider the language's very nature and its encoded masculinity. The word *lingua*, from which ‘language’ derives, is feminine, yet the formality and rigidity of Classical Latin express an ordered dominion, predominantly crafted and perpetuated by male custodians over centuries. Its complex morphology, its intricate case system, and the solemnity of its syntax mark it as a bastion of learned authority—one decidedly perceived as masculine.

The term “correcting Latin” itself merits scrutiny. To “correct,” from the Latin *corrigere*—*cor-* (together) and *regere* (to rule)—literally means “to guide rightly” or “to bring into proper order.” Correction, then, is an exercise of control, a reassertion of established order. When a woman undertakes to “correct” Latin, she implicitly challenges this linguistic order, infringing upon what early modern and contemporary doctrine regard as the rightful exercise of male authority. This transgression is thus not merely about knowledge but about governance—the very essence of *regere*.

The Church's use of Latin is no mere accident. This sacred tongue, derived from the Roman liturgical tradition, became the language of divine authority and ecclesiastical command. Women's exclusion from clerical roles renders their engagement with Church Latin a symbolic violation; their corrections echo as unwelcome interventions in a semiotic space governed by fathers and priests. The solemn *dominatio*

conveyed through Latin scriptures and rituals relies on the reinforcement of linguistic hierarchies—to disturb them is to contest divine order itself.

Within the academy, Latin operates as a lingua franca of erudition, a gatekeeper of classical knowledge. The very structure of academic Latin—with its declensions, conjugations, and classical allusions—demands rigorous study and discipline generally inaccessible to women under prevailing educational restrictions. Thus, a woman’s correction of Latin here is an implicit questioning of privileged intellectual labour. Moreover, the etymology of “academy” from *Akadēmeia*, the groves where Plato taught, conjures a traditionally masculine ideal of philosophical dialectic. The female corrective, then, while framed by politeness, disrupts this symbolic masculine enclave.

The legal domain’s appropriation of Latin further sharpens this image. Legal Latin, a precise and archaic dialect rich in formulae and maxims, perpetuates the masculine authority of law. Consider *lex* (law), a feminine noun paradoxically wielded overwhelmingly by men. Corrections here reveal a deeper subversion: the linguistic script that rights society’s order is revealed to be fallible and contestable—even by those formally excluded from legal participation, namely women. The act of correcting legal Latin becomes a semiotic re-inscription, asserting female agency where none was permitted.

Thus, correcting Latin in these three fields cannot be seen as mere grammatical oversight. It is, linguistically, syncretic resistance: the blending of formal knowledge and coded rebellion. The very phonology of Latin, with its clipped syllables and resonant consonants, resounds with patriarchal echo. A woman’s intervention on this stage resonates loudly precisely because it disrupts the deeply symbolic and historically masculinised order of *regere*—to rule rightly.

In sum, the correction of Latin is a potent emblem of female trespass into the male intellectual sphere because language itself embodies and perpetuates social hierarchies. To correct Latin is to question not just words but the power structures encoded therein. As a linguistic specialist, I see this act as one of both courage and necessity, signalling the early murmurs of a broader upheaval—a reclamation of female voice in the most coded of male bastions.

When next they accuse a woman of correcting Latin, let it be known she was correcting history.

1912: On the Topic of Women's Votes

Reverend Septimus Fry, Provost of Westmoreland Cathedral

As noted by that wise historian Saki, I suggest we draft a Bill—the *Compulsory Female Franchise*—enacting that women shall vote at all future elections. *Shall vote*, you observe; or, to put it plainer, *must*. Voting will remain optional, as before, for male electors; but every woman between the ages of twenty-one and seventy will be obliged to vote, not only at elections for Parliament, county councils, district boards, parish councils, and municipalities, but for coroners, school inspectors, churchwardens, curators of museums, sanitary authorities, police-court interpreters, swimming-bath instructors, contractors, choir-masters, market superintendents, art-school teachers, cathedral vergers, and other local functionaries whose names I will add as they occur to me.

Failure to vote at any election falling within her area of residence will involve the female elector in a penalty of £10. Absence, unsupported by an adequate medical certificate, will not be accepted as an excuse.

Such a measure would, I am persuaded, immediately extinguish the present agitation for woman suffrage. Nothing will so effectively cool the ardour of a reformer as being required to practise reform. The average Englishwoman is, at heart, a creature of domestic convenience; she will sign petitions all day but faint at the prospect of standing in a queue.

Nor can it be doubted that a full exercise of civic duty will draw her back to the true business of her sex: moral guardianship of her household. Once she has queued in the rain to vote for a sanitary authority, she will comprehend the divine order of things—that certain matters are best left to men.

In short, by granting women a compulsory vote, we shall protect them from the indignity of wanting one. They may thereby retain that exquisite bloom of feminine ignorance which is the Englishman's most cherished export.

1912: The Times, Letter to the Editor

Viscountess Viola Vorpel

I have read with great admiration—though not surprise—the recent address of the Reverend Septimus Fry, who has contrived, by a curious blend of solemnity and satire, to out-Swift Swift himself. That his proposal for a *Compulsory Female Franchise* should be derived from the writings of “that wise historian Saki” only enhances the comedy.

One must admire a divine who mistakes a humorist for a historian; it is rather as if one cited Mr. Punch in a sermon on Genesis.

The tale to which he refers—*The Great Weep*—was, I remind your readers, a piece of deliberate absurdity. In it, Englishwomen, compelled by law to vote, dutifully obeyed and did so in floods of tears so voluminous that the polling-booths were washed away and the Act repealed for sanitary reasons. It was, as Saki intended, an allegory on the male fear of female obedience—that should women ever do precisely as they are told, the Empire would drown.

Mr. Fry appears to have missed both the irony and the warning. His theology, like his logic, leaks in all directions. Yet perhaps he has inadvertently stumbled on a truth: women's tears, properly directed, are more powerful than all the sermons in Christendom.

If we must be compelled to vote, let us be compelled likewise to choose our candidates. Then we shall see how swiftly the moral hydrology of the nation adjusts itself, and which clerical banks are first to overflow.

1912: The Times, Letter to the Editor

Reverend Septimus Fry

I take exception to your decision to print such a public reply to my recent address against the fatuous voting demands of women. The perfidy of a woman like the Viscountess Vorpel knows no boundaries. She may be a gentlewoman, but she is by no means a genteel member of her class. Women, like children, should neither be seen nor heard. Nor, as in this instance, permitted to publish their views or opinions in such an august publication as yours.

Nevertheless, she is correct in her comment that “women should ever do precisely as they are told.” For woman, no matter her title or status, is made of man, and we are made in God's own image; and it is meet that they should follow our directions as we follow His commands.

The worst mistake made in the last hundred or so years has been to give education to women who now believe themselves better than their masters and superior to their Maker.

1912: The Times, Letters to the Editor

Editor's Note

The Reverend's letter has been printed in the interests of equal representation. Readers are reminded that Viscountess Vorpel's earlier remarks were likewise her own. The paper declines to mediate between theology and irony.

1915: On God as a Badge of Class

Viscountess Viola Vorpel

My mother is charitable: she calls God an alibi for idleness. I call Him a fraud, stitched like a heraldic crest onto the waistcoat of the aspiring classes.

The nobles need no such emblem. Their right to idleness is ancient, and they display it without shame: a duke yawns in his pew as naturally as in his bedchamber. The poor have no time for metaphysics—what bread they steal they must eat quickly before the beadle finds them. But the middle ranks, those anxious shopkeepers and solicitors, those bankers' wives with too much linen to starch and too many daughters to marry off—they required a symbol to lend their industry the gloss of eternity.

God became that symbol. Not a mystery, not even a presence, but a mirror. He was made to look respectable, managerial, stern. He kept books, balanced ledgers, rewarded diligence, punished impropriety. In short, He was invented anew as the apotheosis of the middle class: an overseer in the sky, exacting rent on every life.

It was not devotion but ambition that built the Gothic revival, filled the missionary ships, and polished sermons into moral pamphlets for export across the Empire. One sees in every tract the hand of the tradesman, in every hymn the voice of a clerk. God became not only omnipotent but omnipresent in that he served everywhere as a badge of "good family," as reliable as a calling card or a school tie.

I do not doubt His utility. But let us not mistake utility for truth. A gentleman can be made by a tailor, a lady by a milliner, and a Christian by a pew. All are costumes, stitched and donned for society's inspection.

1916: War makes knights of all men

Viola Vorpel

How splendid it all is, this grand little war of theirs! The gentlemen march off in such a flutter of ribbons and pride, as though they were all Lancelots bound for holy quests rather than grimy trenches. One cannot help but be charmed by their extraordinary seriousness—our dear boys puffed up with talk of honour and glory, each quite certain he is saving civilisation itself from ruin, as if civilisation were not being ruined precisely by all their saving of it.

There is scarcely a man left who is not some sort of knight these days. The postman has become Sir Albert of the Dispatch; the grocer, Sir Thomas of the Tin Can; even my dear chauffeur, who once wrestled with the motorcar rather than dragons, has been transformed—at least in his own mind—into a very St. George of France. They speak of “duty” with the solemn fervour of clergymen and of “sacrifice” as though they were already carved upon their own memorials. Yet one might suspect that if the world did not reward them with medals and songs, they might not find the business quite so enchanting.

The papers are full of their gallantry—how bravely each regiment advanced, how nobly this one died, how heroically the other “held the line.” One would think courage had never been required of women at home who watch, week after week, as telegrams become oracles of doom. But of course, we are not knights. We are the spectators left behind, expected to smile prettily and write encouraging letters to our valiant children and husbands, while they play at being saviours.

Ah, the pageantry of it all! The khaki, the bugles, the banners—and behind them, the same petulant scramble for power and recognition that animates boys on a schoolyard. They quarrel, they boast, they form alliances, and they dash recklessly into battle to win approval from invisible fathers. Only now their broken toys are nations and their playground, Europe itself.

I am repeatedly told that war is a great purifier of the spirit. Perhaps it is—though no one has yet explained what spirit remains to be purified once it has been shot to pieces. It seems to me that war makes knights not of all men, but of all boys who refuse to grow up. They crave pageants and noble deaths because they so dread the dull, decent labour of living: to build, to heal, to understand.

Let them have their shining fantasies of honour. Let them roar their songs and brandish their swords. When it is all over, when the banners are moth-eaten and the medals hauled out only for funerals, perhaps they will return with quieter eyes and humbler hearts. And maybe then, at last, they will learn the lesson their “kighthood” concealed—that

courage is not conquest, but compassion, and that true chivalry is not to die gloriously, but to live wisely.

1917: a nation of women pretending

Viola Vorpel

If war truly makes knights of all men, then what a grotesque parody of knighthood it has become. Our knights now ride trains instead of horses, their lances replaced with rifles, their banners with tattered letters from home. They are told that death for one's country is the most splendid of destinies, a comfort mothers whisper as they sew yet another uniform, as if the act of dying could be made polite through embroidery.

And how earnestly the women have helped build this delusion. From infancy, the boy is bathed in the mythology of manly courage. His mother hushes his cries—"Be brave, my darling, brave like Father." His schoolmaster thrashes sensitivity from him lest tears betray unpatriotic softness. And in the pulpit, Father Gregory assures all that Heaven smiles more richly upon those who fall with a rifle than those who live with compassion. Thus does domestic conditioning, that quiet provincial ritual, arm every household with the first weapon of war—the idea.

Even now, in their letters home, the soldiers write as if they were still schoolboys performing a part before admiring eyes. They have learned to disguise terror as cheer.

"We gave them what for today," says the same child who once boasted of winning a cricket match. War has simply made the field larger—the stakes blood instead of bruises. And here we are, a nation of women pretending to be proud while sweeping the nursery floor, aware that the knights our society created have marched like obedient sons into the mouth of ruin.

They call it manhood. I call it mass regression, a return to the sandbox dressed in khaki. England's mothers, teachers, and clergy have polished the armour, wound the clockwork, and sent their toys to play at conquest. The tragedy is not that men die, but that they are taught to believe it noble. Knights, indeed—gallant, mud-streaked, terrified children wielding bayonets to defend a dream they were raised never to question.

1918: The Brutal Art of Being Men

Viola Vorpel

Ah, the noble art of emotional suppression—that most shining hallmark of modern masculinity! How dreadfully unfashionable it has become to admire this ancient tradition, yet one must give credit where credit is due: men, those dear, stoic creatures, did not reach their majestic state of inner desolation by accident. No, it was carefully cultivated, the result of exquisite domestic horticulture—watered by fathers, pruned by mothers, and fertilised by every sermon that ever declared tears “unmanly.”

Let us begin, as all tragedies do, at home. The father—that heroic gladiator of the sitting room—takes on the lofty duty of disciplining the heart out of his son. One can just picture it: the child dares to exhibit that most frightful of weaknesses, a feeling, and faster than you can say “British Empire,” he is told to “man up.” A few well-placed scoldings, perhaps a hearty shove toward the rugby field, and presto—another fine young automaton joins the ranks of England’s emotionally stunted elite. To show tenderness, after all, is frightfully continental.

But we must not heap all the laurels upon dear Papa. No, a woman’s hand is always detectable in the subtler refinements of repression. The mother, that vigilant guardian of propriety, teaches the boy that a “good man” never whimpers, never sighs too softly, and certainly never admits to confusion. She will cradle him as an infant only to later instruct him—often tearfully, and with perfect hypocrisy—that crying is for girls. Oh, maternal contradiction, thou art the sweetest poison.

Let us not forget the clergy, those tireless shepherds of masculine austerity. They preach of fortitude, of the noble endurance of Job, all while artfully ignoring that poor fellow’s breakdowns and lamentations—best not to clutter Sunday with nuance. The divine decree of manliness, it seems, is conveniently missing from Scripture but strongly implied by the vicar’s moustache.

To be a man, one learns, is to bear all griefs silently—so silently, in fact, that one might be forgiven for thinking him carved of oak rather than born of woman.

And the teachers! Ah, the schoolmasters, wielders of canes and killers of sentiment. They ensure that every trace of tenderness is flogged out before it has the chance to ferment into thought. A boy’s tears are met not with compassion, but with Latin declensions and the rod. “*Vir fortis*,” they say—a strong man. The translation, however, appears to mean “one who can withstand both algebra and abandonment without so much as blinking.”

Thus, through the combined efforts of these domestic artisans, we produce the ideal Englishman—strong, silent, and so emotionally constipated that he might crumble to dust the instant he feels affection—and yet, *when a woman touches him kindly, he disintegrates; centuries of armour undone by warmth.* He goes to war, of course, quite bravely, because by then, death is the only sensation left he has not been trained to repress. And on he marches, a monument to tradition, a casualty of family values neatly dressed in khaki.

One must marvel at the efficiency of it all. Decades of tender brutality, of moral instruction disguised as stoicism, and the result? A society of men who can face cannon fire without flinching but faint at the thought of conversation about their feelings. How splendidly British.

1920: On the parasitism of “fitness”

Viscountess Viola Vorpel

It amuses me that my mother’s “friendship” with Mr Darwin is treated as proof that he was a genius. In truth, he was simply a gentleman with enough leisure and income to stroll with a notebook and make pronouncements. The real work was done by others before him—but they had no fortune, no family connections, and thus no platform from which to declaim their findings.

Darwin’s phrase, “survival of the fittest,” is no better than a clever fraud and not even his own words but those of the philosopher Herbert Spencer. Yet what does “fittest” mean? Strongest? Aptest? Noblest? The ambiguity was the point. By leaving the word loose, Darwin’s gentlemanly readers could stuff it with their own interests. Landlords declared themselves fittest because they owned land. Capitalists announced their fitness because they had capital. The idle classes, living on inherited income, congratulated themselves for surviving on the labour of others.

Thus “fitness” became an alibi for parasitism. The “gentleman scientist” was no scientist at all but a consumer of others’ labour, translating their observations into a language that society would applaud. The “gentleman landlord” was a thief dressed in tweed. The “gentleman industrialist” was merely a sharper clerk who had moved up a rung. And the “gentleman soldier” was a killer sanctified by uniform and prayer.

My mother liked to think herself Darwin’s equal because she could play at ideas over tea, but what was Darwin himself but a Mallard of

another stripe—a man who spent his life describing what was already known, draped in the authority of being “fit” by birth and fortune?

If survival of the fittest means anything, it means this: that parasites live long when society protects them. The rest must die or serve. That is the gentleman’s secret.

1920: The Burden of Raising Children

A Quiet Questioning

In the quiet moments stolen between social engagements and the daily demands of the household, I find my thoughts returning, with increasing insistence, to a question seldom dared aloud: am I truly meant only to bear children? The expectation rests heavily upon me from all sides—society pronounces the woman’s chief worth in motherhood, my husband shares this conviction, fervently yet with a curious hesitancy—and certainly, bearing heirs is deemed our solemn duty. Yet I cannot help but wonder if this is the finest use of a woman’s talents and desires, or merely a custom upheld in the name of tradition and empire.

My husband, though not bound by law to primogeniture in the way his forebears would be, behaves as if he carries the burden nonetheless. Despite the fact that our eldest son need not inherit estates or titles—for our family belongs solidly to the professional middle class—he speaks often of “the family line” and “continuity” as though these were matters of life and death. His fervour for children, I suspect, is less about personal investment in our progeny and more about fulfilling an abstract ideal. Is he truly committed to raising a lively, flourishing family—or does he see our children as little soldiers, to serve as cannon fodder in this relentless Empire’s ceaseless wars?

The Empire looms over every corner of our existence. One does not merely raise children; one raises imperial subjects, imbued with the sense that they are destined for sacrifice in distant lands. I watch the young men paraded in recruitment drives and the endless flow of patriotic songs, and I shudder. Is this the future my husband desires for our sons, or the future he is compelled to support because the social order demands it? The question unsettles me deeply.

Yet beyond the political, there remains the personal cost to a woman. Raising children—the constant, unceasing care, the sacrifice of self—is lauded as the highest calling, but it can also be a profound confinement. I am educated, with interests that extend beyond the nursery and the needlepoint, refined tastes and ambitions that stretch towards the arts and letters. To devote my life solely to motherhood feels, increasingly,

like the wasting of a valuable resource. Society heralds it as sacrifice, but it is often neglect, masked by piety.

I do not deny the joys born of motherhood, nor do I diminish the love one develops for one's children. However, the relentless expectations graven into our social fabric leave scant room for women to question or choose differently. Rarely does anyone ask whether a woman might prefer to cultivate her intellect, to engage with the world beyond the hearth, or to define herself in ways unconnected to the reproductive imperative.

My husband's stance is emblematic of a society trapped in a web of expectations. He is caught between his own desires and the external pressures to conform, much as I am. It is a dance of habit and hope, of fear and duty. He asserts his need for heirs with the conviction of one upholding a sacred trust, yet I see in his eyes moments of uncertainty—a silent question of whether this too is a role forced upon him.

Thus, we both bear burdens: he, the weight of maintaining likeness and legacy for an imperial future; I, the endless labour of nurturing and shaping potential heirs amid the question of whether the task is just or merely traditional. I long for a time when such decisions might be openly discussed, with honesty, and where a woman's talents might be valued beyond the capacity to proliferate.

Until then, I remain, as all women of my class, a custodian of an ambiguous inheritance—one filled with love and duty but also doubt and silent defiance.

1925: On Victoria

Octavia Mallard, lecture notes (unpublished)

Victoria did not merely reign; she fabricated. Our modern calendar of sentiment owes more to her whim than to scripture or history. Christmas as a family feast, complete with decorated tree and gifts? Imported from Albert and enshrined by Victoria. Birthdays celebrated with ritual fuss? Elevated by her court. Even “middle age,” that curious invention, owes itself to her determination that women—and especially her daughters—should accept a fixed script for life.

She clothed her subjects in costumes of her own making: black for grief, white for innocence, blue for docility, pink for virility, all inverted to suit her politics. She chained women to mourning for years, not in sorrow but in performance. She mandated purity at the altar, not for God's sake but for monarchy's theatre. She built industries of jet and lace, veils and velvet, making commerce from grief and chastity alike.

And we still pretend these customs are ancient, as if handed down by the Fates themselves. They are not. They were manufactured, barely a century ago and enforced by a court that punished dissent. Yet our parents and grandparents cling to them with reverence, like holy writ, never seeing that they are as recent and as arbitrary as the invention of Mother's Day or Father's Day—a confection to sell more trinkets between Christmas and Easter.

Tradition, when examined, is not the voice of the past. It is the device of power. And in Victoria's case, it was the art of dressing tyranny in velvet.

Give me the brutal monarchs—the Henrys, the Elizabeths, the Cromwells. With them, at least you knew where you stood: a head might roll but it rolled in daylight. Victoria was worse. She cloaked her viciousness in lace and jet, sanctified cruelty in the name of family and spread her theatre of sentiment across the Empire.

Consider arsenic wallpaper: known to kill and known to have killed. One of her own diplomatic guests poisoned in her very palaces. What did she do? Removed it from her walls, yes—but not from the market. Her subjects continued to sicken and die in green parlours and nurseries across Britain. No command to cease, no royal protection for her people. What mattered was her comfort, not their survival.

She made mourning an industry, chaining women to years of black crepe and jet jewellery, as if grief itself were taxable. She made white the colour of weddings, though white was once the hue of death. She inverted symbols to suit her pageantry, then convinced her subjects that this was tradition. Even her children she bound, denying them freedom, refusing to prepare Edward for rule. And still she is venerated—as if cruelty, when softened with sentiment, is virtue.

Do not mistake this for strength. Victoria was not strong, nor wise. She was small, selfish, cruel, and—most unforgivably—she was stupid. A clever monarch can at least be respected. A brutal monarch, feared. But Victoria? She was neither. She was merely mean. And because she ruled so long, her meanness calcified into culture, infecting generations with false traditions and false morals.

Her legacy is not empire, nor progress. It is the elevation of hypocrisy itself into the crown jewel of British life.

1930: On Royalty

Octavia Mallard

If the nobility can best be described as a spent force, royalty is an empty vessel—an echo chamber of inherited gesture. Possessed of no

real or divine power since the signing of the Magna Carta, they have become, at best, sovereigns above a midden: a crown adrift on a cesspool.

For the word *sovereign*, when traced to its Latin origin (a language we women have, for centuries, been discouraged from learning—lest we use it properly), is *superanus*. *Super* means above. *Anus* means ring—and, more vulgarly, that unmentionable physical attribute upon which we all sit.

Thus, a sovereign is quite literally one who sits above. And that, I think, is the most accurate definition of monarchy yet devised.

The illusion of divine appointment is not unlike the odour of sanctity: both are most convincing from a distance. Up close, one finds only ornament, ceremony, and an extraordinarily delicate digestion.

Royalty persists because people mistake its stillness for stability, and its pageantry for purpose. But it is only the theatre of continuity—the last and most expensive costume drama in Europe, sustained by those who fear what might replace it.

If a woman were ever to sit upon that throne, truly as herself and not as emblem, she would have to rise not by birth but by intellect, and she would not reign by grace but by irony. For she would know what *superanus* means—and would rule accordingly.

1932: On institutional reproduction

Viola Vorpel

All reproduction that occurs in institutions is symbolic. Women and their bodies are utterly unnecessary.

That, at least, is the secret that the men of science and the clerks of empire dare not name. Universities, governments, and churches all reproduce themselves without recourse to the womb. They imitate fertility through paperwork, inheritance, promotion, and hierarchy. Their offspring are titles, not children; their midwives are committees.

The feminine is retained only as ornament or metaphor: Alma Mater, Mother Church, Britannia—each a figurehead carved at the prow of the ship, while the crew beneath her deck reproduce only the rules of their fathers.

Meanwhile, women are told that their highest calling is motherhood, even as the world is organised to ensure they are dispensable. Every institution that claims to protect the family exists to replace it. Factories, schools, hospitals, armies—each is a machine for continuing itself. The true miracle of birth is that it still occurs at all, and not yet by decree of the board.

The men who speak of progress speak of machines that will one day make women unnecessary. They do not see that they already have.

1933: On symbolic and linguistic reproduction

Octavia Mallard

Viola is, as usual, half right and twice certain.

It is true that the institutions reproduce without us—by charter, by lineage, by endless signatures that pretend to breathe. Yet these signatures are still words, and words are still born from the mouth. Even their coldest records begin as sound.

The clerks may stamp and file, the bishops may seal and bless, but every decree they issue depends upon language—the first and last feminine domain.

Before a child, before a law, before a machine, there was the word: shaped in the mouth, carried in the breath, received by an other. Every act of naming is a birth, though the fathers of institutions pretend otherwise.

Women have been dispossessed not of the body but of the grammar that once bound body and world.

We are told that the word is flesh made divine, yet the word was once flesh enough. The alphabet itself is a theft—stolen midwife's marks, simplified into tools of accountancy. What men call order is only the narrowing of the womb.

If institutions reproduce symbolically, women reproduce linguistically: we birth continuities of tone, gesture, and silence.

Our speech carries memory, while theirs manufactures record.

They inherit systems; we inherit resonance.

So perhaps my sister is right that they no longer need our bodies.

But they will always need our tongues, though they pretend otherwise.

1932: On southern voyages

Elsbeth Mallard

As two of my daughters voyage to live in Sydney, I am reminded that the so-called discovery of that far colony was made not by a gentleman but by Captain Cook, a man of common stock and worse manners, who—mercifully, perhaps—was not rewarded with a peerage for his pains. It has always struck me as fitting that the crown was unwilling to ennoble him, for what he “discovered” was little more

than an afterthought: a place so distant that it was useful chiefly as a warehouse for flax and felons.

My mother, in her diaries, rightly observed that transportation was not conceived in pity for starving wretches who filched bread or poached a rabbit from my lord's estate. No, the penal colony was a commercial expedient—a salve for the Empire's loss of America. Ships demanded sails, sails demanded flax, and flax demanded land. That the great southern continent became instead a dumping ground for the Empire's refuse was, as ever, a matter of distance, indolence, and convenience.

I once thought no Mallard would ever set foot in such a savage land, let alone reside there. Yet the reports I now read, and the letters sent by our cousins in administrative service, tell of a colony somewhat domesticated—Federation achieved, universities founded, the crude huts of the early settlers replaced by terraces and parlours. I allow myself to hope that this country may prove a gracious home for my well-bred, if incorrigibly intellectual, daughters.

Gloriana, ever ambitious, may find a provincial society to aspire toward and perhaps even dominate, while Octavia, with her linguistic genius, will no doubt dazzle a population that has never heard a woman speak as she does. Or perhaps I misjudge: perhaps it is not they who will soften beneath the colonial sun, but the colonies themselves which will find their manners sharpened by the presence of a Mallard.

So our family, already dispersed across the Empire, now extends itself to the South. It is consoling to think that in so doing, we are not a diminished but an enlarged flock.

1933: On setting foot in a colony

Gloriana Mallard, Sydney

How very odd this place is. One arrives with the expectation that the air will be uncouth and the people worse, but I find that the climate itself conspires to make one forget propriety. The sun is too strong for velvet, the dust too coarse for silk, and the flies—I will not speak of the flies. Even the harbour, which is admittedly beautiful, has an unfinished air about it, as though it is waiting to be claimed by someone who knows how to stage it properly.

Mother is quite wrong if she imagines this a place already humanised. It is not humanised, it is only domesticated: made habitable in the way one tames a servant without ever teaching him refinement. Houses are large but graceless, society plentiful but poorly arranged. People call one another "dear" without the least acquaintance. A man will smoke

in front of a lady, and no one calls him to order. Worse, women themselves make no protest.

Still, I am not so blind as to fail to see what may be done with this. Where manners are wanting, a woman of good breeding may shine doubly bright. I am not as clever as Octavia nor as admired as Viola, but here those defects scarcely signify. No one here knows the measure of a true lady; thus, I may set the measure myself.

I shall cultivate acquaintances among the administrators and the wives of barristers. It is remarkable how quickly doors open when one is dressed properly, bows slightly less than required, and speaks as though accustomed to being answered. The men of Sydney may be rough, but they are also malleable: they want to be instructed in what is “done.” And the women are eager for a model.

I daresay I might miss England, were there not so much to win here. In Sussex, I should always be compared to my sisters; here, I may be myself—or better than myself. And why not? Is that not the point of manners: to make one more than what one is born to be?

1933: On arriving among the savages

Octavia Mallard, Sydney

My mother, in her letter of farewell, referred to this country as “savage,” though I confess I have heard more savagery in the drawing rooms of Sussex than in all my strolls through Sydney’s botanic gardens. The word itself bears unpardonable confusion. From the Latin *silvaticus*—of the woods—it merely means “untamed.” A thing not yet corralled, not yet bent into use. But by that measure, my mother herself was savage when she thought for herself; so too are poets, and children, and men who refuse the treadmill of commerce.

The people I have met here—convicts’ grandchildren, Irish labourers, Chinese merchants, Aboriginal women selling fish on the wharves—are far less “untamed” than the gentlemen of Oxford who once sneered at me for giving a lecture. Their manners, though not stamped with the polish of Paris or London, are no less courteous when measured in kind. If they lack the absurd polish of powdered dukes, they more than compensate with directness, which I confess is preferable to being “bowed” into silence.

I begin to think that “gentleman” is not a condition, but a costume. Here, the coat and waistcoat sit uneasily on the body of a man who has cut sugar cane or driven cattle across the inland deserts. He wears civility like an ill-fitting glove, and when it slips, the raw hand beneath is visible—blistered, calloused, undeniably human.

I do not find this vulgar. I find it refreshing. My mother imagines society to be an orchestra in which every player knows her part and suppresses her self for the harmony of the whole. Australia feels rather like a field of cicadas—loud, uncoordinated, insistent—yet alive.

As for language: here lies treasure. The Aboriginal words—harsh, delicate, precise, elliptical—make a mockery of our tired categories. What we call “gentle,” they call by a dozen names, each shading a difference in touch, sight, or sound. If England invented the “gentleman” to mask inequality, here words reveal it. That, at least, is honest.

My sisters may find their place in salons or in silence. I, meanwhile, shall be listening at the wharves, where the so-called savages speak a better English than the gentlemen who seek to define them.

1934: On the attempt at refinement

Gloriana Mallard, Sydney

I determined that if one is to make a mark in society here, one must begin at the table. There is no other way. Australians, I am told, are careless eaters: they pile their plates, speak with their mouths full, and think nothing of drinking beer with the main course. It is appalling. Yet it is also an opportunity.

Thus, I planned a dinner of six courses, with French wines for each, and imported crystal to dazzle the eye. The oysters were quite fresh, the consommé clear enough to see one’s reflection, and the saddle of lamb perfectly pink. Yet I could not help but notice the silence that fell when I instructed the butler (borrowed from a friend) to serve the wine from the right. They did not know why it mattered, and when I explained, they laughed. Imagine—laughed! At a point of correctness.

One woman, the wife of a judge, cut her bread with a knife. I was obliged to place my own piece delicately upon my knee and break it, so she might see her error without rebuke. But she did not notice. Another gentleman poured his champagne as though it were cider. Still another attempted to carve the lamb himself, though the footman stood ready.

I confess I grew heated—though I kept my smile—when one guest remarked, “My word, Gloriana, this is very grand for Sydney! We usually just put everything on the table and let people help themselves.” He meant it kindly, I think, but it was as if he had thrust a knife into my ambition.

Still, I comfort myself. They will speak of my dinner—perhaps mock it, but speak of it nonetheless. And the next time, they will take greater

care. If they laugh at me, they laugh upwards, which is always preferable to being laughed down.

After all, refinement is a slow contagion. It must spread one detail at a time: the way a napkin is placed, the order of the wines, the quiet refusal to eat soup with a fork. I intend to be patient.

1935: Octavia Mallard
On Character and Service

In the nineteenth century no servant could move from one household to another without a “character.” This was not their own disposition, their wit, or their honesty. It was a piece of paper—a testimonial written by a master or mistress, attesting to qualities which, true or false, became the servant’s only coin of passage. It was even made a criminal offence to give a false one. Thus “character” was never an interior possession but a portable stamp of obedience.

And does it differ so very much for women? A wife’s *character* was vouched for by her husband’s standing, a daughter’s by her father’s reputation, a lady’s by her title. Even at the top of the ladder, the so-called “gentlewoman” is nothing more than a servant to the family name, her reference written in her lineage.

The irony persists. Today we demand résumés and “references of good character,” which is to say, modern testimonials of service. Employers want not the worker’s story but someone else’s assurance that the worker has conformed to expectations. Once again, character is outsourced.

And perquisites? Another sly trick of language. In service, a perquisite was a small allowance, a privilege bestowed on the domestic staff—worn clothes, candle stubs, food scraps. Yet the same word inflates upwards, where it names the prerogatives of nobility: hunting rights, rents, parliamentary seats. The servant’s perquisite and the lord’s perquisite are twins, differing only in scale.

What this reveals is the true “mobility” of society: not ascent but mimicry. The servant shadows the master, the master shadows the king, the lady shadows the lord. Everyone’s “character” is merely a reference handed down, a borrowed stamp.

A gentleman may think himself free, but he too is only carrying a paper character written by others—the church, the crown, the club.

1936: on morals

AP Herbert

"Under the old law a woman was held to have no sense, a man under the new law, it appears, is held to have no morals."

1936: on Divorce

Excerpt from Viola's Lecture, St Hilda's College

My subject this evening is the great moral reform of our time: the belief that men and women are now, by Act of Parliament if not by nature, to be judged by the same standard.

One must admire the optimism. For generations a wife could be dismissed from marriage for what the law delicately termed *a single unauthorized embrace*; a husband, meanwhile, was required to provide corroborative evidence—generally in the form of a mistress, a broken rib, or a prolonged absence abroad—before the courts considered him equally deserving of freedom.

The reformers call this progress. I call it housekeeping: they have merely rearranged the furniture while leaving the same old drafts whistling through the moral corridors.

Under the old order, a woman's lapse was a scandal and a man's a shrug. Under the new, the scandal has been nationalised. The radio assures us that the sovereign himself has discovered the modern conscience—proof, perhaps, that equality between the sexes is at last achievable, provided one begins at Buckingham Palace.

But I digress. The point, ladies, is that law can tidy conduct but not character. The hope that men and women might one day behave with equal virtue is touching—though one suspects the lawyers, as ever, will benefit most.

1937: A Lecture on Perquisites

Viscountess Viola Vorpel

Do not imagine, gentlemen, that your "perquisites" are secured by the crown alone. No, their origin lies higher up the crooked ladder. The crooked God, stamped on earth by His crooked priests, is the first giver of favours. To them all honour is owed—so you tell yourselves. And thus every "gentle" creature, man or woman, is yoked to a fantasy of eternal patronage.

Your estates, your rents, your seats in Parliament—these are sacraments masquerading as privileges, blessed by priests who certify that you are what you claim. The servant’s candle-end, the nobleman’s hunting-right: both are the same perquisite, merely scaled to the fiction of divine favour.

So what is a gentleman? A tame believer, tethered to an unknowable deity whose authority cannot be questioned because it never appears. A gentleman is not free; he is franchised. His gentleness lies not in virtue but in submission to a crooked God and His earthly clerks.

1946: On the word “fit”

Octavia Mallard

My mother Elspeth makes merry with Mr Darwin’s “fittest,” though I suspect he meant nothing quite so domestic as a beagle or a skein of wool. But her instinct is not wrong: the trouble lies in the word itself.

The English “fit” is a magpie. In Old English it was *fitt*, a portion of a poem, a division, a stanza—a fitting-together of words. Later it was *fitten*, to be suitable or meet. A thing “fit” was not strong but apt: it belonged, it answered the occasion, it sat well in its place.

To be “fit” was to be proper, decorous, becoming. Only in later centuries, with our modern mania for the muscular, did it begin to mean strong of limb, taut of belly, ready for athletic exertion. Even now we call a dress “fit” when it sits correctly on the figure—not when it proves itself stronger than the cloth next to it.

So when Darwin tells us that the “fittest” survive, he borrows a word that has already shifted its ground. He might mean the apt, the suitable, the well-placed. He might mean the strong. He might even mean the fortunate. The ambiguity allows his readers to hear in it whatever they desire: moral justification, social consolation, national flattery.

My mother wonders if weakness may not be the truer fitness. She is not far astray, for the pliant often outlast the rigid. The very word *gentle* (which makes our “gentleman”) once meant tame, domesticated, yielding. That is its fitness.

Thus we arrive where Darwin did not mean us to: survival not of the strong, but of those who suit—who fit into the crooked pattern, whether by yielding, by hiding, or by knitting themselves unobtrusively into the cloth of society.

1950: A lecture to gentlemen

Viola Vorpel

Gentlemen—or rather those who would be so styled—you parade about with your borrowed feathers, yet not one of you can tell me what you are.

A *yeoman*? That is but a man permitted to stand above a serf yet beneath a knight—half-free, half-bound. A *squire*? A boy at service, waiting on the leisure of his betters. A *gallant*? That is a peacock in borrowed silk, all bow and flourish, rarely substance. A *cavalier*? You think yourself a horseman, but it is the horse that lends you nobility, not your seat upon it.

Or perhaps you favour the word *genteel*. That limp handkerchief of a term, pressed against the brow to absorb the sweat of true labour. It denotes quality, yes—but only the sort that requires a witness to be believed.

Even *gentle* itself betrays you: once it meant noble by blood; soon it meant tame, pliant, domesticated. What greater insult than to have your “gentility” confused with the docility of a lapdog?

You stand, then, in a hall of mirrors: not knights, not lords, not peasants, but some shimmering middle thing, calling itself “gentry.” You are noble only in contrast to those beneath you, and servile when measured against those above.

Thus, when society calls you *gentleman*, it does not define you. It defines itself—declaring what it would like to see reflected in you. A duke calls you “gentleman” and you are small; a clerk calls you “gentleman” and you are grand. The word is not a title, it is a trick of perspective.

Tell me, then—what are you, really, without the word?

1953: On Declining Gratitude

Viola Vorpel

My dears, gratitude is the most treacherous of courtesies. It masquerades as virtue but is, in truth, a small chain laid delicately about the neck. One is expected to bow one’s head and wear it prettily. Most do.

But I was taught—too late for usefulness and too early for comfort—that to accept gratitude is to accept someone else’s definition of your worth. It fixes the exchange and fixes *you* within it. One must learn, then, how to decline graciously, lest one become the debtor in one’s own house.

Declining gratitude is not rudeness. It is art. It must be done with calm precision, never in haste or pique. The tone should neither chill nor invite; it must hover between both, like a veil over a candle. To say “You are kind” is better than “Thank you,” for the former returns the light to its source, while the latter steals it into your own hands and burns you.

If the other insists, do not contradict them—merely step aside and let their words fall to the floor. A small silence does the work of an entire sermon. People are uncomfortable with stillness; they will fill it with their own retreat.

And beware the modern notion that gratitude must be *felt*. To feel obliged is to be trapped. One can act courteously without being conquered. It is a lesson few women of my acquaintance ever mastered, since our education in charm was meant to keep us pliant, not poised. But I found that polite detachment, offered with a smile, achieves both independence and the illusion of sweetness.

A lady—or a gentleman, for that matter—ought to cultivate this invisible armour. For gratitude, like love, is a transaction. Decline it lightly, and you remain the author of the scene. Accept it too deeply, and you become someone else’s good deed.

If anyone accuses you of ingratitude, take it as proof that you have succeeded.

1953: On Revival and Providence

Octavia Mallard

The word *revival* is a sly one. It promises breath, spirit, a return to life. Yet in the nineteenth century it signified no such thing. There was no life in the Gothic to revive—only fragments of masonry and parchment. What was raised in England was not the past, but a simulacrum, a confection of Walter Scott’s prose and Pugin’s sketches, as contrived as any stage set. To call it *revival* was to persuade a nation that memory could be invented.

So too with that peculiar American invention, the *dream*. A dream is, strictly, a thing seen while asleep, incoherent, absurd. Yet in the republic of the self-made, it became the highest form of waking life. To live a dream was to be lulled into the conviction that wealth and status lay within reach of all—at the very moment those same privileges were secured more tightly than ever. A dream is not progress but delusion; its utility lies in keeping men docile while the factory clock devours their hours.

Providence is worse. It once meant foresight, prudent management. By the nineteenth century it was stolen by theologians and rebranded as divine governance. What an elegant theft! A word that ought to name human responsibility was transferred upward to God, so that famine, plague, and poverty might be explained not as failures of government or greed but as His inscrutable design. To speak of Providence is to launder injustice.

The Gothic *revival*, the American *dream*, the Christian *providence*—these are not beliefs but disguises. They are words that papered over soot-black walls, fantasies erected against the terror of mortality, war, and industrial want. Language in such hands is chloroform: sweet on the lips, numbing in effect, until whole populations fall into a stupor and call it civilisation.

1957: On the Word Lord

Octavia Mallard

The authorities (Partridge, Onions, Skeat, the OED) derive it from Old English *blāford*—literally *blāf-weard*, “loaf-ward” or “keeper of the bread.” A lord was he who held the bread, the dispenser of food to dependents. That sounds benign enough until one recalls that “loaf” itself carries the darker double: to loaf is to be idle. So the one who “keeps the loaf” is not he who makes it but he who loafs on it. A parasite.

But there is another current—folk etymology, whispered more than written—that takes *lord* from Greek *lordos*, meaning bent, crooked, deformed of spine. Richard III’s court, swollen with hastily created lords, provided both the model and the slur. Thus a lord is crooked in body and in conduct: a lord is a crook.

And the God who styles himself *Lord*? The crooked god. The one who holds the loaf but does not bake it.

From here, the chain of equivalence is easy to extend:

- Lord = crooked, parasitic, idle.
- Manor = dwelling of the man who keeps what he has not earned.
- Manorial right = the right to steal openly.
- Noble = he who is ennobled by theft.

To call someone “my lord” is not an elevation but an indictment. You address him as the one who steals in public, with sanction.



The Raised

1967: On Erotic Discipline

Viola Vorpel

It seems to me that erotic discipline is the one thread of continuity between every age of so-called civilisation. The gentlemen were trained to command, the ladies to comply, and the whole arrangement was politely renamed *good breeding*.

I once read that “no woman wants to look appealing in bed.” The remark was meant to be reassuring: an assurance that modesty survives even in the dark. What it really betrayed was exhaustion—the long inheritance of women taught to desire without appearing desirous, to perform surrender so gracefully that it passes for chastity.

From the Victorians onward, repression has been the empire’s favourite export. Its missionaries carried the creed of self-control like smallpox: fatal to pleasure, infectious to propriety. By the time my cousin Fabrice was being caned into gentility in Sydney, Englishwomen were still being quietly whipped by social expectation into their own forms of invisibility.

Discipline, as we inherited it, is not the opposite of desire but its choreography. The tighter the corset, the more elegant the posture. The quieter the voice, the more charged the silence. A woman who obeys the code perfectly learns the trick of appearing inert while commanding the entire room.

We pretend that emancipation has loosened these laces, yet even now the modern woman is rewarded for restraint and derided for appetite. Erotic discipline persists—only the implements have changed. The rod has become the gym subscription, the confessional the therapist’s couch, the corset the curated profile.

What the gentlemen never quite understood was that obedience was never our natural state. It was simply our performance of theirs.

1970: The Hidden Curriculum

Fabrice Mallard

It was not Blandy’s fussing over soup spoons, nor my mother’s endless rehearsals in the minor theatre of manners, that made me what I

am. It was something quieter, crueller, and altogether more instructive: the discipline of hiding in plain sight.

My mother, Gloriana, did not teach me to speak, but to withhold; not to flourish, but to fold. She thought she was moulding me into a gentleman. In truth, she was training me in invisibility. To be seen but not grasped. Present, but untouchable.

Later, a woman said of me: “You can never tell what he is thinking.” She thought it a riddle; I knew it was the answer. The lesson was already complete.

It explains my lifelong admiration for certain women, and women only. Catherine de Medici, who ruled through layers of secrecy; Elizabeth Tudor, who turned virginity into power; Madame de Pompadour, who held a throne without a crown. These were women who knew everyone and let no one know them. They learned—as I had learned—that survival depends not on being loved or feared, but on being unreadable.

I have no male heroes. Men thrust themselves forward, declare, posture, proclaim. Women like these dissolve into the very fabric of their courts and yet remain the axis upon which everything turns. They understood that to endure in a man’s world is to become what no man can quite seize.

That is the true education of a gentleman: not polish, but opacity. To appear candid while never revealing the core. To remain visible while impossible to pin down.

1975: My Fabrice and the Proper Gentleman

Gloriana Mallard

It is no small burden, I assure you, raising a boy for destiny. One cannot simply let him grow up to be any ordinary Australian man—heaven forbid, one of those beer-spilling, stubby-short-wearing types who refer to all furniture as “stuff.” No, my Fabrice is being reared for something far finer. Should certain genealogical accidents occur—and one must always be prepared for the fragility of English constitutions—he is positioned as a potential Duke. Yes, a real one. Not a “Duke of Earl” or whatever the Americans pretend to have, but a proper, hereditary, God-and-debts-ordained Duke.

Naturally, this requires training—one cannot rely on blood alone, especially when diluted by generations of Australian humidity. So I’ve made it my life’s mission to cultivate in Fabrice the attributes befitting his probable inheritance. I refer to this as his “pre-peerage phase.” It’s a serious business, though, between you and me, less appreciated by our

neighbours, who seem to think my efforts “a bit fancy.” But I remind them: refinement takes discipline. Gritty hands do not make history.

First and foremost, posture. I have engaged a retired ballet instructor to monitor Fabrice’s bearing. A gentleman must never slouch, except when lounging with intention—a subtle but crucial distinction that separates the aristocrat from the accountant. His chin must tilt at precisely the angle of mild condescension—sufficient to suggest access to family portraits but not so steep as to appear sinus-challenged.

Speech, too, is an art form. We practice vowels at breakfast. “Ah” as in “Balmoral,” not as in “barbecue.” “E” as in “Eton,” not “Esso.” I will not have my son’s nobility betrayed by an antipodean accent. He may reside in Australia, but his destiny lies in Surrey—or at least within earshot of it. When he greets people, he must never say “G’day.” He must say “Good afternoon,” with a pause that implies he already knows something they don’t.

Naturally, deportment and manners follow. Fabrice has been taught to rise when a lady enters the room, to bow (never nod), and to pour tea without creating turbulence. We hold mock luncheons twice a week, during which he must entertain his “guests”—Mrs. Mott and her poodle, mostly—with conversation that is witty but understated. A gentleman never laughs; he acknowledges amusement.

He dresses, of course, as a young duke ought. His tailor in Toorak is under strict instruction: no synthetics, no logos, and absolutely no denim. I once caught him attempting a pair of jeans—a moment of rebellion I can only attribute to the school influence—and sent them straight to the op shop. He now understands that a man of breeding should feel physically unwell in polyester.

Certain sports are also essential. Fencing for grace, rowing for discipline, and cricket because, unfortunately, the English still imagine it to represent civilisation. Rugby is tolerated only when played abroad and discussed in a lowered voice. I draw the line at Australian rules football; it simply will not do for a boy with ducal prospects to associate with something so... populist.

As for moral virtues, I have reminded Fabrice that a gentleman must never display hunger—for food, for money, or for approval. He must glide through life as if he were accustomed to better things, even if he must one day marry into them. “One must appear born to it,” I tell him, “at least until the will is executed.”

People sometimes whisper that my ambitions are extravagant, even unseemly. But isn’t it every mother’s duty to see her son rise above the herd? Australia is quite content with larrikins; I, however, am raising legacy. Should young Edward fail in his dynastic obligations—and let’s be honest, he seems the type—my Fabrice will be ready. Ready to

inherit the grand estates, the obligations, the ancestral silver, and, of course, the approved melancholy of English nobility.

In the meantime, we practice decorum over dinner. He sets the table, stands when I enter, and calls me “Mother” with a restraint that promises a title. And as he sits there, chin poised, vowels polished, hands folded correctly on the linen, I see it quite plainly: the makings of a duke, born inconveniently under Australian daylight, but destined, I flatter myself, for overcast greatness.

1976: On the Discipline of Gentlemen

Fabrice Mallard

My school’s motto, *honor non honores*, was meant to inspire the pursuit of virtue over the pursuit of recognition. In practice it taught how to disguise ambition as modesty and aggression as courtesy. We were not to *seek* honours—merely to expect them.

Discipline was the altar at which we daily genuflected. It was a public school in the British sense: that is, private property masquerading as a moral institution. The headmaster believed pain improved character and that character improved obedience. Many a future captain of industry was bent over in that chapel of small humiliations.

Someone once said of Eton that it prepared Englishmen for their later imprisonment by teaching them early the habits of confinement. The same may be said of my Sydney alma mater. It was a kind of genteel barracks, a coercive hybrid of army camp and monastery, with day release for some. We wore our uniforms as willingly as the condemned their numbers.

I have often reflected that discipline is merely fetish disguised as virtue. The line between the two is only a question of lighting and vocabulary. The masters took their pleasure in correction; the boys in being corrected. It was the nearest we ever came to intimacy, this ritualised exchange of power and shame. One learns, after a few years of such formation, that a gentleman’s composure is not innate but trained—drilled—into him like a muscle memory.

When I later encountered the same dynamic in other, more expensive rooms, I recognised it at once. The same tone of command, the same thrill of submission, the same ceremony of reward. Only the uniforms were finer and the punishments more imaginative.

Honor non honores, indeed.

1980: On the Maintenance of Solitude

Fabrice Mallard

There comes a time when privacy is mistaken for invitation.

Withdraw, and the world, alarmed by your silence, rushes in with fruit baskets, phone calls, and thinly veiled concern. Absence, like wealth, must be carefully managed lest it provoke acquisitiveness in others.

I have learned that stillness has a peculiar luminosity. The fewer words I offer, the more elaborate the fantasies that form around me. My quiet becomes their conversation. To remain quiet, therefore, is an act of control: a way of editing the narrative others insist on writing.

When I was in trade—though no gentleman ever admits to such—I found that silence was half the service. A client’s imagination filled every pause; my economy of gesture made me seem wise, attentive, mysterious. I have since discovered that solitude, properly tended, produces the same effect.

There are those who mean well. They appear at my door with gifts, invitations, and anxieties about my well-being. Their concern is touching, but it is also a bid for entry. The gracious thing, of course, is to thank them—and decline. Gratitude is the most elegant form of refusal, especially when accompanied by a smile that promises nothing.

It takes a lifetime to learn that being alone is not a punishment but an art form. Privacy, like a well-laid table, is not for everyone’s use; it exists for the pleasure of its arrangement. One cannot explain this without seeming cruel. So I merely nod, murmur my thanks, and retreat into the only society that never disappoints: my own.

Arthur Blandy’s marginal note:

“The boy has learned what no schooling could have taught him—that courtesy is best when it defends rather than admits. I find, to my satisfaction, that solitude has made him quite the gentleman I was engaged to produce.”

1980: The Emotional Apocalypse of the Modern Man

Alice Mallard

Somewhere between “walk it off” and “don’t be a girl,” a whole generation of men learned to perform emotional taxidermy on themselves—neatly stuffing the soft bits and propping them up in the shape of confidence. It’s an old family hobby, really, passed down like

the good china. The fathers provide the hammer; the mothers provide the measuring tape; and the teachers, pastors, and youth coaches all nod approvingly while the delicate work of psychological flattening goes on.

Let's start at home, where the miracle begins. Dad, that majestic foreman of masculine construction, believes he is building character, but he's really just sanding off everything resembling a pulse. When his son cries after falling off his bike, he doesn't comfort him—he offers the sacred mantra: “Man up.” Translation: suppress that noise before someone mistakes you for a person. It's domestic emotional bootcamp—no medals, no hugs, just the lifelong privilege of not knowing how to say “I'm sad.”

Then comes Mum, the angel of emotional quality control. No one polishes the myth of manliness quite like she does. With a teary smile, she'll tell her little boy that real men don't cry—and she cries as she says it, because irony is hereditary. She'll reward stoicism with cookies, and compassion with confusion. Don't be soft, sweetheart—softness is for scatter cushions.

In steps the educational system, that fine factory of standardised silence. Schools teach emotional literacy about as gracefully as a meat grinder teaches origami. A boy who sits quietly and never complains? Model student. A boy who cries? “He's having trouble adjusting.” Adjustment, of course, meaning, “Please fold your feelings into something that fits in your locker.” And let's not forget the good old clergy, forever doing mental CrossFit over manhood. They preach endurance, sacrifice, suffering—all wonderful virtues, unless you happen to feel them. Then it's “pray it away.”

By adulthood, these boys-turned-men have learned that “strength” means “emotional illiteracy with a strong jawline.” They're experts at conflict, allergic to intimacy, and yet oddly proud of it—like someone brags about having survived on instant noodles for ten years. And when they finally explode, as all sealed containers do, society pretends to be shocked. How could this happen? Who taught them that feelings were weakness?

You did. We all did. *The pattern is so familiar it has stopped looking like cruelty; it's just the wallpaper of our homes.* Every time we said, “Boys will be boys.” Every time a man's vulnerability made us uncomfortable enough to change the subject. Every headline that glorified “toughness” and every movie hero who solved grief with a punch. We've built an emotional desert and then wondered why no one seems to bloom.

So yes, boys have their emotions beaten out of them—not always with fists, but with expectations, silence, and the slow torture of “that's

not what men do.” It’s a family tradition, a cultural export, a national pastime. And the most tragic part? We call it raising them right.

1982: On Fabrice

It has been suggested to me that Fabrice ought to speak for himself. And so he does, volubly, eloquently, and always with that honeyed cadence he perfected under Aunt Octavia’s watchful eye. But if you wish to know how he was first seen by those who raised him, you must hear the voices of his elders.

1982—Octavia, writing to her sister Viola in London:

“Our nephew has been to stay at Lumlocks for this last fortnight. If ever one needed proof that heritage can as easily pass on the female as the male line, he is most assuredly that proof. A gentle and rather sweet young man in many respects, yet he carries that poise, that certain assurance, that air of our cousins in days gone past. Had he but title and fortune, he might easily step into a Ducal role.”

Octavia, you see, could never resist dressing him in the family’s discarded robes, half-serious, half-mocking, but always a little enchanted by his presence.

1983—Viola’s reply from London:

“We joined the Queen at one of her private dinners and she was much taken with him. His knowledge of her personal collections was astonishing: she would not have it that he was a colonial. It was all I could do to stop her conferring a title.”

Even Viola, who scorned pretension wherever she sniffed it, could not help admiring how Fabrice could fill a room without making a scene. He never strutted, never claimed, but somehow compelled notice simply by waiting—still, composed, letting attention fall toward him as water pools at a hollow.

And finally, Viola again, less indulgent:

“It must be conceded—though never in his mother’s hearing—that Fabrice has grown into a young man of quite unnerving beauty. His brow might have been lifted from a coin of Alexander, his lips from some sculptor’s half-finished Venus... Yet it is the softness that has troubled me. His skin is too pale, his hands too finely tapered, his walk too fluid for comfort. One sees in him not strength but compliance, a

beauty that bends rather than resists. And beauty in a man is never a neutral inheritance: it invites command or ruin or both.”

This, then, is how he appeared before he had yet chosen his path: to one aunt, a possible Duke in disguise; to another, a dangerous beauty too yielding for the world.

As for me, I will only say that both were right. Fabrice grew into a man who could inhabit either vision when it suited him and abandon both when it did not.

1984: On the making of a waistcoat

Fabrice Mallard

I once attempted to make a waistcoat myself. It went admirably well until the moment when the thing must be turned inside out—a stage, I have learned, where most good intentions collapse. There is a trick to it, of course: some sleight through the armholes, a discreet pull of lining through narrow passageways, then an excess of top-stitching meant to disguise the struggle. Jackets, paradoxically, are easier. They have arms to hold them steady.

Mine, alas, puckered at the seams; the satin lining refused to yield. Unpicking it was like performing delicate surgery in poor light. Eventually I threw the whole enterprise away and returned to cloaks, capes and dressing gowns—garments that flow rather than constrain.

Still, the lesson stayed with me. Gentility and tailoring share the same secret: both appear effortless only because someone has spent hours making the hidden parts behave.

Proper service shares it too.

1985: Honor Non Honores— On the Art of Erasure as Elevation

Fabrice Mallard (or perhaps any true gentleman)

There are phrases that reveal an entire class system in miniature, and none so concisely as *honor non honores*.

Honour, not honours.

In six syllables lies the architecture of centuries of training, repression, and performance—a social order built not upon what one does but how one appears to do it.

The motto implies that to seek is to fall. To grasp is to expose one’s want; and to want is to betray the essential illusion of sufficiency. Thus the gentleman—and, by extension, the gentlewoman—is taught to act

without acting, to achieve without trying, to embody grace as though it were congenital. A gentleman's most prized attribute is not virtue itself but the *appearance* that virtue is his natural state.

Yet it is not pursuit that the motto recommends; it is assumption. The gentleman does not labour toward virtue. He simply inhabits its silhouette. He moves within an inherited grammar of propriety—measured voice, calm gesture, impeccable poise—so that even in idleness he conveys a kind of moral weight. One might say the gentleman has been raised to *grace* rather than to action. He floats above ambition by appearing never to desire.

The rule follows: accept nothing openly, desire nothing visibly, and everything will arrive unbidden. It is astonishing how often it does. Society, it seems, rewards stillness more than effort. The quiet man is a vessel into which others pour admiration, trust, or desire. To be reserved is to seem wise; to be inscrutable is to be irresistible.

There is, of course, hypocrisy in this refinement. The gentleman's invisibility is not humility but armour. It allows him to move unchallenged through rooms where others must justify their presence. It is the posture of one who knows that modesty is the surest form of advertisement.

My mother, Gloriana, would have called this *breeding*—as though the manners of a gentleman were some biological advantage transmitted through the blood. But it is not lineage that makes the man; it is the discipline of withholding. To be gentle is to repress, to smooth every visible trace of want or irritation. One must never reveal the seams.

Over time this becomes less a performance than a disappearance. One is seen, admired even, yet not quite perceived. I have lived much of my life as such a figure: erasure mistaken for virtue, invisibility mistaken for class. The closer one looks, the less one sees. What remains is outline, aura, afterimage.

And here lies the exquisite perversity of *honor non honores*: it elevates self-concealment to the highest moral good. To show no hunger is to be fed. To decline praise is to be praised. To possess grace is to make it look accidental. The world, ever credulous, rushes to fill the vacuum with its own projections.

That is why I say erasure *is* elevation, and the reverse no less true. The gentleman disappears into his manners as a saint into his faith. The substance of him is irrelevant; only the impression endures.

If I have learned anything—in society or in trade, in pleasure or in reflection—it is that the motto is both curse and crown. To live without honours is to gain freedom from envy and expectation; to live by honour is to be trapped by its perfection. The line between refinement and absence grows thin.

I have often thought: were I to vanish entirely, society would only become more polite in speaking of me.

1985: Alice Mallard

Editorial note on Octavia Mallard, OAM

My mother, ever the reluctant honouree, accepted her medal as if it were a parking ticket. “They have mistaken discretion for merit,” she said, and hung it on the door of her study where it gathered dust beside a child’s clay bust of Aristotle.

The citation praised her for “services to education and linguistics,” which amused her immensely. She maintained to the end that she had done nothing for education but dismantle it, and as for linguistics—“a male science of naming the obvious,” she would call it—her contribution had been to reintroduce tone, silence, and rhythm as legitimate forms of speech.

When I reread her essays now, what strikes me most is how far ahead of the times she was in seeing language as the true site of reproduction. She taught that every institution begins in an act of mispronunciation: an imperfect echo mistaken for law. Men, she said, build monuments to stabilise these errors; women keep them alive by speaking around them.

The medal itself means little, but the irony of it delights me. She, who refused every appointment and publication that required obedience, now sits immortalised on the list of the obedient. I keep her letters as she kept her books—unfiled, annotated, half-scorched by cigarette ash.

She would have laughed to know that in honouring her, they proved her point: that women’s work only becomes visible once it has been rendered symbolic.

1985: A Wink from Mayfair

Louisa May Fitzartur

“Whore.” Such a heavy little word, isn’t it? Men like to roll it on their tongues as though it might choke them. I find it delicious. Why pretend otherwise? I wear it like silk—cool against the skin, whispering as I move.

My father disinherited me, poor dear. Said I’d tarnished the Fitzartur name. As if the Fitzarturs weren’t already a family of bankrupt gamblers and bed-hoppers! The difference, I suppose, is that I make

money at it. Quite a lot, actually. Enough to buy back half the estate, if I had the slightest inclination. I don't.

Clients come for many things—pleasure, certainly, but also permission. They unfasten their collars and let out secrets as though I were some confessor in lace and stockings. “Don't tell anyone,” they murmur, and I laugh. Who would I tell? Their wives? Their board? Their God? No, I keep their sins tucked away like love letters. Confidentiality is the one thing I never sell.

It's absurd, really. These powerful men, quivering at my table like schoolboys, confessing as though I might grant absolution. Sometimes they want forgiveness; sometimes they just want to be heard. And all it costs them is a hundred thousand pounds and a bottle of good champagne.

So yes, I am Louisa May Fitzartur. A whore, if you like. But I daresay I am the happiest one in Mayfair.

1985: Fabrice and the Fall of Refinement

Gloriana Mallard

Well, we may as well all admit it now—the great ducal dream has died. One could almost hear the ancestral sigh across the hemispheres when word arrived from England: Edward, hopeless, damp little Edward, has managed to produce an heir after all. I always said he was an anaemic soul, the sort who once caught a chill from champagne, but apparently, he is vigorous enough in other departments. Thus the title, the estate, and the portrait gallery—every scrap of breeding and burden—remain in the English branch of the family.

And my Fabrice, my carefully cultivated exemplar of gentility, has, I am sorry to say, taken it rather... practically. I would have liked him to grieve—discreetly, of course, with a firm jaw and a dignified sorrow. But instead, like a tradesman's son, he shrugged off the disappointment and announced he was “going into business,” as though vulgar ambition were a substitute for noble despair. Business! The very word sounds like something one apologises for after dinner.

You cannot imagine what it is to see one's efforts squandered before one's eyes. All those years of deportment, the endless vowels, the crisis-level avoidance of denim—gone, simply gone. He now wears shirts that crease, and worse still, are not ironed by anyone else. He attends “meetings,” where apparently people discuss profit margins and “strategy,” a term I had always associated exclusively with Napoleon. He no longer carries a handkerchief. I fear the decline is irreversible.

He even insists upon earning his own money—the most dreadful confession of all. I warned him that true gentlemen never work; they occupy themselves. But he seems proud of his pay slips, as if remuneration were a mark of character rather than a vulgar necessity. Last week, he bought himself a car—Japanese, I believe—and called it “efficient.” I could scarcely look at it. Efficiency is the death of grace.

At dinner, he now speaks with an awful sort of confidence, full of words like “market potential” and “growth sector.” He addresses me, his own mother, as “Mum” instead of “Mother,” which sounds, to my ear, like something shouted across a paddock. He even brought home—I struggle to write it—a girl. Not a debutante, not even a speech-corrected CWA daughter, but a “partner” in his firm. She introduced herself without courtseying, which rendered me momentarily speechless, a rare occurrence.

When I remind him of his education—the fencing, the readings from Thackeray, the correct spoon for syllabub—he only laughs and says they’ve “given him good people skills.” People skills! That ghastly phrase, waving the white flag of gentility’s defeat. I did not raise my son to acquire people skills. I raised him to avoid people tastefully.

The tragedy is, he’s happy. He says he finds satisfaction in “building things,” as though contentment were a matter of assembly. He seems genuinely at ease among those who work, who produce, who handle their own affairs. It is dreadful. True refinement thrives on quiet discontent; contentment is for colonials.

I sometimes imagine what might have been: Fabrice at a long table in some draughty hall, signing incomprehensible documents with family crests embossed on them, speaking languidly about rain and inheritance. But instead, he sits at his desk—fluorescent light, mechanical pencil, phone ringing—and calls this life.

Still, I must be dignified about it. When people ask after him, I say vaguely that he’s “in commerce abroad.” It sounds less mercantile if you don’t know the suburb. And when I occasionally glimpse him in his ill-fitted business suit, smiling with untroubled purpose, I tell myself the English lost something, too—that perhaps he inherited not a title but the dreadful Australian virtue of optimism.

God help us both.

1986: In Which I Am Both a Gentleman and a Disappointment

Fabrice Mallard

Mother imagines I threw it all away when I went into business. She pictures me in some fluorescent-lit cubicle, unshaven, speaking in monosyllables, hunched like a stevedore. That is because she never comes to my office, where the chairs are Italian, the desk is mahogany, and the coffee machine cost more than some people's cars. One does not abandon the airs and graces she so painstakingly installed; one simply deploys them with tactical precision.

Do I still stand when a lady enters the room? Of course—and I stand just so—chin at eleven degrees, left hand loosely at the hip, as if awaiting the presentation of an obscure ambassador. Do I still fold my napkin from the corner? Religiously. Do I say “good afternoon” instead of “g'day”? Always. But in business, these things aren't quaint relics—they are competitive advantages. You'd be surprised how pliable a property developer becomes when you pour him tea as though it were 1923.

Mother thinks I mock her refinement; the truth is I have weaponised it. My “people skills” are simply peerage training translated into profit. The hesitation before shaking a client's hand? It makes them desperate for my approval. The way I listen—silent, head slightly cocked, as though hearing court gossip—convinces them I am pondering their soul. I am not. I am calculating the cost per square metre.

I do, however, enjoy playing the Colonial Barbarian in reverse. At certain family dinners, I'll deliberately say things like “synergy” or “vertical integration” and watch Mother's wine hand tremble. Last Christmas, I mentioned “profits” three times between the soup and the fish, just to see if she'd faint. She didn't, but she asked if I'd consider becoming an MP.

Ah, and then there's the subject she never addresses directly: that I am, as it happens, quite thoroughly uninterested in producing heirs—ducal, colonial, or otherwise. My personal life is mine, though the fact that my partner, Thomas, out-charms most of her bridge club has not escaped her. When introduced, he bowed just the right amount, praised a Sèvres teacup she forgot she owned, and complimented her pronunciation of “Chichester.” She hasn't dared criticise him since.

Business dinners with Thomas by my side are a masterclass in polite domination. We glide in, we sit just so, I make a small, controlled joke in my best Surrey vowels, and the room inclines toward us. Landlords lower rents. Investors raise offers. Developers agree to deadlines they

can't possibly meet. There's an art to it: one part restraint, two parts theatre, all served with the steady calm of someone who has mastered both the small fork and the large cheque.

Mother frets that money is vulgar, but there's nothing vulgar about making it well. I've learned you can keep your hands clean, your sentences crisp, and your reputation unsmudged, even as you dismantle an opponent across the negotiating table. The old-world graces aren't obsolete. They're just... *monetised*.

One day, perhaps, I'll tell her that without all that Eton-by-proxy upbringing, the posture coaching, the bans on denim, and the years of fencing practice, I might never have been able to do what I do now. But for the moment, I'll keep teasing her, because it's far too delicious watching her believe she raised a gentleman and lost him—when in truth, she raised a gentleman, and he put it to work.

And between you and me? This gentleman is doing perfectly.

1987: On Erotic Discipline

Louisa May Fitzartur

Discipline is the one art the English have ever truly mastered. We lace it into our children, our soldiers, our speech. It is the heritage of a nation that confuses control with civility. My forebears built an empire on restraint; I built a career undoing it.

The men who visit me come for permission—to let go, to be commanded, to be unmade. They call it punishment; I call it pedagogy. Most are the very type my aunts once lectured on *gentlemanly virtue*—educated, mannered, important, and bored beyond endurance. They crave the same structure that schooled them: a voice that tells them what to do, how to behave, when to stop. They mistake my whip for their mother's correction, my gaze for absolution.

A woman in my profession learns quickly that obedience is the true luxury of power. The higher a man stands, the deeper he wishes to bow. The same head that wears a crown or signs a treaty will, in privacy, bend to a woman's command if she speaks with the calm authority of his upbringing. "Yes, Miss Fitzartur," they say, like schoolboys hoping for praise.

There is nothing degrading in it, for either of us. I am simply the mirror their education forgot: the reflection that reveals who taught them pleasure through denial. My own discipline lies in observation—knowing precisely when to tighten or to yield, when a silence will hum louder than a blow.

Society calls it scandal. I call it symmetry. My body is a finishing school for men too long uncorrected by honesty. I sell them not sex but release—the same education in submission their fathers once paid tutors to give their sons.

After all, what is a gentleman if not a man trained to obey a higher order? I merely remind him who gives the orders now.

1987: On the Terms of Exchange

Fabrice Mallard

The difference between a gift and a purchase is often only the silence that follows it.

A man offers money and calls it gratitude; a woman offers a present and calls it affection.

But both, if we are honest, are engaged in the same small commerce: the hope of altering the balance between us.

I have never objected to being paid for. It is, in its way, an act of honesty—so long as both parties understand the contract. The courtesies of civilisation rest on just such arrangements: money for service, deference for power, praise for access. Only the naive pretend that affection sits above such things.

Those who tried to buy me wholesale—room, board, devotion, permanence—always left disappointed. I was not theirs to own; I was merely theirs for the hour, the evening, the duration of a specific illusion.

Payment ensures clarity; love muddies the terms.

It is no sin to be kept. It is, in truth, the most elegant position in any society—to be desired enough that others insist on paying for the pleasure of your company. But the rule is simple: one may be hired, never owned.

That distinction marks the boundary between servitude and sovereignty, and I have spent a lifetime keeping it intact.

Arthur Blandy's marginal note:

“He speaks as a Mallard should—aware of his worth, unashamed of his utility, and never fooled by the sentiment that would enslave him. Service, properly conducted, is not submission but style.”

1987: On nakedness

Fabrice Mallard

If I learned anything from my vocation, it is that hierarchy dissolves the instant a man is naked. Dukes and dockers, priests and politicians: once aroused, desiring, ashamed or exultant, they are indistinguishable.

A duke once came to me straight from his club, still scented with cigars and port. He wanted to be told what to do, and when I obliged, his aristocratic hauteur evaporated into gratitude. A bishop came in full of scripture and guilt, only to weep like a boy when I touched his hand. And a labourer, skin cracked from cement, paid me with the savings he had kept in a tin, and asked simply to be held.

Three men from three “stations in life,” yet all levelled by the same need: to be seen, to be touched, to be momentarily free of the roles they performed in public.

Whether I was skilled because I saw this, or whether seeing it made me skilled, I have not decided. But I can say with certainty that all their careful titles and poses came off with their shoes.

The only true difference was in the price. For some, an hour with me was the hoard of years; for others, the careless flick of petty cash. Yet once the door was closed, I accepted all, and treated them the same.

If there is any gentleman’s code worth keeping, it is that: to accept all, to treat all the same. Not out of charity, nor superiority, but because the game of rank collapses in the face of need.

1988: The Gentleman’s Vocation

Fabrice Mallard

I am no longer in business, at least not in the way annual reports would define it. The suits are softer now, the hours far more civilised, and while the income remains impressive, the deliverables are of an altogether different sort. Retirement, as Mother imagines it, involves gardening and bridge; mine involves travel and exquisite privacy. She pictures me in a country house conducting mild philanthropy. I conduct something else entirely—though always in tasteful linen.

It amused me, in the end, how well my gentlemanly education prepared me for this life. Business taught me transaction; breeding taught me presentation. Both, it turns out, are the same game—just with better lighting. What was once called courtship of investors I now perform more literally, though the contracts are verbal and the profits immediate. My clients are men of substance and position—corporate chairmen, minor nobility, political lifers with nerves like glass. They are

accustomed to control, yet oddly desperate for gentility. That, I have in spades.

The key is never to look as though one is being paid. One must appear effortlessly attentive: never too familiar, never too eager, never so detached that gratitude feels unnecessary. I listen exactly as Mother taught me—still, poised, the faint suggestion of amusement behind the eyes. When one of them confides something serious—a scandal brewing, a boardroom war, a failing marriage—I tilt my head with the same gravity I once reserved for quarterly projections. Discretion, after all, is the rarest commodity. In this work, it's pure gold.

They tend to think of me as different, which is precisely the point. I speak softly, with just enough Oxford in my vowels to sound reassuring. I never gossip. I pour their drinks properly, never too full, always left hand steady under the glass. They pay handsomely not simply for what I do, but for what I don't do: reveal, demand, expect permanence. In the world of exposure and excess, a gentleman who refuses to speak is worth a fortune.

Occasionally, one of them will say, half-joking, that I was “born for the role.” I smile—because I was, though not in the sense Mother intended. She raised me to serve Kings; I simply became indispensable to those who act like them. Her lessons in posture and composure have ripened into an art form. I move through drawing rooms and penthouses like a ghost of the old order—polite, polished, and utterly unattached.

Sometimes, when they leave and the door clicks shut, the silence feels almost chivalric—a debt settled without coin.

I'm not ashamed. In truth, I rather admire the symmetry of it all. The empire built itself on the quiet manipulations of charm; I simply individualised the model. Emotional restraint, tasteful flattery, silent observation—once the tools of diplomacy, now the instruments of survival. I am, in the most elegant sense, a professional anachronism.

When I see my reflection—good tailoring, good posture, not a line out of place—I sometimes think Mother got her way after all. Fabrice, the duke who never was, inhabiting a world of privilege, civility, and discretion. I've merely modernised the inheritance. Where land and title once conferred power, now allure and secrecy do the same. And I, reliably punctual, impeccably mannered, still make my living exactly as I was trained to—by never letting them see me need.

1990: On the Discipline of Gentlemen

(Annotated by Alice Mallard; marginalia by A.F. Blandy.)

Fabrice's observation—"He's always been trained to serve"—is, I think, the keystone to the whole Mallard male condition. It recurs in every century of their correspondence, from dukes who mistook dominance for destiny to the valets who mistook obedience for safety. In truth, both were performing the same act from opposite sides of the same mirror.

The gentleman is not born free; he is bred for service—only to a more abstract master. His spine is straightened by expectation, his speech softened by schoolroom irony, his desire redirected through duty. It is the performance of autonomy while remaining on an invisible leash. The leash changes hands—from father to headmaster, from regiment to club, from wife to mistress to the discreet professional—but it is never removed.

This is why Fabrice's occupation scandalised those who least understood it. To them, it was degradation; to him, it was the purest expression of lineage. The Mallard men have *always* been servants—of kings, of patrons, of the public good, of reputation itself. Fabrice merely inverted the equation: he made service visible, eroticised, and transactional. By charging a fee for what others disguised as honour, he exposed the hypocrisy of the system that trained him.

In this, he stands not apart from his forebears but squarely within the family tradition. He served men of influence, discretion, and inherited command—precisely as the Blandys once served the dukes. Yet where the Blandys perfected humility, Fabrice perfected detachment. He gave satisfaction without surrender, presence without self. It is a refinement of the old ducal mode, not its perversion.

—A.F. Blandy (in marginalia):

Indeed, Miss Octavia, you overstate not the case. The instinct to serve is hereditary, though not confined to lineage. My own forbears, the Blandys of Wiltshire, were retainers to the 43rd Duke—a long line of valets, stewards, secretaries, and confidential men. We too learned that true power lies not in command but in proximity. To anticipate, to observe, to preserve the master's comfort and dignity—this is the art of service, and it is neither humble nor ignoble. It is an intimacy of knowledge, a kind of secular priesthood. We hear the prayers the gods themselves pretend not to hear.

When young Master Mallard came under my instruction, I recognised that same inheritance, though he was unfit for the servile professions. His mind was too subtle, his will too divided between

pride and longing. So I taught him what my own father had taught me—that grace lies in precision, and precision in restraint. If he later chose to employ those lessons in a different market, I cannot say the blame is mine. A servant's success is measured by the perfection of his master's disguise. If Master Mallard learned to conceal his, then I have served him well indeed.

Alice concludes:

That, perhaps, is the tragedy and the triumph of the Mallard bloodline—that their finest art is erasure. They excel at becoming invisible in plain sight. Whether in palaces or private rooms, their genius is the same: to make service look like sovereignty, and submission seem like style.

1992: On the Discipline of Gentlemen

Fabrice Mallard

Discipline, I've learned, is the one language a gentleman still understands. It's the only part of his education that survived the decades of moral collapse and the softening of the class system. The cane may have gone out of fashion, but the impulse remains—the longing to be corrected, contained, told what to do by someone who knows.

Most of my clients were educated in places where authority wore a gown and a smile. They can recite Latin verbs they've never needed but cannot say what they want in bed. They come to me because I know how to read silence—the clipped vowels, the downcast eyes, the diffident pause before a confession. All that expensive self-restraint has nowhere else to go.

They think I'm there to please them, but I'm really there to release them from their own pretence. It's extraordinary how many powerful men want to be treated like boys again—told to strip, to wait, to apologise. The higher they've climbed, the more rules they want applied to their bodies. I've watched CEOs, politicians, clergy, men who own continents, tremble when I tell them to hold still.

I don't humiliate them. I remind them that surrender is not always defeat. Control, after all, is what they were trained for. They crave its mirror. My job is to hold that mirror steady—without mockery, without mercy.

They call me a whore. I call myself an educator. My classroom just happens to have better lighting and cleaner sheets. What I teach isn't sex; it's honesty through structure. They pay not for pleasure but for

permission—to step out of their titles, their families, their wealth, and rest for an hour inside a single command: *obey*.

That's the real secret of the gentleman. All his polish, his manners, his invisible income—they're just different uniforms of submission. He's always been trained to serve: the Queen, the Church, the firm, the family name. I only ask him to serve himself, for once, in truth.

And he calls it love.



Standards of Behaviour

Gloriana deMallard

Preface to This Edition

Fabrice Mallard

Among my late mother's papers, I discovered a small folio bound in faded green leather. It was entitled *Standards of Behaviour: Manners Maketh Mannerisms* by Gloriana deMallard. In it, she set down, with the earnestness of her kind, a series of instructions on how society ought to conduct itself. I offer it here, with the necessary clarifications of Mr Arthur Blandy, and the occasional interpolations of me, her son Fabrice, who has had the misfortune to test these rules in practice.

My cousins Alice and Fenella and I have often laughed at the pretensions of my mother, who raised me to become what I am now: an anachronism. Unfit for the world in which I find myself, and temperamentally unsuited to the one she intended me to inhabit.

What use is a dukedom without land, without tenants, without so much as a coat of arms worth polishing? Even had it been mine, I would have inherited little more than stationery and a sense of entitlement.

Besides, how could a woman—herself neither titled Lady nor one raised in that milieu—have imagined she might manufacture a gentleman? And had she known what a gentleman truly was, she might have noticed that the station ranked scarcely above irrelevance: the bottom rung of a ladder already rotten.

Alice is best placed to show how words like *gentleman* have lost their meaning; Fenella, to demonstrate its uselessness in a society where manners of any kind are in retreat. For my part, I have simply passed

this manuscript to my publishers, alongside my own memoirs, to do with as they please.

My old tutor, Mr. Blandy, has already gone to his rest. I grant him this small courtesy in print—not out of gratitude for what he made of me, but as a nod to the sad, thwarted life he led.

If this volume is of any use, it is as a museum-piece of former attitudes: the props and proprieties of a vanished world. And if it proves nothing else, let it prove this: that while I live among the luxuries my mother insisted upon, my titled cousin now resides in a council flat. That, I think, is the true measure of nobility's pretensions.

Preface

*Arthur Frederick Blandy, D.Phil. (Syd.),
sometime Fellow in Genealogical Studies*

Gloriana Mallard was a woman of decidedly immovable convictions as to how one ought to conduct oneself, in society or, as in her case, rather firmly outside it. She held that correctness of deportment was a universal solvent: polish a man sufficiently and the world would yield before him. This belief she applied most vigorously to her son, for whom she drafted the present manual.

Her conviction—misplaced though never dislodged—was that the boy might in due course ascend to a dukedom. Such an outcome was not sheer fantasy: the Mallard title did exist, and for a time the line appeared so fragile that the merest nudge of fate might have set the coronet upon his brow. Fate, alas, is never nudged; it shoves. The succession held, and the dream curdled.

It was my lot, and perhaps my penance, to be engaged as the boy's tutor and valet. My academic work lay elsewhere. I devoted my Master's thesis to "*U and Non-U: Linguistic Indicators of Class in English Domestic Service*" (Oxford, 1954), and followed it with monographs of some modest circulation: *On the Speech of Gentlemen and Their Servants* (1958); *The Decorum of Address: From Mistress to Miss* (1962); and *Language as Ladder: Social Class and the Idiom of Distinction* (1967). Though not without merit—at least in my own estimation—these volumes failed to secure me that elusive tenure so casually bestowed on less industrious men.

Thus denied my rightful place in the academy, I accepted instead a position within the household of Mrs Mallard, whose ambitions for her son exceeded all proportion. To "groom" him (the word now debased by modern tongues, yet here used in its older, nobler sense) was my charge. And here I must confess: the boy was a delight to me. His

beauty was disarming, his wit sharper than his mother suspected, and his capacity for kindness quite un-English in its frankness. I was fond of him—perhaps more fond than a retainer ought to admit—and so the task, though humiliating in its descent from scholarship to servitude, never felt barren.

This manual, with Mrs Mallard's permission, I corrected where correction was necessary. At her death she directed that it be published, for she fancied her precepts might serve a wider world. Whether they do is not for me to say. My role is merely to present them, stitched with fragments from my family's long correspondence in service to the Dukes of Mallard, and annotated with the odd aside from my own experience.

If my tone here seems to waver between gravity and irony, know that the matter itself demands it. Manners are at once everything and nothing: the scaffolding of class and the mask of failure, the polish that conceals the crack.

1974: An excerpt from *Ladies' Companion*

On the Cultivation of a Proper Gentleman: Notes from the Drawing Room of Decency

It has often struck me, as I sit in our tasteful Federation home in Toorak with a tulip-shaped glass of Cointreau, that true gentlemanly conduct is in frightfully short supply these days. The modern Australian male, for all his broad shoulders and manual confidence, so rarely embodies the quieter refinements of English breeding. I have therefore taken a particular interest in the upbringing of young Fabrice—my son, heir to the family trust—with a view to preparing him for something rather more elevated. One must always think ahead; after all, one never knows when one's child might be called upon to marry above their postcode.

A duke, you see, is not made overnight. He is cultured—cultivated, really—like those fine houseplants that require indirect sunlight and meaningful conversation. It begins at school, of course. None of your suburban public schools, thank you very much. A gentleman-in-training must be educated somewhere with stone buildings, Latin mottoes, and at least one annual ceremony involving blazers, caps, and the singing of something in Latin no one understands. Learning to stand still with noble discomfort is half the battle.

Speech must also be managed early. Australians have a national weakness for flattening their vowels—so proletarian, so beer-garden. I have secured for Fabrice an elocution tutor from England (Surrey, not

London, heaven forbid) who has already corrected his tendency to say “dance” instead of “dahnce.” A duke should glide through vowels as though they were fine Scotch, not gulp them like lager.

Dress, too, is crucial. A proper gentleman must cultivate a relationship with linen—respectful but firm. Tailoring should hint at restraint, not rebellion; elegance lies in the quiet suggestion that one might own an estate but not discuss it. His shirts are to be white, always starched; his shoes polished until reflection reveals the weary but steadfast face of empire. I find leather instructive—practical, durable, obedient. Much like the ideal man himself.

Then there is behaviour—a realm in which Australians, bless them, require considerable guidance. A would-be duke must never shout, never guffaw, and above all, never chew loudly. He must nod gravely even when baffled, and look every elderly woman in the eye as though she were about to knight him. Politeness is not servility, I tell Fabrice; it is theatre. The world must never see the effort underneath.

And of course, he must understand women. Not too much—heaven forbid the sensitivity of an artist—but just enough to appear effortlessly considerate. He must open doors, listen without comprehension, and feign amusement at anecdotes involving cousins’ Labradors. It is not charm, precisely, but etiquette adorned with empathy, like cucumber sandwiches cut on the diagonal.

His inner life? That must remain opaque. Mystery is the perfume of nobility. Real men may chop wood or attend to emotional authenticity (that ghastly Californian invention), but true gentlemen are trained to gaze vaguely beyond the middle distance, as though pondering the possibility of polo in heaven.

In essence, to raise an English duke in Australia is no easy feat. One is constantly battling humidity, egalitarianism, and the neighbor’s Holden ute parked against the hedge. Yet perseverance is the mark of breeding. And as I remind my friends at the club—between discussions of Europe and the tragic decline of handwriting—our Fabrice is being trained for something greater than rugby or real estate.

He is being trained for destiny—or, failing that, for lunch at the Melbourne Club. In our climate, the difference is academic.

A Note on Gentility

(scribbled in the margin by Fabrice Mallard)

My mother’s handbook insists that a gentleman is recognised by his fork, his glove, his tone of address, and the particular angle at which he

sits upon a chair. All very well, if one's purpose is to be mistaken for furniture.

But gentility, if it exists at all, is not a performance. It is not the studied gesture of the soup spoon, nor the correct order of introductions. These are costumes, useful for passing through society unseen, but they are not the thing itself.

A gentleman—or a gentlewoman—is one who carries awareness of themselves without the presumption that others must resemble them. They can sit among strangers without correction, without fuss, and without the vulgar itch to be admired.

Such a person does not fling open the folds of their private life for inspection. They live, but they do not broadcast. They may even smile, but their smile is never a demand.

They are curious, but without ambition: a dilettante in the best sense, ready to wander across subjects without the urge to pin them down. Their charm lies not in mastery but in openness.

And above all, they are constant without fashion. They wait. They endure. They remain what they are, whether in fashion or in ridicule, because their measure is not the applause of the room but the quiet of their own stance.

So let my mother's instructions be read as theatre, a choreography for the anxious. But let this, my definition, be taken as the thing itself: the art not of display, but of presence.

Gloriana Mallard, upon discovering Fabrice's note

Oh, what nonsense. Scribblings in the margin are not a philosophy. A gentleman must *do*, not merely *be*. A man who waits achieves nothing. A man who says "I am as I am" has no gumption. You'll never amount to anything with that sort of attitude, my boy.

A dilettante! I could die of shame. A man should specialise—become *something*. A doctor, a barrister, a man of business. Something one can announce to one's friends. I raised you for society, not obscurity. A name without a profession is merely a disappointment.

And what is this foolishness about presence? Presence is only useful if others remark upon it. Otherwise it is simply invisibility—and invisibility is not a career.

You take after your father: passive, evasive, always waiting for life to present itself instead of demanding it. Mark me, Fabrice, standards of behaviour are not an ornament. They are a weapon. A ladder. They are how one ascends, not how one disappears into books and silences.

Chapter IV: On the Relative Unimportance of Sex

Gloriana's Instruction

It has long been my view that one must rise above the vulgar appetites that preoccupy the common man. My sisters may busy themselves with words and books, but I, with equal devotion, attend to the shaping of character.

When my son reached his seventeenth year, I took him aside and explained—most patiently, for he had begun to display the usual impetuositities—that there is more to life than sex.

It was a lesson he did not wish to hear, but one must stamp firmly on the garden path before the weeds run riot. A young man of breeding must not be led by the body. To imagine that pleasure, or worse, the pursuit of it, could form a life is the most damning error of our age.

A gentleman is defined by restraint. By composure. By his ability to deny the flesh and maintain his appearance before others. I told him plainly: *Do not think of yourself. Think of your future. Think of what you might yet be called to represent.*

If he sulked, or appeared wounded, I did not notice. The point of discipline is not to coddle feelings but to ensure obedience. And I dare say he thanked me for it in the end.

Fabrice's Aside

Reader, I did not thank her. I smiled, as any well-schooled son does, and made a mental note: *If Mother says sex is insignificant, it must therefore be of supreme importance.*

She believed she was curbing me. In fact, she sharpened my appetite, and, unknowingly, gave me the clearest indication of where my future lay.

From her I learned restraint, but not the kind she imagined. She taught me to smile while concealing irritation. To wait for a pause before speaking. To let others reveal themselves while I remained inscrutable.

What is sex work, if not precisely that? A vocation where one must listen without judgement, soothe without disclosure, and master the art of being everything while seeming to be nothing.

Her cruelty—whether from ignorance or ambition—made me fluent in that most valuable of gentlemanly arts: appearing above the fray while quietly attending to its most urgent business.

If my mother made me a gentleman, it was only by accident.



“The Blandy Improvements”

It is astonishing how the smallest of improprieties at table may render a man ridiculous, even when his appetite is sated and his host indulgent. To hang one’s napkin like bunting upon a buttonhole, to ask for a “piece of hen” as though the barnyard had migrated to the dining room, to return an egg unbroken as if it were a sacred relic—each of these errors betrays not ignorance of food, but ignorance of *society*. It is the conduct that is consumed, not the meat or the soup.

Permit me, therefore, to emphasise: *manners* are not about the taste of the dish but the taste of the man. A gentleman may dislike claret, but he must never dislike *claret wine*. He may loathe bread, but he must never cut it with a knife. These are not questions of sustenance. They are questions of survival in polite company.

Fabrice

And yet, Mr Blandy, the soup still warmed the belly, however the spoon was held. The egg was no less nourishing, intact shell or no. The bread, sliced or broken, reached the stomach in equal measure. I cannot help but suspect that those who so fastidiously corrected the Abbé’s errors enjoyed their meal no more than he did.

What you call survival in society, I have sometimes thought of as starvation in company. One is forced to nibble on appearances and swallow words whole. At least when I am eccentric at table—as I am in life—I feed myself honestly, even if it leaves the others looking askance.

Correctness as Power

It is not the soup itself that matters, nor the meat upon the plate, nor even the wine that accompanies them. What matters, always, is the manner in which these things are approached. To eat with proper deportment is to signal one’s membership of a society of distinction. I have often remarked that the gentleman who enters a dining-room improperly attired—without cufflinks, without the restraint of a waistcoat, without the sober dignity of leather shoes polished to a high gleam—has already lost his place before the meal begins.

One does not “cut” bread; one breaks it. One does not pour coffee into a saucer to cool; one waits until it can be drunk with composure. A gentleman does not signal his wants like a common inn patron, but employs a glance, a subtle tilt of the brow, or the faintest inclination of

a finger. The entire purpose of manners is restraint, so that others might mistake necessity for mastery.

Fabrice

And yet, how amusing to discover that bread tastes the same whether broken or sliced; that coffee scalds regardless of cup or saucer; and that the most vulgar patron gets his food quicker than the silent gentleman with the eyebrow. Blandy is not wrong—his rules do confer a certain presence. But presence is itself theatre.

I have learned, in life and in work, that theatre is what people crave. A trilby tipped at the right angle unsettles the young; a brooch of diamonds on a lapel disorients the middle-aged; a stud collar today all but paralyses the uninitiated. In such moments, one gains the advantage. Not because a rule was observed, but because the rule was forgotten by others and remembered by you.

Correctness, then, is not morality. It is a kind of stagecraft, a sleight of hand. I may smile, I may bow, I may say “thank you” with more gravity than the occasion deserves—and immediately the world rearranges itself around me. Manners are power because they make others uncertain of their own.

Stillness

The gentleman must learn stillness as well as motion. To enter a room with poise is to command it. He who fidgets, flails, or fusses is already undone. The trick, if trick it be, is to *wait*. To hold one’s ground with patience. To let others pass and exhaust themselves. Such stillness is not idleness; it is mastery.

Fabrice

I discovered long ago that I could stop a crowd by stopping myself. No gesture, no raised voice, no demand—only stillness. The absence of hurry unsettles people, perhaps because it exposes how much of their life is lived in haste. If you dress correctly, people defer to you. If you move correctly, they may admire you. But if you stand correctly—quite still, as though the world itself might pivot on your patience—they are forced to rearrange themselves around you.

Poise is not virtue, and it is not merely politeness. It is self-preservation disguised as courtesy. Why risk anger when you can sidestep it? Why collide when you can compel the other to move by doing nothing at all?

On Virtue

“Brathwait in his *English Gentleman* (1633) declares that true gentility rests upon virtue—not upon wealth nor yet upon title. By ‘virtue,’ he intends not the pallid chastity we moderns take for it, but that robust virility which in Latin derives from *vir*, a man. Virtue is manhood in its fullest exercise: strength, courage, youthful vigour, tempered by God’s eye alone.”

Fabrice

“How strange, then, that so many of the ‘gentlemen’ who sought my company had long since surrendered any virility, and whatever youth they possessed was embalmed in cigars and port. Their only surviving virtue was punctual payment. If manhood is measured in dollars, then I have been in the company of the most virtuous men alive.”

On Silence

Silence is the sovereign tool of the gentleman. Speech must be rationed, like good wine, lest its potency be diminished by excess. To converse is not to babble. A pause, judiciously held, compels others to reveal themselves; it unsettles the insecure and steadies the refined. It is, in truth, the invisible punctuation of social intercourse.

Gloriana Mallard

Silence is all very well in a cathedral, but at the dinner table it is intolerable. I recall once hosting a luncheon where no one spoke for several minutes. I was obliged to tell a story about my cousin’s gallstones simply to rescue the company from embarrassment. Fabrice insists upon “listening quietly,” which I take to be sulking. A young man should sparkle, not stare at his plate as though expecting prophecy to be written there.

Fabrice

My mother confused noise with vitality. But silence has its own eloquence. Most people cannot abide it; they rush to fill it, blurting secrets or half-thoughts simply to banish the void. I have profited greatly by saying nothing. Clients, mistaking my quiet for sympathy, unburden themselves without invitation. Lovers, unnerved by my calm, offer more than they intended. Even strangers in the street sense it: a man standing silent too long seems to belong to the place more than those who hurry past.

Silence is not absence. It is presence magnified.

Poise and Presence

The essence of poise is the refusal to rush. A gentleman is never hurried. He may walk with briskness, he may act with precision, but he is never seen to scramble. The moment haste enters the bearing, dignity is lost. Observe therefore:

- To stand still in a corridor is to command the corridor.
- To pause at a threshold is to mark the threshold.
- To wait silently in a crowd is to part it as surely as if you carried a sceptre.

One need not be grand in appearance for this to hold true; stillness itself confers grandeur.

Gloriana Mallard

My son has been still all his life, and I can assure you it is not grandeur but idleness. He will stand in a doorway gazing into space while others bustle about him—and they step aside, it is true, but only because they wish to get on with things. He calls it presence; I call it doing nothing. I never knew a duke to be made from standing about. A duke rides, marches, commands. Fabrice waits. And yet, most annoyingly, the world indulges him for it.

Fabrice

My mother never grasped the art of stillness. She thought it laziness because she mistook movement for importance. But stillness is not the absence of action; it is the presence of patience. In shops, queues, or crowded streets, I do nothing—and others, embarrassed by their own haste, move for me.

It is a trick, of course, but an effective one. Clients too learned to surrender in silence, not through persuasion but through my refusal to fill the air with chatter. Stillness gave them permission to falter, to admit, to reveal. And once they did, they were already mine.

On knights

Gloriana Mallard

War makes knights of all men.

In these modern times, when machines roar louder than the human voice, and treaties are signed with pens rather than swords, it would be easy to imagine that chivalry has passed into the realm of romance and history books. Yet, I have come to observe—in those who have

endured its trials—that war does indeed still awaken the knightly spirit, stripping away the delicate veneers of peacetime and revealing within every man, regardless of station, a certain nobility of courage.

In my girlhood, I was taught that knighthood was the preserve of noble birth, conferred with titles and hereditary honour. Men of my father's acquaintance wore their dignity as they did their crested helmets—polished, ceremonial, untested. But when war broke upon our shores and colonies, this finely kept illusion shattered. The village grocer became a captain; the gardener drilled with the same discipline as the son of a peer. It mattered not whether the hands had once lifted silver or soil—they lifted rifles all the same, and with equal resolve.

In the muddy fields of Flanders, young men learned to stand for one another as knights once stood in the courts of Edward and Henry, binding themselves not by lineage but by loyalty. They rode not steeds but armoured lorries, and their jousts were with artillery shells. Yet the essence was unchanged: bravery in the face of danger, courtesy even amidst cruelty, and a steadfastness that made them protectors of the weak. Letters from the front often bore witness to small mercies—sharing rations with a shivering comrade, shielding civilians from harm—gestures that echo the old code of honour.

It seems to me that war has a peculiar alchemy. While it rends bodies and landscapes, it fashions souls into a finer metal. Men who in times of peace might be trivial, self-serving, or indifferent are compelled to a higher service. In facing mortality side by side, they abandon the petty distinctions of wealth, learning, or rank. The knightly virtues—fortitude, sacrifice, and selflessness—become the common coin of their brotherhood.

Of course, the knight of war today is often wearied beyond poetry's measure, emerging from battle not in shining armour but with torn boots and hollow eyes. Yet I contend that such scars are the very sigils of modern chivalry. Titles may fade, medals may tarnish, but the memory of having stood firm for a cause greater than oneself—that is the true accolade.

Thus, I say, war makes knights of all men—not because it crowns them, but because it calls forth the knighthood that dwells hidden in the human spirit, waiting only for a clarion strong enough to answer. And in that call, even the humblest soul may find himself armed in honour.

On Doorways

Gloriana Mallard

One must never linger in a doorway. A doorway is not a destination but a passage: to stand in one is to obstruct, and obstruction is the essence of rudeness. It is the duty of a gentleman to step aside, of a lady to glide through, and of children to be dragged clear at once.

A.F. Blandy

Quite right. The servant's rule is simple: if you must pause, pause to the hinge side, never the latch side. One permits the traffic of the house to flow. I have moved more dukes than I care to count from their natural habit of filling a frame with their bulk.

Fabrice

I once waited three minutes in silence while a group of tourists debated gelato flavours in a café doorway. It struck me that Gloriana is correct: a doorway is the modern battlefield, where courtesy goes to die. I said nothing, though I confess I rehearsed a foghorn.



1912: On Inviting a Guest

From The Mallard Guide to Manors

No one possessed of his senses would invite a person to his country house for the purpose of making him unhappy. At least, so we should say at first thought. Yet it is an obvious fact that very many guests are invited to the country houses of their friends and are made extremely miserable while there.

They are compelled to rise at unholy hours, to eat when they are not hungry, to drive or walk or play tennis when they would prefer to do anything else. They must give up those hours which might be precious to them for other duties or pleasures. And so, after a season of visiting, many are apt to say, "*No more of the slavery of country-house hospitality for me, if you please!*"

But the question remains: why invite guests at all, unless one truly wishes to see them? The answer, of course, is that we *do* wish to see them—for a part of the day, not the whole of it. No one can sit and talk from breakfast until midnight. The hostess should have her privilege of retiring after the mid-day meal, with her novel or her needlework, and

so too should the guest. Well-bred people understand all this instinctively: they know that the finest courtesy is mutual absence. There is nothing so restorative—nor so civilising—as an hour of solitude.

The tastes and habits of two people staying in the same house may be very different, and each should respect the peculiarities of the other. It costs neither much time nor any money for an opulent hostess to learn what her guest wishes to do with the day. With a little tact, she can easily permit her visitor to be happy in her own way, which is the surest path to preserving friendship.

A hostess must remember that when she invites company, she takes on two solemn duties: the first, *not to neglect her guests*; the second, *not to weary them by too much attention*. Never let a guest feel she is “being entertained,” nor that she is a burden upon your thoughts. Conduct your household as usual. Ensure that your visitor is never in an unpleasant position—but never in constant company either.

If you have a *tiresome* guest who insists upon following you about like a hound, retreat to your room and lock the door. If you have a *sulky* guest who stares at the carpet and sighs, throw open the library door, order the carriage, and make your own escape.

But if you are fortunate enough to have a *model* guest—one who is pleased to please—then grant her the privilege of choosing her own hours and her own retreats. A model guest never infringes upon the rights of her host. She does not spoil a dinner or a drive by being late; she does not send anyone back for her parasol; she does not insult the family, the cook, or the dog. She avoids disagreeable topics; she joins the whist-table if she can play; and if she cannot, she finds something quiet and useful to do until the rubber is finished.

Above all, she does not rise an hour earlier than is her custom simply because her host must take an early train. The early-morning breakfast is no time for conversation, and it ruins the day for bad sleepers.

There is an art to visiting, as there is to everything worth doing: to seem present when absent, and absent when present. Those who master it will never lack for invitations. Those who do not, deserve none.

1912: On Being a Guest

From The Mallard Guide to Manors

A visitor is bound by the laws of social intercourse to conform, in all respects, to the habits of the house. To do this gracefully, she should inquire—or cause her personal servant to inquire—what those habits are. To keep one’s friend’s breakfast waiting upon the table; to delay

the dinner by want of punctuality; to accept outside invitations and treat one's host's residence as if it were an hotel to be slept in; or to keep the family up until unnatural hours—these are all signs of an untrained mind and an unfeeling heart.

At breakfast and luncheon, absolute punctuality is not imperative, but it is best not to become known as the last to appear. Those who saunter in as the teapot cools will not be asked again. No order of precedence is observed at either meal; guests seat themselves as they enter, exchange their morning salutations, and begin without delay. Conversation, at these hours, should be light, brief, and merciful.

If letters are brought to you at breakfast or luncheon, you may read them—but only after requesting permission from the lady who presides at the urn. Should the news within be tragic, fold the letter quietly and wait until after the meal to be overcome.

A guest must always hold herself at the disposal of her hosts. If they propose to ride, drive, walk, or otherwise occupy the day, she should take it for granted that these plans were made for her benefit. She must, therefore, receive them with good humour, enter into them with cheerfulness, and—whether or not she enjoys them—appear to. There is no greater social accomplishment than the ability to seem pleased without betraying deceit.

She should never remove a book from the library to her own room without permission. When one is lent, it must be guarded as carefully as a child. Should the book be old or rare, it is advisable to cover it before handling. (Many a friendship has been lost through a careless thumbprint.)

Above all, a guest should make it her business to amuse herself. The true test of good breeding is self-sufficiency. A visitor who cannot occupy her own mind will always be a burden. However welcome she may be, she is not always wanted.

Remember: one is not invited to *live* in another's house, only to pass through it without leaving marks upon the furniture—or the memory. The perfect guest departs as she arrived: tidy, grateful, and faintly mysterious, as though she might never have been there at all.

On the Gentleman's Countenance

A.F. Blandy

A gentleman must never conceal his thoughts. His face is to be as a windowpane, letting in the light of sincerity and casting it out upon others without shadow or distortion. He must speak plainly, think nobly, and act in such a manner that all who meet him may say: here is

a man who hides nothing, who carries no guile, who is as transparent as crystal. It is this frankness that inspires trust, secures friendship, and distinguishes the true gentleman from the charlatan.

Fabrice

Blandy, as always, mistakes theatre for truth.

A gentleman transparent? Impossible. Were a man truly plain as glass, he would be smashed within the week. It is not transparency that secures trust, but the careful simulation of it.

I learned early—not from Blandy but from my mother’s cruel pedagogy—that inscrutability is the greater safeguard. To remain visible yet unreadable; to speak with warmth yet withhold the core; to allow others to imagine what they please while never confirming nor denying. That is the trick.

Elizabeth played it with her body politic. Catherine de Medici with her web of spies. Pompadour with her salons. Each woman knew that candour is a liability, and opacity a form of sovereignty.

The closer one looks at me, the less one sees. This is not deceit. It is protection. It is, in its way, courtesy: for by hiding myself, I allow others to find themselves reflected.

That is the true gentleman’s art.

On the Gentleman

Gloriana Mallard

A gentleman is a title in embryo. One trains a son in manners, deportment, and deportation of self so that, should fortune turn, he may step seamlessly into rank. Gloves, calling cards, respect for ladies, a bow neither too deep nor too shallow. The art of being seen, never caught. That is what I tried to give my boy: a preparation for destiny.

A.F. Blandy

Permit me to correct Mrs deMallard. A gentleman is not destiny but discipline. The service of centuries proves it. To know which knife, which salutation, which chair to occupy—this is language itself, a dialect of superiority. I trained the lad as I would a thoroughbred: to move with ease, to speak with courtesy, to silence vulgarity. His later employments only confirm my success.

The Archbishop

Your education has equipped you for the oldest and most delicate profession. Not politics, not law, but the commerce of pleasure. Do not

scorn my remark: only a gentleman knows how to keep confidences, how to smile without speaking, how to sit in judgement yet never judge. The Church requires such skills; so too, it seems, do your clients.

Fabrice

I took it as a compliment. Proof that the school had failed to make me mediocre and that my parents' investment had misfired. They bought the fantasy of superior education and delivered me into a class they could never enter. My father, poor man, longed to be called a gentleman. He conferred it upon me instead, once my income became invisible. His joke—"you must spend a lot of time in bed"—was kinder than he knew.

Fenella Mallard

A gentleman is not a man at all but a cipher. Once, idle independence. Later, polite servility. To the bourgeoisie, a life without work. To the modern world, a door held open. To the Archbishop, a keeper of secrets. Always it means absence: a man defined by what he does not do.

Alice Mallard

The word has collapsed under its own refinements. Old money vs. new, titled vs. untitled, educated vs. merely schooled. Each uses "gentleman" to project a fantasy of being above the fray. Its only constant is this: an art of erasure. To remain still, to wait, to appear honest even in deceit, to pay without flinching, to serve while seeming to command. In short: the gentleman is a performance of frigidity, polished into charm.

On the Polite Lie

Fabrice Mallard

It is commonly assumed that honesty is a virtue and that to speak one's mind is a mark of integrity. I would argue the opposite. Honesty is often nothing more than cruelty disguised as frankness. It wounds, it unsettles, it robs another of their necessary illusions.

A gentleman does not do this. He lies. Not viciously, not self-servingly, but politely. He lies to oil the mechanism of human interaction. He lies so that the other may keep face, and so that the room does not collapse under the weight of an awkward truth.

I know this well from my profession. Many of my clients were, if I may put it delicately, monuments to boredom. Men who could talk

endlessly about their business, their grievances, their ailments—yet nothing of substance, nothing alive. I would sometimes glance at the clock and wonder whether it might be more merciful to end the session early, to refund the balance and send them on their way. I rarely did. That would have been “honest” but also unwise. Men have friends. A single bitter word spreads faster than any advertisement.

So I smiled. I listened. I allowed them to believe themselves fascinating. And in so doing, I played the gentleman’s part: gracious, attentive, inscrutable. They left thinking themselves understood, perhaps even admired. That was the service as much as anything else.

This is why I say: to be a gentleman is not to tell the truth. It is to cultivate the art of lying without malice. To smooth over dullness with interest, arrogance with deference, fear with calm. Honesty may be a virtue in the pulpit, but in society—and certainly in my studio—it is politeness, not honesty, that keeps the peace.

On Mr Blandy’s Instruction

Fabrice Mallard

Arthur Frederick Blandy did not simply teach me how to *be* a gentleman; he taught me how to *simulate* one so perfectly that no one could tell the difference. That was his true gift—and his own curse.

He began with the trivialities, as though building a man from the outer layers inward: the napkin folded to signal readiness, the fork at the correct angle, the soundless lift of a glass, the quiet use of the eyes to order rather than the voice. He corrected my gait, my tone, my handwriting, the manner in which I stood waiting for someone who would inevitably be late.

But, by increments, I saw what he could not disguise: he was teaching me to be himself—only improved. The butler dreaming his own escape through the pupil who might live the fantasy.

Where he spoke of *refinement*, I learned *function*. If he instructed me on the difference between a soup spoon and a dessert spoon, I also learned how to polish both to a shine. If he trained my nose to discern saffron from turmeric, I went further and learned to cook with each. If he explained the correct proportions for a gentleman’s tailor, I stitched a waistcoat by hand to see if he could tell.

I discovered that gentility, like most crafts, is best understood from the servant’s side of the table.

Arthur, for all his stiffness and pride, was pleased by this. He saw my progress as a reflection of his own refinement, the servant perfecting his master by proxy. Yet my eventual mastery troubled him too; there is

nothing more dangerous to a teacher of manners than a pupil who learns *why* they exist.

He believed he had made me; I believe I had unmade him.

Arthur Blandy's marginal note:

“The boy excelled all expectation. I confess I had hoped to instil the bearing of a gentleman; instead, he acquired the capacity to perform one. To watch him now is to see my own lessons turned inside out—a mirror polished to the point of blindness.”

On the Tactics of Charm

Fabrice Mallard

Every so-called book of manners is a military manual in disguise.

Lord Chesterfield called it grace; Machiavelli, prudence; Sun Tzu, strategy; Dale Carnegie, influence.

The rest of the world calls it charm, as if smiling were a moral virtue rather than a manoeuvre.

I learned early that the essence of a gentleman—or of a whore—is the same: to control the field without appearing to command it.

Chesterfield instructed his son to *glide*, never stumble; to make flattery look like admiration and submission like choice.

Machiavelli would have recognised the move, though he'd have called it *political necessity*.

Sun Tzu might have added that the surest victory is to make the other yield willingly.

Carnegie wrapped the same principle in American cellophane: “Make the other person feel important.”

It is the same doctrine, minus the velvet glove.

Charm, you see, is not kindness—it is the application of power through gentleness.

A smile delays suspicion; stillness suggests depth; discretion conceals contempt.

Every word and gesture is calibrated, a form of invisible tailoring.

The well-mannered man wears his deceit so naturally that others mistake it for sincerity.

It is not hypocrisy; it is *discipline*—the art of never allowing truth to ruin a useful impression.

As I have often told my clients, courtesy is simply the way we keep the transaction alive.

The rest—grace, style, tact—is embroidery.

On Dinner Parties

Fabrice Mallard

As host

A dinner party is a sensual undertaking: a seduction disguised as civility.

The pleasure is in the preparation—arranging every element so that appetite rises exactly on cue.

The table becomes a bed of sorts: the linen crisp, the lighting soft, the promise implicit.

One must know when to feed, when to pause, when to draw back and let the room breathe.

The art lies not in the food but in *timing*—that slow, teasing orchestration of comfort and anticipation.

Each course is foreplay, each silence a held breath.

To host well is to govern desire without appearing to; to satisfy without being seen to serve.

If the evening ends in laughter and languor, one has achieved the ideal dinner: exhaustion without excess, intimacy without indecency.

As guest

To be a guest, however, is an exercise in endurance.

One arrives unaccompanied—a curiosity, a puzzle, sometimes a prize.

The host beams too widely, the women glance too long, the men too briefly.

Conversation flutters about like badly trained birds: loud, directionless, decorative.

The food, earnest; the wine, apologetic; the company, worse.

There is always music, and always too much of it.

At such tables, I find myself cast as the evening's spice—expected to enliven the bland, provoke the dull, and charm the tedious.

I have learned to play my part: a story, a smile, a retreat.

It is better to leave early, leaving them wanting more.

Gratitude, after all, is the finest dessert.

A.F. Blandy

Ah, my boy sets a table as though for seduction, and perhaps it is.

I taught him the geometry of silver and glass, the distance between desire and restraint.

He learned too well.

There is a rule in service: *never appear indispensable while being so.*

He understood the inverse—that mastery is invisible only when it owns the room.

I taught him to carve meat; he learned to carve men.

I taught him to wait upon gentlemen; he learned to become one and sell the illusion back to them at a profit.

He calls it work. I call it a mirror.

The same bow, the same smile, the same exquisite falsity that once made a servant useful now makes a lover indispensable.

Corporate, carnal—same discipline, same disguise.

I watch him sometimes, through the long glass of memory, and think: *There goes my finest act of subversion.*

He took everything I meant as instruction and turned it into art.

He is what I could never be—seen, admired, paid, forgiven.

All I have left is to polish his silver and take the credit.

Alice Mallard

Footnote to Fenella and Gloriana

The word *gentleman* has always been a semantic fraud. *Gentilis* once meant “of a clan” and then, by ecclesiastical sleight of hand, “not of the faith.” Already contradictory, already hollow.

Gloriana, like so many aspirants, filled that hollow with her own desires: obedience, polish, a certain docility to her ambitions. She mistook those for virtues, as mothers often do.

Fabrice’s so-called diletantism was never weakness but resistance. A refusal to be trapped in one definition. He was not unformed but overformed, capable of slipping across registers—courtly, commercial, carnal—without ever being pinned. That is why he bored of ladders. They only ascend to a fixed point, while he was fluent in multiplicity.

If one insists on definitions, then: a gentleman is nothing more than a man whose freedom is mistaken for form. Fabrice played the part when it suited him, shed it when it did not, and in doing so revealed what the rest of us inherited: a costume, nothing more.

Fabrice Mallard

It amuses me that “gentleman” is always argued upward. The duke need not be a gentleman—his rank exempts him. The baronet squabbles with the banker, the parvenu with the clerk, each polishing the lowest rung as though the ladder mattered. I stand aside.

I accept the word with bemusement, as one accepts a faded medal. I am not titled, but neither am I *of* the crowd. Call it eccentricity, call it nobility, call it what you will: it is simply being outside.

Outside, not above. For there is no “below.” All people are equal—some more so than others, as Orwell taught us. And in these modern times, the pond is level: everyone flounders together at the bottom, safest in schools. I am not in the school. I swim alone. That is my title.

1975: The Burden of a Mother’s Ambition

Growing up under the watchful eye of a mother bent on social advancement is a peculiar education in itself—one often marked less by affection than by expectation. My mother, the quintessential social climber, viewed her life’s work not as a personal journey but as an enterprise in which I was both her product and her project. It is a curious and often lonely position, to be raised less as a son and more as an extension of one’s mother’s unrealised ambitions.

From an early age, I was steeped in a culture of appearances. Dinner parties were lessons in diplomacy, each guest carefully selected to expand the family’s stature in Melbourne society. My manners were scrutinised—not for my sake, but for theirs. A misplaced fork or an unsuitable phrase could undo the delicate work of a year’s socialising. I learned to speak in measured tones, to hide any awkwardness behind practiced charm. But beneath this veneer lurked a sense that my true self was subordinate to the image my mother wished to project.

Her aspirations were palpable and often heavy. She had no illusions about her own origins and was relentless in her efforts to punch above our social weight. To this end, I was enrolled in the best schools, exposed to the cultural institutions she herself had long admired but never quite entered. The Sydney Opera House meant more than art—it was a symbol of acquired taste, of belonging to a class she felt was always just out of reach. Every achievement of mine became a trophy she displayed rather than a milestone I reached.

Therein lay the profound difficulty. It is one thing for a mother to encourage her child; it is another to live vicariously through him, to demand success not as a pathway to happiness but as a validation of her own worth. I recall evenings when conversation was less about my interests and more about the connections my accomplishments might bring. I became a means to an end rather than an end in myself. Any attempt to stray from the predetermined path was met with disappointment more cutting than any rebuke.

Yet her ambitions were not merely social but profoundly personal. She saw the world through the lens of status, often equating

respectability with material symbols: a designer dress, a name at a gala, a school badge. Love and intimacy were measured by how well they could be performed in public. I learned early that familial affection was conditional, recorded as one would tally a ledger, with credit for conformity and debit for independence.

Living under such scrutiny bred in me a duality. Outwardly, I mastered the polished patter expected of my class; inwardly, I wrestled with questions of identity and autonomy. The constant tension between the self I desired to be and the self demanded by my mother was exhausting. I often felt less like a son and more like an actor obliged to perform on her stage.

Ironically, while her efforts aimed to elevate us both, they also isolated us. In striving to shape the perfect gentleman, she sometimes overlooked the imperfect, wrestling boy beneath. Our relationship became a delicate dance—publicly seamless, privately fraught, with affection expressed in expectations rather than tenderness.

In reflection, this upbringing left me with both gifts and burdens. I gained social polish and a keen understanding of the world's subtle hierarchies, but often at the cost of inner freedom and spontaneity. My mother's dream, though driven by love in its own complex way, became a mirror reflecting her own ambitions more than my true self. Learning to disentangle the two—to define who I am beyond the social scripts written for me—remains, after all these years, my greatest challenge.



On Gentlemen

Octavia Mallard, OAM

Gentle, Gentile, Genteel, and the riddle of Manliness

To say *gentle* once meant “well-born, noble, generous” is to forget its other kin: *gentile* and *genteel*. Three sisters of the same root, who wandered into different houses.

Gentile—in the Latin, simply “nation,” the people who are not us. To the Jews, the heathen; to the Christians, the pagan; to the Moslems, the infidel. Thus a word that first meant “belonging to a group” soon meant “belonging to the wrong group.”

Gentle—nobility by birth, later by conduct. But watch how it slips: from “noble” to “kind,” from “kind” to “tame,” from “tame” to “pliant.” A horse, once spirited, becomes “gentled.” To be “gentle” is to have one’s rough edges pared away until one no longer resists. The nobleman and the domesticated beast are, in language, uneasy companions.

Genteel—the faint perfume of gentility. A simulation, a fashion, a costume. To be genteel is not to be noble, but to arrange oneself so as to appear noble. It is surface without depth, conduct without root.

Each shows the same drift: from lineage to behaviour, from behaviour to affectation, from affectation to parody.

And then we are offered *manliness*. What is that, except the constant comparison of men with other men? The word has no meaning except in contrast. To be “manly” is to perform what others deem masculine, which changes from age to age.

In the sixteenth century, *manliness* is courage, constancy, martial bearing. In the nineteenth, it becomes moral probity, self-restraint, the stiff upper lip. By the twentieth, it can be nothing more than avoiding faintness at the sight of blood or ordering the right drink at the bar.

What is constant is not the quality but the surveillance: one man observing another, measuring his likeness against an imagined ideal. To call a man “manly” is not to describe him but to place him within the gaze of other men.

And *polite*, too, plays its tricks. Once from *politus*—polished, smoothed, burnished—it meant refinement of the surface. A polite man was one rubbed free of burrs, able to slide through company without offence. But polish can also be a mask, concealing flaws beneath a gleam.

So a gentleman may be *gentle* in the sense of pliant, *gentile* in the sense of outsider, *genteel* in the sense of pretender, *manly* in the sense of comparative display, and *polite* in the sense of polished to blandness. All the words dissolve if you touch them too firmly.

The Contradiction at the Core

The gentleman is born of two irreconcilable words: *gentle* and *manly*.

To be *gentle* is to be softened, tamed, made pliant. A hawk gentled will no longer strike; a horse gentled will no longer buck. A “gentleman” should therefore be domesticated, polished, agreeable—smoothed down for society’s use.

To be *manly*, by contrast, is to resist, to dominate, to assert oneself in the company of other men. The manly figure is praised for his

hardness, his constancy, his refusal to bend. The soldier, the boxer, the stoic—all archetypes of *vir*.

How then can a man be both *gentle* and *manly*? One cannot be simultaneously pliant and unyielding, tame and dominant. Yet the English tongue has yoked them together for centuries, and society has forced men to perform both at once.

The result is the paradox we still endure: the man who must conquer in battle but soften in the drawing room; who must rule his household yet defer to his betters; who must display strength but hide his desires; who must be moral in sermon and hypocrite in secret.

This double-bind is not an accident—it is a system. It is how society has kept men in line: press them to be warriors in public and compliant in private; aggressive in enterprise yet deferential in rank; virile in whispers yet immaculate in appearance. No wonder so many collapse under the strain.

The gentleman is, in truth, not a man at all but a performance of contradictions. He is both the hawk that strikes and the hawk that sits quietly on the glove. He is the horse that pulls with power and the horse that yields to the rein.

If there is tragedy in the word, it is this: the more a man succeeds in embodying the “gentleman,” the less he exists as himself.

On the Gentlewoman

If *gentleman* is already a contradiction, then *gentlewoman* is an impossibility. For the word itself admits she cannot stand on her own. A “gentlewoman” is a man by proxy, a derivative of the male form. She is not granted gentility in herself but only by extension—her gentleness defined against *his*.

Etymology betrays the theft: *woman* as *wif-man*—the man attached to another man. She may be gentled, but only as a shadow of his nobility. She is never an origin, only a reflection.

How curious, then, that the slang of Grose makes this absurdity so naked:

A horse godmother—a masculine woman, a “gentlemanlike lady,” praised for approximating male presence while mocked for the deformity of it.

A lady—reduced to crookedness, the humped body as a sign that she does not fit the mould.

A gentry mort—the gentlewoman again, but cast in thieves’ cant, as though even in crime her refinement must be borrowed.

One sees the pattern clearly. When a man is called a gentleman, it elevates him above his fellows, however fraudulently. When a woman is

called a gentlewoman, it reduces her twice over: once by reminding her she is not a man, and again by ridiculing any attempt to claim the word as her own.

This is why I distrust the language of “ladylike.” It is not only prescriptive but parasitic. It asks women to be polite versions of men, pliant shadows, crooked silhouettes against the outline of their betters.

Better, I say, to dispense with *gentlewoman* altogether. A woman is no more gentle for being a wife, no less noble for being alone. Let her speak in her own name, without being saddled with borrowed syllables from the opposite sex.

Until then, every so-called gentlewoman is little more than a counterfeit gentleman, stamped with an authority not her own, and expected to smile at the theft.

On Ladies and Characters

The word *lady* began nobly enough. She was the *blæfdige*, the loaf-giver, mistress of the household, distributor of sustenance. Not a mere ornament but the one who fed. Yet see how quickly language rots under the weight of patriarchy. From *blæfdige* she declines to *lady*, then to crookedness—“a hump-backed woman,” as Grose records without pity.

The joke is ancient: men raise women to symbolic honour only to mark them as malformed when they step beyond it. The *lady* is not allowed to be merely a person; she is an angle bent out of place, a spectacle of curvature against the straight lines of male order.

And what of *character*? The Greeks used it for a stamp, a graving tool, the imprint left on coin or prisoner alike. To be “given character” is to be branded, marked with an authority not one’s own. In this way, a *lady* is a character: defined by her relation to man, pressed into shape by his signet. The gentlewoman is not herself but the mark upon her.

Consider how society persists in this stamping. We still say “she has character” when what is meant is resilience under constraint, the quality of having borne the blow and kept the mark. No one asks whether she might exist without the stamping.

Thus the *lady* is a paradox: once a giver of bread, later a crooked body, always a branded character. She is praised not for her own authority but for how well she carries the mark impressed upon her.

Better, perhaps, to return her loaf. Let her feed, speak, and stamp herself—or else discard the title entirely. For as long as she is called *lady*, she remains crooked in the eye of the word.

On the language of gentlemen

The vocabulary by which “gentleman” has been defined is itself a muddle, a palimpsest of half-remembered roles and borrowed honours.

A *yeoman*—once an attendant below the rank of sergeant, later “a man of good standing.” The very ambiguity shows how status drifts: one may serve, yet still be styled respectable.

A *squire*—first a boy in attendance on a knight, then a country proprietor, then a “gentleman” by association. The word carries its own decay: from apprenticeship to ownership, and finally to a residue of deference.

A *gallant*—the “fine gentleman,” courtly, splendid, amatory. An epithet born of display, of outward fashion. He is defined less by his own qualities than by the attentions he offers women—and how ostentatiously he offers them.

A *cavalier*—at first simply a horseman. Mounted power, made into courtesy by proximity to the court. That the animal lends dignity to the rider is quietly forgotten once the title takes root.

A *cove*—slang, the gentry’s echo among thieves. “Gentry cove”: nobleman, “bene cove”: good fellow. The underworld preserves the form of gentility by parody.

Genteel—a pale cousin of “gentle,” softened into appearances. It marks people not by their deeds or inheritance but by the degree to which they can simulate refinement.

Gentry—those of gentle birth, landholders, the people who exist between nobility and labourers. It is less a class than a buffer.

Gentle itself is the pivot. Once noble, well-born, generous. Then pliant, tame, domesticated. A horse may be called gentle; a child, too. The word wavers between strength and submission.

Even *clement*—gentle of character—points us to morality, weather, or mood rather than lineage.

And lastly *valet*—the “gentleman’s man.” Here the inversion is complete: the servant borrows the term to describe his own servitude. A gentleman may even be reduced to the “gentleman of the chamber,” defined not by blood but by proximity to another’s authority.

Taken together, these terms do not describe a man; they describe an aspiration, a set of manoeuvres. The gentleman is less a person than a vocabulary of poses.

On Taste

It is a modern corruption to imagine “taste” belongs solely to the mouth. In my youth it still retained its older sense, that of touch, of

tactility—the subtle judgment of the fingers as much as of the tongue. To have “taste” was not to favour one dish over another but to distinguish with delicacy, to feel what others could not perceive.

A gentleman of taste was not merely a man with a cellar of claret but one who handled life with discernment: who could tell at once the silk from the counterfeit, the sound judgment from the rash impulse, the word that would soothe from the word that would wound.

Later generations reduced this to *gustus*—to appetite and ingestion. They forgot that taste is not consumption but discrimination. This decline from tact to palate marks, I think, the collapse of refinement into fashion. One may cultivate appetite with money; one cultivates taste only with discipline.

Thus when I say a man has “taste,” I mean that he touches the world with judgment—not that he chews it with his teeth.

Fabrice Mallard

My aunt Octavia, as ever, is right in principle if not in practice. Taste, in her sense, is touch and judgment—the tact to move unseen yet leave an impression.

But I confess that in my own profession “taste” carried still other meanings. Some clients used the word in its crudest form, asking if I might indulge their literal appetite. Others wished for me to demonstrate that tact Octavia so admired: to tell them without words that they were still desirable, still men of discernment, when the mirror told them otherwise.

Taste, then, is never one thing. It is the velvet glove that conceals the hand, the polite lie one tells to preserve another’s dignity, and sometimes—I say it frankly—the willingness to keep one’s face still when a client shows what he believes to be his finest qualities.

If my aunt taught me that taste is judgment, my clients taught me that taste is theatre. One performs it for others, that they may not see what lies beneath.

The Gentleman Thief: Polite Larceny as Social Grace

The expression “gentleman thief” is, on the face of it, an oxymoron. Yet on closer inspection, it is merely tautology. The gentleman, as we have seen, is himself a kind of thief—trained in the art of concealment, schooled in manoeuvre, heir to a tradition of stealing not with a cudgel but with a smile. The thief, for his part, is only the gentleman without the benefit of tailoring.

The quaintness of the phrase is instructive. It reassures us that

larceny can be charming, that the social order is not truly threatened by theft so long as the thief observes the niceties of dress, diction, and dinner. A “base criminal” robs you of your purse in the street; a gentleman thief relieves you of your estate in the drawing-room, and you thank him for his company.

Indeed, society itself is a criminal syndicate operating under the cover of manners. The rituals of deference, of calling cards and curtsies, are devices to distract from the greater robbery—the transfer of wealth upward while maintaining the illusion of grace. Crime, in this sense, is not an aberration but the very logic of civilisation.

To label a man a “gentleman thief” is therefore not to distinguish him from society’s villains but to acknowledge him as its most polished exemplar. He embodies the fraud of the system while flattering us into believing in its civility. The only difference between his theft and that of the “base” criminal is one of costume and accent.

It is no accident that literature has celebrated these figures. A.J. Raffles, created by E.W. Hornung, plays cricket for England by day and cracks safes by night: a portrait of the English gentleman whose “fair play” masks his true appetite. Arsène Lupin, Maurice Leblanc’s Parisian master-thief, robs the rich with wit and panache, leaving calling cards at the scene of his crimes as though he were paying a social visit. These characters delight precisely because they strip away the pretence: they show us that theft, conducted with charm, is indistinguishable from gallantry.

In celebrating them, readers tacitly admit what society denies—that power and privilege have always been forms of theft, decorated with manners. The “gentleman thief” does not undermine the system; he makes its fraudulence visible, but palatable. He is the criminal we are happy to applaud, because he is us, only better dressed.

The Gentleman Scientist: A History of Graceful Fraud

It has long been assumed that the gentleman is a man of refinement, a bearer of culture, a figure whose comportment elevates him above the mass of unwashed humanity. Yet etymology, that most unforgiving of microscopes, discloses an alternate genealogy: the gentleman as thief.

The word *manners* descends, not from divine grace, but from *mainour*—a Middle English term meaning “the stolen goods found upon a thief.” To have manners was not, therefore, to be virtuous, but to possess the booty of one’s artifice and the skill to conceal it. Manners were camouflage. Etiquette was legerdemain. To be “well-mannered” was to be a consummate criminal, but polished.

Similarly, the verb *to manoeuvre* (from the same root) meant to

“manage by trickery.” And so the gentleman, far from being a paragon of moral restraint, was in fact a practised deceiver, a man trained in concealment, disguise, and social theft.

Enter the *gentleman scientist* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here, the fraud acquires laboratory glassware. The amateur of wealth and leisure—never obliged to earn a wage—turns his idle curiosities into public authority. “Science,” in this sense, was little more than polite looting:

Looting of nature, extracted and bottled.

Looting of ideas, rebadged as “discoveries.”

Looting of status, re-packaged as “knowledge.”

The apparatus of science—the wig, the salon, the society minutes—was no less a costume than the powdered courtier’s bow. Experimentation became performance. Objectivity was another form of etiquette, its footnotes standing in for calling cards.

To call such a figure a “gentleman scientist” is, etymologically speaking, tautology. The gentleman was already a thief; the scientist was already an artist of deceit. The compound term doubles the fraud but clothes it in grace.

The collapse comes, of course, when everyone is allowed to join the act. By the nineteenth century, science opens its gates to the middle classes. Soon, gentlemen proliferate beyond measure, and with them “discoveries.” The fraud becomes too obvious. One might even say that the gentleman’s last experiment was his own evaporation: dissolved in the acid of democracy, leaving only the residue of his tricks.

And what remains? Manners without meaning. Science without certainty. A society trained to admire the thief who smiles as he robs you.